

Teaching assistants and nursery nurses are education's **hidden professionals**. Their roles and responsibilities are growing ever more demanding. And study after study confirms their value in **raising educational standards**. Yet this contribution is rarely acknowledged and **pay and working conditions** remain pitifully **poor**. GMB is determined to win a **new deal** for the school workforce, delivering proper recognition, reward and career opportunities **for all**.



Education's hidden professionals

GMB NATIONAL SURVEY OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND NURSERY NURSES

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Foreword

We at GMB are proud to represent the staff who contributed to this report. Study after study confirms that the work of teaching assistants and nursery nurses raises educational standards—from OFSTED to the Head Teachers Literacy and Numeracy Survey to the National Foundation for Educational Research.

The depth and breadth of our members' responsibilities in schools and the quality of their contribution to learning, ought to speak for themselves. But it can be difficult to get this message heard.

One of the reasons is often a reluctance in schools to fully acknowledge the work of teaching assistants and nursery nurses because to do so would highlight their pitifully low wages and lack of opportunities. Yet that lack of recognition is almost as damaging to morale as the low pay itself.

We are publishing this report as part of our campaign to change all this. The DfES consultation on school workforce remodelling, 'Time for Standards,' represents a unique opportunity. For the first time all the difficult issues surrounding roles and relationships among the school workforce are being openly discussed.

Equally important are the talks in the local government National Joint Council aimed at delivering long overdue improvements to pay, conditions, training opportunities and career progression for school support staff.

Expectations among GMB members are running high. There is real hope that we can get some solutions to concerns which have been swept under the carpet for too long.

And there is real impatience. The high profile of schools staff in last summer's successful day of action for a better local government pay deal shows their ability to mobilise.

One of our members wrote of her rising frustration at "not having a strong enough voice over my future career in the school, and not having a strong enough voice to negotiate better terms with the local education authority."

Her words sum up the challenge which GMB as her union is determined to address. But they also represent a challenge to our partners in the DfES, the local authorities and the other education professions. It's time to listen and learn.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost special thanks to all those teaching assistants and nursery nurses who made this report possible by taking the time and trouble to respond to our survey in record numbers. The same passion and enthusiasm which they apply in the classroom every day has gone into responding to the questionnaires, and the quality of the information they provided is reflected throughout the report.

Thanks must also go to the GMB officers, reps and recruitment teams for their energy and commitment in distributing the questionnaires to so many staff, and for the many consultation and information sessions they have conducted in schools.

And last but not least, thanks to the Research Department, and a special thanks to Helga Pile, GMB Research & Policy Officer, for the time and effort which has gone into analysing the questionnaires and writing this report.



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January 2003

Executive summary

1. About the respondents

- The report is based on a survey of 1,297 teaching assistants and nursery nurses. 1,033 responses have been included in the full analysis with 264 late responses analysed for qualitative data only
- Three-quarters work in primary schools – the rest in secondary schools, special schools or nursery schools
- Respondents are highly experienced: 59% of the nursery nurses have over 10 years experience, 31% have between 5 and 10 years' experience. Among the teaching assistants 27% have over 10 years' experience while 19% have between 5 and 10 years' experience

2. Roles and responsibilities

- 83% of the nursery nurses work with the whole class, as do 58% of the teaching assistants
- 87% of the teaching assistants and 82% of the nursery nurses regularly work with pupils with special needs
- 84% of the teaching assistants and 78% of the nursery nurses work with children on an individual basis and similar proportions work with groups

Teaching activities

- 50% of the teaching assistants deliver lessons prepared by a teacher, 80% mark pupils' work and 46% contribute to lesson planning
- 77% of the nursery nurses plan, prepare and deliver lessons, 53% write reports, 68% assess and keep their own records of children's achievement, 61% supervise student placements and 22% do home visits

Cover for absent teachers

- 90% of the nursery nurses and 66% of the teaching assistants sometimes cover for teachers
- Among those who do cover, teaching assistants mainly do so for short periods, on an ad hoc basis, while nursery nurses are more likely to supply longer term cover

Circumstances in which cover is provided	Nursery nurses	Teaching assistants
As and when – for periods of less than 1 hour	71%	90%
Planned – for several hours	38%	5%
Longer term – to cover sickness, absence etc	52%	5%

The '25 tasks'

- Of the 25 routine tasks which the Department for Education and Skills says teachers should not carry out, teaching assistants commonly undertake only six of them. These are mainly 'traditional' classroom assistant roles such as display work, and preparing materials. The remaining 19 tasks attracted low numbers of responses reflecting their predominantly clerical/administrative or technical nature

3. Status

- Respondents feel that their status within schools is generally low, reflected in lack of understanding and consistency when it comes to job titles and roles
- Many feel they are treated as 'second class,' 'invisible,' 'spare parts' or 'servants'

4. Working relationships

- Just over three-quarters of both the nursery nurses and teaching assistants are positive about their working relationships with teachers
- Two-thirds of the nursery nurses are regularly included in staff meetings with teachers, while the figure for teaching assistants is only 38%
- Some respondents feel that their effectiveness is undermined by poor communication, not being fully involved, being asked to do inappropriate tasks and being deployed in an ineffective or impromptu manner

5. Training & qualifications

- Over 95% of the nursery nurses have a formal early years qualification at Level 3 or higher – the vast majority NNEB, Cache, BTEC, HNC or HND diplomas or certificates
- Two-thirds of the teaching assistants have formal job-related qualifications

- Nearly a quarter of the teaching assistants and 19% of the nursery nurses are currently working towards additional formal qualifications such as foundation degrees

6. Career progression

- 84% of the teaching assistants and 89% of the nursery nurses have only one grade available for their jobs in school
- 87% of nursery nurses and 84% of teaching assistants do not have opportunities for progression and/or promotion in their jobs
- Over half of the nursery nurses and 38% of the teaching assistants have considered doing QTS but very few are actually pursuing it

7. Pay and grading

- 40% of the teaching assistants are earning less than £5.30 an hour with 27% on less than £5 an hour
- Among the nursery nurses only 5% are earning below £5 an hour, but half earn between £5 and £7.50 an hour. A further 32% have hourly rates of between £7.50 and £8
- Only 9% of the nursery nurses and 14% of the teaching assistants report that their job has recently been evaluated under a job evaluation scheme
- 18% of the nursery nurses think their pay should be linked to the teachers' pay scale. Of the remaining 82%, the biggest group (40%) say their full-time annual salary should be between £15,000 and £18,000, with £18,000-£20,000, favoured by a further 20%
- Among the teaching assistants 31% believe they deserve a salary of £12,000- £15,000, and another 31% think it should be between £15,000 and £18,000

8. Term-time only contracts

- 10% of the nursery nurses and 56% of the teaching assistants are on a term-time only contract where some weeks of the year are not paid
- Half are on contracts for 39 weeks or fewer, just over a third have contracts for between 40 and 45 weeks and the remaining one in six have contracts for between 45 and 50 weeks
- This may be an underestimate of the true extent of term-time only contracts due to confusion and complexity around how salaries are worked out

9. Working hours

- Nearly half the teaching assistants are contracted for between 25 hours and 31 1/2 hours a week. A fifth are on between 16 and 24 1/2 hours a week, while another fifth work fewer than 16 contracted hours

- The nursery nurses are more likely to work full-time: 74% of our respondents have a contractual week of 32 hours or more
- Three quarters of the nursery nurses and nearly 60% of the teaching assistants work unpaid overtime. And 74% and 58% respectively of those putting in overtime do so regularly – they simply do not have enough contracted hours in which to complete their work

10. Job security

- Nearly half of the teaching assistants and a fifth of all the nursery nurses are employed on a fixed-term or temporary contract
- Some of these are pupil-specific contracts which are liable to be terminated when a pupil moves on or is successfully integrated

11. Motivation and morale

- Motivation among respondents is very high, but a number of issues are harming morale

Most job satisfaction from...	Nursery nurses	Teaching assistants
Pupils' development, achievements	75%	71%
Interaction and relationships with pupils	13%	14%
Empowering/integrating special needs pupils	6%	11%
Other	6%	4%
Least job satisfaction from...		
Pay and conditions	33%	30%
Lack of recognition and respect	30%	15%
Menial tasks	7%	12%
Not being deployed by teacher appropriately	–	10%
Pupil behaviour	2%	10%
Lack of time to do job properly	6%	8%
Bureaucracy and paperwork	6%	1%
Lack of support from colleagues or parents	3%	4%
Lack of career opportunities	2%	2%
Staff shortages	1%	–
Other	10%	10%

About the survey

GMB has a long-standing membership among school support staff. In recent years it has been growing rapidly, particularly among classroom-based staff. This reflects the overall increase in the numbers of such staff employed. But it also reflects unprecedented changes to roles and responsibilities which have occurred without any corresponding changes to pay and conditions. There is now a growing perception among classroom-based staff of the need for an organisation capable of representing their views and protecting their interests.

Since November 2001 GMB has been involved in national discussions with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and other partners about the roles and responsibilities of support staff in schools. To inform those discussions and build a more detailed picture of the views and experiences of our members, GMB launched a national survey of teaching assistants and nursery nurses¹ in June 2002. The results, as summarised in this report, are intended to form part of GMB's response to the DfES consultation package 'Time for Standards' which sets out proposals for 'remodelling' the school workforce in order to raise standards of teaching and learning, and reduce teachers' workload.

Questionnaires for the two groups were distributed via GMB Regional Offices to schools in England and Wales. This report is based on a total of 1,297 responses—992 responses from teaching assistants and 305 from nursery nurses. Of these, 775 teaching assistant and 258 nursery nurse responses have been included in the full analysis while 217 and 47 late responses respectively have been analysed for qualitative data only. The majority of respondents are GMB members, although we received small numbers of responses from members of other unions, and non-members.

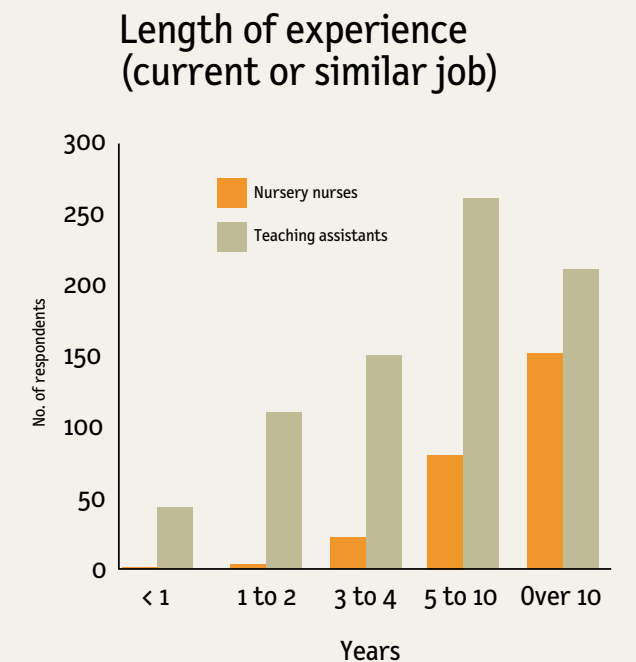
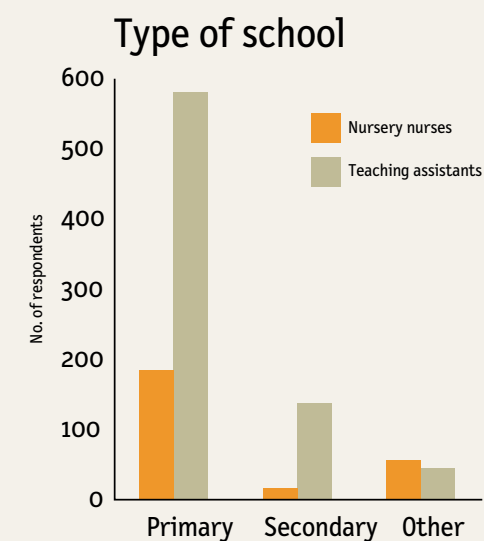
¹ For the purposes of this survey the term 'teaching assistant' is used to encompass a range of job titles used for staff who work in the classroom with pupils, including classroom assistants, learning support assistants, teachers' aides etc. The term 'nursery nurse' is used to describe staff who have a professional early years qualification eg NNEB or Cache (or equivalent experience) and are employed in that capacity



About the respondents

The majority of our respondents—72% of the nursery nurses and 76% of the teaching assistants—work in primary schools, reflecting our membership base and employment patterns more generally. Some 7% of the nursery nurses and 18% of the teaching assistants work in secondary schools. The remaining 21% of nursery nurses work in other schools mainly special schools or maintained nursery schools. Among the teaching assistants 6% work in other schools, again mainly special schools.

Our respondents bring lengthy experience to their jobs reflecting the high level of commitment among these groups to working in the education sector. This means that, unlike other low-paying sectors, there is relatively low staff turnover. Fifty nine per cent of our nursery nurse respondents have over 10 years' experience, while 31% have between 5 and 10 years' experience. Among the teaching assistants 27% have over 10 years' experience and 19% have between 5 and 10 years' experience.



1. Roles and responsibilities

I take responsibility for joint planning and assessment with the teacher in lower reception class (27 children). Sole planning and assessment for six children in mixed age class for three sessions a week... Whole school assemblies, KS1 and Reception assemblies and playground duty (100 children approx), parents meetings, story sacks, handling money, emotional development, first aid, joint home visits for new reception children, joint planning and creating displays, marking work, covering for teacher...

Nursery nurse, primary school, 34 years' experience

Level and setting

Our survey confirms that teaching assistants and nursery nurses are taking on wide-ranging responsibilities with a great deal of flexibility in terms of the levels and settings in which they operate.

Some 87% of teaching assistants and 82% of nursery nurses regularly work with pupils with special needs, either assigned to them exclusively or as part of wider responsibilities. The nature of special needs work covers a whole spectrum of difficult and complex responsibilities and can encompass physical and medical care of pupils including administering medicine, suctioning, tube feeding and so on.

Eighty four per cent of teaching assistants and 78% of nursery nurses work with children on an individual basis and similar proportions work with groups.

And 83% of nursery nurses work with the whole class, as do 58% of teaching assistants.

Our survey shows that delivering lessons or sessions on a planned basis while teachers are elsewhere is already common practice for nursery nurses.

I take responsibility for the whole nursery reception class in order to release the teacher for non-contact time for specific periods daily

Nursery nurse, primary school, over 10 years' experience

Between March and July I organise and am in sole charge of a pre-nursery class. This is progression and promotion but without any financial gain

Nursery nurse, in a primary school

Among teaching assistants, roles are generally less well defined and delegation of responsibility is often determined reactively depending on the immediate pressures facing the school. Many respondents share the frustration expressed by this special needs learning assistant in a primary school:

It's the swinging pendulum of levels of responsibility. For when it suits a situation you are given responsibilities. Then when the crisis is over you are back to your original place. This makes you feel used and undermined

Special needs learning assistant, primary school, 23 years' experience

Some teaching assistants take regular whole-class sessions but still find it difficult to get proper recognition.

From 1994 until 2001 I taught catering to Year 11 pupils every Wednesday for 5 lessons in the morning. When it was stated that LSAs could get paid for standing in for teachers, I asked 'What about me? I teach every Wednesday, I plan my own lessons and leave work for supply teachers when I'm out.' I was told I could not be paid. Every year I was getting pupils through an OCR exam and they were passing

Learning support assistant, secondary school

Typically, teaching assistants plan and deliver lessons for smaller groups working within or away from the main class and/or deliver intensive one-to-one support to individual pupils.

I work alongside the teacher making joint decisions but I also do my own planning when taking the class by myself. I set work for groups and for special needs groups and carry out behaviour targeting for specific children

Teaching assistant, primary school

Teaching activities

Our survey responses show the depth of involvement of teaching assistants and nursery nurses in most aspects of teaching activity:

Teaching assistants:

- 80% mark pupils' work
- 67% invigilate exams or tests
- 50% deliver lessons prepared by a teacher
- 46% contribute to lesson planning

I plan from the pupils IEPs and differentiate the national strategy on literacy and numeracy. I am assigned my own room to support pupils' learning needs. Hence all work undertaken is for my own room environment

Special needs learning assistant, primary school

There were two examples in our survey of teaching assistants taking on Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) roles previously carried out by a teacher. One, an assistant SENCO in a secondary school, with an HNC Level 4 qualification and a specialist teaching assistant diploma, feels she is doing the same job as the teacher she replaced but for £6.18 an hour on a term-time only contract.

Nursery nurses:

- 77% plan, prepare and deliver lessons
- 68% assess and keep their own records of children's achievement
- 61% supervise student placements
- 53% write reports
- 22% do home visits

The autonomy and responsibility given to nursery nurses is often more formalised than it is for teaching assistants. Nursery nurses are frequently assigned formal responsibility for all aspects of care and education for their groups (typically 12-16 pupils), including planning, base-line and other assessments, profiles, target setting, record-keeping, reports, parent evenings and so on. They also prepare Individual Education Plans and liaise with outside agencies, and some plan SEN sessions for learning support assistants to follow. Responses from both surveys show that nursery nurses often have line management responsibility for the teaching assistants they work with.

Additional responsibilities

Responses to our survey highlight the huge diversity of special and extra responsibilities that teaching assistants and nursery nurses take on in addition to their core duties.

These often correspond to the particular skills, talents and interests of the staff concerned, but there is rarely any extra pay for doing them. Some respondents feel that they should have a system of responsibility payments akin to that of teachers which would show that the school values their extra effort and time.

I currently provide music teaching and I'm involved in organising school concerts and music festivals. This is unpaid due to head teacher being unable/unaware of additional funding for these support activities. Also have taught French in Year 2 and recorders

Classroom learning support assistant, primary school

Examples of special responsibilities

Speech and language therapy	Makaton training for all staff, and parents
First aid	Festivals co-ordinator
Mother and toddler group	Lunch-time club for 'difficult children'
Home-school book club	Minibus driver
Learning mentor reading groups	Brain gym tutor
ICT teaching: pupils and staff	Non-teacher governor
Art co-ordinator	JCC rep
Craft, design and technology	Additional literacy lunch-time support
Under 5s music	Teaching through sign language
School productions	Piano playing at assemblies, concerts
Reading/spelling clubs	Looking after nursery pets

Cover for absent teachers

With large numbers of unfilled vacancies and high levels of stress and sickness among teachers, most nursery nurses and teaching assistants at some time have to cover for absent teachers. Our survey reveals just how widespread this is. Ninety per cent of nursery nurses and 66% of teaching assistants sometimes stand in for teachers.

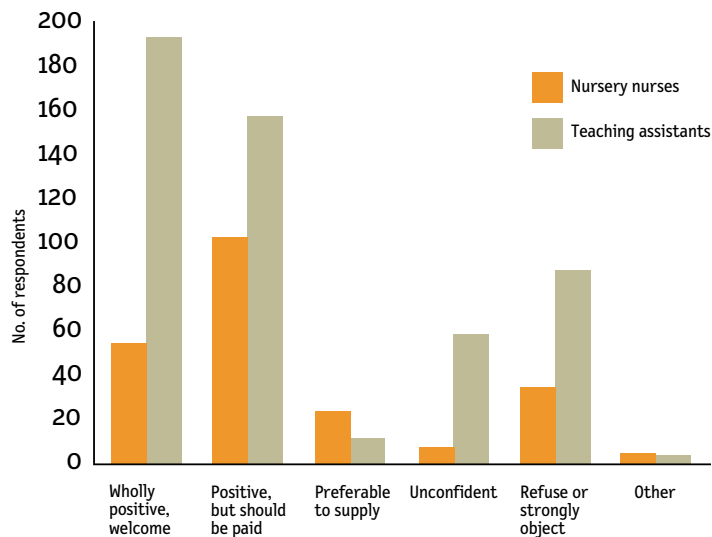
Among those who do cover, teaching assistants mainly do so for short periods, on an ad hoc basis, while nursery nurses are more likely to supply longer term cover, as the table illustrates.

Circumstances in which cover is provided	Nursery nurses	Teaching assistants
As and when – for periods of less than 1 hour	71%	90%
Planned – for several hours	38%	5%
Longer term – to cover sickness, absence etc	52%	5%

We asked respondents how they feel about covering for teachers: their responses are shown in the graph.

Around a quarter of nursery nurses feel wholly positive about covering for teachers – they welcome being asked, see it as a measure of the trust and confidence placed in them and relish the challenge. Among teaching assistants the figure goes up to 38% which may reflect the degree to which many feel frustrated by the fluctuating autonomy and lack of acknowledgement they normally receive.

Attitudes to covering for teachers



I don't really mind. I find it quite satisfying to have the freedom in class to pick up on things I've observed that the teacher has missed

Teaching assistant/nursery nurse, primary school

In the SEN group I sometimes cover and take a whole session if the SEN teacher is unavailable. I am currently happy to do this as I feel it is good experience if I decide to go into a teaching career. Realistically this should be the role of a 'higher grade' assistant

Teaching assistant, primary school

Only a handful of respondents indicate that they receive any extra pay for covering. This is part of what makes the issue so emotive.

I was promised to be paid at a trainer level last academic year but this never happened. I then covered for a sick colleague this year. I now refuse

Teaching assistant and lab tech, special school

A further 45% of nursery nurses and 20% of teaching assistants are happy to be asked to cover and enjoy doing it, but strongly feel that they should be paid extra.

I feel privileged that the head teacher has confidence in me to do the job, but bitter when I know how much money supply teachers receive

Nursery nurse, infants school

But some object to covering as a matter of principle, and a few have actively refused.

I'm not prepared to do it in the present climate especially after Nigel de Gruchy's comments about teaching assistants ... If we do cover as part of our job, our wage should reflect this

Teaching assistant, primary school

I've made it very clear to my head teacher that I'm not prepared to do it. He's very understanding and can see my principle behind it

Nursery nurse, primary school

Some have mixed feelings about covering, but prefer it to the disruption of having a supply teacher come in.

Don't mind as it's better than having a supply in who knows nothing about the children or how the class is run, but won't ask you what needs to be done, although you are there every day and could run things with your eyes closed!

Nursery nurse, primary school

Only 12% of teaching assistants and 4% of nursery nurses feel unconfident about covering. One of these describes it as 'nerve-wracking' and others worry about issues such as insurance and the attitudes of parents.

The circumstances of the cover can make a big difference to how people feel. Many are much more likely to enjoy it if it is a class with which they already work and have input into lesson or activity planning.

OK if it is an emergency, however when it was planned I did enjoy it and got job satisfaction from it

Nursery nurse, primary school

Some teaching assistants feel fine about covering if they can share it with another teaching assistant.

I have done it in a previous job. As two teaching assistants we managed a class of 34 children for 4 days

Nursery nurse, previously a teaching assistant, primary school

Many feel that how they are asked makes all the difference – too often it is simply assumed that they will interrupt their planned work and step in, and little account is taken of the consequences.

When dealing with nursery children, continuity of staff is better than having a supply and not a problem as we are all professionals and fully capable. However this situation automatically makes us one member of staff down and teaching staff feel we are being given a treat – 'allowed to be teacher for a day'

Nursery nurse, primary school

One respondent raises the issue of who covers for the coverers: "I feel guilty about having to take time off when my child is ill – there should be a supply list of teaching assistants".

The '25 tasks'

Teaching assistants were asked if they currently carry out any of the 25 tasks identified in DfES circular 2/98 as not to be routinely carried out by teachers. Of the 25, the main tasks commonly undertaken reflect what used to be the key components of a traditional classroom assistant role:

- 80% do classroom display
- 75% do bulk photocopying
- 62% do record keeping and filing
- 45% prepare and issue materials
- 39% collect money

The remaining tasks attracted low numbers of responses reflecting their predominantly clerical/administrative or technical nature.



2. Status

Job titles

Status and recognition of roles within schools are very important and the starting point for that is often the job title. Teachers and head teachers have titles which are clearly understood by the wider public, but many other staff working in classrooms do not.

Our survey found a very wide variety of job titles, particularly among the teaching assistant group. These include: learning support practitioner, classroom assistant, learning mentor, general school assistant, teacher's assistant, learning tutor, learning support assistant, specialist support assistant, special needs assistant, speech and language assistant, integration assistant, individual needs assistant, bi-lingual support/home school links worker.

One respondent summed up the problem:

I feel 'classroom assistant' is vague and covers many different roles – depending on a teacher's/school's expectations. If a classroom assistant had a clear role agreed upon by all the parties, the school might run more efficiently... For example, I am studying to be a 'senior practitioner' but the school has no idea what the role is!

Classroom assistant, primary school

Nursery nurses are a more homogenous group when it comes to job titles, mostly called nursery nurses or 'NNEBs' but a few have other titles such as early education centre group leader or classroom manager.

Opinions are divided on 'nursery nurse' as a job title for the future. Many feel it is outdated: "I would prefer something to do with education rather than nursing."

Preferred alternatives include:

- Early years practitioner or educator
- Support (nursery) teacher
- Learning/special support mentor
- Auxiliary teacher
- Child development officer
- Nursery tutor

I am very frustrated as I work with a very good team of staff but we nursery nurses are the hidden professionals, unrecognised by government, the public, the parents etc. We are the backbone of education in the foundation stage.

Nursery nurse, £14,286pa but only paid for 40 wks, primary school

But others remain strongly attached to the 'nursery nurse' title, believing that it carries a 'professional' status which does command recognition and which they do not want to lose.

Respondents in both groups feel that lack of clarity about job titles is closely linked to lack of clarity about roles both within the school and in the wider world. Many are angry at being called 'non-teaching staff' by head teachers or being referred to by parents as 'helpers'.

School hierarchy

Many respondents feel that lack of status within the school leads to lack of respect and credit for the contribution they make.

Head teachers need to give us the respect we deserve and not treat us as mums just doing the job for pin money

Teaching assistant, primary school

Respondents gave us numerous examples of how this manifests itself:

- Not being trusted to have a key for resources I feel that I need for my role
- Being thought of as having the same skills as a cleaner
- Being invisible to some members of staff
- Being treated like a servant by some of the teachers
- When people visit and only the teacher is introduced
- All the extra jobs that I am asked to do because they know that I will do them. There is a standing joke in the staff-room – if you can't do it ask Emma
- To come in early, trying to get things done, displays, paperwork etc but to have management praise teaching staff rather than a whole team effort
- Treated generally as a second class citizen by staff which then filters through to the children and parents
- Being treated differently from teaching staff eg being excluded from staff meetings and training etc

3. Working relationships

I am unable to carry out my stated child's Individual Education Plan because I keep being asked to work with groups. I have no time for preparation for the single lessons I cover – you have to learn the subject as the lesson is delivered then help the children as best you can.

Classroom assistant, secondary school

Teamworking

Survey respondents feel that working relationships in schools are generally good, but they have key concerns about involvement, communication and methods of deployment.

Just over three-quarters of nursery nurses and teaching assistants are positive about their working relationships with teachers describing them as "excellent" or "good and supportive".

But when it comes to regular inclusion in staff meetings with teachers, two-thirds of nursery nurses report that this happens compared with only 38% of teaching assistants.

Deployment

There is widespread frustration about poor deployment practices which mean respondents are not always able to operate as efficiently as they would like. Examples include:

- Lack of inclusion in key activities such as planning

Not being included as a full member of the team eg not seeing reports, not being fully involved with plans, not discussing child's progress

Nursery nurse, primary school

- lack of consultation

Lack of communication, not knowing the lesson plans or the objective and being expected to teach within seconds of being informed

Teaching assistant and librarian, primary school

- ineffective or impromptu deployment

Last minute changes and decisions especially when you've done a lot of preparation

Learning assistant, primary school

- inappropriate requests

Being told to mop floors, clean up vomit and clean toilets when in the middle of something else which involves the actual children we are supposed to be caring for

Nursery nurse, primary school



4. Training and qualifications

PPA Playgroup Supervisor's certificate, OU Pre-School Child Certificate, OU Childhood 5-10 Certificate, NVQ III Childcare and Education, Food hygiene certificate, Classroom assistant certificate, RNIB Facilitating Independence Certificate, Certificate in Professional Studies in Education, Supporting Visually Impaired Pupils in Mainstream Certificate, Makaton Vocabulary Development Project Basic Workshop no 2 certificate, Teaching Assistant Certificate Of Achievement, CLAIT Course Certificate, NOF Training, plus eight St John Ambulance life saver/first aid/patient handling certificates

Selection of qualifications held by one primary school special needs teaching assistant

Over 95% of respondents to the nursery nurse survey have a formal early years qualification at Level 3 or higher – the vast majority NNEB, Cache, BTEC, HNC or HND diplomas or certificates.

Nearly two-thirds of teaching assistant respondents have formal qualifications relating to their job. Compared with our nursery nurse respondents there is a greater variety of core qualifications among this group including: City and Guilds Certificate/Advanced Certificate in Learning Support, NVQs II, III and IV in Childcare and Education, Special Needs Classroom Assistant Certificate, Specialist Teaching

Assistant Certificate and the Certificate for Literacy and Numeracy Support Assistants (CLANSA).

Most of these are well-suited to primary schools but one respondent comments that there is very little training and qualification provision which meets the needs of those working in secondary education.



Our respondents also have a variety of additional professional and specialist qualifications.

Examples of specialist qualifications

BTEC diploma in social care	Makaton regional tutor's license
BTEC certificate in caring	British Sign language
Qualified Teacher Status	Bi-Lingual Communicators Certificate
State Registered Nurse	Certificate of Braille competence
BTEC or Edexcel speech and language therapy	BTec/Edexcel Level 3 Communication
Diploma in Social Work	RSA CLAIT
Pre-School Playgroup Leader Certificate	NVQ 4 Use and Support of IT
Oxford University module in autism	European computer driving license
Teaching in FE certificate	Business for all computer course
Foundation degree in behaviour management in mainstream schools	YMCA Exercise to music certificate in instruction
Certificate in counselling	Diploma in Indian head massage
Certificate in basic psychology	Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing Licentiate
ICS Diploma in Child Psychology	
Makaton sign language	

Nearly a quarter of teaching assistant respondents and 19% of nursery nurse respondents are currently working towards a formal qualification. The Early Years Foundation Degree and BA are popular choices. Others include RNIB courses,

Sports coaching certificate, Teaching English as a Foreign Language Certificate, FE teaching certificate, NVQ Assessor certificate. A small number are embarking on QTS.

Barriers to training and professional development

When asked about training received, some respondents feel that they have good opportunities to access training, but the majority experience considerable barriers, usually around paid release.

Apply for courses, and don't get any feed-back. Courses are always full, or I'm told they cannot afford a supply NNEB
Nursery nurse, primary school

I received EAL training but missed some sessions as I had to stand in for a teacher
Nursery nurse, primary school

I started CLAIT Level 1 but had to stop halfway through due to the Head Teacher cancelling it
Teaching assistant, primary school

Reaping the benefits

Many respondents feel disappointed and angry that when they achieve higher level qualifications, there is no financial reward or recognition, which means that schools reap the benefits without paying for them.

There are advanced nursery nurse diploma courses but more pay for the extra qualifications is highly unlikely
Nursery nurse, primary school

Thus a learning support assistant, for example, who gains a Diploma in Childcare and Education brings the benefits of that learning to the school, often finds that they are given greater responsibility, but retains their old job title and pay rate.

5. Career progression

Until our important role in the classroom is fully recognised by government, LEAs, teachers and parents there will be very little opportunity for promotion
Teaching assistant, infant school

Grading structures

Eighty four per cent of teaching assistants and 89% of nursery nurses have only one grade available for their jobs in school.

I have been working for 25 years and my job has changed to cover paperwork, responsibility for children etc and I am still on the same grade as I was 25 years ago
Nursery nurse, nursery school

Even where there is more than one grade available, decisions about grading are made in an arbitrary fashion.

I recently qualified as HNC so I have been given the higher grade of unqualified teacher. Another two in this school with the same qualification have not been given the same status
Nursery nurse, primary school

Nursery nurses are level 3, but if the children they work with are level 2 they get paid accordingly. I feel that a person's own qualifications should be recognised rather than the level of the child they support
Nursery nurse (special support assistant), primary school

In other cases extra pay for extra responsibilities is not reflected in grading but paid as a lump sum because associated funding is based on a short-term government initiative.

For taking special responsibility as support staff co-ordinator I get 1 point of approx £999 a year which has to be paid in a lump sum once a year as the authority cannot/will not pay it monthly in my salary. This is only granted for three years as we are a beacon school
Nursery nurse (SEN), primary school

Progression/promotion

Some 87% of nursery nurses and 84% of teaching assistants feel they have no opportunity for promotion. The majority believe that the main reason for this is the lack of a career structure. Around one in five say there is plenty of opportunity for personal progression through taking on more responsibility and gaining qualifications but this does

not result in a promotion or any financial gain. Others cannot progress because the school or LEA will not pay for them to go on courses, or because they are on temporary contracts.

I have been told during job review and by Investors in People that there is no progression or promotion available. Quote 'You have a Cinderella job'
Nursery nurse, primary school

There is no definition of our role, no job security, status or opportunity for progression. Until the job is recognised and defined nationally there can be no career development
Learning support assistant, secondary school

Progression to QTS?

The absence of a grading and career structure in schools leads many respondents to conclude that 'there is nowhere to go except qualifying as a teacher.' We asked if they had considered pursuing qualified teacher status (QTS). Over half of the nursery nurses and 38% of the teaching assistants have considered it, mainly because they feel they are doing some or most of the role already and that it is the only way to improve their pay and status. One is considering it because she says more black teachers are needed.

However, very few are pursuing QTS. The main reasons among those who have considered it and decided against are:

- having to start at the beginning when current qualifications and experience ought to count as credits

It would be nice if our experience could be put towards a teaching post. After all, we have done the classroom work and planning – the only thing we would need is more training on the management side and on the paperwork
Nursery nurse, special needs, primary school

- financial loss associated with giving up a job to go to college
- family commitments do not leave enough time
- age
- requirement for GCSE maths

The main reasons given by those who have not considered doing QTS, centre on negative perceptions of the job of teacher itself:

- too much paperwork and bureaucracy
- not enough close interaction with pupils
- too much stress and pressure
- workload

Responses among this group show a degree of resentment at the fact that QTS is raised at all – they simply want recognition and reward in their own right for their own jobs.

6. Pay

I feel undervalued and seriously underpaid. The LEA insists £5.30 an hour is all they will pay regardless of qualifications training, responsibilities etc
Qualified learning tutor, secondary school

Pay data

The complexities surrounding term-time only contracts which apply to some of our respondents make a consistent analysis of salary data difficult. Some respondents are notified of an annual salary expressed as the amount someone would receive if they were paid for 52 weeks in a year. Their actual salary is then pro-rataed down but with payments annualised into even monthly amounts. Others have their annual salary expressed as the figure after this pro-rating process. For the purposes of this survey we have calculated salary information provided by respondents (where there was sufficient information) as a gross hourly rate based on the number of basic contractual hours in the working week. This approach allows comparisons to be made but does not reflect the depressed income of those respondents who do not receive payment for that basic working week during holidays.

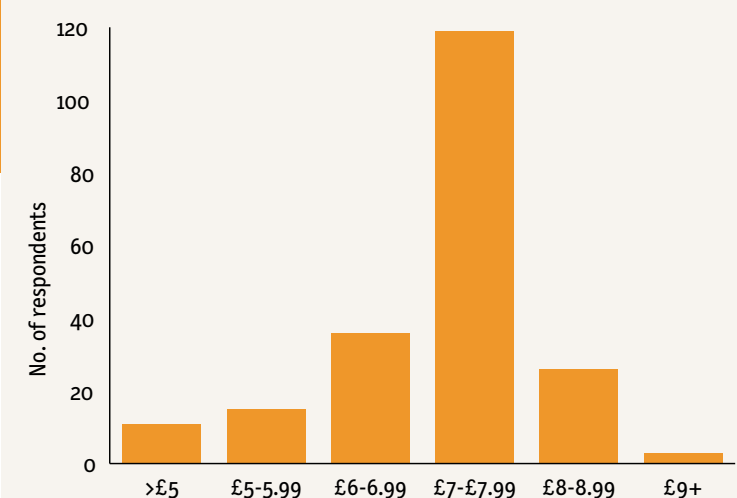
Our survey highlights the incidence of low pay among nursery nurses and teaching assistants. The 2002 pay settlement in local government (implemented after the survey period) includes a £5 an hour minimum wage backdated to April 2002, rising to £5.30 in April 2003. Our survey suggests that substantial numbers of teaching assistants stand to benefit from this deal. Four out of 10 teaching assistant respondents earn less than £5.30 an hour and 27% are earning below £5 an hour. Nearly half earn between £5.30 and £7 per hour, only 11% earn above £7 an hour, while only 3% are earning over £8 an hour.

Hourly pay: Teaching assistants



Pay rates among our nursery nurse respondents are slightly higher. Only 5% earn below £5 an hour. A further 16% are earning between £5 and £6.50 an hour, while 33% are earning between £6.50 and £7.50 an hour. A further 32% have hourly rates of between £7.50 and £8. The remaining 14% of respondents earn above £8 an hour, with £9.26 as the highest reported hourly rate.

Hourly pay: Nursery nurses



The pattern of pay rates is more compressed among nursery nurse respondents than among teaching assistants. This reflects the continued use of the defined grade for nursery nurses prescribed under the old local government pay agreement for white-collar staff. A large cluster of nursery nurse respondents reported an hourly rate of £7.62 an hour which equates to spine point 15 (£12,879) the top of the defined grade. Hence it is clear that it survives in many authorities where new pay and grading structures have not been concluded under Single Status. What was originally a measure to ‘protect’ pay rates now acts a ceiling which has not kept up with the changing role and responsibilities involved in the job.

There is greater variation in pay rates among teaching assistants partly because by historical anomaly there are no protected rates for teaching assistants.

Our survey reveals a deep and rising anger about low pay and the lack of recognition and respect it signifies.

I work in the class with the statemented children. I also have three other statemented children that I work one-to-one with. I also take groups of children out of class who have IEPs. Next Spring I am undertaking the FLS with children out of class to make their grades up. In a nutshell I am teaching. This does not reflect in my pay. I earned more money as a cleaner working fewer hours. Classroom support assistants play a great part in a child’s education – this government needs to know just how much. Gone are the days of nose-wiping and cleaning paint pots. We deserve a decent wage!

Classroom assistant, primary school

I am doing the same job as others and seeing the pay gap grow wider and wider. I most of all resent being regarded as ‘Non-teaching staff’. What do they think I do with my time??

Nursery nurse, nursery school, 25 years experience, greater responsibilities but still on same grade

Respondents give moving testimonies about what it means to live on such low incomes.

For a good number of years this has been my only income. When I split up with my husband it was very hard to cope. For a while I had to get another job as well to make my money up. Now I’ve got a cleaning job within the school where I work, but if the teaching assistant post paid a lot more I would not have to do the cleaning – someone else could have the job

Teaching assistant, primary school

I would like to be paid double what I get now so that I only have to do one job and can spend some time with my own children

Primary school learning support assistant, £5.38 an hour, 40 weeks a year

I am at the top of the scale for NNEB and have been for some years. I’m fortunate because I am married – a single nursery nurse working in Surrey has no hope of getting a mortgage

Nursery nurse, reception class, £8.45 an hour

Part of the problem is the apparent failure to ensure that evaluation and grading of these jobs has kept up with changing roles and responsibilities. Only 9% of nursery nurse respondents and 14% of teaching assistants report that their job has recently been evaluated under a job evaluation scheme. This comment is typical of what has happened when schemes have gone ahead: “Learning support assistants were never included to be evaluated anyway.”

Lack of progression opportunities and career structures for teaching assistants and nursery nurses mean that pay remains low despite the accumulation of experience, training and qualifications.

I enjoy my job but I trained as an infant/junior teacher in the 1970s. I have been an LSA since 1994. I have worked with children on a 1:1 basis with emotional/behavioural problems in a pupil referral unit, a school on special measures and this year took the course for the Advanced Certificate in Learning Support. When I asked my Head if I could possibly have a rise he happily informed me that I had received a rise in April. This amounted to 12p an hour... I receive £5.63 an hour and resent strongly the fact that a new lady can be employed and earn £5 an hour with little or no experience

Learning support assistant, primary school

Low pay adds to the sense reported by respondents of not being valued for the contribution they make. As public servants, many draw a link between their pay and the value placed on them by society.

I have spent 30 years working with SEN children, teaching drama, music and language. All this experience is used with my pupils and I know they benefit considerably but I cannot earn an adequate wage

SEN teaching assistant, £5.46 an hour

Many are acutely aware of the possibilities that other jobs such as those in supermarkets can offer: better pay for a fraction of the pressure, stress, skills and responsibility they are required to operate with in their current jobs.

I am most dissatisfied by the responsibility, training and expertise I have without the financial reward. I could earn as much stacking shelves in a supermarket

Nursery nurse, primary school, 10+ years’ experience, better reading partnership co-ordinator, special responsibility for bilingual support, £7.62 an hour

I earn £6.27 for a Saturday job at a shopping centre

Learning support assistant, primary school, £4.98 an hour

Many are also aware of what they consider to be an unacceptably wide gap between their pay and that of teachers.

When I started working as a nursery nurse, the salary was roughly 2/3 that of a comparable teacher. By today’s standard that would be comparable to the national average wage of £19,000, but now we have far more responsibilities and workload

Nursery nurse, primary school, 10+ years’ experience, £7.60 an hour = £12,650pa

One classroom assistant contrasted the £100 which she takes home after a full week with the £100 a day commanded by supply teachers.

We asked respondents what they feel they should be paid and the results are shown in the table below. Nursery nurses are more likely to make reference to the teachers’ pay scale, either seeking parity with the NQT rate for a qualified, experienced nursery nurse, or a proportion (usually 75%) of the salary of a teacher with a commensurate length of service. Some teaching assistants say they deserve parity with what NNEB qualified staff or learning mentors are paid in their schools.

Salary aspiration	Nursery nurses	Teaching assistants
Link to teacher’s scale	18%	6%
£9-12,000	–	27%
£12-15,000	12%	31%
£15-18,000	40%	31%
£18-20,000	20%	4%
£20,000+	10%	1%

The salaries in the table are based on all-year round payment. Many teaching assistants say they would be much happier with their existing salary if it were paid all year-round.

7. Term-time only contracts

I feel we are discriminated against – teachers and nursery nurses are paid 52 weeks a year and dinner ladies are paid a retainer.

Specialist teaching assistant, primary school, £5.45 an hour, 39-week contract

Linked to pay, one of the biggest sources of resentment and dissatisfaction among GMB members working in schools is the use of term-time only contracts. Our survey illustrates the anomalies and complexities of this thorny issue.

The ‘protected’ status afforded to nursery nurses under the old white-collar pay agreement also included an all-year round contract akin to that of teachers. While this has largely survived Single Status reviews so far, anecdotal evidence from our members suggests that there are moves in some authorities to remove that protection. This is backed up by our survey which shows that 10% of nursery nurse respondents are now on term-time only contracts.

With no pay during the school holidays there’s no security. I’m at the point now where I cannot manage without pay – finding temporary jobs for those weeks is a nightmare. If I can find a job out of the education system with security I’m going for it. A lot of the teaching assistants feel the same
Nursery nurse, primary school

For teaching assistants, the practice is much more widespread. Respondents were asked for how many weeks a year they are paid. 44% are paid for 52 weeks, while 56% are on some form of term-time only contract where some weeks of the year are not paid.

However, we believe that this may be an underestimate of the true number on term-time contracts. The practice of spreading payments out over the year to give 12 equal monthly payments is widespread and may have caused some respondents to say they are paid for 52 weeks a year, basing that answer on the method of payment rather than the level of remuneration.

It is clear that there is a great deal of confusion, with many respondents saying they don’t know or are uncertain about how many weeks they are paid. Jobs are often advertised giving the salary for a 52-week year, and employees are not told what they will actually get. Even among those who have been given details of how their pay is arrived at, some find the calculation hard to follow or misleading, particularly where there is a further pro-rata calculation to reflect part-time hours.

My salary is supposed to be £11,100 but it is worked out as:
 $27 \text{ hrs } 30 \text{ mins} \times 42.4 \text{ weeks (incl } 4.4 \text{ weeks holiday)} \times £11,100$
 $37 \text{ hrs} \times 52.14 = \text{full-time appointment rate}$
so on this basis I will never get £11,100. So why have this?
Why not just say that my pay is £6,708?

Teaching assistant, primary school

Taking those who identified themselves as paid for less than 52 weeks a year, half are on contracts for 39 weeks or fewer, just over a third have contracts for between 40 and 45 weeks a year and the remaining one in six have contracts for between 45 and 50 weeks.

During the 1970s and 1980s it was common for schools staff to receive a ‘retainer fee’ during school holidays. This sometimes corresponded to a percentage of salary or was paid as a flat rate. But starting in the mid-1990s retainers have gradually been removed, and our survey finds that only a fifth of those who identify themselves as term-time receive a retainer.

Term-time workers and the benefits system

Lack of income during holidays has long forced many GMB members to turn to the social security system to supplement their income during what is commonly three months of the year when they are not in paid work. The introduction in 1996 of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) to replace unemployment benefits complicated matters considerably. The regulations introduced a false averaging provision which ignored periods of holiday and calculated average working hours by reference to term-time only. JSA could only be claimed if the weekly average was below 16. By disregarding the weeks of the year when no hours were worked many employees could not meet the less than 16 hours requirement and had their claims turned down.

I was refused on the grounds that ‘it was your choice to work in a school’

Teaching assistant, £5.45 an hour

Furthermore, even when this hurdle is cleared, the practice by local authorities of spreading pay evenly across the year (which is helpful in terms of managing finances) means that employees are treated as having earnings during the period for which they are trying to claim. In practice this bars many more employees from claiming NI contribution-based JSA. And those who cannot claim this form of JSA will be ineligible for income-based JSA if the household income exceeds a certain threshold. So having a working partner is usually a bar to claiming. Even when all these hurdles are cleared a claimant must comply with a host of rigorous benefit rules, such as demonstrating that they are available for and actively seeking work.

A recent decision by the social security commissioners found that the false averaging provision under JSA was indirectly discriminatory. From now on, schools staff will be able to take the average of their weekly working hours over 52 rather than the number of paid weeks. So a small number will again be able to claim. But the numbers will only be small. For example if a person is contracted for 21 hours a week for 40 weeks a year, their annual hours are 840. When that is divided by 52 weeks it comes out at 16.2 – and bars a JSA claim.

Employees may currently be eligible for working families tax credit, and from April 2003 more may qualify for the new working tax credits and child care tax credits. But GMB remains concerned that eligibility will still depend on entering a lottery of hours thresholds and family income means-testing, with arbitrary cut-off points and excessive form-filing.



8. Working hours

I have worked as a TA for 14 years with an ever-increasing workload. As a school we work as a team and many staff often give up 40 minutes of their lunch break to give children reading practice as well as extra time before the morning session and after the afternoon session to prepare and finalise the day's tasks... Somebody needs to come and shadow a TA to see what the job entails. All most TAs want is to be paid for the hours they work, and to be recognised for how valuable a TA can be.

Teaching assistant, primary school

There is a wide spread of contractual hours among teaching assistants while nursery nurses are more likely to work full time. Most of those on full-time contracts have basic hours of 32 or 32½ hours a week, which suggests that not many authorities are employing full-time teaching assistants on the standard 37-hour week for local government workers.

Contractual weekly hours	Nursery nurses	Teaching assistants
<16	5%	19%
16-24½	9%	24%
25-31½	12%	47%
32+	74%	10%

Unpaid overtime

Contractual hours only tell part of the story on working time. Our survey reveals that staff are regularly working in excess of their contracted hours without remuneration. Three quarters of nursery nurse respondents and nearly 60% of teaching assistants work unpaid overtime. And 74% and 58% respectively of those putting in overtime do so regularly. For example, a senior teaching assistant in a secondary school told us her contract is for 28 hours a week at £5.45 an hour, but she works an extra 10 hours a week at home unpaid.

Respondent after respondent describes the pressures they are under:

I help at discos, fun days and school trips in my own time unpaid. Also work done at home includes information sheets for pupils with SEN, reports for SEN teachers etc
Teaching assistant, secondary school, 15 hours a week paid term-time only

Non-contact and preparation time have been taken away as we are not considered important enough to warrant it!
Nursery nurse, special school, sole responsibility for own group of pupils

I usually start 30 minutes early every morning to prepare work and finish at least 20 minutes late every day as I have to see the child to the parent (who is usually late) and then tidy up and write up my diary
Learning support assistant (special needs), primary school

Many ascribe unpaid overtime working to the widespread practice of using contracts which simply cover the hours staff are timetabled to be in the classroom. This leaves no choice but to complete activities such as planning and preparation, liaison with teachers, staff meetings and liaison with parents—all vital to the role—in their own time.

Impact on pupils

Many respondents feel that lack of time or being stretched too thinly impacts on their effectiveness in the classroom and leaves pupils short-changed.

Lack of time means there's too much to try and complete within the day – everything ends up being rushed
Teaching assistant, primary, contracted for 26¼ hours a week

Through lack of time I feel I can not give a child the amount of attention I feel they need
Nursery nurse, primary school

9. Job security

I have been working here for over five years and am unlikely to be offered a permanent contract.

Learning support assistant and midday supervisor, primary school

Our survey reveals a shocking degree of job insecurity caused by widespread use of temporary contracts. Local government as a whole employs a disproportionately high number of temporary workers—over 10% of the workforce compared with 6% in the whole economy. But the situation in schools is in a different league. Nearly half (48%) of teaching assistant respondents, and a fifth of all nursery nurse respondents are employed on a fixed-term or temporary contract.

The survey responses reveal a widespread practice of renewing successive temporary contracts either term by term or at best annually.

A NNEB qualified classroom assistant working in a primary school says: “It is never possible to progress my career as I only have six-monthly contracts.”

Schools seem to be leaving it late in the day to make decisions about renewals. An NVQ III qualified classroom assistant with over 10 years' experience wrote of the detrimental effect on her job satisfaction of not knowing if she will be employed for the following term.

We also found widespread use of ‘patchwork’ contracts with the same individual employed for a number of hours a week on one contract, and for a further number of hours on another contract. One respondent combines three jobs: learning mentor, midday supervisor and teaching assistant, in the same primary school. Another makes up her earnings from £318 a month as a learning support assistant, £105 per month as a school meals worker and £100 a month as a cleaner.

Often one or more contracts are temporarily yoked to a permanent one. For example a nursery nurse in a primary school is employed part-time as a nursery nurse on a temporary contract (52 weeks payable), and part-time as a

special needs assistant and IT technician (39 weeks payable). She says: “I studied nursery nursing five years ago, but the school will still not give me a full-time nursery nurse contract.”

How much more I could help both the teacher and the children achieve if my position was permanently full-time
Nursery nurse, primary school, with over five years' experience employed for 15 hours on a permanent contract and 10 hours on a temporary contract

Many respondents working in the area of special needs have pupil-specific contracts which contribute directly to job insecurity. When the pupil leaves the school or is successfully integrated and no longer requires help, the employee's contract ends.

I was given a contract as a full-time nursery nurse in June to start in September. Three days into the term it was cancelled because the child with the statement changed schools. I had spent the last three months looking forward to the extra money

Nursery nurse, primary school

I have recently had my hours cut by half because a child that I worked with for two years left primary school. I believe that it is extremely unfair that my hours are just halved because of this...We work extremely hard with these sometimes difficult children

Teaching assistant, primary school

10. Motivation and morale

Every day gives me job satisfaction. I am constantly challenged and motivated and enjoy the increasing responsibility. The children motivate me! I enjoy being a nursery nurse. Every day is different. I see the children's progression and can assess early signs of specific needs.

Nursery nurse, primary school, over 30 years' experience

At the end of our questionnaire we asked respondents to nominate the one area which gives them most and least satisfaction in their jobs. There is a remarkable degree of uniformity in the responses as to the sources of satisfaction.

Most satisfaction from...	Nursery nurses	Teaching assistants
Contribution to pupils' development, achievements	75%	71%
Interaction and building relationships with pupils	13%	14%
Empowering/integrating special needs pupils	6%	11%
Other	6%	4%

At the end of the academic year, the children you work with regularly have achieved a higher reading level, spellings, times tables, and you have helped

Learning support assistant/senior midday supervisor, primary school

Working with children and helping them attain their potential when others often feel they have none

Learning support assistant, primary school



The smile on my charges' faces when they feel they have achieved a great deal, and the hugs of sheer joy this brings with it

NNEB care assistant, primary school

To see the results of long, patient, repetitive work with children particularly SENs and slow learners – that glimmer of light – the excitement and enjoyment of learning and achieving (it works both ways!)

Teaching assistant, infants school

I love watching the children improve with their signing and school work and also to watch the mainstream children integrate with them

Nursery nurse, primary school

Sources of dissatisfaction are more varied:

Least satisfaction from...	Nursery nurses	Teaching assistants
Pay and conditions	33%	30%
Lack of recognition and respect	30%	15%
Menial tasks	7%	12%
Not being deployed by teachers appropriately	–	10%
Pupil behaviour	2%	10%
Lack of time to do job properly	6%	8%
Bureaucracy and paperwork	6%	1%
Lack of support from colleagues or parents	3%	4%
Lack of career opportunities	2%	2%
Staff shortages	1%	–
Other	10%	10%

Pay and conditions clearly top the list, but for nursery nurses this is closely matched by lack of recognition and respect. Being asked to do menial tasks such as making coffee for staff and cleaning toilets is an irritant for significant numbers. Pupil behaviour is more of an issue for teaching assistants than for nursery nurses reflecting the fact that they are more likely to work with older children.

A variety of factors fall into the 'other' category including alarming instances of violence and abuse which tend to affect staff working in special schools or pupil referral units.

Getting punched, spat on, having chairs and tables thrown at us and kicked, called names – the list is endless

Teaching assistant, primary school, pupil referral unit

This category also includes factors linked to the physical environment of the school such as lack of space, leaking roofs and cold corridors, and the emotional stress of the very difficult home backgrounds endured by some pupils. Some respondents also referred to what they perceive to be the negative impact of educational policy changes on the quality of education being provided

Not enough time to play and talk, too much pressure on the children from exams

Teaching assistant, primary school

I used to enjoy seeing children develop socially and educationally through play and becoming individuals. Now I'm being asked to do work with children that is not appropriate to their age – in our nursery we no longer learn through play

Nursery nurse, nursery school

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Motivation and morale

- While motivation among teaching assistants and nursery nurses remains very high—largely generated by the intrinsic rewards of working with children and young people—morale is dangerously low

Recommendation

- **A New Deal on pay and conditions and action to raise the profile and status of these jobs is the only way to arrest declining morale**

2. Time for Standards: fears and expectations

- Staff are concerned that the ‘headline’ message of Government funding for 50,000 extra staff will encourage schools to go for numbers rather than quality. The ‘two-for-the price-of-one’ approach is already leading some head teachers to replace one nursery nurse with two cheaper teaching assistants (often inexperienced and unqualified)

The Government are promoting quality education but unfortunately are not prepared to pay for it...up to two years ago the school employed a full-time NNEB. Now an unqualified person is employed paying them a learning support assistant rate. This puts tremendous pressure on myself and the class teacher

Nursery nurse, primary school

Recommendation

- The Time for Standards vision is generating high expectations among staff that at last their role and contribution will be recognised. If they are to be the ‘solution’ to the teacher workload crisis there must be reform to pay, conditions and employment practices in schools. The DfES and LEAs should be aware that the price of failing to meet these expectations could be serious

3. Roles and responsibilities

- School workforce remodelling is well underway—teaching assistants and nursery nurses are working flexibly to deliver a whole range of teaching, planning, assessment and extra-curricular activities
- The acquisition of greater skills and responsibilities has been unplanned and ad hoc
- Nursery nurses in most cases have retained a defined role often taking formal responsibility for all aspects of the education and care of their groups—and where this works best it should be a model for how teachers and other professionals can work together in complementary and overlapping roles
- Teaching assistants have less well-defined roles and delegation of responsibility is often in response to short-term crises, and ‘on the quiet’ to avoid open acknowledgement of the role
- Covering for teachers is a regular feature of the working week—but it is happening without any coherent framework of safeguards, recognition or reward
- Most of the 25 tasks not to be routinely undertaken by teachers are most appropriately delegated to clerical and administrative staff

Recommendations

- Before moving on to look at employing extra staff or introducing new responsibilities under Time for Standards, Local Education Authorities and schools should ensure that the roles and responsibilities of existing staff are clearly defined, formalised and properly recognised by everyone in school
- Local Education Authorities and schools should develop, in consultation with the recognised unions, a protocol governing support staff cover for teachers with adequate safeguards and a fair payment system
- Staff should be fully involved in planning and preparation so that if they are called upon to cover they can do so more effectively
- Schools should ensure where possible that they employ

sufficient clerical and administrative staff to cover the 25 tasks, and that there are proper systems for organising this work so that tasks such as photocopying are not left to the last-minute and thus delegated to classroom based staff simply because they are there

4. Status

- Teaching assistants and nursery nurses feel that they have very low status both within schools and in the wider community partly because their roles and job titles are poorly understood
- While their contribution has grown, the ‘Mum’s Army’ or ‘paint-pot washer’ image remains remarkably persistent
- Low status is closely linked to low pay—each reinforces the other
- Teachers and others often feel ‘embarrassed’² about the gap between what other staff are paid and what they actually do—and this may make some reluctant to always acknowledge the depth and breadth of responsibility taken on, even though this is essential to the running of the school
- There is a hierarchy in schools which can lead those with vested interests in preserving it to treat other staff as subordinates

Recommendations

- The national employers, the trade unions and local education authorities should agree a consistent and coherent set of job titles whereby ‘educational practitioner’ status replaces ‘assistant,’ ‘aide’ or ‘non-teaching’ status
- The DfES and Local Education Authorities, supported by the unions, should promote information and awareness raising for pupils and parents about the role, status and responsibilities of all staff who work in classrooms

5. Working relationships

- Good teamworking is often undermined by ‘us and them’ practices such as separate staff meetings or generic training sessions for teachers
- Teaching assistants in particular are often spread too thinly and subject to crisis-management deployment which often means being pulled out of planned activities with no notice
- Staff could work much more effectively if they were deployed in a more planned and consistent way with better communication and consultation
- Pressures on teachers mean that they often do not work with other staff in the way that best utilises their skills

Recommendations

- **Head teachers and governing bodies should ensure that they develop a ‘whole-school’ approach to information, consultation and involvement**
- **There should be input for all staff into staff meetings with paid time built into contracts to cover attendance**
- **There should be built-in paid time for teaching assistants/nursery nurses and their teacher colleagues to undertake joint planning and preparation work and exchange information about pupils and classes**
- **There should be comprehensive training for teachers—both as part of initial teacher training and for existing staff—covering effective working with other staff**

² See comments in ‘Teaching assistants, a survey analysed for the NUT by the University of Warwick’, 2002 eg “They are valued by teachers and work as hard. I am embarrassed by the huge difference in our hourly rates.”

6. Training and qualifications

- Nursery nurse qualifications are relatively coherent and well-understood
- A high proportion of teaching assistants also have formal qualifications relating to their job, giving the lie to the traditional ‘unqualified’ image
- Teaching assistant qualifications encompass a wide range of general and specialist areas which have developed in a haphazard way. Equivalences are not always well understood, and qualifications not always recognised
- There is little training and qualification provision specifically designed to meet the needs of secondary school staff
- Lifelong learning is a strong part of the culture in schools, but staff often have to fund their own professional development and do it in their own time
- Although continuing development brings its own rewards, it is unfair that schools benefit from staff widening and deepening their skills and expertise without giving them the opportunity for financial gain

Recommendations

- The DfES should deliver on its pledge to map existing provision of training and qualifications as a matter of urgency, in order to benefit current staff as well as any new entrants
- The DfES should work with LEAs and local providers to ensure that there is appropriate provision for staff working in secondary as well as primary schools
- LEAs and schools should agree with the recognised trade unions proper training and development programmes and implement personal development plans for all staff so they have access to adequate paid time off and cover arrangements. LEAs should ensure that they apply to schools staff the provisions of the newly revised local government NJC training and development agreement

7. Career progression

- The acquisition by teaching assistants and nursery nurses of deeper and wider responsibility, higher skills, training and qualifications does not usually translate into career progression or promotion, higher pay or status
- Many LEAs and schools operate a ‘one grade fits all’ approach which leads to resentment when it encompasses a wide range of roles and levels of experience and qualifications
- More staff would be interested in progressing to QTS if it were possible to receive due accreditation for the qualifications and experience they already hold, and some financial support to replace their lost earnings
- But better pathways to QTS should not be seen as the ‘answer’ to career development for teaching assistants and nursery nurses – they want proper career progression and recognition in their own right

Recommendations

- The Local Government NJC should work with LEAs to ensure that there is a proper career structure consisting of at least 4 grades linked to responsibilities, qualifications and experience
- The DfES and LEAs should encourage head teachers and governing bodies to develop appropriate management posts open to senior teaching assistants and nursery nurses
- For those who do wish to become teachers, the DfES should explore schemes such as those which allow healthcare assistants and care assistants to pursue qualifications as nurses and social workers while remaining in employment and drawing their normal salary



8. Pay

- The pay and conditions of teaching assistants and nursery nurses provide a graphic illustration of the undervaluing of what is seen as ‘women’s work’
- Gender pay inequality in relation to male-dominated local government workers remains entrenched and with it the risk of equal pay cases
- In recent years the divergence between the value of the work done and the pay it commands has reached crisis point
- Rising levels of dissatisfaction with pay have not necessarily translated into obvious recruitment and retention difficulties largely because of the dedication and commitment of staff to their jobs, but morale is suffering and that will store up trouble for the future
- Staff are resentful that if they choose not to leave for better paid work in a supermarket, this is thrown back at them as evidence that there is no need to improve pay levels
- Recruitment difficulties may not be obvious but if pay levels do not improve there will be a limit to the ability of schools to attract applicants of sufficient calibre to fill a greater number of higher level jobs

Poor pay will mean a poor quality of nursery nurse. I love and enjoy my job but cannot afford to stay as I am

Nursery nurse, primary school

- The single status agreement for local government has not delivered improved pay because very few authorities have completed pay and grading reviews, and many have left schools staff to one side in the first instance, partly due to the operational autonomy exercised by head teachers and governing bodies, and the implications of an improved pay and conditions package for their budgets

Recommendations

- There must be substantial increases in pay for existing staff to reflect the responsibilities, experience and qualifications they already hold
- The DfES should ensure that the funding settlement supporting Time for Standards does not concentrate resources for pay on recruiting new staff into higher paid roles over the heads of existing staff
- Pay structures for teaching assistants and nursery nurses must reflect the appropriate overlap with teachers’ pay scales – a two-tier workforce cannot be sustained once there is formal recognition of the complementarity of roles
- The DfES should liaise closely with the local government NJC to assist it in arriving at a robust national framework for local pay and grading, job profiles and model job descriptions
- LEAs should enter meaningful negotiations with support staff unions to agree local implementation within the national framework as a matter of urgency, taking the necessary steps to involve head teachers and governing bodies and gain their commitment to the process

How to contact us

9. Term-time only contracts

- The unfairness of term-time only contracts for some staff generates problems both in terms of morale and the practical impact of extended unpaid holidays
- There is a great deal of confusion about how term-time-only salaries are calculated, and what if any assistance is available through the tax credit and social security system
- As Time for Standards leads to more formal recognition and expansion of the extent to which teaching assistants undertake teaching activities, so the unfairness of paying some staff (teachers and most nursery nurses) all year round, and others for term-time only will become all the more glaring

Recommendations

- The NJC should agree national guidance for LEAs on dealing with the unfairness of term-time only contracts
- Ultimately, all staff working in classrooms should be paid all year round. One option for achieving this is by crediting an annual block of undirected time into contracts in addition to the 195 day school year. This would cover those duties and tasks over which staff have discretion as to where and when they are carried out

10. Working hours

- A combination of dedication and pressure means schools and pupils are benefiting from hours of 'voluntary' overtime, and taking it for granted
- Teachers have rightly drawn attention to their unacceptable workload and long working hours, but the pressures teaching assistants and nursery nurses work under are rarely acknowledged
- Government action to reduce teachers' hours and workload is generating fears among GMB members that the pressure to put in unpaid overtime will get worse as more work comes their way

Recommendations

- LEAs and head teachers should ensure that jobs are designed with sufficient directed and non-directed time to cover the duties allocated
- Teaching assistants and nursery nurses also need guaranteed time for planning, preparation and assessment activities

11. Job security

- The prevalence of temporary contracts stems in part from the patchwork of central government grants for which schools have had to bid and the ensuing uncertainties over whether funding allocations will continue
- It is having a detrimental effect not just on job security and morale but also on access to training and development opportunities, and continuity of relationships with other staff and pupils
- Pupil-specific contracts are one of the few examples of work where staff truly are the victims of their own success – the reward for successfully integrating a child is often a P45

Recommendations

- The commitment in Time for Standards to shift monies for support staff salaries into mainstream budgets must be backed by a joint effort by DfES, LEAs and the unions to change the 'temporary contract culture' and promote better employment practices
- LEAs should work with head teachers towards redesignating all pupil-specific contracts so that staff are retained for other duties – where necessary involving work in more than one school.

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