This briefing note summarises findings from the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project on support staff characteristics and the preparedness of teachers and the category of support staff that forms nearly a quarter of the school workforce – teaching assistants (TAs). We present a new typology of support staff and some broad descriptors detailing who they are. We introduce the component of preparedness and show that much work is needed in terms of improving training, communication and role preparation for teachers and TAs in order to maximise the effectiveness of TAs.

### Aim of the DISS project

To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of TAs and other support staff and their characteristics, and how these changed over time.

### Characteristics of support staff and preparedness of TAs: data collection methods and responses

- **Surveys**: Responses from 6,079 schools, 4,091 teachers and 7,667 support staff
- **Case studies**: 65 schools; 591 interviews with school leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils

### Who are the support staff?

#### Classification of support staff

- Wide variety of support staff roles, responsibilities and job titles
- New classification of support staff developed to reflect role expansion following the remodelling of the school workforce
- New typology developed through systematic grouping of post titles based on similarities in activities, using cluster analysis

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<tr>
<th>TA equivalent</th>
<th>Pupil welfare</th>
<th>Technicians</th>
<th>Other pupil support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
<td>Learning mentor</td>
<td>ICT manager</td>
<td>Bilingual support</td>
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<td>Higher level teaching assistant</td>
<td>Education welfare officer</td>
<td>ICT technician</td>
<td>Cover supervisor</td>
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<td>Classroom assistant</td>
<td>Welfare assistant</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Escort</td>
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<td>Learning support assistant (LSA)</td>
<td>Connexions advisor</td>
<td>Technology technician</td>
<td>Midday supervisor</td>
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<td>LSA (for SEN)</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Science technician</td>
<td>Midday assistant</td>
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<td>Nursery nurse</td>
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<td>Therapist</td>
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<tr>
<th>Administration staff</th>
<th>Facilities staff</th>
<th>Site staff</th>
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<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
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<td>Office manager</td>
<td>PA to Head</td>
<td>Cook</td>
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<td>Finance officer</td>
<td>Data manager</td>
<td>Other catering</td>
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<td>Bursar</td>
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<td>Attendance officer</td>
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### Support staff’s conditions of employment

#### Job satisfaction

- 89% of support staff were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ satisfied with their job
- Support staff reported high levels of satisfaction with their contracts and working arrangements (around 77%)
- Support staff were more satisfied with training they received (76%), than with training opportunities available to them (62%)
- Over time, support staff’s level of satisfaction with how much they felt appreciated by the school declined (69% at Wave 3)
- 44% of support staff reported dissatisfaction with their pay

#### Goodwill of support staff

- At Wave 3, 71% of support staff reported working extra hours
- Support staff were three times more likely to work extra hours voluntarily than because they were required to by a member of staff (e.g. TAs meet with teachers in their own time after school)
- Half of support staff (largely TAs and pupil welfare staff) were not paid for the extra hours they worked

### Preparedness

#### Preparedness 1: training for TAs and teachers

- Most support staff (84% at Wave 3) had attended Inset or some other training event within the past two years
- Some TAs criticised the higher level TA accreditation process, citing poor administration and that it did not lead to promotion
- At each wave, 75% of teachers reported having had any training to help them work with TAs or other support staff
- Yet teachers’ involvement in directly training or developing support staff increased at each wave, to 55% at Wave 3
- Two-thirds of teachers who line managed support staff had not received any training or development to help them in this role
- Majority of teachers who had had training for either working with or line managing support staff said it had lasted only one day or less. Only half of teachers rated these types of training as useful

#### Preparedness 2: Teacher-TA planning and feedback

**Main findings from the surveys**

- 75% of teachers had no allocated planning or feedback time with TAs. This figure was 95% for secondary school teachers
- Teacher-TA communication was ad hoc, occurring at lesson change-over, before/after school, and/or at break/lunch times
- Communication relied on the goodwill of TAs (e.g. unpaid hours)

**Main findings from the case studies**

- Many TAs were not involved with lesson planning and felt under-prepared for tasks they supported pupils with
- TAs picked up subject and pedagogical knowledge by ‘tuning in’ to teachers’ delivery to the whole class
- TAs ‘frustrated’ that information fed back to teachers was not used (e.g. integrated into future lesson planning)

### Recommendations

- Schools must ensure the goodwill of TAs is not abused, and that they are appropriately rewarded for the work they do
- More needed to prepare teachers to work with and manage TAs
- More time is needed for teachers and TAs to have joint planning and feedback time, particularly in secondary schools