



Teaching on the cheap?

How deploying teaching assistants to cover for teachers is compromising their value and impact

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A study of the extent and impact of teaching assistants covering classes and leading lessons in place of teachers in schools in England and Wales

Rob Webster

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About the author

Rob Webster is an internationally-recognised researcher on the topic of teaching assistants (TAs), inclusion and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). He has worked on some of the most influential research projects in these areas of recent years, including the world's largest research study of the deployment and impact of TAs. He also led the UK's largest study of the everyday school experiences of pupils with SEND – the results of which are captured in his latest book, *The Inclusion Illusion*.¹

Rob created the award-winning *Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants* programme, which has been accessed by thousands of UK schools. His most recent research includes studies of the impact of Covid and the cost of living crisis on TAs and schools, and how the pandemic lockdowns affected special schools, families and children with SEND. In 2023, he co-led a project to pilot and evaluate innovative approaches to making public dialogue processes, such as citizens' assemblies, more inclusive of young people with SEND.

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¹ *The Inclusion Illusion* is free to download via UCL Press: <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/theinclusionillusion>

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Glossary of key abbreviations

1-2-1	One-to-one TA/one-to-one support (e.g. for a pupil with an EHCP/IP)
ALN	Additional learning needs
CPD	Continuing (or continuous) professional development
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DISS	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (project)
ECT	Early career teacher
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
ELSA	Emotional learning support assistant
HLTA	Higher level teaching assistant
IP	Individual Plan
LSA	Learning support assistant
MFL	Modern foreign languages
NJC	National Joint Council for Local Government Services
NUT	National Union of Teachers
PPA	Planning, preparation and assessment
QTS	Qualified teacher status
SALT	Speech and language therapy
SEN/SEND	Special educational needs/disabilities
SLT	Senior leadership team
SSSNB	School Support Staff Negotiating Body
STPCD	School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document
TA	Teaching assistant
WAMG	Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group

Executive summary

The report presents results from a study designed to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of how the on-going challenge of teacher shortages is driving the deployment of teaching assistants (TAs) to cover whole classes and lead lessons. The study provides evidence of the extent and impact of TAs covering classes on pupils, schools and TAs themselves.

Data were collected via a survey of nearly 6,000 TAs in mainstream and special schools in England and Wales. The results show TAs cover classes for, on average, over three hours a week. One in four TAs report having to cover classes because schools do not have enough teachers and/or are unable to get in external supply teachers. In some schools, unfilled teacher vacancies mean that TAs are planning, teaching and assessing curriculum subjects.

The conditions under which TAs cover classes are challenging. Unlike most teachers, 50 per cent of TAs cover classes without a lesson plan or support from another TA. Despite national guidance stating TAs should not 'actively teach' the lessons and classes they cover, three-quarters of TAs say that covering classes inevitably involves them having to teach pupils. The expectation to teach, the lack of preparation and support, and the short notice nature of covering unplanned teacher absences are sources of stress and anxiety for TAs.

Three in four TAs report that their role is not covered when they cover classes. Not surprisingly, well over half of TAs report that being deployed to cover teachers disrupts their regular work of delivering intervention programmes and providing classroom support for pupils with additional needs. TAs feel that they are letting pupils down. Covering classes diverts TAs from the work that delivers the greatest impact. Consequently, two-thirds of TAs say covering classes negatively impacts the quality of learning in their school, and four in five TAs say it negatively impacts provision for pupils with additional needs.

Three-quarters of TAs are not paid an uplift for covering classes. Those that are report receiving as little as 20 pence extra per hour. TAs feel undervalued and taken for granted. Four in five TAs report that cover has a detrimental impact on their workload and wellbeing.

The conclusion that TAs actively teach lessons to whole classes – too often under conditions to which teachers would object – has significant real-world consequences and implications for accountability and the professional status, pay and conditions of both teachers and TAs.

With a general election due before the end of 2024, the strong likelihood is that teacher shortage and supply will be the number one school workforce issue facing the next government. The workload, recruitment and retention crisis relating to TAs, which this study suggests is brewing, should not be treated by policymakers as a separate and less urgent problem. It is connected to the crisis facing teachers, and efforts to resolve both must include a comprehensive and coordinated programme to support and reward the TA workforce.

It should not take the need to address a crisis affecting teachers to justify and develop policy for and about TAs. There is a clearcut case for a national strategy for TAs, co-developed with them and the NJC unions that represent them. The profile and rigour of this strategy should be informed by an on-going research programme into the working lives of TAs.

Summary of key results and findings

- Three in five TAs (61%) cover classes for up to four hours per week. Two in five TAs (39%) cover classes for at least five hours per week. Some TAs cover classes full-time
- Almost half of TAs (45%) cover classes more than they did last year (2022/23)
- A quarter of TAs report covering classes because their school does not have enough teachers (24%) and/or is unable to get external supply teachers (26%)
- TAs report being deployed to plan, teach and assess curriculum subjects where schools have not replaced a teacher that has left or is absent due to long term sickness. Many TAs find this role challenging and stressful
- Despite being a role that only TAs at Level 4 should carry out, over two-thirds of TAs (68%) that routinely deliver lessons (i.e. do specified work) are in a role below Level 4
- Just one in four TAs (24%) are paid an uplift for covering classes; 76% of TAs are not
- The uplifts TAs receive to cover classes range from as little as 20 pence to £3 per hour
- Three-quarters of TAs (75%) say covering lessons involves actively teaching pupils, yet only half of TAs (51%) report being provided with the teacher's lesson plan
- Half of TAs in mainstream schools (50%) cover classes on their own. Yet teachers, especially in primary/infant schools, regularly have TA support in their classes
- Three-quarters of TAs (74%) do not have their role/duties covered when they cover classes. TAs are trying, and struggling, to provide cover *in addition to* their regular duties
- The majority of TAs report that covering classes gets in the way of carrying out their regular duties, with pupils missing out on classroom support (63%), intervention sessions (58%), and those with an EHCP/IP missing out on one-to-one support (52%)
- Deploying TAs to cover classes diverts them from the work that delivers the greatest impact. As a result, two-thirds of TAs (68%) say covering classes negatively impacts the quality of learning in their school, and four in five TAs (81%) say it negatively impacts provision for pupils with SEND/ALN. A third of TAs say it has a large negative impact
- Four in five TAs say covering classes has a negative impact on their workload (85%) and their health and wellbeing (82%). Covering short notice absences is a particular cause of stress and anxiety
- Around three in five TAs say covering classes has a negative impact on their sense of effectiveness (66%) and their job satisfaction (58%). Many TAs feel that covering classes contributes to a sense of feeling undervalued and taken advantage of.

Background to the study

With targets for teacher recruitment repeatedly missed and persistently problematic retention rates (McLean et al., 2023; 2024), recent reports have described a potentially decisive and consequential shift in the way schools in England and Wales are deploying teaching assistants (TAs)² to address the on-going challenges of teacher shortages and supply. As the cost of external supply teachers spirals upwards, becoming increasingly unaffordable for more and more schools (Norden, 2024a; Martin and Norden, 2024), school leaders it seems, are turning to TAs to cover classes and lessons as an alternative to qualified teachers.

A survey of 2,800 school leaders and teachers in state-funded mainstream and special schools found that in response to recruitment and retention pressures – which includes the overheated supply teacher market – over three-quarters of schools have changed the ways in which TAs are being deployed, with covering for teacher absence and unfilled vacancies a marked example (Lucas et al., 2023). This shift in TA deployment, and its effects, have been evidenced in a recent survey of UNISON members involving 8,360 TAs, which found that two-thirds cited lesson cover as a principal driver of additional workload (UNISON, 2023).

Cover supervision and specified work

In England and Wales, the deployment of TAs to cover classes in the absence of teachers is not new. The catalyst for this innovation was a policy signed by the government, local government employers and the majority of school workforce unions in January 2003, known as The National Agreement (DfES, 2003). The Agreement was a response to concerns at the time over excessive teacher workload, which – in a historical echo of the current crises – was negatively impacting teacher recruitment and retention.

The National Agreement set out three major reforms to teachers' working practices, which were phased in over three years (DfES, 2003). From September 2003, routine administrative tasks (i.e. photocopying; putting up displays) were removed from teachers and given to TAs and other support staff. From September 2004, a limit was put on the amount of lesson cover that teachers could be expected to do for absent colleagues. Initially set at 38 hours per year, this provision has been incorporated into subsequent guidance, but without a defined upper limit.³ And from September 2005, a guarantee was introduced giving teachers regular, scheduled time away from the classroom each week for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) equivalent to at least ten per cent of their timetabled teaching time.

The National Agreement proposed schools use a floating teacher and/or a supply teacher to cover a class(es) when the regular teacher was absent or taking their PPA time. But it also endorsed and encouraged the deployment of TAs to undertake cover. The overarching logic behind extending the role of TAs in this regard was to mitigate some of the effects of teacher absence, including disruption to classroom routines and the consistent implementation of

² For the purposes of this report, the term TAs is used to refer collectively to support staff with a different job title, but the same or similar role, including: classroom assistants; learning support assistants; special needs assistants; and higher-level teaching assistants.

³ Paragraph 52.7 of STPCD (2023) states that teachers should be required to provide cover 'only rarely, and only in circumstances that are not foreseeable'. 'Only rarely' is not quantified (i.e. in terms of hours).

long term instructional strategies, and classes being led by adults that lack both meaningful relationships with pupils and knowledge of their specific needs and skills (Miller et al., 2008).

The National Agreement created two additional roles specifically for the purposes of covering classes in place of teachers: higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and cover supervisors. Detailed guidance prepared by the Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG) – the committee of signatories that oversaw the implementation of the National Agreement – stated that, because they had qualified teacher status (QTS), floating and supply teachers were expected to *teach* classes that they covered (cited in UNISON, 2009). In order to protect teachers' professional status, TAs, HLTAs and cover supervisors, however, were *not* expected to 'teach' classes that they covered. The implementation guidance contained two carefully defined terms – 'cover supervision' and 'specified work' – to avoid giving the impression that TAs, HLTAs and cover supervisors were encroaching on teachers' principal role and function of 'teaching' (UNISON, 2009).

'Cover supervision' refers to the covering of classes due to short term teacher absence. Such absences may be anticipated or planned (e.g. attending training offsite) or unexpected or unplanned (e.g. off due to sickness). Cover on a cover supervision basis involves pupils completing work set by a teacher under the supervision of a member of support staff, where 'no active teaching is taking place' (UNISON, 2009). WAMG guidance suggested that support staff could be deployed to cover for the first three days of an unplanned absence.

'Specified work' describes the planning, preparation and delivery of lessons on a routine basis, mainly (though not exclusively) as part of arrangements to release teachers for their PPA time. Subsequent to the National Agreement, the current legislation, which applies to all schools and academies, permits support staff to carry out specified work 'provided they are subject to the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher, and the headteacher is satisfied that they have the skills required to carry out the work' (The Education (Specified Work) (England) Regulations, 2012). Cover on a specified work basis involves an appropriate member of support staff *delivering* a lesson planned by or with a teacher.

Support staff role profiles developed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) – a body made up of local government employers' organisations and the support staff NJC unions (UNISON, Unite and GMB) – further delineated the two functions. It recommended that cover supervision is an activity that can only be carried out by support staff at Level 3, and specified work is an activity that can only be carried out by support staff at Level 4 (NJC, 2003; 2013). These activities map on to the roles created via the National Agreement: cover supervisor is a Level 3 role, and HLTA is a Level 4 role. In practice, only cover supervisors, TAs at Level 3, and HLTAs should be deployed to undertake cover supervision, while 'specified work' should only be carried out by HLTAs and TAs at Level 4. It is worth adding that as a general rule, cover supervisors only undertake cover supervision (it is their one and only role), while for some TAs and HLTAs, cover supervision and/or specified work forms part of their role. To clarify: not all TAs in all schools are deployed to cover classes.

The introduction of the terms cover supervision and specified work creates something of a hierarchy. Defined in relation to one another, teaching is the apex activity, undertaken only by qualified teachers. Next there is specified work, which involves the delivery of a lesson.

Underneath this is cover supervision, which explicitly precludes active teaching and implies pupils engaging in self-directed learning under the watchful eye of a cover supervisor or TA.

The attempts to differentiate these activities in the early days of the National Agreement, however, did not assuage concerns expressed by the largest teacher union at the time, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), about how cover supervision and specified work would be operationalised in schools. In a statement to its members, tellingly entitled '*A price too high*', the-then General Secretary, Doug McAvoy, explained that the NUT 'refuses to accept an inadequate and educationally unsound package', in which 'the Government will have legitimised the employment of unqualified persons to teach whole classes' (McAvoy, 2003). The NUT was the only teachers' union not to sign the National Agreement.

The NJC unions also had concerns that the new system would not work unless properly implemented, funded and monitored. And TAs themselves expressed misgivings about widening the scope of their duties. Research involving ten schools carried out from an industrial relations perspective, found 'universal opposition' to TAs being in sole charge of classes (Bach et al., 2006). Barkham (2008) found TAs were 'unhappy at the prospect of supervising whole classes' and reluctant to see this as part of their role, nor were they keen to seek HLTA status. An evaluation of the HLTA scheme in Wales found that, despite its recognition and appeal, the take-up of places was limited (Kilbride et al., 2019).

The experiences, implications and impact of support staff covering classes

The broad message from the recent research indicating a change in schools' deployment of TAs (UNISON, 2023; Lucas et al., 2023) is this: in the face of funding pressures and teacher shortages, many schools have been left with little option but to deploy them to cover classes. TAs' experiences of covering classes, and the implications and impact of cover are, however, under-researched. Most of the evidence that does exist is over a decade old, and reflects the flurry of research activity that followed the implementation of the National Agreement in England and Wales. These studies also centre on TAs and HLTAs. There is almost no coverage relating to the role and impact of cover supervisors.

The longitudinal, multimethod Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project, conducted between 2003 and 2009, and involving data collected from over 6,000 schools in England and Wales, revealed that schools tended to deploy TAs to cover classes, rather than using floating or supply teachers – a decision that was almost always financially driven (Blatchford et al., 2012). A 2006 survey of 1,560 HLTAs found a third of respondents took whole classes every day, with 41 per cent of primary HLTAs and 22 per cent of secondary HLTAs taking whole classes once a week (Wilson et al., 2007). A large scale, mixed methods study conducted in 2008 involving 2,315 schools found that TAs were deployed to cover classes in over 80 per cent of mainstream and special schools (Hutchings et al., 2009). In the main, they were deployed to cover teacher absences of a day or less, with one in ten primary schools, and four in ten secondary schools assigning TAs to cover absences lasting at least three days – beyond what the guidance recommended. Studies from Wales are rare, though a 2013 inquiry by the Welsh school inspectorate, which drew on data from 23 school visits, interviews and questionnaires, estimated that just under ten per cent of lessons were 'covered by staff who are not the usual class teacher' (Estyn, 2013).

In line with policymakers' rationale for deploying TAs to cover classes, the studies cited above provide some support for the view that this arrangement can mitigate some of the downsides of teacher absence. The majority of the 1,764 English headteachers that participated in the study by Hutchings et al. (2009) – including over 90 per cent of special school headteachers – said the need to minimise disruption and to have cover staff familiar with school procedures and pupils was an important consideration in the decision to deploy TAs to cover lessons, rather than getting in external supply teachers. But less than half of all headteachers agreed the lesson cover arrangements heralded by the National Agreement had led to greater continuity for pupils. One expression of discontinuity can be seen in the finding that a fifth of primary schools teachers reported pupils missing out on regular in-class support as a result of TAs being deployed to cover lessons elsewhere in the school (Hutchings et al., 2009). For contrast, HLTAs in a 2007 study by Wilson et al. identified providing continuity for pupils during teacher absence as one of their 'greatest impacts'.

Estyn (2013), meanwhile, found that when TAs were 'familiar with the learners and with school processes', the 'adverse effects of short term teacher absence on pupils' learning [were] reduced'. However, it also found the pace of these lessons was 'often too slow and expectations are too low'. This, it concluded, led to pupils making 'less progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding' (Estyn, 2013). The quality of lesson planning and the level of expectations for cover lessons appear to be a contributing factor. A small scale study by Hancock et al. (2010) on the use of support staff to cover classes attributed the lack of impact on learning to TAs and HLTAs being 'required to take on planning and cover duties, which are beyond their knowledge and training'. The DISS project, meanwhile, found that the limits of TAs' and cover supervisors' subject knowledge prompted teachers to set less demanding tasks for pupils to complete during cover classes (Blatchford et al., 2012). Science teachers, for example, did not plan practical experiments. That said, the common experience among TAs and, in particular, cover supervisors was to go into cover lessons without a plan or a briefing from a teacher (Blatchford et al., 2009).

The perceived lack of impact must be seen in the context of the very different conditions under which TAs lead classes, their levels of training, and the (lack of) opportunities to plan and prepare, relative to teachers. Expecting TAs to perform to the same standard as teachers is unfair and unrealistic. Simply put: TAs are not at fault for any lack of impact.

Indeed, the limited potential for support staff to directly influence learning outcomes was, in effect, designed in to the National Agreement, with the explicit directive precluding them from 'teaching' lessons. The expectation was that improvements in pupil outcomes would come about indirectly, as a consequence of teachers spending less time on onerous administrative tasks and lesson cover, and having more dedicated time in which to improve the quality of their lessons and develop their teaching craft. The majority of headteachers in the Hutchings et al. (2009) study, however, said that the cover arrangements introduced via the National Agreement had not led to improvements in either pupil behaviour or academic outcomes.⁴

⁴ Some additional context is helpful. International research shows classes covered by supply/substitute teachers are associated with a reduction in teaching quality and achievement scores. Herrmann and Rockoff's (2012) analysis of longitudinal data from schools in New York City found 'the expected loss in daily productivity from employing a temporary substitute is on par with replacing a regular [teacher] of average productivity with one at the 10th to 20th percentile of productivity'. Benhenda's (2019) innovative analysis matching absent teachers with their replacements in French secondary schools, found 'the expected loss in daily productivity from non-replaced

Again, context is important. School leaders were making a holistic judgement about the impact of the reforms, not a summary judgement on the impact of support staff alone.

The semantic takes on cover supervision and specified work seem to have had little or no bearing on the impact of these arrangements. Indeed, WAMG guidance from 2008 (cited in UNISON, 2009) mentioned unspecified 'evidence that suggests cover supervision can quickly become specified work, especially in primary and special schools'. Hutchings et al. (2009) conclusion that 'most schools do not make a clear distinction between cover supervision and specified work' suggests that in the face of operational necessity, such nuance dissolved fairly early on in the implementation of the National Agreement.

Leaton Gray and Whitty (2010) cite 'reports of HLTAs standing in for teachers with QTS ... during maternity leave, for example, even though this is not permitted by the HLTA regulations'. Hutchings et al. (2009) found that only half of the support staff 'who ever took responsibility for whole classes' in secondary schools were in a Level 4 role or above – yet this was still twice as many as in primary and special schools. The practical implication of this is that support staff in Level 3 roles (and lower) undertook Level 4 activities that should not have been part of their role. However, there are no data on which to make a judgement about whether this situation persists today.

Bach et al. (2006), Blatchford et al. (2012), Leaton Gray and Whitty (2010), and Wilkinson (2005) all offer critiques on the thinking that influenced and informed the National Agreement, and how the introduction of terms such as 'supervision', 'delivery' and 'specified work' stretch common and conventional conceptualisations of 'teaching'. For all the careful formulation of terminology intended to avoid any pretence that support staff teach the classes they are deployed to cover, a consistent finding from the limited research on this issue is that the line between 'teaching' and 'not teaching' is hard to draw in practice. Hancock et al. (2010) make the pragmatic point that 'no active teaching taking place ... seems an unlikely scenario for a whole lesson in a primary school'. Indeed, in the DISS project, TAs reported that covering classes inevitably had a pedagogic element (Blatchford et al., 2012), and 30 per cent of TAs in the Hutchings et al. (2009) study said they 'regularly taught the class, delivering a complete lesson'.

Cover is a duty TAs take seriously. For example, a study of 24 primary TAs who led maths lessons found that they 'feel responsibility towards children when lessons do not go as well as they hoped' (Houssart, 2013). More than a decade on from these studies, three-quarters of respondents to a 2023 NEU survey described cover as 'teaching' (NEU, 2023). The unchecked drift of the TA, HLTA and cover supervisor roles into teachers' pedagogical territory, precipitated by the National Agreement, is 'an indication of the gradual blurring of professional boundaries' (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010).

Over 20 years on, schools in England (Martin, 2023) and Wales (Hughes, 2023) are once again grappling with combined crises of teacher workload and teacher recruitment and retention. In 2003, the policy response to these challenges – an expansion of support staff, in number, role and remit – led to improvements in teachers' perceptions of their workload,

days is on par with replacing an average teacher with one at the 30th percentile of the teacher value-added distribution'. On average, supply teachers are unable to mitigate the negative impact of absent regular teachers.

stress and job satisfaction (Blatchford et al., 2012). It is possible that this partial success may explain the lack of interest in the specific issue of TAs covering classes post 2009/10, after the studies evaluating the impact of the National Agreement had been published.

Another explanation is that pivotal analyses from the DISS project – which found that pupils who received support from TAs made less progress than peers of similar ability, social class and gender (Blatchford et al., 2009; 2012) – led to policymakers, practitioners and researchers focussing on TAs' classroom support role to the exclusion of their role in covering classes.

Despite efforts to ensure the DISS project findings are understood and acted on in context – the researchers were clear that any lack of impact was attributable to decisions made *about* TAs, not by TAs – extreme takes on these results have been used to misrepresent and undermine the role and value of TAs. In 2013, for example, an article on the front page of the *Sunday Times* suggested '230,000 classroom assistants face [the] axe' (Woolf and Griffiths, 2013). The article amplified a recommendation made in a report on how to reduce school spending by the Reform thinktank. 'Ministers', it said, 'should support schools that reduce numbers of teaching assistants and allow class sizes to rise' (Thorpe et al., 2013). The basis for this proposal was a one-sided and simplistic interpretation of the DISS project findings on pupil progress, and seemingly designed to influence opinion in favour of a measure to reduce public spending on schools ahead of the 2013 Comprehensive Spending Review.

The current iteration of the teacher recruitment, retention and workload crunch is occurring in a different and more challenging context. Indeed, some of these contextual elements – on-going fallout from the pandemic; ever tightening school budgets; the high stakes nature of school accountability – actively contribute to the present crisis. Capacity across the overall school workforce is stretched, and deploying TAs to plug gaps in the teacher workforce is likely to disrupt provision for the pupils they commonly support – most notably those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or additional learning needs (ALN).

Diverting TAs away from the activities for which they are trained and in which they are most impactful, and putting them in situations for which they are not trained, risks undermining their sense of purpose and compromising their effectiveness. Furthermore, it may be fuelling a recruitment, retention and workload crisis within the TA workforce itself.

It is worth noting that, having removed the National Agreement's list of administrative tasks that teachers no longer needed to carry out from the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) in 2014, an updated list of such tasks was reinstated in March 2024 (DfE, 2024a). UNISON, however, raised concerns that this had not been developed with the involvement of the NJC support staff unions, and could potentially add to the workload of already overstretched staff.

Aims and purposes of the study

This study reported here was designed to provide the data to address and update gaps in the existing evidence. The main aims were to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of how on-going teacher shortages in England and Wales is driving the deployment of TAs to cover classes, and to characterise the extent and impact of these arrangements on pupils, schools and TAs themselves. Incorporated in these aims was a question concerning the extent to which schools' deployment decisions about cover supervision and specified work are consistent and commensurate with national guidance on each type of cover.

This study takes a more expansive view of impact than previous research. It considers the direct and indirect effects of deploying TAs to undertake lesson cover. Some of these effects might be called opportunity costs, and are reflected in questions about the extent to which TAs are able to fulfil their regular duties, and what impact (if any) this has on their workload and wellbeing, and the continuity and quality of provision for the pupils they commonly support. One of the study's working hypotheses was that, due to general shortages of school staff, TAs are unlikely to have their own role/duties covered when they are deployed to cover classes. That is, no-one does their job when they are elsewhere filling in for teachers.

This research was specifically prompted by findings from surveys by UNISON (2023) and Lucas et al. (2023), which addressed the deployment of TAs to cover classes in more tangential ways. The purpose of this study was to not only look directly at the issue of cover (its extent and impact), but to provide evidence to address a further issue that has been hiding in plain sight for many years: the appropriateness of deploying TAs and cover supervisors to, in effect, teach classes and lessons in place of teachers.

This study was designed to provide an evidence base for recommendations to school leaders on the operationalisation of guidance relating to cover supervision and specified work, and – with a general election anticipated before the end of 2024 – to policymakers on the working lives of TAs and issues regarding their role in covering classes.

Methods and procedures

The data for this study were collected via an online survey, conducted between late-January and mid-February 2024. The study used a convenience sampling approach. An invitation to complete the survey was emailed to UNISON members who cover classes in state schools in England and Wales. The same invitation was also posted on the UNISON in Schools Facebook page⁵, thereby potentially encouraging non-members to take part.

The survey took between five and ten minutes to complete. It consisted of closed-ended items designed to elicit numerical data on the amount of time support staff spend covering classes in place of teachers per week, and the main reasons why they are deployed to cover classes. Two groups of items invited respondents to indicate the extent to which their experiences of covering classes align with the expectations and requirements set out in national guidance relating to (i) cover supervision and (ii) specified work.

Additional survey items regarding respondents' experiences of covering classes included questions about the extent to which: (i) they have additional support from a TA in classes that they cover; (ii) TAs' duties are covered – or backfilled – when they are elsewhere covering a class; and (iii) TAs receive extra pay for covering classes. Data on the opportunity costs were collected through items on the extent to which TAs' regular duties are affected by being deployed to cover classes, while a further set of items captured perceptions of the impact of covering classes on pupils, schools and support staff themselves (e.g. in terms of their workload and wellbeing), school provision (including for SEND/ALN) and pupils.

The survey contained an optional open question, which captured qualitative data on respondents' views and experiences on covering classes and the impact on them, their colleagues, their school and/or pupils.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/UNISONinSchools/>

Sample

The survey received a total of 6,504 responses. Table A1 in the Appendix presents a breakdown of all respondents by role (i.e. job title) and school type. Prior to analysis, the very small number of responses from people working in all-through schools, alternative provisions and pupil referral units were removed. Cases of cover supervisors in special schools and TAs that indicated they are temporary agency staff, were also removed due to their very limited number (11 and 15 respondents, respectively).

TAs and HLTAs were collapsed into one overarching role category (TAs), and cover supervisors were split out to create a second role category. Only relevant analyses were conducted using the data from the subsample of cover supervisors.⁶ A breakdown of the sample used for the analyses can be seen in Table 1 below. After refinement, the dataset comprised a total of 6,356 responses: 5,989 responses from TAs in mainstream and special schools; and 367 responses from cover supervisors in mainstream schools.

Table 1. Respondents by role and school type

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Teaching assistants</i>	3,852	61%	185	3%	540	8%	4,577	72%
<i>Higher level TAs</i>	1,172	18%	111	2%	129	2%	1,412	22%
Total TAs	5,024	79%	296	5%	669	11%	5,989	94%
Cover supervisors	164	3%	203	3%	-	-	367	6%
Total	5,188	82%	499	8%	669	11%	6,356	100%

The relative number and proportion of responses from staff working in secondary and special schools are much smaller compared with responses from those working in primary/infant settings. Also, TAs considerably outnumber cover supervisors. Comparing the sample with the national picture, school workforce data for England and Wales from 2022/23 (shown in Table A2 in the Appendix) indicate that two-thirds of all TAs (66 per cent) work in primary/infant schools, 17 per cent work in secondary schools, and 16 per cent in specialist settings. Data on cover supervisors are unavailable for either England or Wales.

It is worth noting that a number of TAs in the study sample reported having a split contract of employment. This means they spend part of their week working as an HLTA and/or as a cover supervisor. In all, 866 TAs (19 per cent of all TAs) have a split contract. Of this total, the majority, 799 TAs (17 per cent of all TAs), work in primary/infant schools. Thirteen per cent of all TAs work for part of the week as an HLTA, and six per cent work for part of the week as a cover supervisor, in addition to their TA role. The survey asked staff with a split contract to identify their job title in terms of the role that incorporated covering classes.

⁶ As cover supervisors are employed and deployed specifically, and usually exclusively, to cover classes in place of teachers, a number of analyses were not relevant to this group.

Key characteristics

Level of role

Respondents were asked if their role is described in terms of a particular level, and if so, to indicate the level at which they are employed. As there are no national job descriptions for school support staff posts, the survey used the most common template provided by the NJC role profiles.⁷ There may be a small number of schools that use an alternative framework.

As Table 2 shows, a third of TAs (34 per cent) are in Level 3 roles, and 16 per cent are in roles at Level 4 or 5. Level 4 is the minimum level at which HLTAs should be employed under the TA role profiles. Over a quarter of TAs in primary/infant schools and special schools did not have (or did not know) the level at which they were employed. Higher proportions of TAs and cover supervisors in secondary settings did not know their level or did not have one (48 per cent and 66 per cent, respectively). It is not certain, but this may be connected to the fact that the majority of secondary schools in England are academies. A fifth of cover supervisors (21 per cent) are employed at Level 4 or 5, which is higher than required for this role (Level 3).

Changes made in 2012 to how HLTA status is funded and delivered have resulted in a great deal of variability in the level and quality of training provided, and the awarding of HLTA status. This includes HLTA roles being created and awarded at the discretion of the leaders of individual schools. The category 'HLTA' is not as a consistent and reliable indicator of a verifiable higher level of training, skills, knowledge or expertise as it was pre-2012.

Table 2. Level of role

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Level 1 or 2	892	18%	37	13%	114	17%	1,043	17%	4	2%	3	1%	7	2%
Level 3	1,706	34%	65	22%	242	36%	2,013	34%	51	31%	26	13%	77	21%
Level 4 or 5	835	17%	50	17%	91	14%	976	16%	34	21%	31	15%	65	18%
N/A/don't know	1,397	28%	122	41%	183	27%	1,702	28%	64	39%	123	61%	187	51%
Other level	194	4%	22	7%	39	6%	255	4%	11	7%	20	10%	31	8%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

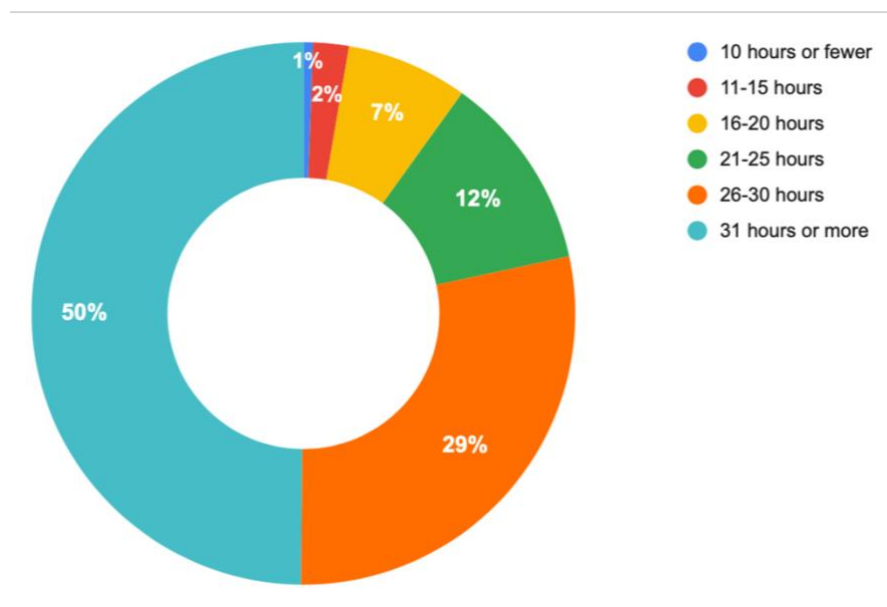
Contracted hours of work

Figure 1 shows the range of contracted hours for TAs and cover supervisors collectively. These are the hours specified in respondents' contract of employment (or contracts, for those with split roles), not the number of hours they actually work (which may be greater). The majority of TAs and cover supervisors (79 per cent) are contracted to work full-time

⁷ <https://www.skillsforschools.org.uk/resources-research/professional-standards-for-school-roles/role-profiles>

hours (31 hours or more) or close to full-time hours (at least 26 hours per week). Table A3 in the Appendix shows a breakdown by role and school type.

Figure 1. Contracted hours of work: TAs and cover supervisors



Other background characteristics

The survey respondents are an experienced group. Four in five TAs (79 per cent) and two-thirds of cover supervisors (67 per cent) have been in their current role for at least six years. A further nine per cent of TAs and cover supervisors have been in role for at least four years. They are also experienced in terms of the time spent in their current setting, with seven in ten TAs and cover supervisors reporting at least six years of service in their current school. Tables A4 and A5 in the Appendix provide a breakdown of respondents' experience.

In terms of their geographic location, the highest proportion of responses came from support staff in the north west of England (22 per cent), followed by those in the Midlands (20 per cent) and the south east of England (15 per cent). Response rates from the other regions were: Yorkshire and the Humber (10 per cent); south west of England (eight per cent); north of England and Wales (seven per cent each); and Greater London and the east of England (five per cent each). Finally, 94 per cent of respondents are members of UNISON.

Subsample of respondents and responses for the open comment item

The numerical analyses of survey data are supplemented with an analysis of responses to the optional open comment on TAs' views and experiences of covering classes. Just under a third of TAs (31 per cent, or 1,840 TAs) provided a comment, and the analysis was based on a subsample of these responses. A sampling frame was drawn up to inform the random selection of 1,000 responses (54 per cent of all responses), which, as shown in Table 3, was designed to broadly reflect the proportions of TAs and HLTAs from the different types of school in the main survey sample (see Table 1).

Table 3. Sampling frame for responses to the open-ended question

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teaching assistants	580	58%	80	8%	90	9%	750	75%
Higher level TAs	200	20%	30	3%	20	2%	250	25%
Total	780	78%	110	11%	110	11%	1,000	100%

Between 5% and 7% of responses in each school type were from TAs/HLTAs in Wales

The selection of comments from each set of respondents was random, with the requisite quota of comments drawn from the middle of each relevant dataset. For example, 126 secondary school TAs responded to the open item. The middle 80 comments were extracted to meet this quota, with the first 23 comments and the last 23 comments excluded.

On inspection, not every comment in the dataset pertained to the issue of covering classes, and so the 1,000 comments were individually screened for their useability in the analysis. Fourteen per cent of comments did not directly address issues relating to covering classes. Typical examples were broad-based comments about the general effects of staff shortages, increases in the number/proportion of pupils with SEND/ALN, or low pay. These comments were excluded from the analysis, so too were comments that replicated a response to another survey item. These accounted for 29 per cent of the comments, and included examples of TAs stating the number of hours of cover they undertake, the reason(s) for cover, or that they did not receive additional pay for covering classes. In total, 57 per cent of the comments (565) were used in the qualitative analysis. The bulk of these comments (80 per cent) are from TAs and HLTAs in primary/infant settings.

All of the comments from cover supervisors on covering classes were included in a separate analysis. Of the 120 comments, 34 (28 per cent) were either unrelated to cover, or replicated a response to another survey item. Of the 87 useable comments, 47 per cent are from primary/infant cover supervisors and 53 per cent from secondary cover supervisors. Eight comments (seven per cent) are from cover supervisors in schools in Wales. Consistent with the sample used for the numerical analyses, comments from cover supervisors working in special schools were not included in this analysis.

For each analysis, a coding frame was developed via an open-ended inductive analysis of the comments in each dataset. Recurrent views, experiences, issues and commentaries were collated under the broad thematic headings used to organise the main survey items. This allowed for plausible and credible generalisations, while retaining the individuality of particular comments from respondents to serve as illustrative examples of specific points. The prevalence of key and recurring features contained within the data were coded. This process validated the selection of the predetermined headings, and these then provided a set of emergent overarching themes capturing the main findings from the analyses of open comments. The findings from these analyses of qualitative data are integrated into the presentation of results that follows. The coding frameworks, with prevalence counts by school type, are presented in Tables B1 and B2 in the Appendix.

Results and findings

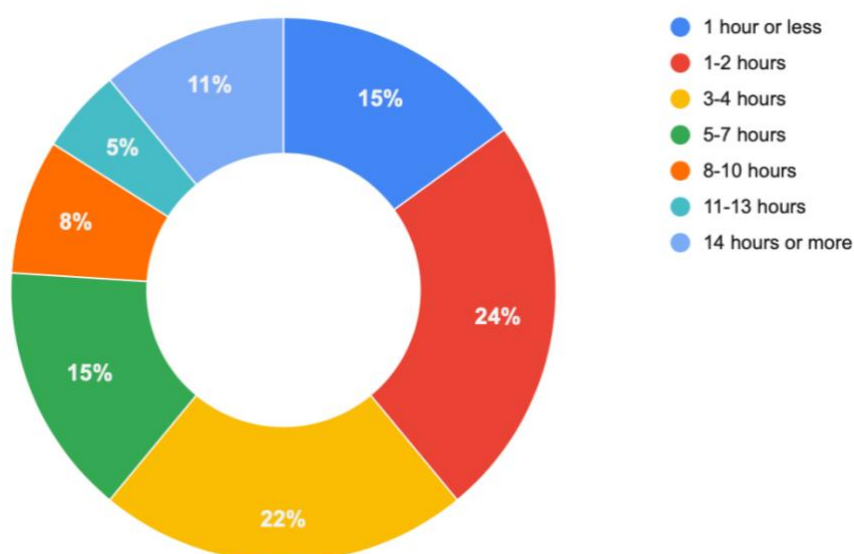
The principal analyses involved TAs, but where relevant, results of analyses involving the subsample of cover supervisors are presented. Where they diverge notably from results for TAs, results for HLTAs only are also highlighted. The presentation of results and findings is thematic. For each theme, the quantitative data are presented first, followed by a summary of findings from the analysis of the qualitative data from the open comments. Indicative quotes from respondents are integrated to add colour and depth to the numerical results.

1. The extent of, and reasons for, cover undertaken by TAs

Amount and frequency of cover

The first set of results relate to the amount and frequency of cover undertaken by TAs. These analyses are based on data from the 5,989 TAs that reported covering classes. TAs were asked to estimate how many hours per week, on average, they spend covering classes. The results, shown in Figure 2, reveal that three out of five TAs (61 per cent) cover classes for up to four hours per week. Two out of five TAs (39 per cent) cover classes for at least five hours per week. Five hours is equivalent to at least one school day.

Figure 2. Amount of cover (estimated average hours per week)



Results comparing HLTAs and TAs (see Table A6 in the Appendix) show that HLTAs have the heavier cover load. More than twice as many HLTAs cover classes for at least five hours per week, compared with TAs (69 per cent vs. 29 per cent).

Results by school type are presented in Table 4. Indicative estimates suggest that, taken together, TAs and HLTAs in primary/infant schools and special schools cover classes for, on average, between three and four hours per week, while TAs and HLTAs in secondary schools cover classes for, on average, between two and three hours per week.

Table 4. Amount of cover (estimated average hours per week)

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 hour or less	760	15%	61	21%	80	12%	901	15%
1-2 hours	1,207	24%	92	31%	138	21%	1,437	24%
3-4 hours	1,096	22%	64	22%	148	22%	1,308	22%
5-7 hours	789	16%	34	11%	101	15%	924	15%
8-10 hours	401	8%	17	6%	67	10%	485	8%
11-13 hours	247	5%	10	3%	34	5%	291	5%
14 hours or more	524	10%	18	6%	101	15%	643	11%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

Around two in five TAs in primary/infant schools (39 per cent) cover classes for at least five hours per week (i.e. one day), while 15 per cent cover classes for at least 11 hours per week – the equivalent of at least two days. TAs in secondary schools appear more likely to cover classes for shorter periods of time: just over half of TAs (52 per cent) do up to two hours of cover per week. In special schools, TAs are more likely to cover classes for lengthier periods. Forty-five per cent of TAs do at least five hours of cover per week (i.e. one day), and 20 per cent cover classes for at least 11 hours per week (i.e. two days).

It is understood that not all TAs in all schools are deployed to cover classes. As the main target of the survey were staff that undertake cover, the data are biased in this direction, and should not be taken as reliable estimates of the proportions of TAs who do and do not cover classes. That said, the survey does offer some insight into this. In addition to the exclusion criteria described above, the first survey item screened for eligibility, in order to ensure only TAs that undertake cover proceeded to the main survey. The actual number of people that responded to the invitation to complete the survey was 8,066. A quarter of those who initiated the survey – 2,077 respondents – indicated that they have not covered classes so far this school year (2023/24).

TAs were asked to compare their estimate with the amount of cover they did in the previous school year. Only TAs who reported covering classes in the same school in 2022/23 were included in this analysis (96 per cent of the sample). The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison with amount of cover in previous year (average hours per week)

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
More than last year	2,148	44%	137	49%	288	45%	2,573	45%
No change	1,804	37%	102	36%	232	36%	2,138	37%
Less than last year	898	19%	41	15%	118	18%	1,057	18%
Total	4,850	84%	280	5%	638	11%	5,768	100%

Percentages expressed as a proportion of all TAs who covered classes in same school in 2022/23 (n=5,768)

Overall, 45 per cent of TAs report doing more class cover than in the year before. This group includes those who report doing no cover at all in the previous year. Results by role show that half of HLTAs (51 per cent) report an increase in cover, compared with 41 per cent of TAs. Thirty-seven per cent of all TAs report no change in the amount of cover they are doing, while 18 per cent of all TAs report doing less cover than the year before. An additional indicative analysis suggests that TAs in each setting that report an increase in cover do more cover overall, compared with other TAs.

A separate analysis of responses from cover supervisors indicates a rise in the amount of cover undertaken. These results, presented in Table A7 in the Appendix, show 57 per cent of cover supervisors report an increase in the amount of cover undertaken, while 36 per cent report no change. Seven per cent report doing less cover than in 2022/23.

Overall, the picture that emerges from the analysis of these data suggests an increase in the need for cover across mainstream and special schools, which is being met by TAs. The next set of analyses address the extent to which this increased need is attributable to the on-going challenges associated with teacher shortages and supply.

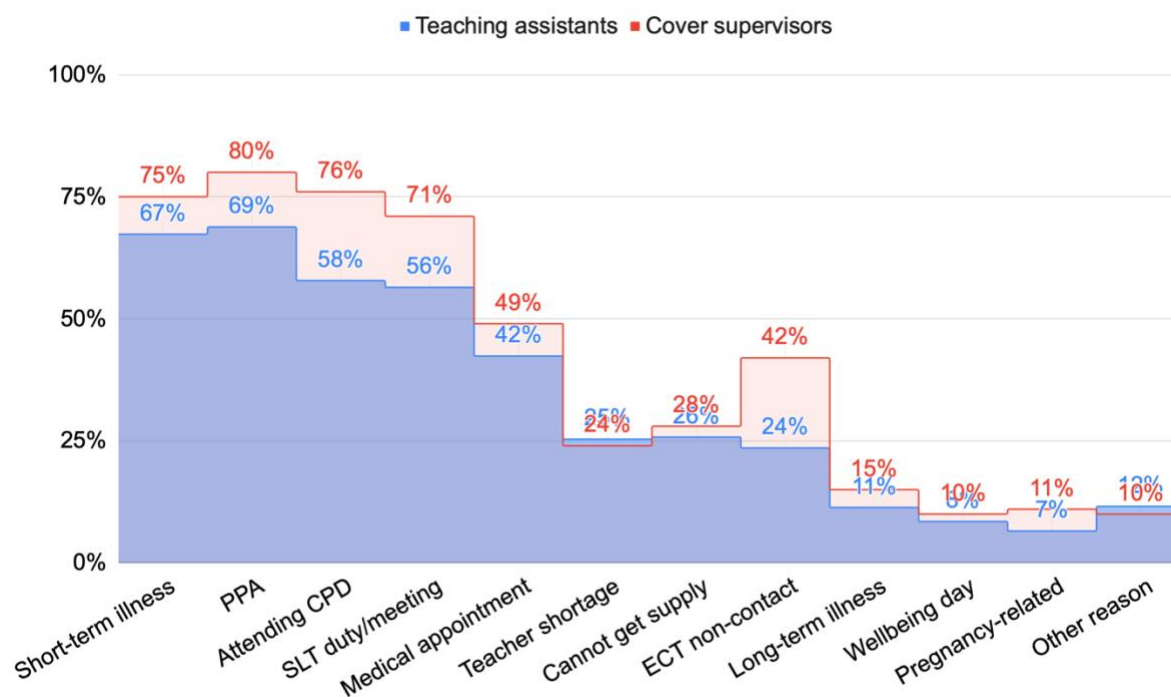
Reasons for deploying TAs to cover classes

As well as collecting estimates of the amount of cover undertaken by TAs and cover supervisors, the survey captured the reasons why they are deployed to cover classes. Respondents were asked to identify up to six common reasons for which, as far as they were aware, they have been deployed to cover classes, so far this school year. The options were expressed in the form of reasons why teachers are unavailable to teach classes.

The results are presented in Figures 3, 4 and 5. Figure 3 compares responses for TAs with responses for cover supervisors in primary/infant and secondary schools, providing an overall impression of the reasons why cover is required in mainstream settings. Figures 4 and 5 compare responses by school type for TAs and cover supervisors, respectively. As respondents were invited to select multiple reasons for cover, the results are presented in terms of the proportion of all TAs and all cover supervisors selecting each option.

The most common reasons for covering classes in mainstream settings, as shown in Figure 3, relate to short notice absences due to sickness (67 per cent of TAs; 75 per cent of cover supervisors) and short term release for PPA time (69 per cent of TAs; 80 per cent of cover supervisors), attending CPD (58 per cent of TAs; 76 per cent of cover supervisors), and attending senior leadership team meetings or other related duties (56 per cent of TAs; 71 per cent of cover supervisors). These results are broadly in line with expectations, as it is for these specific, limited term purposes that schools can deploy support staff to cover classes (i.e. from a half-day to a day). It is worth noting that PPA arrangements for secondary school teachers are generally timetabled during their non-contact time, hence the relatively low proportion of respondents in these settings citing PPA as a reason for cover.

Figure 3. Reasons for covering classes: TAs and cover supervisors in primary/infant and secondary schools

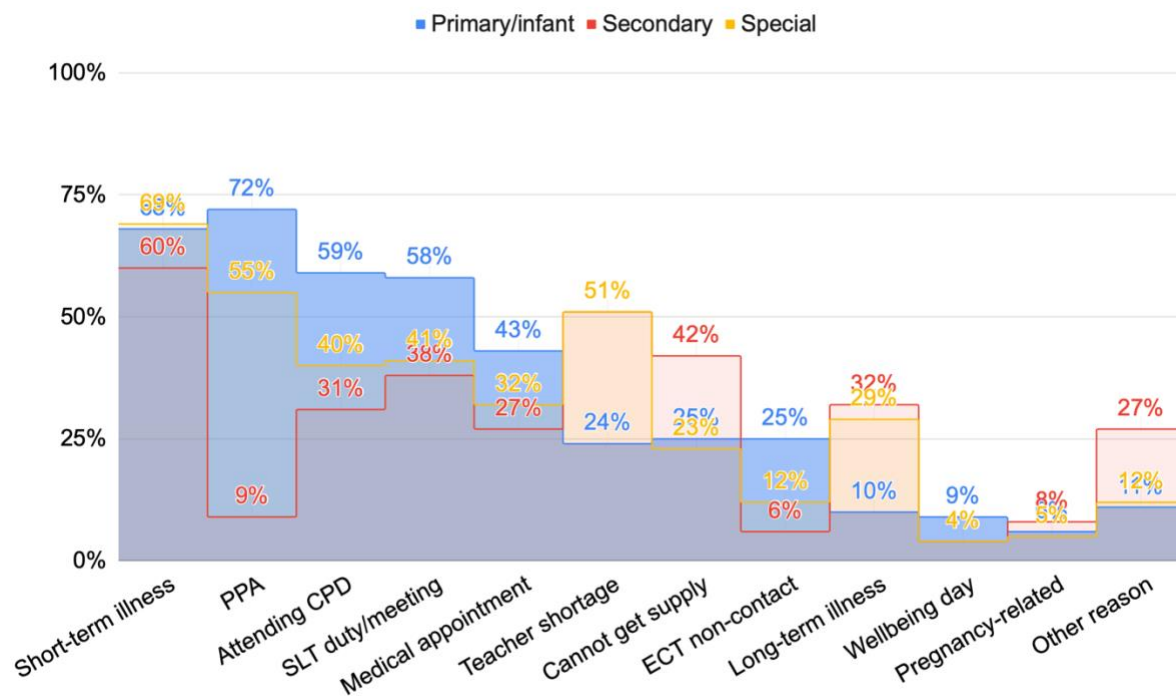


The notable results relate to the proportion of support staff covering classes due to on-going difficulties with the supply of teachers. Overall, around a quarter of TAs (24 per cent) and cover supervisors (25 per cent) cover classes because their school does not have enough teachers. Furthermore, similar proportions of TAs (26 per cent) and cover supervisors (28 per cent) cover classes because schools do not, or are unable to, bring in external supply teachers. A third cause of extended teacher absence is long term sickness. Eleven per cent of TAs and 15 per cent of cover supervisors report covering classes for this purpose.

TAs and HLTAs are equally likely to cover classes for reasons due to teacher shortage (TAs: 29 per cent vs. HLTAs 26 per cent) and the lack of supply teachers (TAs: 25 per cent vs. HLTAs 26 per cent). HLTAs, however, are slightly more likely to cover classes due to a long term sickness (17 per cent vs. 12 per cent for TAs). Also, consistent with requirements for specified work, HLTAs are more likely than TAs to cover classes in order to release teachers for their PPA time (81 per cent vs. 66 per cent) and early career teachers (ECTs) for their non-contact and training time (35 per cent vs. 18 per cent). See Table A8 in the Appendix.

Results for all TAs, presented in Figure 4 and in Table A9 in the Appendix, show marked differences between settings for reasons linked to teacher shortage and supply. Half of the TAs in secondary and special schools (51 per cent per setting) report covering classes because the school does not have enough teachers (vs. 24 per cent of primary/infant TAs). A further 42 per cent of secondary TAs cover classes because the school cannot, or does not, get in supply teachers (vs. 25 per cent of primary/infant TAs, and 23 per cent of special school TAs). Just under a third of TAs in secondary schools (32 per cent) and 29 per cent of TAs in special schools cover classes because of teacher absence due to long term sickness, compared with ten per cent of TAs in primary/infant schools.

Figure 4. Reasons for covering classes: TAs

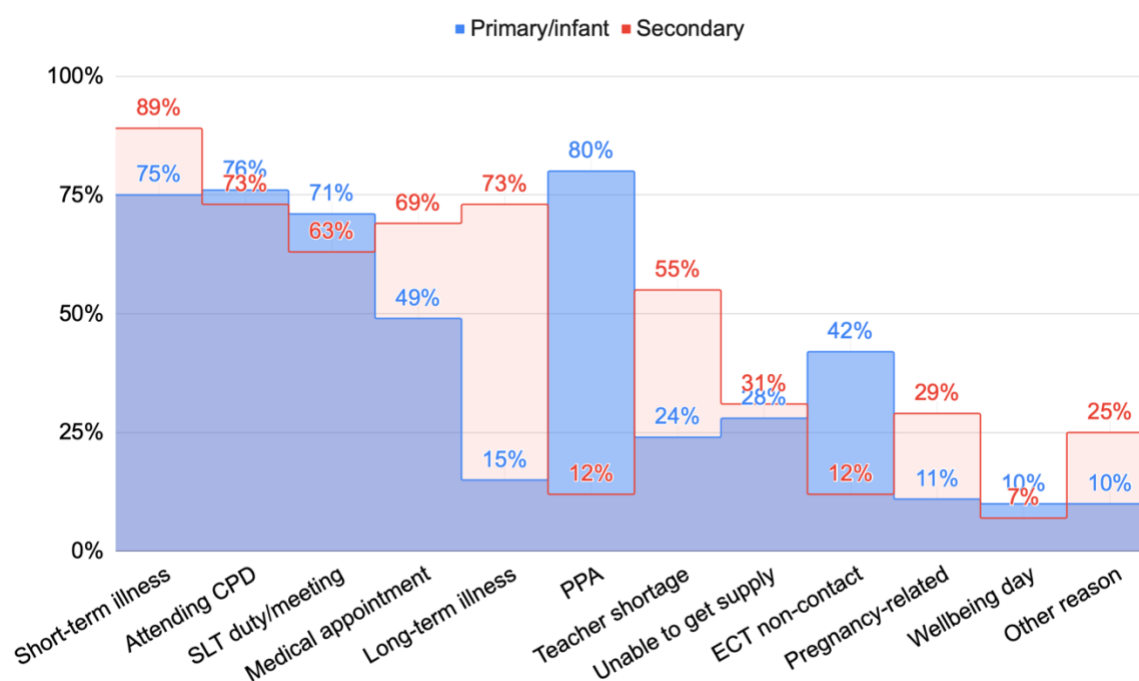


One further finding from this analysis worth drawing attention to concerns cover for wellbeing days. Wellbeing days are a relatively new, but growing practice, to support mental health and wellbeing, whereby schools allow staff to take a paid day off during term time. This practice seems more common in primary/infant settings, where nine per cent of TAs were deployed to cover teachers taking their wellbeing day.

Additional analyses were conducted to test an emergent hypothesis: TAs undertaking the most cover (i.e. 11 hours or more per week) are more likely to cover classes for reasons connected to teacher shortages, the inability to get in supply teachers, and/or cover for long term sickness, compared with TAs who do an average amount of cover (3h 20m). The rationale behind this assumption is that schools might, where possible, aim for consistency by deploying the same TA to cover a class (or classes) experiencing an extended teacher absence. Evidence to support this hypothesis, however, could not be found. One inference is that some schools do not have a sufficient number of Level 4 TAs to deploy to do specified work (as national guidance advises). Another is that schools might lack a coherent strategy for managing extended gaps in staffing. Either way, the data cannot provide certainty.

After accounting for the expected results relating to common short notice and short term absences, the data for cover supervisors, presented in Figure 5 and in Table A10 in the Appendix, show once again that on-going difficulties with teacher shortage and supply are a notable driver of the need for cover in secondary schools. Over half of cover supervisors in these settings (55 per cent) cite teacher shortages, and almost three-quarters (73 per cent) provide cover for long term teacher sickness (vs. 24 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, for TAs in primary/infant schools). Thirty per cent of cover supervisors across both types of school report having to cover classes as a result of being unable to get in supply teachers.

Figure 5. Reasons for covering classes: cover supervisors



In summary, these results provide evidence of the role of teacher shortages and supply in the deployment of TAs to cover classes, above and beyond the prevailing need for cover due to short notice and short term absence.

Open comments on the extent of, and reason for, cover undertaken by TAs

The open comments contained a number of examples across all school types of the marked increases in the amount and frequency of cover undertaken by TAs, and the reasons for it.

When I first started it was a couple of PPA sessions a week and short term sickness cover at short notice. This has increased over time and I now cover SLT release time, ECT [early career teachers], PPA for several year groups, part-time staff hours... the list goes on. This is due to a lack of funding and the lack of available supply teachers. Primary/infant HLTA

My role has become increasingly cover for absent teachers in my department. Last year about 50 per cent of my time was covering absent teachers. Secondary HLTA

The general use of more and more ECTs as opposed to experienced more expensive teachers means that we are required to cover more PPA/ECT time. Special school TA

A striking refrain, found in 11 per cent of the comments, is the sense that covering classes is now 'expected' of TAs, or it is 'assumed' that they will cover classes when needed.

There is then an assumption I will cover if teachers are off at short notice. Primary/infant TA

It is an expectation. If a teacher is off and has provided work, the TAs are expected to teach the lesson. Special school TA

I am told I have to plan and deliver a lesson every Monday as our class teacher does not work this day. I have raised the issue with management about myself not having time to plan a lesson, nor am I confident in planning lessons as I don't have training. I was told it's in my contract. Special school TA

In some cases, TAs report feeling obligated to cover classes, or unable to refuse.

They always ask if you can provide cover but make you feel that you can't say no. Primary/infant TA

If we refuse to cover then we are made to feel worthless. Primary/infant TA

While no relationship was found in the data between having a high cover load and reasons for cover linked to teacher shortage and supply, six per cent of the comments contained examples of TAs covering for durations far in excess of the weekly average (3h 20m).

I am having to cover an average of 3/4.5 days a week on a regular basis. This is partly because of the lack of funds to employ the extra staff needed or a supply. Primary/infant TA

I have led reception class every afternoon since November. Head implied another member of staff would be taken on and they have not. Looks like this is the future. Primary/infant TA

My school has used agency teachers to fill vacancies. The agency teacher in my class left so I was asked to step up and teach my class until a new teacher can be recruited. I am teaching my class on a full term basis for the foreseeable future. Special school TA

Some weeks I have been teaching 20 out of 25 lessons. Some days I am teaching 5 full lessons plus a tutor time. Secondary HLTA

I teach classes full time 30 hours a week. Primary/infant TA

The greatest proportion of comments from secondary school cover supervisors (37 per cent) reveal a tendency to take on teaching curriculum subjects following the departure of teachers.

Recently the cover supervisors have been asked to cover English lessons for a teacher that has now left [and] a member of staff going on maternity leave. Secondary cover supervisor

Due to shortage of staff I am the main teacher for English for a group of 30 students. Secondary cover supervisor

I have a fixed timetable where I'm teaching maths. This timetable belonged to a deputy head but has since moved to a new school, therefore passed on to me. Secondary cover supervisor

I have been given a teaching timetable. Some was to cover maternity leave, some was to fill a gap where a teacher left and no one was recruited to fill the space. Secondary cover supervisor

A related reason for deploying TAs to cover classes is the low availability and/or high cost of external supply teachers. Four per cent of comments referred to this.

My school cannot afford supply teachers, so more TAs are having to step in for teaching colleagues than ever before. Primary/infant TA

Supply staff can't be booked because "there is no more budget left". Primary/infant TA

There is an issue with outside cover teachers as not only do they charge a fortune, they are now having to book these two weeks in advance to ensure cover. There is a shortage of cover teachers too. How can a school predict their staffing shortages, two weeks in advance? It's a ridiculous situation. Secondary HLTA

Some TAs report that school leaders leverage the unaffordability of supply teachers in order to get them to cover classes.

We're told there's no money to pay supplies to cover, and that if supply staff are used that will mean the loss of TA roles. Primary/infant HLTA

Feel pressured to cover classes, threat of redundancy has been made. Primary/infant TA

Irritatingly we were expected to do a teacher's job in order to keep our own. Primary/infant TA

TAs report they are preferred to supply teachers, not just for reasons of cost effectiveness, but also because they have established relationships with classes and pupils (three per cent of comments). Several cover supervisors also made the same point.

I have found that pupils treat me with more respect as I cover classes. I know my subject matter. It is much better to have a subject specialist (albeit a TA) cover, rather than a supply teacher. Secondary TA

In an SEN school, a TA who knows the children and classroom routines covering the class teacher works much better than having people brought in who are unfamiliar to the children and who often don't understand their needs and can trigger behaviour. Special school TA

The headteacher believes that TAs can often provide better cover than supply staff, which I agree with. Primary/infant TA

I believe the impact it has on the pupils is mainly positive as they know me, I know them and their needs which removes a level of uncertainty for them. Secondary cover supervisor

Some TAs feel they should not cover classes, especially for extended periods, as this they say, compromises the quality of education. Several TAs made the additional point about the lack of public awareness of the extent of cover in schools being undertaken by TAs.

TAs should not be allowed to routinely cover for teachers. Primary/infant TA

TAs should not be used to cover teachers lessons. We are not qualified teachers and the students deserve a good quality education. This can't happen if lessons are being covered by TAs. Special school TA

In no other profession would a less qualified person be asked to perform a more qualified person's role. Primary/infant TA

I don't think that parents have any idea about how much of their children's education is being delivered by unqualified TAs. Primary/infant HLTA

Finally, a small number of TAs referred to the need for cover by TAs for reasons relating to schools' efforts to manage teacher workload. These comments are interesting as they reveal a potentially increasing need for teachers to have time out of the classroom in order to complete non-teaching duties, which as one TA put it, creates a 'sense of unfairness'.

Increasingly we are covering for teachers to have 'planning mornings', attending numerous SEND meetings, subject leaders' meetings. It seems to be never ending. Primary/infant TA

Covering a teacher for 2 to 3 days out of 5 days as they are in meetings that could happen after school is ridiculous. Primary/infant HLTA

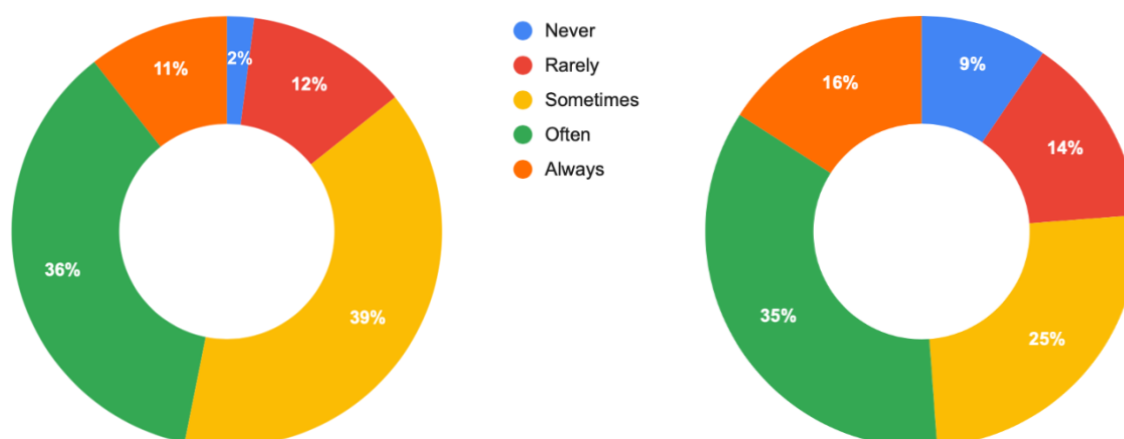
There is a sense of unfairness to cover teachers' time out of class when they are paid so much more than us. It seems that the teachers' workload is being increasingly added to TAs' without any financial reward adding to our stress levels and resentment. Special school TA

2. The experience of covering classes: cover supervision and specified work

The survey asked TAs and cover supervisors about their experiences of undertaking the two types of cover: cover supervision and specified work. To recap: cover supervision refers to short term cover needed due to short notice teacher absence (e.g. sickness), where pupils are expected to complete work set by a teacher under the supervision of a member of support staff, and 'where no active teaching is taking place' (UNISON, 2009). Specified work, meanwhile, describes the planning, preparation and delivery of lessons on a more routine basis; for example, taking a class to release a teacher for their PPA time. Specified work should only be undertaken by HLTAs and TAs at Level 4 (or higher).

The first analysis provides an overview of the extent to which the cover that TAs and cover supervisors are deployed to undertake fits the definition of cover supervision, and the extent to which it fits the definition of specified work. The results, captured in Figure 6, show that while a greater proportion of TAs and cover supervisors cover classes on a cover supervision basis, they cover classes on a specified work basis slightly more frequently. Just under half of respondents (47 per cent) report undertaking cover supervision often or always, with 39 per cent doing so sometimes. Just over half (51 per cent) of respondents report doing specified work often or always, and 25 per cent do so sometimes.

Figure 6. Cover supervision vs. specified work



Responses for HLTAs and TAs in relation to undertaking cover on a cover supervision basis are consistent between the two roles. In line with expectation, HLTAs are more likely to report covering classes on a specified work basis than TAs. Almost three-quarters of HLTAs (72 per cent) do specified work often or always, compared with 44 per cent of TAs.

Responses differ between the different types of school (see Tables A11 and A12 in the Appendix). TAs in primary/infant schools are deployed to undertake specified work often or always (53 per cent) more than cover supervision (45 per cent), while the reverse is the case for TAs in secondary schools (cover supervision: 53 per cent vs. specified work: 31 per cent) and TAs in special schools (cover supervision: 57 per cent vs. specified work: 37 per cent).

Cover supervision

Respondents who indicated that they are deployed to undertake cover supervision either sometimes, often or always (86 per cent of all TAs, and 87 per cent of all cover supervisors) were asked to rate the extent to which the following situations, based on national guidance, occur when they cover classes on a cover supervision basis:

- A lesson plan is provided
- Any necessary resources are provided
- They supervise the work set
- They actively teach
- They respond to pupils' questions about what to do
- They manage behaviour
- They collect any completed work
- They report any issues that arise.

The purpose of this was to ascertain the extent to which experiences of undertaking cover supervision correspond with the agreed expectations of what it should and should not involve. Tables A13 to A20 breakdown the results for each scenario by role and school type.

Lesson plans and resources

Just over half of all TAs (51 per cent) and 60 per cent of cover supervisors report being provided with a lesson plan for classes they cover on a cover supervision basis, but there is variation by role and setting (see Table A13). TAs in primary/infant schools are more likely to be provided with a plan, with 55 per cent saying this happens often or always, and 13 per cent saying rarely or never. This is also the case for cover supervisors (often/always: 60 per cent vs. rarely/never: 11 per cent).

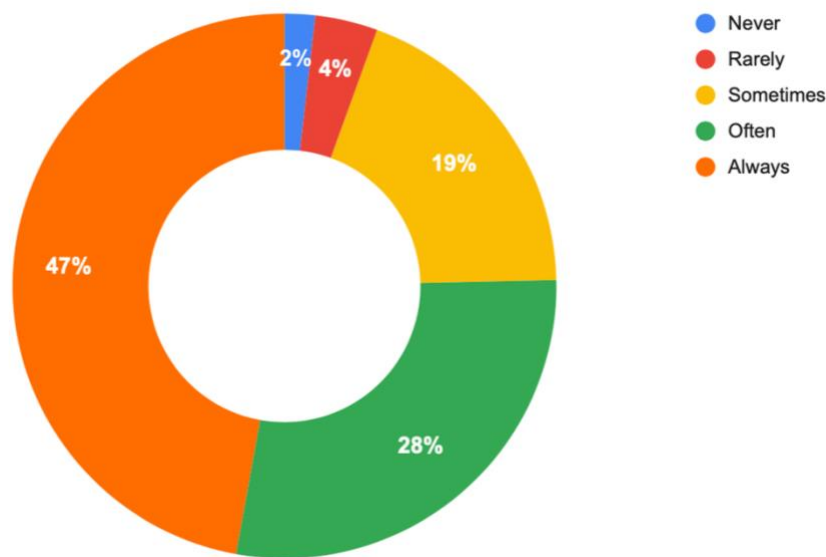
However, TAs in secondary and special schools are as likely to be provided with a lesson plan as not. Just over a third of TAs in secondary schools (35 per cent) and 31 per cent of those in special schools said they are given a plan often or always, while 35 per cent and 29 per cent of TAs in these respective settings said they are rarely or never given a plan.

In secondary schools, cover supervisors are much more likely than TAs to be provided with a lesson plan. Sixty-one per cent said they are given a plan often or always, and 13 per cent said this happens rarely or never. Cover supervisors in mainstream schools are also more likely than TAs to report being provided with any necessary resources for cover lessons (see Table A14). However, it was TAs in special schools that are, overall, least likely to be left with the requisite materials when covering lessons.

Supervising vs. teaching

According to national guidance on cover supervision, support staff should not be required to 'actively teach'. Instead, they should supervise work set and respond to pupils' questions about what to do. Across the settings, 61 per cent of TAs and 67 per cent of cover supervisors report that cover supervision often or always involves supervising work set (see Table A15), and 70 per cent of TAs and 78 per cent of cover supervisors said it always involves responding to pupils' questions about what to do (see Table A16). However, taken together, three-quarters of TAs and cover supervisors said it often or always involves active teaching, as Figure 7 shows.

Figure 7. Cover supervision: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors actively teach



Comparing the two roles, 55 per cent of HLTAs say cover supervision always involves actively teaching, while 36 per cent of TAs say the same. The breakdown of results in Table A17 shows differences between schools. Just over half of TAs (51 per cent) and two-thirds of cover supervisors (67 per cent) in primary/infant schools report that cover supervision always involves active teaching, while in secondary schools, the comparative figures are lower (TAs: 26 per cent; cover supervisors: 31 per cent). In special schools, 31 per cent of TAs said cover supervision always involves active teaching.

Other consistent features of cover supervision are managing behaviour, collecting completed work, and reporting issues that arise during lessons. Clear majorities (i.e. at least two-thirds) of TAs and cover supervisors said cover supervision always involves doing these things (see Tables A18, A19 and A20).

Specified work

Respondents who indicated that they are deployed to undertake specified work either sometimes, often or always (76 per cent of all TAs; 83 per cent of all cover supervisors) were asked to rate the extent to which the following situations, based on national guidance, occur when they cover classes on a specified work basis:

- Plan and prepare lessons and/or courses for pupils
- Deliver lessons to pupils
- Assess pupils' development, progress and attainment
- Report on pupils' development, progress and attainment

Again, the purpose of this was to ascertain the extent to which experiences of undertaking specified work correspond with the agreed expectations of what it should and should not involve. Tables A21 to A25 breakdown the results for each scenario by role and school type.

Overall, TAs and cover supervisors report that specified work does not involve planning and preparing lessons and/or courses for pupils (see Table A21). Just under half of all TAs (49 per cent) and 60 per cent of all cover supervisors said they rarely or never do this. HLTAs, however, are more likely than TAs to plan and prepare lessons/courses. Two in five HLTAs (39 per cent) often or always do this, compared with just 12 per cent of TAs.

TAs in secondary schools are the more likely group to report planning and preparing lessons, with 39 per cent saying specified work involves doing this often or always (vs. 23 per cent of primary/infant TAs, and 28 per cent of special school TAs), while secondary cover supervisors are the least likely group to be required to plan and prepare (11 per cent).

Respondents that report planning and preparing lessons and/or courses as part of specified work either sometimes, often or always (39 per cent of all TAs, and 33 per cent of all cover supervisors) were asked a supplementary question about the extent to which they are provided with time to do this. Of this group, 49 per cent of TAs and 34 per cent of cover supervisors said that they are never provided with time, and a further 31 per cent of TAs and 39 per cent of cover supervisors said they are rarely given time. Just six per cent of TAs and eight per cent of cover supervisors were often or always given time. There is little variation in responses across the types of schools (see Table A22).

More than half of all TAs (53 per cent) and all cover supervisors (58 per cent) said specified work always involves delivering lessons to pupils, and a further quarter of each said it often involves this (see Table A23). HLTAs are more likely than TAs to report that specified work always involves delivering lessons (64 per cent vs. 33 per cent). Support staff in primary/infant schools are more likely to report that this the case than those in other settings.

HLTAs are about twice more likely than TAs to often or always assess and/or report on pupils' development, progress and attainment as part of specified work (57 per cent vs. 32 per cent). And TAs overall are more likely to do this than cover supervisors, particularly in secondary schools. TAs in special schools are the more likely group to assess (52 per cent) and report on (57 per cent) these things often or always (see Tables A24 and A25).

Open comments on cover supervision and specified work

The analysis of open comments (six per cent of all comments) reveals a preference among TAs for providing PPA cover for teachers (i.e. specified work) over providing cover at short notice (i.e. cover supervision). Cover for PPA is generally predictable and planned in advanced, whereas short notice cover is not. TAs are also more likely to be paid an uplift for a PPA cover than for a short notice cover (more below). Together, these factors inform TAs' experiences of, and views about, the two types of cover. Some of the most negative comments about covering classes are specifically about undertaking short notice cover.

I am happy to cover PPA as it is planned and paid at higher rate, but when it is unplanned it becomes stressful because I am not prepared for the lesson. Primary/infant TA

Covering for a teacher overall has a positive impact for me. It gives the feeling that I'm trusted to deliver lessons and handle the children alone. Teachers will often leave a solid plan, and when I cover PPA, it is often for classes I know. [Short notice] cover on the other hand... There is usually no warning, and I'm often unprepared. Primary/infant TA

Covering PPA is not the issue, but being thrown in without notice, as it is often hard to understand someone else's plans and expectations for the lessons without communication. Primary/infant TA

I dread getting the staff update on a Sunday night only to find that yet again another teacher is out on a course/PPA/medical appointment etc and I am expected to cover AGAIN! Primary/infant TA

The stress levels when being handed planning 5 minutes before and being told to teach is unbelievable. I don't know any other job where you'd be expected to do a skilled professional's job with 5 minutes notice and not get paid. Primary/infant TA

The deployment of TAs to undertake specified work appears to stretch further than the guidance intends, with some TAs reporting being responsible for planning, teaching and assessing a curriculum subject (or subjects) on a full-time basis.

I teach full time. I mostly cover teachers' PPA and teach art, as I am also the art subject lead in school. I am responsible for my own planning, preparation and marking. Primary/infant TA

I teach computing across the whole school. The job is rewarding but can't plan, deliver and assess work in 32 hours a week term time only! Primary/infant HLTA

We are expected to mark everything which can be up to 120 pieces of work in 1 day and report back to the class teacher on it. 120 pieces of work based on 30 children times 4 lessons in a day. We have 36 in some classes so can be having to mark well over 140 pieces of maths, English, topic or science work per day! Primary/infant TA

Implicit in many of the comments from TAs is the sense that covering classes involves actively teaching pupils, as opposed to 'just supervising' them.

I am not a qualified teacher but constantly asked to teach lessons, not just supervise work set. Secondary TA

TAs are being used to teach classes, being told they are instructors. Secondary TA

*Cover no longer means just supervising, it always involves delivering the lesson.
Primary/infant TA*

The sense that covering classes involves teaching is also prominent in the comments from cover supervisors (41 per cent of all comments). Almost half of the comments from cover supervisors in primary/infant schools (46 per cent) describe being 'expected to act like teachers' or 'treated as if they are teachers'.

As cover supervisor, I'm aware that on paper my role is one which should not involve direct teaching. I spend every single day of the working week teaching as any other teacher or supply would do. Primary/infant cover supervisor

I cover every day throughout the school, from nursery to Year 6. Primary/infant cover supervisor

All my sessions are planned for me, however, I do actively teach in every lesson. It is never just supervising. Primary/infant cover supervisor

I teach each and every day all day and never have any time not teaching in the school. I am only paid as a cover supervisor yet treated as a teacher. Primary/infant cover supervisor

A similar sentiment is evident in the comments from secondary cover supervisors, who, as noted above, have taken on teaching curriculum subjects as a result of teacher shortage.

Despite being more likely than TAs to be provided with a lesson plan for cover lessons, secondary cover supervisors report that the quality and/or quantity of the work set by teachers is often insufficient (14 per cent of comments vs. four per cent for cover supervisors in primary/infant schools).

The issue of insufficient planning is connected to poorer pupil behaviour in lessons covered by support staff. This is a greater issue for cover supervisors in secondary settings, for whom it presents particular challenges (11 per cent of comments vs. five per cent for those in primary/infant).

One afternoon I was left with a post-it note saying 'PSHE' [personal, social, health and economic education] and nothing more. Primary/infant cover supervisor

The cover work set is usually not meaningful or related to what the students are currently studying, so they are not interested or engaged in the lesson. Secondary cover supervisor

Certain subjects duplicate work i.e. work already completed previous lessons. I then have to find alternative work to deliver. This impacts on behaviour in lessons which can be stressful. Secondary cover supervisor

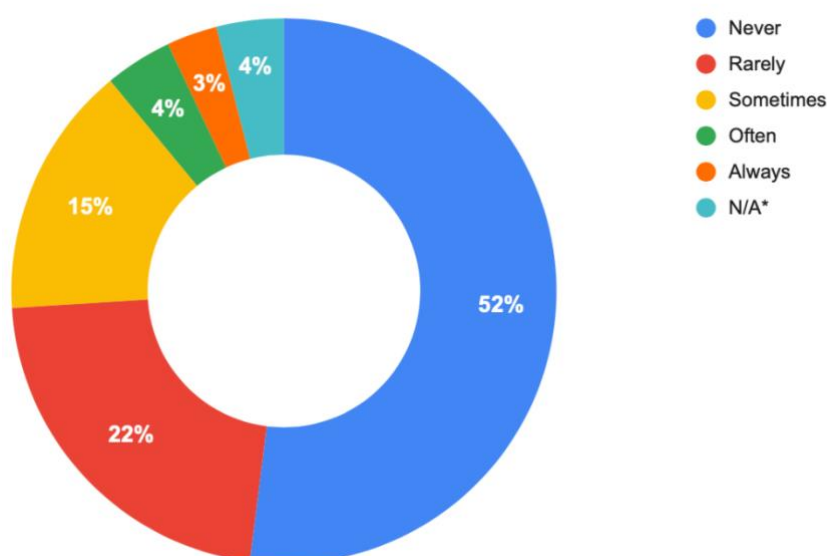
Resources are often minimal and often repeated and students often take their frustrations out on us. Secondary cover supervisor

3. Support for TAs and cover supervisors

Backfilling

A key aim of the survey was to explore the extent to which TAs' roles/duties are covered – or backfilled – by somebody else (e.g. another TA) when they are deployed to cover classes, and to describe any implications this has for schools and TAs. Overall, as the results in Figure 8 show, almost three-quarters of TAs (74 per cent) report that their role/duties are rarely or never backfilled when they cover classes in place of teachers.

Figure 8. Backfilling: to what extent are TAs' roles/duties covered when they cover classes



* For example: TAs that report only undertaking cover supervision

Over half of TAs in primary/infant schools (54 per cent) and 60 per cent of TAs in secondary schools report that, when covering classes, their role/duties are never backfilled (as shown in Table A26 in the Appendix). A further 22 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, said that their role/duties are rarely covered. Just two per cent of TAs in mainstream settings said their role/duties are always backfilled. Backfilling for TAs is somewhat more common in special schools, with 15 per cent of TAs saying that their role is covered often or always. Nevertheless, a majority of TAs said their duties are rarely (25 per cent) or never (34 per cent) covered when they are deployed to cover a class elsewhere.

Open comments on backfilling

The extent and impact of a lack of backfilling is prominent in the open comments, and often tied to comments about workload (eight per cent of comments). Some TAs report being expected to carry out and complete their regular duties, as well as covering classes.

This year has seen a lot more cover on top of my already HLTA timetable of teaching classes.
Secondary HLTA

It has been very difficult since September as the class teacher has been on long term sickness. The school could not provide/find cover so it was left to myself to plan and deliver lessons, cover breaks and class assembly time etc, as well as trying to do my own work. Special school TA

I've been told I need to cover a class two days a week as the class teacher, leading, planning and assessing for the foreseeable future, on top of my other job role. Special school HLTA

The effort to meet the demands on them left some TAs feeling that they were neglecting their regular duties. (Results on the impact on pupils of TAs being unable to carry out their regular duties are presented later).

I have covered a class for 8 days because the school didn't have any money to get a teacher in. No interventions have been carried out. Primary/infant HLTA

I feel children are missing out as I can't split myself and help as many as I would when it is me and a teacher in the room. Primary/infant TA

I have been relied on so much to teach and support cover for other teachers' PPA. I teach more than I actually do the role I was employed to do. Special school TA

[Short notice cover] is stressful because my duties are then neglected or a child who is 1-2-1 has no support. Primary/infant TA

There is always a feeling of guilt that you are letting the children in your [intervention] groups down. Primary/infant TA

Additional TA support

Given the infrequency with which TAs' roles are backfilled, it is perhaps not surprising that when they cover classes, they do not have support from another TA – especially in mainstream settings. Instead, TAs are in class on their own, and so some classes that may be used to having an additional TA present are left without. Half of TAs in mainstream schools (50 per cent) cover classes alone. A quarter of TAs (26 per cent) report having extra TA support often or always, compared with a fifth of HLTAs (20 per cent).

Half of TAs in mainstream schools (50 per cent) cover classes alone. Around half of those in primary/infant schools (49 per cent) and two-thirds of secondary TAs (67 per cent) rarely or never have extra TA support in the classes they cover (see Table A27). A fifth of TAs in primary/infant schools (20 per cent) and just six per cent of secondary TAs said they often or always have additional TA support. This may reflect the needs of pupils in these classes. Classes in special schools typically have several TAs present, therefore, fewer TAs in these settings report being without support when covering. Sixty-three per cent said they often (23 per cent) or always (40 per cent) have additional TAs in the room when covering classes.

The situation regarding additional TA support extends to cover supervisors. Half of those in primary/infant and secondary settings report rarely (37 per cent) or never (14 per cent) having support from another TA when covering classes. Cover supervisors cover for gaps in the teacher workforce, whereas TAs backfill for teachers and one another. Therefore, cover supervisors are, overall, more likely to have TA support when covering lesson than are TAs.

Open comments on additional TA support

The matter of covering classes without additional TA support came up frequently in the open comments (five per cent of comments). The comments draw attention to what TAs describe as the idiosyncrasy of teachers having TA support in classes they teach, while they do not.

When the teacher is in the class, I am in the class as a TA. However, when I take the class and cover, I am on my own with no support. Primary/infant TA

A teacher has the support of a TA, but a TA covering a teacher is expected to teach the lesson, explain the work and mark, manage behaviour and support pupils with no extra support. Primary/infant TA

Is it fair that a class teacher can have an additional TA deployed but a TA does not get the same support? Primary/infant TA

Some TAs report that instead of an additional TA, the school provides a less experienced member of staff, which can present its own challenges.

When I am covering a teacher I am left with a dinner lady as support who has no qualifications or real experience in class. Primary/infant TA

Teachers have support staff, LSAs get a lunchtime supervisor or agency. Special school TA

When I am expected to step up and covering for my teacher, I am often backfilled with a supply TA and they don't always have adequate experience of SEND, and that can often make things very difficult for me to manage. Special school TA

Preparation and planning

TAs and cover supervisors were asked to rate their level of preparedness (including training) in relation to covering classes using a four point scale: not at all prepared; under prepared; partially prepared; or fully prepared. The results are presented in Table A28 in the Appendix.

Within the TA population, HLTAs seem the most prepared. Over a third of HLTAs (36 per cent) report being fully prepared for cover, compared with just 13 per cent of TAs. Support staff in primary/infant settings are the most prepared, with just under half of TAs (48 per cent) and cover supervisors (49 per cent) indicating they are partially prepared. A further 19 per cent of TAs and 34 per cent of cover supervisors report they are fully prepared.

Cover supervisors in secondary schools are better prepared than TAs. Half of secondary school TAs report being either under prepared (23 per cent) or not at all prepared (27 per cent), whereas three-quarters of cover supervisors report being either partially prepared (38 per cent) or fully prepared (38 per cent). TAs in special schools are slightly less likely than those in mainstream settings to report being fully prepared (15 per cent). Most TAs in special schools (44 per cent) said they are partially prepared.

An analysis using data from respondents that indicated doing cover supervision either sometimes, often or always (86 per cent of the overall sample) found that support staff are,

in general, not provided with time to plan or prepare for cover lessons. The results, shown in Table A29, reveal that over half of TAs (54 per cent) and cover supervisors (52 per cent) said that they are never provided with time. A further 29 per cent of TAs and 34 per cent of cover supervisors said they are rarely given time. Only six per cent of respondents are given time often or always. These results are consistent across all types of schools. It should be said that given the short notice nature of cover supervision, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of respondents do not have opportunities to prepare.

TAs were asked to what extent they have to do planning and preparation (including doing marking and admin/paperwork) in their own time as a result of covering classes. The results, shown in Table A30, are mixed, though consistent across settings. Overall, 20 per cent of TAs said they never plan or prepare in their own time, and a further 11 per cent said this happens rarely. However, 18 per cent said they often do, and 21 per cent said they always do. HLTAs are more likely than TAs to have to plan and prepare in their own time often or always (51 per cent of HLTAs vs. 35 per cent of TAs).

Open comments on preparation, planning and support

A clear and consistent finding from the analysis of the open comments from TAs is that the increase in the amount and frequency of cover they undertake has not been matched by the provision of paid time in which to plan and/or prepare for cover lessons, and/or mark pupils' work completed in these lessons (eight per cent of comments).

Last year, my school made 12 people redundant. This included lunchtime supervisors. The LSAs are now required to cover lunch for 45 minutes then immediately teach a class (without support) in the afternoon. Primary/infant TA

You get a shorter lunch than teachers, but still expected to have lessons prepared after lunch so miss your lunchtime to get them prepared. Time to get resources ready if you are asked to cover for sickness in a morning doesn't happen as we don't arrive much earlier than the children. Primary/infant HLTA

TAs with a high cover load, and particularly those who report teaching curriculum subjects and/or leading a SEND/ALN unit or provision, say they receive little or no support from SLT.

I have just been given two subjects to teach and basically left to it, with no guidance or support within these subjects. I therefore worry whether I'm teaching these well. I also have to plan a subject that I have no experience with! Primary/infant TA

I lead a [autism] provision with no support from teachers or SLT. I have 5 TAs working on rota with me. We plan and deliver all activities. I complete all paperwork. Primary/infant TA

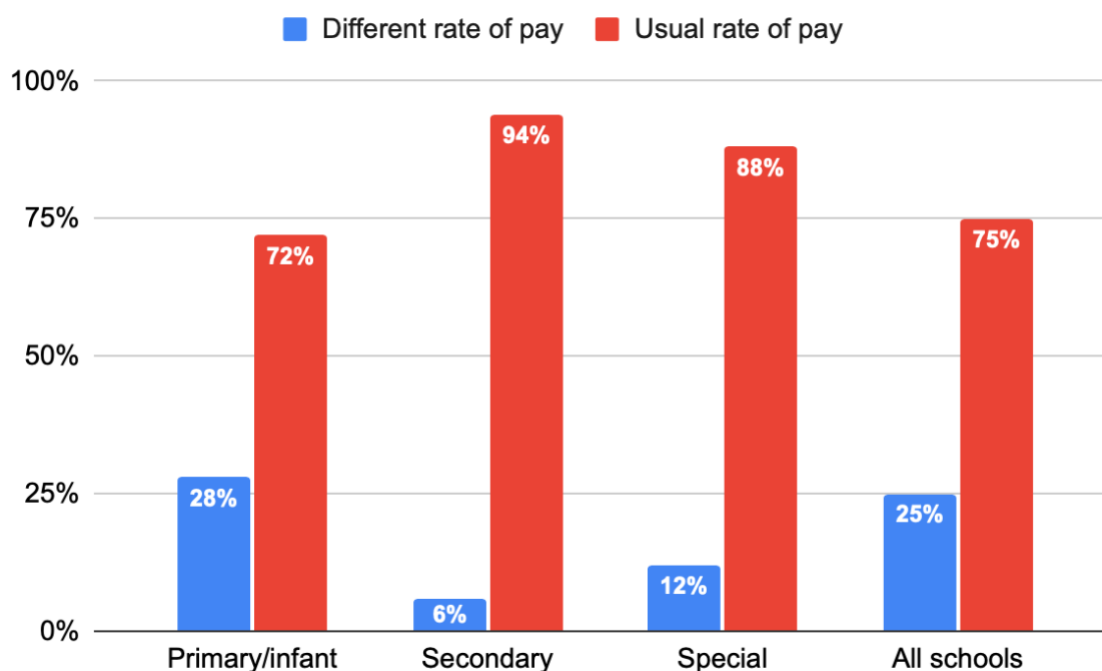
I am teaching 2 days a week as the school have not replaced a part time teacher who left last academic year. I feel more like a teacher. Support from SLT is extremely limited. Primary/infant TA

We are never informed of the need to cover teachers sickness. We are never approached by SLT informing us of how long, what lessons we will provide, how we are going. Nothing. Special school TA

4. Payment for covering classes

TAs were asked if they are paid at their usual (hourly) rate of pay or at a different (i.e. higher) rate when covering classes on either a cover supervision basis or a specified work basis. As the results in Figure 9 indicate, a clear majority of TAs in each type of school said they are paid their usual rate (see also Table A31 in the Appendix).⁸ Only a quarter of all TAs (25 per cent) receive a pay uplift for undertaking cover.

Figure 9. Rate of pay for undertaking cover: TAs



Of particular relevance to the issue of pay for covering classes is the extent to which TAs on NJC Level 3 or below are deployed to undertake specified work, which is designated in the national guidance as a Level 4 task. Two further analyses were conducted on: i) the extent to which TAs at Levels 1, 2 and 3 are deployed to do specified work; and ii) the extent to which those that are receive a pay uplift for doing so. These analyses involved only the TAs that indicated (or knew) their NJC level (see Table 2) – a total of 67 per cent of the sample.

The first analysis, presented in Table A32 in the Appendix, found that almost three-quarters of TAs at Level 1, 2 or 3 (73 per cent) undertake specified work at least sometimes, and 45 per cent do so either often or always. Almost half of all Level 3 TAs (49 per cent) and 38 per cent of TAs at Level 1 or 2 report doing specified work often or always. Just over a quarter of TAs at Level 1, 2 or 3 (28 per cent) do specified work sometimes, while a third (34 per cent) of those at Level 1 or 2 rarely or never do. In primary/infant schools (which account for 85 per cent of cases in this analysis), 69 per cent of Level 1 or 2 TAs and 79 per cent of Level 3 TAs do specified work at least sometimes.

⁸ The analysis presented in Figure 9 was adjusted for the small number of responses (321) that referred to other forms of (unspecified) compensation, and cases where payment at a different rate did not apply (for example, because the TA's only role is to undertake cover supervision).

Put more simply, over two-thirds of TAs (68 per cent) that routinely undertake specified work – which is a Level 4 task – are not in a Level 4 role. A fifth of TAs (20 per cent) are in a Level 1 or 2 role, and almost half (48 per cent) are in a Level 3 role.

The salient question, addressed in the second analysis, is this: regardless of their base level (1, 2 or 3), to what extent are these TAs paid a higher rate when they do specified work? The results, presented in Table A33, are consistent with the broad picture described above. Overall, three-quarters of TAs at Level 1, 2 or 3 (76 per cent) are paid their usual rate for specified work, and 24 per cent of TAs are paid a different rate. Just over a third of TAs at Level 1 or 2 (35 per cent) and a fifth of Level 3 TAs (20 per cent) are paid a different rate.

These results imply that TAs at Level 1 or 2 are somewhat more likely to be paid a higher rate for specified work, while TAs at Level 3 are less likely to be paid a higher rate for the same task. Focussing on primary/infant settings, 73 per cent of TAs at Level 1, 2 or 3 are not paid a different rate for specified work, while 27 per cent are. Again, TAs at Level 1 or 2 seem more likely to be paid an uplift, compared with TAs at Level 3. Again, put simply, where an uplift is paid for cover, it is generally paid to TAs on the lowest levels.

Although the number of cases in special schools are smaller (294 TAs), it is worth noting that the differential is even greater in these settings. Over two-thirds of TAs at Level 1, 2 or 3 (69 per cent) cover classes on a specified work basis at least sometimes, but only eight per cent are paid a different rate for doing so; 92 per cent are not.

The same two analyses were conducted using the responses from cover supervisors, which is a Level 3 role. The total number of cases included in these analyses are too small to draw reliable conclusions from; however, 91 per cent of cover supervisors employed at Level 3 report doing specified work at least sometimes, with 16 per cent paid a different rate for doing so. These results can be seen in Tables A34 and A35 in the Appendix.

It is worth repeating that as these analyses involved only the TAs and cover supervisors that indicated their NJC level, the proportion of each group being paid at a commensurate level for specified work may not reflect the situation across the sample as a whole. That said, there is a clear trend based on two-thirds of the overall sample indicating that TAs and cover supervisors employed below Level 4 do not receive a pay uplift for doing specified work.

Open comments on payment for covering classes

Many TAs used the open-ended survey item to report the actual amount of additional pay they receive for covering classes (13 per cent of comments). The comments below are indicative of the range of uplift values primary/infant TAs are paid to cover classes, and their feelings about them. (There were fewer comments from TAs in other settings on pay uplifts).

When we cover classes we get paid 17 pence per hour. This is embarrassing and shows that we are not appreciated.

I only get 20p per hour more than my basic TA pay!

A measly 40p an hour extra.

If I cover a class I will be paid 50p an hour more. I get paid £3 extra for covering a class for a whole day.

When I cover planned absences I sign an uplift form for an extra 60p an hour.

I am paid an extra 64p!! An insult.

I receive a total of 74 pence extra for covering a whole afternoon.

[Uplift] equates to about 80p per hour, which isn't acceptable.

Employer will only pay an extra £0.83 per hour for hours covering classes!

LSAs act up for an extra £1 an hour.

The uplift is £1.64 per hour.

I receive £2 extra an hour to cover for the class teacher. This low pay makes me feel unvalued.

I am only paid £2.40 extra for each hour I teach.

We are paid at a rate of £3 per hour extra to cover a class.

Our uplift to teach without TA support (unlike a teacher!) is £3.26.

Some TAs compared their uplift with the fees and payments involved with bringing in an external supply teacher.

The additional payment for this morning is approximately £2.50 net. Supply staff would have been paid £150. Primary/infant TA

A supply teacher would get sometimes in excess of £100 per day, whereas we get barely £1 an hour additional. For about 30 hours of cover a month, I earned about £40 extra in my salary. It doesn't seem fair. Primary/infant TA

99p per hour feels insulting. We are saving the school on supply fees, so surely we could receive something decent? Primary/infant TA

Some comments reveal variation in the conditions under which an uplift is paid. Some TAs are paid to cover for teachers' PPA time (i.e. for specified work), but not for covering classes due to a short notice absence (i.e. for cover supervision). For other TAs, it is the reverse.

I do [paid] PPA cover, but if I have to do any other unplanned cover, I receive no extra money. Primary/infant TA

Our school operates a system where class TAs are required to lead the class during teacher PPA time. If we cover outside these times, we are paid 1 hour overtime for 1 day of cover. Primary/infant TA

I'm paid if I cover for a whole session (a day, morning or afternoon). However, if I cover the class whilst the class teacher is out for a meeting for an hour or so we don't get anything additional. Primary/infant TA

In several cases, TAs describe conditions or situations that seem to affect the likelihood of them receiving or claiming the uplift.

It has been agreed that we get paid extra if we cover, but only if it's for a whole day. Most hours covered are less than this. Primary/infant TA

TAs at my school don't bother to claim the extra money for covering as it is hardly worth it. Primary/infant TA

Because the cover pay has to be 3+ hours accumulated over the day (and the teacher always makes sure they come back to class just before the 3 hours are up) the TAs are never paid for acting up. Special school TA

I get about an extra £2.00 per hour, but only for my contracted hours – not the full amount of hours I've covered a teacher. For example, I was sent a text at 9.20pm last Sunday to ask me to cover for an absent teacher. I arrived at school before 7.30am Monday, stayed until 4pm, and worked through my lunch break to mark books. I will receive any additional salary for only 5.5 hours. Primary/infant TA

A number of TAs described receiving a low or no uplift for cover as 'teaching on the cheap' (six per cent of comments). Several cover supervisors expressed the same view.

TAs are seen as cheap labour. Primary/infant TA

We are a cheaper/easy option for class cover. Primary/infant TA

We are often told that it's cheaper to use us than to hire a supply teacher. Primary/infant TA

We have become "cheap teachers". Primary/infant TA

I am consistently being used as a cheap teacher. Special school HLTA

My Head sees me as an easy and cheap cover option for shortness in teachers. Special school HLTA

A cheaper alternative to a daily/long term supply booking. Secondary cover supervisor

I regularly teach instead of supervising and the school effectively get teaching on the cheap. Secondary cover supervisor

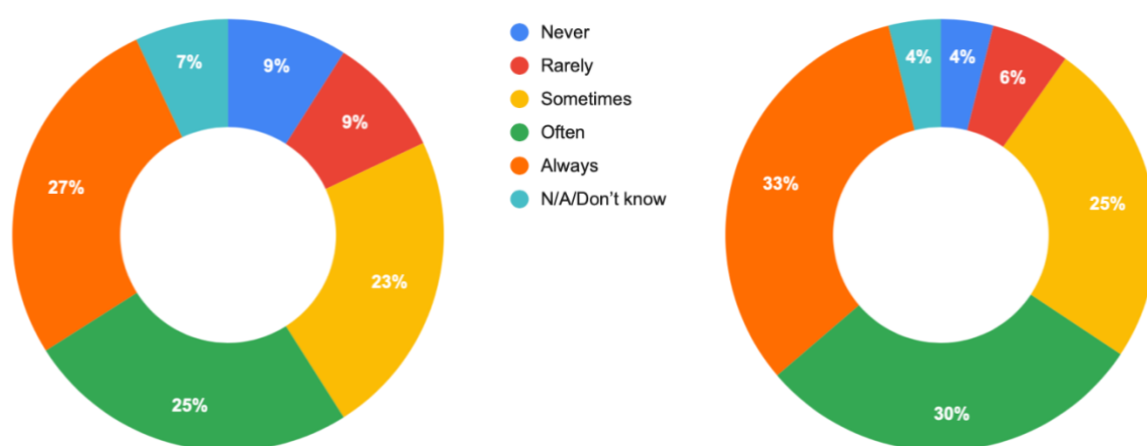
5. The impact of covering classes

Impact on pupils

The survey items addressed the perceived effects of covering classes on pupils and wider school provision, and the reported effects on TAs themselves (see below). Tables A36 to A40 in the Appendix provide a breakdown of the results of analyses relating to pupil and school impact by school type. Note: these analyses use only responses from TAs.

The first two analyses concern the implications of TAs covering classes elsewhere in the school, and in a sense, point to the effects of their role/duties not being backfilled when they do. TAs were asked to indicate the extent to which pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or Individual Plan (IP) miss out on one-to-one support, and the extent to which pupils in general miss out on in-class support, when they cover classes. The results, seen in Figure 10, show that just over half of all TAs (52 per cent) report that pupils with an EHCP/IP often or always miss out on one-to-one support, and 63 per cent of TAs report that pupils in general often or always miss out on in-class support, when they cover classes.

Figure 10. To what extent do pupils with an EHCP/IP (left) and pupils in general (right) miss out on support when TAs cover lessons



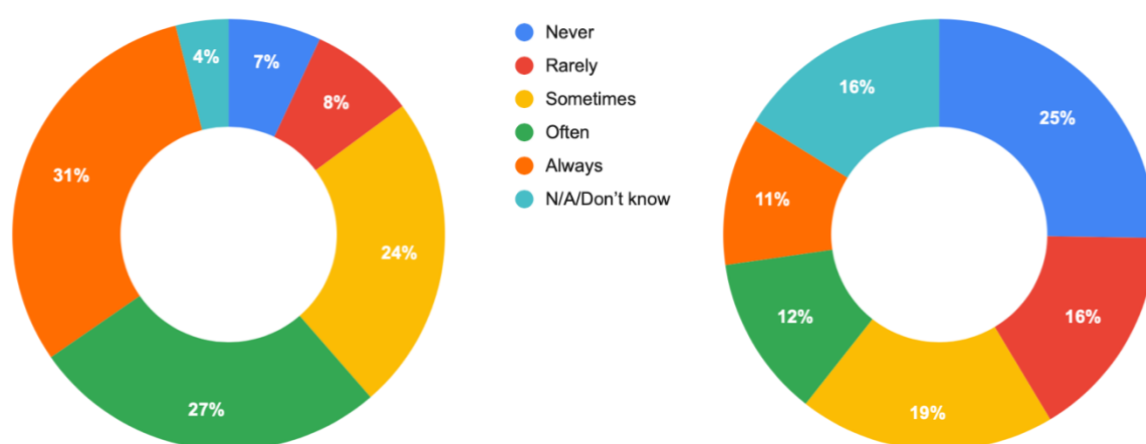
Pupils with an EHCP/IP in mainstream settings are more likely than not to miss out on one-to-one support when TAs cover classes (see Table A36). Half of TAs in primary/infant schools (53 per cent) and secondary schools (49 per cent), and 45 per cent of those in special schools, said that pupils with an EHCP/IP are left without TA support often or always, when they are deployed to cover a class. Around 18 per cent of TAs in mainstream schools and 22 per cent in special schools said this rarely or never happens.

TAs' absence from the class due to cover means that pupils in general also miss out on support during lessons, with those in primary/infant schools most affected (see Table A36). Two-thirds of TAs in these settings (66 per cent) report that pupils miss out on support often or always, with eight per cent saying this happened rarely or never. Half of secondary school TAs (51 per cent) said that pupils miss out on support often or always, and 13 per cent report this rarely or never happens.

The comparatively higher ratios of staff in special schools mean that pupils in these settings miss out on in-class support somewhat less frequently than their peers in mainstream settings, but still 42 per cent TAs said that they miss out often or always. Eighteen per cent said this rarely or never happens.

The next pair of questions asked TAs to describe: i) the extent to which pupils who receive or take part in curriculum intervention programmes and/or therapy programmes (e.g. for speech and language) delivered by TAs miss sessions when they cover classes; and ii) the extent to which these sessions are rescheduled, if or when they are missed. The results of analyses concerning the extent to which sessions are missed are summarised in Figure 11.

Figure 11. To what extent do pupils miss curriculum interventions sessions (left) and therapy sessions (right) when TAs cover lessons



Over half of all TAs (58 per cent) report that being deployed to cover lessons disrupts the routine delivery of curriculum interventions, with sessions missed often or always (see also Table A37). This situation is particularly acute in primary/infant schools, with just over a third of TAs in these settings (35 per cent) saying that pupils always miss on interventions when they cover a class elsewhere, and a further 28 per cent saying that this happens often.

TAs in secondary and special schools, by contrast, said pupils rarely (ten per cent and 13 per cent respectively) or never (17 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively) miss interventions. Similar proportions of TAs (cumulatively, 35 per cent in secondary) and (cumulatively, 36 per cent in special schools) report this happening often or always.

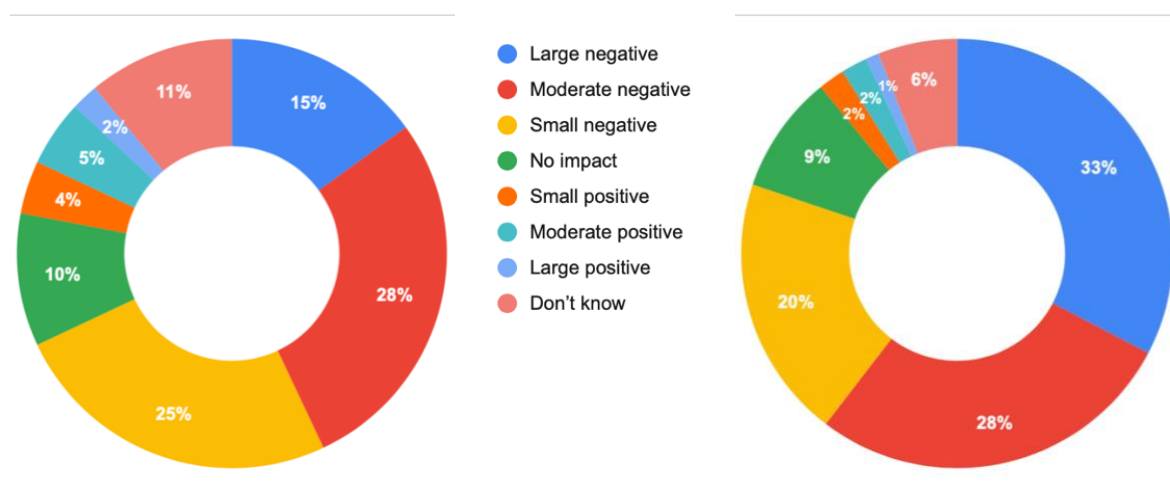
Pupils are less likely to miss therapy sessions when TAs are deployed to cover lessons (see Table A37). Across the settings, 41 per cent of TAs said that therapy sessions are rarely (16 per cent) or never (25 per cent) missed. A quarter of TAs in primary/infant and special schools report, however, that therapy sessions are often or always missed.

Missed sessions for curriculum interventions and therapies are not typically rescheduled (see Table A38). Overall, 45 per cent of TAs said that interventions sessions are rarely or never rescheduled, and 42 per cent said the same about therapy sessions. Sessions for curriculum interventions are more likely to be rescheduled than therapy sessions.

Impact on overall quality of learning and SEND/ALN provision

These two analyses concern TAs' and cover supervisors' perceptions on the effect of cover on the overall quality of learning and the quality of provision for SEND/ALN in their setting. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which these aspects are affected by their deployment to cover classes. The results for TAs' responses are summarised in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Impact of covering classes on quality of learning (left) and provision for SEND/ALN (right)



Over two-thirds of TAs (68 per cent) said covering classes has some degree of negative impact on the quality of learning in their school, and 81 per cent said it has some degree of negative impact on the quality of provision for pupils with SEND/ALN. A third of TAs (33 per cent) said it has a large negative impact on SEND/ALN provision. Eleven per cent of TAs said that covering classes has some degree of positive impact on the quality of learning in their school, ten per cent said it has no impact, and 11 per cent said they did not know.

Compared with TAs, HLTAs are more likely to report that covering classes has a positive impact on the overall quality of learning. One in five HLTAs (20 per cent) said it has some degree of positive impact (vs. nine per cent of TAs). HLTAs are slightly more likely than TAs to say covering classes has a positive impact on SEND/ALN provision (seven per cent vs. three per cent for TAs) or no impact (13 per cent vs. eight per cent).

The sense that covering classes has a negative impact was strongest among TAs in special and secondary schools, with around three-quarters in each setting saying that it has some form of negative impact (vs. 65 per cent for primary/infant TAs). See Table A39 in the Appendix for a breakdown of results by school type.

On quality of SEND/ALN provision, nine per cent of TAs said covering classes has no impact, and five per cent said it has some form of positive impact. Six per cent of TAs did not know. There is little variation in the views of TAs across school types (see Table A39).

Cover supervisors are somewhat more likely than TAs to say that covering classes has some degree of positive impact on the quality of learning in their school (19 per cent vs. 11

per cent). However, 59 per cent of cover supervisors report that it has some form of negative impact, rising to two-thirds (67 per cent) among secondary cover supervisors. Sixty-two per cent of cover supervisors said that covering classes has some form of negative impact on the quality of provision for SEND/ALN. Thirteen per cent of cover supervisors said it has some degree of positive impact, no impact, or did not know, respectively (see Table A40).

Open comments on the impact of covering classes on pupils and provision

The comments below are indicative of TAs' views of how covering classes impacts the general classroom and pupil experience.

We have TAs teaching MFL [modern foreign languages] without the ability to speak another language! Primary/infant TA

I feel that this has a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers will have planned the lessons, but there is always a drop in quality if the person delivering the lessons had not been involved in the planning. Primary/infant HLTA

I feel that the children miss out twice overall. Once by not being taught by a teacher, and secondly they miss out on any support they may need from a member of support staff or they also miss their timetabled interventions. Primary/infant TA

The pupils are missing out on the teaching they deserve. The pupils effectively suffer by not having access to qualified teachers. Their parents are completely unaware of the situation. Secondary TA

Behaviour management can dominate the lessons I deliver. Primary/infant TA

The children are constantly disrupting the session, arguing, fighting and I am on my own for hour or two. Primary/infant HLTA

Behaviour management is really difficult as there is no support and many children do not respect TAs. This has a negative impact on the learning as the lesson has to be stopped many times to try to control behaviour. Primary/infant HLTA

The main concerns among cover supervisors in relation to the impact of cover on pupils was in terms of consistency and the lower quality of teaching that their deployment tends, in their view, to represent (seven per cent of comments).

Have spent 3 days in same class where no active teaching has taken place, so children have no learning for this time period (as I am not a teacher). Primary/infant cover supervisor

I have tried my best to use my own initiative to teach the children when I can but, due to lack of training and resources, I can only do so much and fear it may have negatively impacted the children. Primary/infant cover supervisor

I try my best when expected to teach subject specific content, but I do feel the students are suffering immensely both with their education and the need for continuity, especially the growing SEND community. Secondary cover supervisor

Work set by the teachers is regular lesson they would deliver. Being delivered by unqualified staff so less effective and unable to deliver good quality of learning. Secondary cover supervisor

The comments below are indicative of TAs' views of how covering classes impacts the provision for SEND, including pupils with an EHCP/IP.

Unsettles the children that we work with as a one-on-one. So parents are complaining that their child's TA has been taken away. When we are taken away, it is quite last minute. Primary/infant TA

All support staff at my school feel they are letting their class/1-2-1 child down by not being able to work with them as planned. Parents are unaware of times their child does not have a 1-2-1. Primary/infant TA

Our regular supported children end up with zero support and that time is never made up, because we don't have enough money to employ anyone else to release us to catch up. Primary/infant TA

Staff from [SEND] resource base always taken to cover mainstream rather than getting supply in. Resource bases have a higher staff ratio for a reason! Primary/infant TA

Covering staff has a huge knock on effect on a number of classes, pupils and staff who are expecting you at an agreed time, but you're pulled elsewhere. Primary/infant TA

When I'm having to run the classroom I'm not supporting the students and other TAs as much as I feel I should be. Special school TA

The pupils miss out on the help they needed as my role is not backfilled on most occasions. Special school TA

We do not have enough staff to run lessons in some cases, it is all about keeping our SEND students safe rather than accessing education. Special school TA

When things aren't consistent the students suffer. Special school HLTA

The comments below are indicative of TAs' views of how covering classes impacts the delivery of interventions for pupils.

My ELSA [emotional learning support assistant], wellbeing and nurture sessions are always the first to go. Primary/infant TA

The knock-on effect on the children is huge. They miss out on so many interventions to help them. Primary/infant TA

I am supposed to do interventions in the afternoon. This half term, I will have had 4 afternoons doing my own job. Primary/infant TA

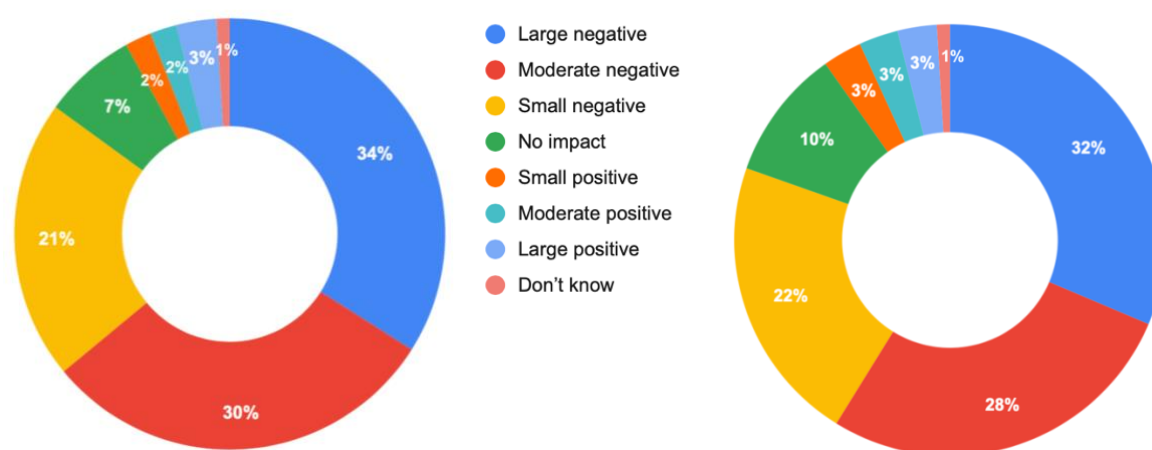
The three HLTAs employed spend more time covering classes and teaching, meaning there are few opportunities to offer specialist programmes etc. The children are losing out and the workload for teachers increases as a result. Primary/infant HLTA

Impact on TAs and cover supervisors

TAs and cover supervisors were asked a short set of questions about the impact of covering classes on personal and professional dimensions of their role. These were: workload; health and wellbeing; their sense of effectiveness; and job satisfaction.

For TAs in each type of school, the results across all of these aspects are in a negative direction. The greatest negative impacts are in relation to workload and health and wellbeing. These results are shown in Figure 13. Four out of five TAs report that covering classes has some degree of negative impact on their workload (85 per cent) and/or their health and wellbeing (82 per cent). Seven per cent of TAs said that cover has no impact on their workload, and ten per cent said it has no impact on their health and wellbeing. Results are consistent across school types (see Tables A41 and A42 in the Appendix).

Figure 13. Impact of covering classes on TAs' workload (left) and health and wellbeing (right)

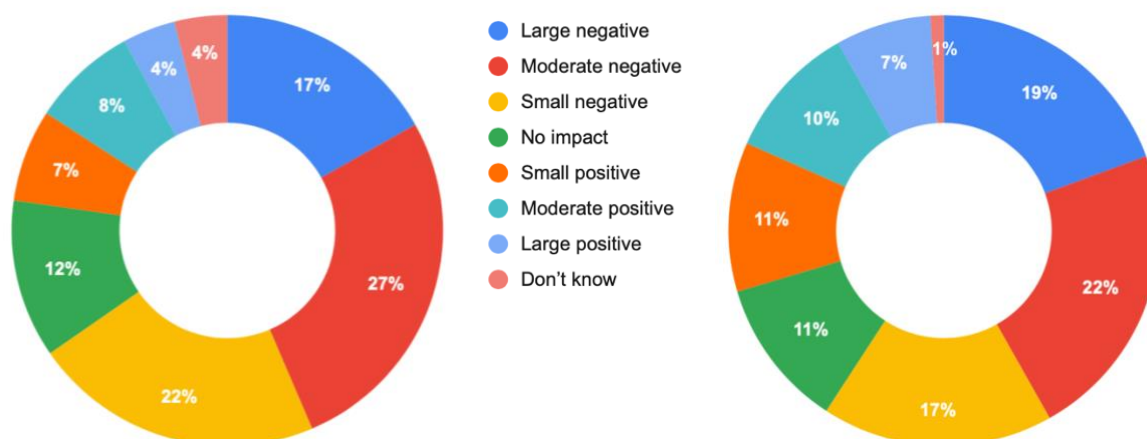


Results for the impact on TAs' sense of effectiveness and job satisfaction are shown in Figure 14. Again, a high proportion of TAs report some kind of negative impact on these dimensions. Overall, two-thirds of TAs (66 per cent) said cover has some degree of negative impact on their sense of effectiveness. HLTAs are slightly more likely than TAs to say cover has a positive impact on their sense of effectiveness (23 per cent vs. 17 per cent of TAs).

The proportion of secondary school TAs reporting a large or moderate negative impact is slightly higher than for TAs in other settings, at 50 per cent (see Table A43). Just under a fifth of all TAs (19 per cent) said that covering classes has some kind of positive impact on their sense of effectiveness, while 12 per cent said it has no impact.

In terms of job satisfaction, 58 per cent of all TAs said that covering classes has a negative impact. This feeling is slightly stronger among TAs (61 per cent) than HLTAs (54 per cent). Again, the proportion of TAs reporting a large or moderate negative impact was highest in secondary schools (53 per cent) (see Table A44). Overall, 28 per cent of TAs said that covering classes has some kind of positive impact on their job satisfaction, while 11 per cent said it has no impact.

Figure 14. Impact of covering classes on TAs' sense of effectiveness (left) and job satisfaction (right)



Responding to the same set of questions, 69 per cent of cover supervisors in primary/infant settings and 52 per cent of those in secondary schools said cover has a negative impact on their workload (see Table A41). Thirteen per cent of primary/infant cover supervisors said it has no impact on workload, while 26 per cent of those in secondary schools said the same.

Concerningly, given that it is the mainstay of their role, undertaking cover has a largely negative impact on cover supervisors' health and wellbeing. Overall, almost two-thirds of cover supervisors (64 per cent) report that it has some degree of negative impact. A fifth of secondary cover supervisors (21 per cent) and 14 per cent of those in primary/infant settings said that covering classes has no impact on their health and wellbeing (see Table A42).

Almost half of cover supervisors in primary/infant settings (47 per cent) report that covering classes has some form of negative effect on their sense of effectiveness, and 15 per cent said it has no impact. A third of TAs said it has a positive impact. Results are somewhat evenly split among secondary school cover supervisors. Thirty-four per cent said cover has some form of positive impact on their sense of effectiveness, 30 per cent said it has a negative impact, and 29 per cent said it has no impact (see Table A43).

Forty-two per cent of cover supervisors in primary/infant and secondary schools said covering classes has a positive impact on their sense of job satisfaction. Those in secondary schools are more likely to say it has no impact (21 per cent vs. 13 per cent for primary/infant), while those in primary/infant are more likely to report that covering classes has some degree of negative impact on their job satisfaction (42 per cent vs. 34 per cent for secondary) (see Table A44).

Open comments on the impact of covering classes on TAs and cover supervisors

The issue that generated the most comments from TAs was the impact of covering classes on their health and wellbeing (16 per cent of all comments). These comments reveal associations between an increased workload and negative feelings and consequences concerning their health and wellbeing.

It's becoming more regular to be pulled to cover staff for all reasons and it's exhausting. Primary/infant TA

The biggest issue is coming into work not knowing what the day is going to consist of. Am I going to be completing my emotional support sessions or am I going to be covering a class? The inconsistency causes me some anxiety. Primary/infant TA

I get quite stressed that my children who are missing their interventions are not making progress and that I am accountable. Primary/infant TA

I am having to cover an average of 3/4.5 days a week on a regular basis. This has had a massive negative effect on my health and life/work balance and I'm not sure how much longer I can keep it up. Primary/infant TA

Cover was up to 3 or 4 times a week. It eventually made me ill with stress and anxiety. Was signed off after doing 60 plus hours as a cover supervisor. Primary/infant TA

[Cover] was never part of my duties/role. At its worst, I was teaching/covering 5 lessons a day, 5 days a week with no PPA. I actually had a breakdown in school last year after a particularly vile cover lesson. Secondary HLTA

A number of TAs identified the particular pressure they feel to fill the teacher's role adequately (four per cent of comments). Both the short notice nature of cover supervision and the predictable, planned nature of PPA cover (i.e. specified work) are causes of stress and feelings that TAs might be 'letting people down'.

I'm not a teacher, nor had the training but expected to have the same amount of responsibility and deliver a lesson as one would. There's no positive outcome from this, is having a negative effect on my mental and physical health. Special school TA

It's incredibly stressful, especially when it's a class I don't know very well or a subject I'm not knowledgeable about. Primary/infant TA

A lot of the time you are ill prepared to cover, with very little time to prep the plans you have and without any form of prep time, which causes a lot of stress. Special school TA

The feeling of letting down the class and teacher through lack of knowledge and expectations. Primary/infant TA

I cover PPA every week and plan for some classes. It is very stressful and I am totally out of my comfort zone. Primary/infant TA

I cover four afternoons a week. It is becoming extremely hard and the pressure of the lessons are stressful. I cover geography, history, science and RE [religious education]. Primary/infant TA

Cover for PPA but I am not a qualified teacher... expected to deliver same standard as teacher who has a TA to support. This is not fair... causes me a lot of stress and worry that I'm not delivering. Primary/infant TA

Being told that every week I'm to take a Year 11 class through a course with no resources, no PowerPoints, no way of knowing how to project anything onto the new screens the school has, no register set up for the class, being responsible for making sure they complete the work to ensure them to grade B at GCSE level. Very stressful and worrying. Secondary TA

Cover supervisors expressed similar views, with the pressure to provide a good quality lesson, despite often not knowing the pupils well or having much, if any, time to prepare, identified as particular stressors (19 per cent of comments).

Because I want to provide the very best for the children and I am not fully qualified I find I feel I fall short and then "beat myself up" about it. Primary/infant cover supervisor

For some TAs, better financial recognition is seen as an ameliorating factor; that is, the stress of covering classes could potentially be offset by being paid at a decent rate to do it.

I don't mind covering classes. I do mind not getting paid for it. I feel that TAs are cheap labour. It's not fair. Primary/infant TA

I would not mind doing the cover if I was paid accordingly. Secondary TA

However, others did not see additional pay as adequate to resolving the broader issue of TAs covering classes.

School should be forced to employ teachers to [cover]. Primary/infant TA

Even if we got paid a higher rate for the cover when teaching, it is still mentally exhausting to step in last minute unexpectedly. Primary/infant TA

TAs felt that their core role and contribution as TAs is undervalued, under-regarded and/or taken for granted. This issue generated the second highest number of comments (15 per cent). These sentiments were typically connected to comments about low pay, compounding low senses of job satisfaction and their professional value and identity in their own minds and in the minds of others in school.

I am happy to cover classes but It leaves me feeling put upon and undervalued. Primary/infant TA

As a qualified teacher working as a TA, I feel that the school is taking advantage of my experience and qualifications. I have chosen this particular job because the workload was enormous as a teacher. However, I am still doing the same job as before a third of the time, just because the school has not got enough staff. Primary/infant TA

There's a constant bad feeling that we are not appreciated and are being taken for granted.
Primary/infant TA

My self-worth takes a hit as I feel I am just a body to be moved to wherever with no thought given to the work or time and effort I put into interventions or children with additional needs.
Primary/infant TA

I feel I am a good TA, but get no job satisfaction from being a pretend teacher. Primary/infant TA

The combined impacts of cover on workload and health and wellbeing were behind reports from some TAs that they and/or their colleagues are leaving their role, or thinking about it.

Already cut my hours down to part-time because of the anxiety caused by not knowing whether we have a teacher in class when going into work. Thinking of leaving the job because of it. Special school TA

I will quit my job in the next couple of months because I am asked to cover more than expected. Primary/infant TA

I am leaving as I have had enough of being a cheap teacher. Primary/infant TA

I do actually enjoy my work as a TA, but it has changed so much in the years since I began working, the workload is a lot more, I rarely go home on time. My colleagues feel exactly the same. If it doesn't get better, there will be lots of TAs like myself that end up leaving the profession. Primary/infant TA

Cover supervisors expressed similar views, in terms of feeling undervalued and under-appreciated (18 per cent of comments).

Considered 'not a real teacher' by pupils and on occasions by teaching staff. Secondary cover supervisor

We are undervalued in the school also under appreciated by staff. Secondary cover supervisor

Summary of key results and findings

- Three in five TAs (61%) cover classes for up to four hours per week. Two in five TAs (39%) cover classes for at least five hours per week. Some TAs cover classes full-time
- Almost half of TAs (45%) cover classes more than they did last year (2022/23)
- A quarter of TAs report covering classes because their school does not have enough teachers (24%) and/or is unable to get external supply teachers (26%)
- TAs report being deployed to plan, teach and assess curriculum subjects where schools have not replaced a teacher that has left or is absent due to long term sickness. Many TAs find this role challenging and stressful
- Despite being a role that only TAs at Level 4 should carry out, over two-thirds of TAs (68%) that routinely deliver lessons (i.e. do specified work) are in a role below Level 4
- Just one in four TAs (24%) are paid an uplift for covering classes; 76% of TAs are not
- The uplifts TAs receive to cover classes range from as little as 20 pence to £3 per hour
- Three-quarters of TAs (75%) say covering lessons involves actively teaching pupils, yet only half of TAs (51%) report being provided with the teacher's lesson plan
- Half of TAs in mainstream schools (50%) cover classes on their own. Yet teachers, especially in primary/infant schools, regularly have TA support in their classes
- Three-quarters of TAs (74%) do not have their role/duties covered when they cover classes. TAs are trying, and struggling, to provide cover *in addition to* their regular duties
- The majority of TAs report that covering classes gets in the way of carrying out their regular duties, with pupils missing out on classroom support (63%), intervention sessions (58%), and those with an EHCP/IP missing out on one-to-one support (52%)
- Deploying TAs to cover classes diverts them from the work that delivers the greatest impact. As a result, two-thirds of TAs (68%) say covering classes negatively impacts the quality of learning in their school, and four in five TAs (81%) say it negatively impacts provision for pupils with SEND/ALN. A third of TAs say it has a large negative impact
- Four in five TAs say covering classes has a negative impact on their workload (85%) and their health and wellbeing (82%). Covering short notice absences is a particular cause of stress and anxiety
- Around three in five TAs say covering classes has a negative impact on their sense of effectiveness (66%) and their job satisfaction (58%). Many TAs feel that covering classes contributes to a sense of feeling undervalued and taken advantage of.

Discussion

This study set out to capture the extent to which the on-going shortage and supply of teachers in England and Wales is driving the deployment of TAs (and cover supervisors) to cover classes, and the impact of this on pupils, schools and support staff. The study characterised and mapped experiences of covering classes on to definitions of cover supervision and specified work, in order to ascertain the extent to which, contrary to national guidance, TAs and cover supervisors 'teach' lessons/classes in the absence of teachers.

Another key aim of the study was to gather evidence to test the hypothesis that when TAs are deployed to cover classes, their roles and duties are insufficiently covered, leading to gaps in provision and consequences for pupils accustomed to receiving TA support – in particular, those with SEND/ALN. In these specific respects, this study aimed to go further than any recent UK research on the issue of class cover by TAs.

Data were obtained via a survey of 6,356 TAs and cover supervisors in mainstream and special schools. The convenience sampling approach means the study has some limitations (see below). That said, the survey was large scale in nature, and so there are grounds for assuming the results are likely to be replicated in, and resonate with, many schools.

The concluding part of this report begins with an overarching summary of the study's main findings, then discusses their implications, before providing recommendations for schools and – with an eye to the general election due before the end of the 2024 – for policymakers.

This study provides evidence that TAs and cover supervisors routinely, and are increasingly, deployed to cover classes because schools do not have enough teachers and/or are unable to get in external supply teachers. In many cases, the conditions under which they cover classes are challenging. Oftentimes, a lesson plan is not provided by the teacher, and there is no additional support from a TA. TAs and cover supervisors are compelled to actively teach lessons, rather than introduce tasks and oversee pupils as they work independently.

Both the short notice nature of cover for an unplanned teacher absence, and the expectation of having to plan, teach and assess a curriculum subject over an extended period (e.g. due to an unfilled vacancy) are sources of stress and anxiety for TAs – and a significant contributor to their workload. Additional sources of pressure and worry stem from the disruptive effect that covering classes has on their capacity to complete their regular duties – as their role/duties are not backfilled – and the sense that they may be letting pupils down. Overall, TAs consider that being required to cover classes is having a negative impact on the provision for pupils with SEND/ALN in their school, and the quality of learning more broadly.

It is little wonder that this, together with the fact that the majority of TAs do not receive a pay uplift for covering classes – and the minority that do describe quite derisory amounts – has a detrimental impact of their workload, their health and wellbeing, and their job satisfaction. There is a consensus among TAs that being extensively and/or inappropriately deployed to cover for teachers compromises their intrinsic value and impact as TAs, and this is the cause of feelings of being ineffective in their role, taken advantage of, and underappreciated.

This study offers signs that the cumulative effects of TAs being deployed to cover classes beyond the scope and scale set out in the National Agreement, while having to carry out their own duties, could unintentionally trigger a fresh national crisis over TAs' workload and their recruitment and retention, adding to the existing one affecting teachers.

Compounded by evidence of how the rising cost of living has impacted TAs and schools (GMB, 2022; Hall and Webster, 2023; UNISON, 2022; 2023), the sharp increase in school leaders reporting cuts to TA posts (Montacute, 2023; Norden, 2024b), TAs feeling 'forced out' of their roles because their pay is not enough to live on (Fazackerley, 2022, 2023), and difficulties of recruiting TAs to support pupils with SEND (Ofsted, 2022), the knock-on effects are not difficult to predict. A significant reduction in TA capacity across schools in England and Wales will have serious implications for maintaining SEND/ALN provision, as well as exacerbating teacher workload and supply challenges that are already at a crisis point (Churches and Fitzpatrick, 2023).

Limitations

Before considering further implications of the study, it is necessary to address some of its principal limitations, and how these may affect the generalisability of the results and findings. First, though large in scale, the survey designed and used to collect data for this study makes no claims to representativeness. There were, for example, proportionately far fewer respondents from secondary and special schools, compared with those from primary/infant schools. Although they were not the principal constituency of interest to the study, it would have been interesting and potentially insightful to have included more cover supervisors, as they have been the subject of very little research to date.

Relatedly, the survey was not a systematic audit on the proportions of TAs who do and do not cover classes. It is not possible to say, on the basis of the results presented here, to what extent the amount and frequency of cover undertaken by TAs is indicative of the TA workforces in England or Wales. Similarly, it is not possible to know the extent to which the reasons why TAs in the study sample are deployed to cover classes, the conditions under which they cover classes, their experiences of covering classes, and their views on its impact, are replicated in, or representative of, those in the wider workforce. That said, the consistency of the results and findings with previous, albeit in some cases somewhat dated, research provide some validation. This is a point to which the report will return, but it is concerning that little seems to have changed or improved since the research conducted in the immediate wake of the National Agreement over a decade ago.

The second mitigation concerns the fact that just six per cent of respondents were not UNISON members. Union membership does not make workers less satisfied at work, but people that are dissatisfied at work are more likely to join a union in order to express their dissatisfaction and to bring about change (Laroche, 2017). There is no reason to assume that the issues, views and experiences expressed in the study's results and findings would not be replicated among support staff that are members of another or no trade union. There is also the possibility that this study did not capture the full range of views and experiences of covering classes, and so may reflect a narrower portrayal of covering classes, which in turn may be more or less positive or favourable than the results and findings describe.

Finally, this study only presents the views and experiences of TAs and cover supervisors. A holistic picture of the extent and impact of, and issues surrounding the deployment of all support staff to cover classes is urgently needed. To that end, data are required from school leaders, teachers, support staff, and pupils in a representative range of settings and contexts. The survey, for example, asked respondents to identify the common reasons for covering classes. In some circumstances, the rationale behind these deployment decisions may be opaque or multifaceted, known only, perhaps, to senior leaders. Complementary and contradictory takes on key aspects of cover from a broader range of stakeholders is necessary for not only understanding the depth and complexity of issues relating to cover, but also in shaping actionable recommendations to improve experiences and outcomes for schools, their staff and their pupils.

Implications

A key inference from this study echoes the conclusion by Hutchings et al. (2009) that 'most schools do not make a clear distinction between cover supervision and specified work'. The more striking finding is this: in the estimation of support staff that cover classes, the function they perform is synonymous with teaching. It is a conclusion that has important implications.

The central issue is not whether TAs and cover supervisors have the capability to teach, or whether they want to teach. It is whether they should be put in a position where they are, or feel, expected or compelled to teach. This is the principal issue that needs to be deliberated and resolved first, as it frames the need for, and response to, all other matters relating to covering classes. A policy solution is the necessary response to a problem that emerged from policy design and implementation, and was compounded by cuts to school funding and the decision in 2010 to dissolve the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) – the body that would have been responsible for the terms and conditions for TAs and other support staff. To that end, what follows is directed more at policymakers than it is at school leaders. That said, there are implications for schools that must be articulated.

Implications for schools

Consider the broad context. School leaders currently face extremely difficult decisions. The on-going challenges of teacher shortage and supply are colliding with acute budgetary pressures. The first order consideration in the minds of school leaders is to maintain service levels. In this sense, operational imperatives – the need to cover the curriculum; to protect and uphold standards and outcomes; preparing pupils for national tests and assessments, the results of which drive school accountability; and the high stakes nature of school accountability – trump conceptual debates about the differences between 'supervision', 'delivery', and 'teaching'. The salience of these distinctions diminishes with the number, length and frequency of teacher absences that require cover.

If resources allowed, school leaders would surely guarantee that every lesson is taught by a qualified teacher (whether staff or supply), at the same time ensuring that TAs are available to carry out their role. But there are pupils to be taught. In the current context, it is naive and impractical to expect teaching to be indefinitely suspended because a TA leads the lesson.

For TAs and cover supervisors that have little, if any, time to prepare for lessons, policing their moment-by-moment interactions with the class – that is, ensuring they stay within the undefined boundaries of 'supervision' or 'delivery', and avoid straying into the territory of 'teaching' – calls to mind the pragmatic point made by Hancock et al. (2010): 'no active teaching taking place ... seems an unlikely scenario'. TAs see pupils that want to learn. It is, again, naive and impractical to expect pupils to put their learning on hold just because a TA fronts the class – not least when they are the only adult in the room.

Indeed, the amount and frequency with which this study has demonstrated that cover is required suggests that even if the fine line between 'teaching' and 'delivery' could be patrolled successfully, TAs and cover supervisors give the strong impression (seen in the open comments) of wanting to ensure the teacher's absence does not impact opportunities

for, and the quality of, learning for pupils. In this sense, they step up to the challenge of teaching, despite it being a source of personal stress and anxiety, and additional workload. The operational imperative is driven by an altruistic sense of not wanting to let people down. While the acute staffing and funding pressures facing schools remain, there is no reason to assume that schools will decelerate the deployment of TAs to cover classes. The practical recommendations for school leaders below, therefore, are intended to support TAs' workload management and address a key discrepancy regarding the provision of classroom support.

Implications for policymakers

It is not trivial to conclude, on the basis of the research presented here, that a seemingly significant proportion of TAs and cover supervisors teach classes on a regular basis. It was precisely to avoid appearances of 'teaching on the cheap' that the unions involved rightly and understandably advocated to encode in the National Agreement careful wording to safeguard teachers' professional jurisdiction and protect TAs; in theory, reducing the potential for exploitation, and securing the space in which TAs can be most effective.

Despite the best intentions and endeavours of those involved in the policy process, this study adds to the evidence, albeit limited, of TAs and cover supervisors being routinely put in charge of, and teaching, whole classes: a position for which they are neither qualified or trained, adequately prepared, supported (i.e. they teach alone), nor acknowledged for in terms of an appropriate rate of pay.

It is important to say that none of this is a negative commentary on the professionalism, capability or value of TAs and cover supervisors. When trained, supported and deployed appropriately for the role they are employed to undertake, TAs are effective and impactful members of the school team. Indeed, since – and in the case of the DISS project, because of – the research on the implementation of the National Agreement, schools have had access to high-quality, evidence-based guidance and resources on how to deploy TAs effectively (see Bosanquet et al., 2021; EEF, 2021; Webster et al., 2021).⁹ A major part of this guidance, which focusses on the TA's role in supporting learning, not covering classes, concerns their deployment to deliver curriculum intervention programmes to small groups of pupils. This is worth mentioning for two reasons.

The first reason is that this guidance recommends schools deploy TAs in this role on the basis of consistent and compelling international evidence that participation in 'catch-up' or 'booster' programmes can improve pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy (Alborz et al., 2009; Nickow et al., 2020). The implicit message to schools contained in this advice, however, is that when TAs are trained and given permission to 'teach' a structured programme in, say, phonics, reading or numeracy, to pupils that struggle most with learning (including those with SEND/ALN), the evidence indicates that they make good progress. It is possible – but not (as yet) proven – that for some school leaders, this evidence provides a limited, but sufficient, platform on which to justify scaling this model up to the classroom level in order to manage teacher absence.

⁹ Full disclosure: the author has been involved in designing guidance and resources and developing training for schools on how to improve the deployment of TAs and maximise their impact. www.maximisingtas.co.uk

The second reason for drawing attention to TA-led interventions is that the evidence from this study indicates that covering classes is cutting across and disrupting the schedules on which these intervention sessions are run – and crucially, effective. Deploying TAs to cover classes diverts them from doing the work associated with their greatest impact. As the survey results indicate, TAs report that interruptions caused by being deployed to do short notice cover has a negative effect on the continuity of programmes and the potential for pupils to make progress. Furthermore, the negative personal impacts TAs report as a result of cancelling intervention sessions is compounded by a sense of being unable to do a key part of their job at which they excel. As one TA quoted in this report put it: “there’s no positive outcome from this”.

All of this should alarm policymakers. The debate about who is and is not teaching – and indeed, what and what does not constitute teaching – necessary though it was to the terms of the National Agreement, has done little to avoid the situation McAvoy (2003) and others warned of at the time of its drafting. The striking similarity between the results of the last robust research on this topic by Blatchford et al. (2009; 2012) and Hutchings et al. (2009) and the results from this study suggest that lesson cover and PPA arrangements have received little or no attention from policymakers.

One possible reason for this could be the relative success of the National Agreement from teachers’ perspective. Despite reports of its key measures falling into abeyance soon after implementation, the large scale, longitudinal DISS project found consistent evidence that the policy had a positive impact on teachers’ perceptions of workload, stress and job satisfaction (Blatchford et al., 2009; 2012). Introducing PPA time and reducing the amount of lesson cover and administrative tasks teachers were expected to do had benefits for teachers’ work-life balance, but TAs and the consistency and quality of school provision bore the cost.

To reiterate: a policy solution is required, along with investment in the school workforce. The recommendations for policymakers that follow focus on a structural review and reform of TAs’ working conditions, and accruing more and better data about their working lives.

Recommendations

As noted, the severity, scale and persistence of the wider contextual challenges relating to teacher shortage and supply, teacher workload, and school funding, require solutions that are connected to, but outside the scope of, this study. This report can only echo the urgent appeals made by professional associations, NJC trade unions, and other stakeholder groups for the introduction of a national pay and grading system that accurately recognises and reflects the range of duties TAs undertake, a significant improvement in funding for schools and initial teacher education, and a meaningful and sustainable pay settlement for teachers.

Beyond this, there are recommendations for school leaders and policymakers. The following recommendations for school leaders suggest adjustments that might improve the day-to-day management of cover and help TAs to balance their duties. The recommendations for policymakers address long-standing, unresolved and fundamental issues relating to cover.

Recommendations for school leaders

1. Prioritise TA support for cover lessons

This study found that half of TAs and cover supervisors in mainstream schools cover classes on their own. They are acutely aware that teachers on the other hand, especially those in primary/infant schools, regularly have TA support in their classes. There is an intuitive case for school leaders and those that manage lesson cover to, wherever possible, prioritise classes covered by TAs and cover supervisors for additional TA support. It is acknowledged that this may cause disruption to other classes and provision.

2. Protect curriculum interventions

The deployment of TAs to cover classes means that pupils can miss out on curriculum interventions. As schools strive to recover learning lost to the pandemic, there are pupils that can ill afford to lose vital opportunities to (re)build their basic literacy and numeracy skills.

School leaders should consider protecting intervention timetables and the TAs that are trained to deliver them. One option is to phase in a system of deploying a limited number of TAs (depending on school/staff size) to run all curriculum interventions. These TAs cannot be used to cover classes. The priority is to ensure intervention programmes proceed as scheduled and are delivered with the high degree of fidelity essential to optimising impact.

Recommendations for policymakers

1. A national conversation on the role of TAs, and the implications for policy

Leaving aside the arguments and mitigations, there is unignorable evidence that the role of many TAs now incorporates the active teaching of classes, lessons and pupils. It is unclear whether the implications and consequences that flow from acknowledging this situation have been considered and debated by policymakers, professional associations, NJC trade unions, regulators (i.e. Ofsted/Estyn), as well as parents, practitioners and the wider public. There are issues and repercussions for a number of policy and practice areas, including (but not

limited to): accountability; professional and paraprofessional status; qualifications and training; pay and conditions; and the rights of, and provision for, pupils with SEND/ALN.

The forthcoming general election provides a timely juncture for key stakeholders to revisit the language and legacy of the National Agreement, and to catalyse a new national conversation about the appropriate role, value and contribution of TAs in the education system. Naturally, TAs and the NJC unions who represent them must be central to shaping and leading this effort.

2. A coordinated national strategy for TAs

TAs are highly motivated by their work and the difference they make to pupils' lives and learning. This study adds to evidence from previous research for UNISON on the impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis on TAs and schools (see Hall and Webster, 2022). Together, these studies reveal troubling levels of disillusionment and dissatisfaction among TAs about key aspects of their role, their persistently low pay, and how the wider contextual challenges facing schools impact their workload, wellbeing and professional identity.

This report restates the call made in the earlier study for a comprehensive, integrated and fully funded package of investment in the TA workforce, and a national strategy for TAs, to be informed and developed in light of the national conversation suggested above.

At the time of writing, and ahead of the next general election, the main UK political parties have yet to publish their manifestos or make their positions clear on school workforce policy. The Labour Party has, however, committed to restoring the SSSNB in England, if it wins the election. A coordinated national strategy should also involve updating the National Agreement to reflect the role and contribution of TAs and cover supervisors, updating the NJC role profiles, and ensuring all support staff are paid appropriately for the work they do.

3. Systematic and longitudinal research on the working lives of TAs, and a 'cover index'

This study provides the first major evidence of the extent and impact of the deployment of support staff to cover classes in English and Welsh schools in 15 years. Contextualising some of the results, such as the reported increase in the amount of cover TAs are doing, is difficult, because there are no longitudinal or representative data on this, or many other aspects of TAs' life in school. Such data are useful as they allow policymakers and researchers to identify trends and changes over time, and can inform the design of policies to support TAs and schools, and ultimately improve experiences and outcomes for pupils.

In 2022, the DfE commissioned a longitudinal survey of the working lives of teachers and school leaders.¹⁰ Now in its third of five scheduled years, the survey covers: workload; pupil behaviour; school culture and leadership; career reflections; and future ambitions. The first wave of the survey included questions about the deployment of TAs (Adams et al., 2023).

¹⁰ <https://www.workinglivesofteachers.com>

Around three in ten people working in schools in England are TAs (DfE, 2024b). This is a significant proportion of the school workforce about which very little routine data are collected.¹¹ A systematic and longitudinal research effort on the working lives of TAs is essential to not only developing a more rounded and inclusive picture of the views and experiences of the school workforce, but to improving policies that help TAs and schools.

The first wave of this research should include a review of uplifts paid for cover, with a view to an appropriate uplift being paid to all support staff when they cover lessons. This would be an interim measure whilst a coordinated national strategy is developed. A national survey would also provide the opportunity to gather routine data on representation, equality, diversity and inclusion.

In addition, this report recommends the DfE conduct an annual survey of the amount and frequency of class cover undertaken by TAs. A 'cover index' might be included in the data collection requirements of the annual school workforce census – a statutory return to which all state schools are expected to respond. Data on other aspects of cover, such as those addressed in this study, could be collected via the proposed working lives of TAs survey.

¹¹ The independent, professional regulator for the education workforce in Wales, the Education Workforce Council, conducts regular surveys of school practitioners, including TAs, on issues including workload, wellbeing, and professional learning. <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/about-us/policy-and-research/>

Conclusion

The results reported here add depth and detail to the empirical record of how schools in England and Wales are responding to the on-going challenges presented by teacher shortage and supply. It is yet more evidence of how TAs are the mortar in the brickwork that hold schools together in ways that often go unnoticed and unremarked (Webster et al., 2021). This study has shown that TAs are, in effect, plugging gaps in the teacher workforce, at the apparent cost of not only creating gaps in provision for the most disadvantaged pupils in our schools, but also to the personal and professional detriment of TAs themselves.

Research has shown that in many classrooms, TAs have inadvertently become the primary educators of pupils they support (Blatchford et al., 2012; Webster, 2022). The conclusion from this study that TAs now actively teach lessons to whole classes – too often under conditions to which teachers would object – requires wider and urgent investigation. The notion that TAs teach is not an abstract one. Were further evidence to confirm this, there would be unavoidable real-world consequences and implications for significant policy areas, including accountability and the professional status, pay and conditions of TAs and teachers.

With a general election due before the end of 2024, the strong likelihood is that the number one school workforce issue facing the next government will be teacher shortage and supply. The workload, recruitment and retention crisis relating to TAs, which the results of this study suggest is brewing, should not be treated by policymakers as a separate and less urgent problem. It is connected to the crisis facing teachers, and efforts to resolve both must include a comprehensive and coordinated programme to support and reward the TA workforce.

It should not, however, take the need to address a crisis affecting teachers to justify and develop a policy for and about TAs. There is a sound and intrinsic case for a national strategy for TAs, the stature and development of which should be informed by an on-going research effort into their working lives.

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Appendix: Tables of data

Table A1. Total respondents by role and school type

	Primary/infant		Secondary		All-through		Special		AP/PRU*		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	<1%	262	%	n	%	n	%
Teaching assistant	3,176	49%	110	2%	17	<1%	129	4%	29	<1%	3,594	55%
Higher level teaching asst	1,172	18%	111	2%	13	<1%	53	2%	22	<1%	1,447	22%
Learning support asst	461	7%	60	1%	12	<1%	224	1%	18	<1%	604	9%
Special needs assistant	172	3%	8	<1%	1	0%	1	3%	17	<1%	422	7%
Classroom assistant	43	1%	7	<1%	0	<1%	11	0%	0	0%	51	1%
Cover supervisor	164	3%	203	3%	7	1%	680	<1%	1	0%	386	6%
Total	5,188	80%	499	8%	50	<1%	262	11%	87	1%	6,504	100%

* Alternative provision/pupil referral unit

Table A2. TA workforce in England and Wales, 2022/23

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Middle		Special/PRU		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
England	185,021	66%	49,039	18%	n/a	n/a	44,827	16%	278,887	100%
Wales	11,450	63%	2,875	16%	1,605	9%	2,340	13%	18,270	100%
Total	196,471	66%	51,914	17%	1,605	1%	47,167	16%	297,157	100%

Note. Includes HLTAs for England and Wales, and cover supervisors for England only. In England, cover supervisors are included under definition of TA. In Wales, cover supervisors are categorised as 'other support staff'. The category of middle school is not used for data collection in England.

Table A3. Contracted hours of work

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
10 hours or fewer	31	1%	1	<1%	3	<1%	35	1%	1	<1%	0	0%	1	<1%
11-15 hours	112	2%	7	2%	10	1%	129	2%	3	2%	3	1%	6	2%
16-20 hours	393	8%	14	5%	40	6%	447	7%	6	4%	6	3%	12	3%
21-25 hours	648	13%	20	7%	39	6%	707	12%	22	13%	15	7%	37	10%
26-30 hours	1,532	30%	67	23%	127	19%	1,726	29%	44	27%	43	21%	87	24%
31 hours or more	2,308	46%	187	63%	450	67%	2,945	49%	88	54%	136	67%	224	61%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	10%	367	100%

Table A4. Years in role

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 year or less	141	3%	18	6%	32	5%	191	3%	10	6%	28	14%	38	10%
2-3 years	415	8%	30	10%	96	14%	541	9%	20	12%	29	14%	49	13%
4-5 years	428	9%	38	13%	76	11%	542	9%	14	9%	20	10%	34	9%
6 years or more	4,040	80%	210	71%	465	70%	4,715	79%	120	73%	126	62%	246	67%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A5. Years at current school

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 year or less	223	4%	27	9%	43	6%	293	5%	9	5%	32	16%	41	11%
2-3 years	528	11%	43	15%	125	19%	696	12%	10	6%	31	15%	41	11%
4-5 years	519	10%	42	14%	101	15%	662	11%	11	7%	17	8%	28	8%
6 years or more	3,754	75%	184	62%	400	60%	4,338	72%	134	82%	123	61%	257	70%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A6. Amount of cover (estimated average hours per week): TAs vs. HLTAs

	Teaching assistants								HLTAs							
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 hr max	729	19%	47	25%	74	14%	850	19%	31	3%	14	13%	6	5%	51	4%
1-2 hrs	1,107	29%	57	31%	125	23%	1,289	28%	100	9%	35	32%	13	10%	148	10%
3-4 hrs	902	23%	41	22%	131	24%	1,074	23%	194	17%	23	21%	17	13%	234	17%
5-7 hrs	577	15%	21	11%	77	14%	675	15%	212	18%	13	12%	24	19%	249	18%
8-10 hrs	241	6%	9	5%	47	9%	297	6%	160	14%	8	7%	20	16%	188	13%
11-13 hrs	119	3%	4	2%	23	4%	146	3%	128	11%	6	5%	11	9%	145	10%
14 hrs+	177	5%	6	3%	63	12%	246	5%	347	20%	12	11%	38	29%	397	28%
Total	3,852	100%	185	100%	540	100%	4,577	100%	1,172	100%	111	100%	129	100%	1,412	100%

Table A7. Amount of cover: this year (2023/24) vs. previous year (2022/23) (average hours per week): cover supervisors

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
More cover vs. prev. year	93	59%	105	56%	198	57%
No change	50	32%	74	39%	124	36%
Less cover vs. prev. year	14	9%	10	5%	24	7%
Total	157	45%	189	55%	346	100%

Table A8. Reasons for covering classes: TAs vs. HLTAs

	TAs		HLTAs		All TAs	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Short term sickness	2,999	66%	1,045	74%	4,044	68%
PPA	2,883	63%	1,146	81%	4,029	67%
Attending CPD	2,416	53%	928	66%	3,344	56%
SLT duty/meeting	2,425	53%	854	60%	3,279	55%
Medical appointment	1,867	41%	602	43%	2,469	41%
Teacher shortage	1,322	29%	368	26%	1,690	28%
Unable to get supply	1,148	25%	374	26%	1,522	25%
ECT non-contact	837	18%	496	35%	1,333	22%
Long term sickness	552	12%	244	17%	796	13%
Wellbeing day	356	8%	126	9%	482	8%
Pregnancy-related	268	6%	114	8%	382	6%
Other reason	520	11%	174	12%	694	12%

Table A9. Reasons for covering classes: TAs

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Short term sickness	3,403	68%	178	60%	463	69%	4,044	68%
PPA	3,633	72%	27	9%	369	55%	4,029	67%
Attending CPD	2,983	59%	93	31%	268	40%	3,344	56%
SLT duty/meeting	2,890	58%	112	38%	277	41%	3,279	55%
Medical appointment	2,173	43%	81	27%	215	32%	2,469	41%
Teacher shortage	1,198	24%	150	51%	342	51%	1,690	28%
Unable to get supply	1,248	25%	123	42%	151	23%	1,522	25%
ECT non-contact	1,233	25%	19	6%	81	12%	1,333	22%
Long term sickness	508	10%	96	32%	192	29%	796	13%
Wellbeing day	441	9%	11	4%	30	4%	482	8%
Pregnancy-related	322	6%	25	8%	35	5%	382	6%
Other reason	537	11%	79	27%	78	12%	694	12%

Table A10. Reasons for cover classes: cover supervisors

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Short term sickness	123	75%	180	89%	303	83%
Attending CPD	124	76%	149	73%	273	74%
SLT duty/meeting	117	71%	127	63%	244	66%
Medical appointment	80	49%	141	69%	221	60%
Long term sickness	24	15%	148	73%	172	47%
PPA	131	80%	25	12%	156	43%
Teacher shortage	40	24%	111	55%	151	41%
Unable to get supply	46	28%	63	31%	109	30%
ECT non-contact	69	42%	24	12%	93	25%
Pregnancy-related	18	11%	58	29%	76	21%
Wellbeing day	17	10%	14	7%	31	8%
Other reason	17	10%	50	25%	67	18%

Table A11. To what extent is cover undertaken 'cover supervision'

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	98	2%	16	5%	11	2%	125	2%	2	1%	3	1%	5	1%
Rarely	631	13%	42	14%	64	10%	737	12%	22	13%	19	9%	41	11%
Sometimes	2,061	41%	81	27%	214	32%	2,356	39%	69	42%	45	22%	114	31%
Often	1,805	36%	90	30%	262	39%	2,157	36%	56	34%	93	46%	149	41%
Always	429	9%	67	23%	118	18%	614	10%	15	9%	43	21%	58	16%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A12. To what extent is cover undertaken 'specified work'

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	393	8%	88	30%	93	14%	574	10%	6	4%	23	11%	29	8%
Rarely	687	14%	56	19%	134	20%	877	15%	11	7%	21	10%	32	9%
Sometimes	1,248	25%	60	20%	196	29%	1,504	25%	34	21%	55	27%	89	24%
Often	1,869	37%	56	19%	168	25%	2,093	35%	83	51%	64	32%	147	40%
Always	827	16%	36	12%	78	12%	941	16%	30	18%	40	20%	70	19%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A13. Cover supervision: to what extent are lesson plans provided

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	182	4%	41	17%	56	9%	279	5%	5	4%	11	6%	16	5%
Rarely	367	9%	44	18%	118	20%	529	10%	10	7%	12	7%	22	7%
Sometimes	1,390	32%	69	29%	235	40%	1,694	33%	42	30%	47	26%	89	28%
Often	1,297	30%	63	26%	127	21%	1,487	29%	50	36%	89	49%	139	43%
Always	1,059	25%	21	9%	58	10%	1,138	22%	33	24%	22	12%	55	17%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A14. Cover supervision: to what extent are resources provided

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	164	4%	20	8%	56	9%	240	5%	1	1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Rarely	518	12%	52	22%	165	28%	735	14%	11	8%	16	9%	27	8%
Sometimes	1,762	41%	84	35%	253	43%	2,099	41%	51	36%	70	39%	121	38%
Often	1,236	29%	58	24%	92	15%	1,386	27%	59	42%	80	44%	139	43%
Always	615	14%	24	10%	28	5%	667	13%	18	13%	15	8%	33	10%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A15. Cover supervision: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors supervise work set

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	279	6%	19	8%	47	8%	345	7%	13	9%	10	6%	23	7%
Rarely	331	8%	14	6%	53	9%	398	8%	14	10%	10	6%	24	7%
Sometimes	997	23%	57	24%	191	32%	1,245	24%	29	21%	30	17%	59	18%
Often	1,123	26%	79	33%	169	28%	1,371	27%	24	17%	47	26%	71	22%
Always	1,565	36%	69	29%	134	23%	1,768	34%	60	43%	84	46%	144	45%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A16. Cover supervision: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors respond to pupils questions about what to do

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	12	<1%	3	1%	18	3%	33	1%	1	1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Rarely	10	<1%	1	<1%	13	2%	24	<1%	0	0%	2	1%	2	1%
Sometimes	315	7%	21	9%	102	17%	438	9%	4	3%	8	4%	12	4%
Often	835	19%	59	25%	153	26%	1,047	20%	26	19%	30	17%	56	17%
Always	3,123	73%	154	65%	308	52%	3,585	70%	109	78%	141	78%	250	78%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A17. Cover supervision: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors actively teach

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	48	1%	17	7%	25	4%	90	2%	2	1%	7	4%	9	3%
Rarely	138	3%	26	11%	33	6%	197	4%	1	1%	5	3%	6	2%
Sometimes	741	17%	68	29%	171	29%	980	19%	9	6%	52	29%	61	19%
Often	1,198	28%	65	27%	178	30%	1,441	28%	34	24%	61	34%	95	30%
Always	2,170	51%	62	26%	187	31%	2,419	47%	94	67%	56	31%	150	47%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A18. Cover supervision: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors manage behaviour

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	9	<1%	3	1%	7	1%	19	<1%	1	1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Rarely	6	<1%	3	1%	11	2%	20	<1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Sometimes	301	7%	19	8%	80	13%	400	8%	5	4%	6	3%	11	3%
Often	817	19%	58	24%	160	27%	1,035	20%	23	16%	19	10%	42	13%
Always	3,162	74%	155	65%	336	57%	3,653	71%	111	79%	156	86%	267	83%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A19. Cover supervision: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors collect completed work

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	33	1%	6	3%	19	3%	58	1%	3	2%	0	0%	3	1%
Rarely	37	1%	4	2%	23	4%	64	1%	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
Sometimes	399	9%	28	12%	113	19%	540	11%	6	4%	11	6%	17	5%
Often	892	21%	56	24%	148	25%	1,096	21%	26	19%	35	19%	61	19%
Always	2,934	68%	144	61%	291	49%	3,369	66%	104	74%	135	75%	239	74%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A20. Cover supervision: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors report issues that arise

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	10	0%	4	2%	7	1%	21	<1%	1	1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Rarely	15	<1%	2	1%	12	2%	29	1%	0	0%	1	1%	1	<1%
Sometimes	354	8%	25	11%	87	15%	466	9%	4	3%	9	5%	13	4%
Often	793	18%	54	23%	154	26%	1,001	20%	23	16%	24	13%	47	15%
Always	3,123	73%	153	64%	334	56%	3,610	70%	112	80%	147	81%	259	81%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A21. Specified work: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors plan and prepare lessons/courses

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
Never	1,087	28%	23	15%	77	17%	1,187	26%	43	29%	59	37%	102	33%
Rarely	908	23%	27	18%	91	21%	1,026	23%	41	28%	42	26%	83	27%
Sometimes	1,011	26%	43	28%	148	33%	1,202	26%	37	25%	40	25%	77	25%
Often	491	12%	30	20%	63	14%	584	13%	16	11%	15	9%	31	10%
Always	447	11%	29	19%	63	14%	539	12%	10	7%	3	2%	13	4%
Total	3,944	100%	152	100%	442	100%	4,538	100%	147	100%	159	100%	306	100%

Table A22. Specified work: to what extent are TAs/cover supervisors given time to plan and prepare lessons/courses

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	822	42%	47	46%	124	45%	993	49%	25	40%	16	28%	41	34%
Rarely	513	26%	24	24%	80	29%	617	31%	18	29%	29	50%	47	39%
Sometimes	315	16%	15	15%	42	15%	372	13%	13	21%	11	19%	24	20%
Often	170	9%	10	10%	18	7%	198	4%	6	10%	1	2%	7	6%
Always	129	7%	6	6%	10	4%	145	2%	1	2%	1	2%	2	2%
Total	1,949	100%	102	100%	274	100%	2,325	100%	63	100%	58	100%	121	100%

Table A23. Specified work: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors deliver lessons

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	36	1%	6	4%	9	2%	51	1%	1	1%	3	2%	4	1%
Rarely	86	2%	3	2%	14	3%	103	2%	1	1%	3	2%	4	1%
Sometimes	734	19%	39	26%	117	26%	890	20%	16	11%	30	19%	46	15%
Often	911	23%	43	28%	140	32%	1,094	24%	29	20%	46	29%	75	25%
Always	2,177	55%	61	40%	162	37%	2,400	53%	100	68%	77	48%	177	58%
Total	3,944	100%	152	100%	442	100%	4,538	100%	147	100%	159	100%	306	100%

Table A24. Specified work: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors assess pupils' development, progress and attainment

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	410	10%	22	14%	39	9%	471	10%	17	12%	50	31%	67	22%
Rarely	633	16%	22	14%	59	13%	714	16%	26	18%	46	29%	72	24%
Sometimes	1,153	29%	49	32%	114	26%	1,316	29%	47	32%	34	21%	81	26%
Often	874	22%	31	20%	125	28%	1,030	23%	26	18%	22	14%	48	16%
Always	874	22%	28	18%	105	24%	1,007	22%	31	21%	7	4%	38	12%
Total	3,944	100%	152	100%	442	100%	4,538	100%	147	100%	159	100%	306	100%

Table A25. Specified work: to what extent do TAs/cover supervisors report on pupils' development, progress and attainment

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
Never	286	7%	16	11%	23	5%	325	7%	11	7%	37	23%	48	16%
Rarely	408	10%	20	13%	42	10%	470	10%	17	12%	35	23%	52	17%
Sometimes	1,090	28%	52	34%	126	29%	1,268	28%	44	30%	40	25%	84	27%
Often	1,004	25%	30	20%	122	28%	1,156	25%	33	22%	30	19%	63	21%
Always	1,156	29%	34	22%	129	29%	1,319	29%	42	29%	17	11%	59	19%
Total	3,944	100%	152	100%	442	100%	4,538	100%	147	100%	159	100%	306	100%

Table A26. Backfilling: to what extent are TAs' roles/duties covered when covering classes

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	2,725	54%	178	60%	225	34%	3,128	52%
Rarely	1,121	22%	52	18%	165	25%	1,338	22%
Sometimes	704	14%	40	14%	152	23%	896	15%
Often	160	3%	4	1%	57	9%	221	4%
Always	120	2%	6	2%	39	6%	165	3%
N/A*	194	4%	16	5%	31	5%	241	4%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

* For example: TAs that report only undertaking cover supervision

Table A27. To what extent do TAs/cover supervisors have additional TA support when covering classes

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	1,178	23%	115	39%	24	4%	1,317	22%	29	18%	24	12%	53	14%
Rarely	1,286	26%	82	28%	62	9%	1,430	24%	52	32%	82	40%	134	37%
Sometimes	1,524	30%	80	27%	159	24%	1,763	29%	58	35%	93	46%	151	41%
Often	559	11%	10	3%	154	23%	723	12%	18	11%	4	2%	22	6%
Always	477	9%	9	3%	270	40%	756	13%	7	4%	0	0%	7	2%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A28. Level of training to and/or preparedness for covering classes

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not at all	466	9%	81	27%	106	16%	653	11%	11	7%	15	7%	26	7%
Under prepared	1,164	23%	69	23%	171	26%	1,404	23%	17	10%	32	16%	49	13%
Partially prepared	2,422	48%	96	32%	292	44%	2,810	47%	80	49%	78	38%	158	43%
Fully prepared	972	19%	50	17%	100	15%	1,122	19%	56	34%	78	38%	134	37%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A29. Time for planning and preparation for cover supervision

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	2,282	53%	155	65%	339	57%	2,776	54%	65	46%	103	57%	168	52%
Rarely	1,235	29%	63	26%	175	29%	1,473	29%	44	31%	64	35%	108	34%
Sometimes	477	11%	13	5%	54	9%	544	11%	19	14%	11	6%	30	9%
Often	178	4%	5	2%	15	3%	198	4%	9	6%	2	1%	11	3%
Always	123	3%	2	1%	11	2%	136	3%	3	2%	1	1%	4	1%
Total	4,295	100%	238	100%	594	100%	5,127	100%	140	100%	181	100%	321	100%

Table A30. To what extent do TAs have to do planning and preparation in their own time as a result of covering lessons

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	950	19%	65	22%	155	23%	1,170	20%
Rarely	560	11%	28	9%	93	14%	681	11%
Sometimes	1,250	25%	67	23%	159	24%	1,476	25%
Often	933	19%	53	18%	97	14%	1,083	18%
Always	1,050	21%	59	20%	127	19%	1,236	21%
N/A/don't know	281	6%	24	8%	38	6%	343	6%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

Table A31. Rate of pay for undertaking specified work

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Paid different rate	1,308	26%	17	6%	80	12%	1,405	23%
Paid usual rate	3,435	68%	267	90%	561	84%	4,263	71%
Other compensation	98	2%	0	0%	3	0%	101	2%
N/A*	183	4%	12	4%	25	4%	220	4%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

* For example: TAs that report only undertaking cover supervision

Table A32. Specified work by NJC level: TAs

	Primary/infant						Secondary						Special						Total					
	Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	106	12%	119	7%	31	4%	14	38%	17	26%	12	24%	18	16%	28	12%	12	13%	138	13%	164	8%	55	6%
Rarely	177	20%	252	15%	70	8%	10	27%	11	17%	6	12%	27	24%	44	18%	11	12%	214	21%	307	15%	87	9%
Sometimes	248	28%	454	27%	147	18%	7	19%	20	31%	10	20%	33	29%	84	35%	27	30%	288	28%	558	28%	184	19%
Often	258	29%	614	36%	392	47%	5	14%	8	12%	10	20%	21	18%	64	26%	28	31%	284	27%	686	34%	430	44%
Always	103	12%	267	16%	195	23%	1	3%	9	14%	12	24%	15	13%	22	9%	13	14%	119	11%	298	15%	220	23%
Total	892	100%	1,706	100%	835	100%	37	100%	65	100%	50	100%	114	100%	242	100%	91	100%	1,043	100%	2,013	100%	976	100%

Table A33. Specified work by NJC level and rate of (hourly) pay for cover: TAs

	Primary/infant						Secondary						Special						Total					
	Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Diff rate	227	39%	275	21%	171	25%	0	0%	2	5%	1	4%	5	7%	14	8%	13	21%	232	35%	291	20%	185	24%
Usual rate	356	61%	1,008	79%	500	75%	13	100%	35	95%	26	96%	62	93%	152	92%	48	79%	431	65%	1,195	80%	574	76%
Total	583	100%	1,283	100%	671	100%	13	100%	37	100%	27	100%	67	100%	166	100%	61	100%	663	100%	1,486	100%	759	100%

Table A34. Specified work cover by NJC level: cover supervisors

	Primary/infant						Secondary						Total					
	Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	1	25%	1	2%	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	4	13%	1	14%	1	1%	5	8%
Rarely	0	0%	2	4%	3	9%	0	0%	4	15%	1	3%	0	0%	6	8%	4	6%
Sometimes	1	25%	10	20%	6	18%	0	0%	9	35%	3	10%	1	14%	19	25%	9	14%
Often	2	50%	29	57%	13	38%	2	67%	7	27%	11	35%	4	57%	36	47%	24	37%
Always	0	0%	9	18%	11	32%	1	33%	6	23%	12	39%	1	14%	15	19%	23	35%
Total	4	100%	51	100%	34	100%	3	100%	26	100%	31	100%	7	100%	77	100%	65	100%

Table A35. Specified work by NJC level and rate of (hourly) pay for cover: cover supervisors

	Primary/infant						Secondary						Total					
	Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5		Level 1/2		Level 3		Level 4/5	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Diff rate	0	0%	6	18%	4	21%	1	100%	0	%	3	25%	1	33%	6	15%	7	23%
Same rate	2	100%	28	82%	15	79%	0	0%	7	100%	9	75%	2	66%	35	85%	24	77%
Total	2	100%	34	100%	19	100%	1	100%	7	100%	12	100%	3	100%	41	100%	31	100%

Table A36. To what extent do pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)/ Individual Plan (IP) and pupils in general miss out on support when TAs cover lessons

	One-to-one support for pupils with EHCP/IP								In-class support for pupils in general							
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	450	9%	32	11%	65	10%	547	9%	172	3%	24	8%	61	9%	257	4%
Rarely	435	9%	17	6%	82	12%	534	9%	262	5%	16	5%	57	9%	335	6%
Sometimes	1,133	23%	74	25%	192	29%	1,399	23%	1,152	23%	82	28%	246	37%	1,480	25%
Often	1,219	24%	81	27%	179	27%	1,479	25%	1,504	30%	76	26%	189	28%	1,769	30%
Always	1,447	29%	64	22%	120	18%	1,631	27%	1,805	36%	74	25%	95	14%	1,974	33%
N/A/DK	340	7%	28	9%	31	5%	399	7%	129	3%	24	8%	21	3%	174	4%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

Table A37. To what extent do pupils miss curriculum interventions sessions and therapy sessions when TAs cover lessons

	Miss curriculum intervention sessions								Miss therapy sessions							
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	254	5%	51	17%	88	13%	393	7%	1,259	25%	86	29%	164	25%	1,509	25%
Rarely	339	7%	31	10%	90	13%	460	8%	796	16%	37	13%	122	18%	955	16%
Sometimes	1,143	23%	73	25%	206	31%	1,422	24%	934	19%	49	17%	177	26%	1,160	19%
Often	1,385	28%	59	20%	164	25%	1,608	27%	584	12%	35	12%	106	16%	725	12%
Always	1,746	35%	45	15%	75	11%	1,866	31%	606	12%	17	6%	63	9%	686	11%
N/A/DK	157	3%	37	13%	46	7%	240	4%	845	17%	72	24%	37	6%	954	16%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

Table A38. To what extent are curriculum interventions sessions and therapy sessions rescheduled when TAs cover lessons

	Curriculum interventions sessions rescheduled								Therapy sessions rescheduled							
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never	1,169	23%	83	28%	118	18%	1,370	23%	1,328	26%	85	29%	169	25%	1,582	26%
Rarely	1,134	23%	32	11%	138	21%	1,304	22%	910	18%	35	12%	146	22%	1,091	18%
Sometimes	1,199	24%	74	25%	193	29%	1,466	24%	901	18%	60	20%	173	26%	1,134	19%
Often	728	14%	40	14%	99	15%	867	14%	364	7%	22	7%	76	11%	462	8%
Always	547	11%	22	7%	50	7%	619	10%	310	6%	12	4%	42	6%	364	6%
N/A/DK	247	5%	45	15%	71	11%	363	6%	1,211	24%	82	28%	63	9%	1,356	23%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

Table A39. Impact of undertaking cover on overall quality of learning and provision for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)/additional learning needs (ALN): TAs

	Quality of learning								Quality of provision for SEND/ALN							
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Large neg	678	13%	68	23%	151	23%	897	15%	1,611	32%	114	39%	223	33%	1,948	33%
Mod neg	1,372	27%	93	31%	196	29%	1,661	28%	1,432	29%	79	27%	156	23%	1,667	28%
Small neg	1,263	25%	56	19%	163	24%	1,482	25%	1,003	20%	44	15%	134	20%	1,181	20%
No impact	531	11%	23	8%	47	7%	601	10%	477	9%	15	5%	56	8%	548	9%
Small pos	216	4%	11	4%	37	6%	264	4%	64	1%	13	4%	18	3%	95	2%
Mod pos	284	6%	11	4%	19	3%	314	5%	72	1%	7	2%	22	3%	101	2%
Large pos	104	2%	12	4%	15	2%	131	2%	31	1%	10	3%	21	3%	62	1%
Don't know	576	11%	22	7%	41	6%	639	11%	334	7%	14	5%	39	6%	387	6%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%

Table A40. Impact of undertaking cover on overall quality of learning and provision for SEND/ALN: cover supervisors

	Quality of learning						Quality of provision for SEND/ALN					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Large negative	12	7%	25	12%	37	10%	28	17%	40	20%	68	19%
Moderate neg	28	17%	68	33%	96	26%	38	23%	40	20%	78	21%
Small negative	40	24%	44	22%	84	23%	35	21%	47	23%	82	22%
No impact	24	15%	17	8%	41	11%	21	13%	27	13%	48	13%
Small positive	10	6%	9	4%	19	5%	10	6%	7	3%	17	5%
Moderate pos	19	12%	14	7%	33	9%	4	2%	10	5%	14	4%
Large positive	6	4%	14	7%	20	5%	4	2%	9	4%	13	4%
Don't know	25	15%	12	6%	37	10%	24	15%	23	11%	47	13%
Total	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A41. Impact of undertaking cover on workload

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Large negative	1,716	34%	108	36%	228	34%	2,052	34%	30	18%	41	20%	71	19%
Moderate neg	1,512	30%	82	28%	193	29%	1,787	30%	50	30%	38	19%	88	24%
Small negative	1,057	21%	53	18%	140	21%	1,250	21%	35	21%	27	13%	62	17%
No impact	344	7%	35	12%	56	8%	435	7%	22	13%	53	26%	75	20%
Small positive	90	2%	3	1%	15	2%	108	2%	5	3%	20	10%	25	7%
Moderate pos	118	2%	6	2%	17	3%	141	2%	10	6%	11	5%	21	6%
Large positive	138	3%	7	2%	11	2%	156	3%	7	4%	7	3%	14	4%
Don't know	49	1%	2	1%	9	1%	60	1%	5	3%	6	3%	11	3%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A42. Impact of undertaking cover on health and wellbeing

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Large negative	1,544	31%	117	40%	230	34%	1,891	32%	38	23%	49	24%	87	24%
Moderate neg	1,406	28%	73	25%	174	26%	1,653	28%	42	26%	36	18%	78	21%
Small negative	1,115	22%	52	18%	152	23%	1,319	22%	33	20%	38	19%	71	19%
No impact	488	10%	31	10%	56	8%	575	10%	23	14%	42	21%	65	18%
Small positive	149	3%	6	2%	13	2%	168	3%	4	2%	15	7%	19	5%
Moderate pos	133	3%	4	1%	19	3%	156	3%	12	7%	11	5%	23	6%
Large positive	130	3%	10	3%	16	2%	156	3%	6	4%	4	2%	10	3%
Don't know	59	1%	3	1%	9	1%	71	1%	6	4%	8	4%	14	4%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A43. Impact of undertaking cover on sense of effectiveness

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Large negative	787	16%	73	25%	130	19%	990	17%	10	6%	14	7%	24	7%
Moderate neg	1,394	28%	75	25%	172	26%	1,641	27%	34	21%	28	14%	62	17%
Small negative	1,099	22%	52	18%	158	24%	1,309	22%	32	20%	19	9%	51	14%
No impact	576	11%	31	10%	86	13%	693	12%	24	15%	58	29%	82	22%
Small positive	362	7%	21	7%	44	7%	427	7%	15	9%	19	9%	34	9%
Moderate pos	395	8%	23	8%	38	6%	456	8%	25	15%	26	13%	51	14%
Large positive	218	4%	15	5%	22	3%	255	4%	14	9%	25	12%	39	11%
Don't know	193	4%	6	2%	19	3%	218	4%	10	6%	14	7%	24	7%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table A44. Impact of undertaking cover on job satisfaction

	Teaching assistants								Cover supervisors					
	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total		Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Large negative	929	18%	89	30%	146	22%	1,164	19%	14	9%	22	11%	36	10%
Moderate neg	1,121	22%	67	23%	148	22%	1,336	22%	22	13%	27	13%	49	13%
Small negative	871	17%	41	14%	125	19%	1,037	17%	32	20%	20	10%	52	14%
No impact	565	11%	25	8%	80	12%	670	11%	22	13%	42	21%	64	17%
Small positive	584	12%	21	7%	63	9%	668	11%	20	12%	15	7%	35	10%
Moderate pos	537	11%	22	7%	53	8%	612	10%	31	19%	45	22%	76	21%
Large positive	343	7%	29	10%	44	7%	416	7%	18	11%	26	13%	44	12%
Don't know	74	1%	2	1%	10	1%	86	1%	5	3%	6	3%	11	3%
Total	5,024	100%	296	100%	669	100%	5,989	100%	164	100%	203	100%	367	100%

Table B1. Coding of open comments from TAs on covering classes

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Expected/feel 'pressured' to cover</i>	82	10%	4	8%	16	14%	102	11%
<i>Teacher shortages</i>	34	4%	12	24%	10	9%	56	6%
<i>Availability and cost of supply teachers</i>	34	4%	4	8%	1	1%	39	4%
<i>TAs preferred to supply teachers</i>	22	3%	1	2%	6	5%	29	3%
Extent of and reasons for TA cover	172	22%	21	41%	33	30%	226	24%
<i>Cover supervision; short notice cover</i>	22	3%	2	4%	7	6%	31	3%
<i>Specified work; cover for PPA</i>	27	3%	0	0%	0	0%	27	3%
Specified work and cover supervision	49	6%	2	4%	7	6%	58	6%
<i>Managing workload; lack of planning/prep time</i>	62	8%	2	4%	10	9%	74	8%
<i>TAs cover without support</i>	44	6%	2	4%	4	4%	50	5%
<i>Lack of support from SLT</i>	28	4%	2	4%	8	7%	38	4%
Experiences of covering classes	134	17%	6	12%	12	20%	88	17%
<i>Pay uplift for covering classes</i>	113	14%	3	6%	6	5%	122	13%
<i>TAs as 'cheap labour'; alternative to supply</i>	44	6%	3	6%	6	5%	53	6%
Pay for cover and pay-related issues	157	20%	6	12%	12	11%	175	18%
<i>Health and wellbeing</i>	126	16%	8	16%	19	17%	153	16%
<i>Pressure/stress of teaching/managing classes</i>	37	5%	1	2%	0	0%	38	4%
<i>'Feel undervalued'; job satisfaction; retention</i>	118	15%	7	14%	18	16%	143	15%
Impact of covering classes on TAs	281	35%	16	31%	37	33%	334	35%
Total	793	83%	51	5%	111	12%	955	100%

Table B2. Coding of open comments from cover supervisors on covering classes

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Treated as if/expected to act like a teacher	35	46%	34	37%	69	41%
Quality/quantity of work set by teachers	3	4%	13	14%	16	10%
Poor pupil behaviour	4	5%	10	11%	14	8%
Impact: inconsistency, esp. for SEND	5	7%	6	7%	11	7%
Health/wellbeing; causes of anxiety/stress	18	24%	14	15%	32	19%
'Undervalued'; 'cheap labour'; retention	11	14%	15	16%	30	18%
Total	76	45%	92	55%	168	100%