

Preparedness: improving teachers' ability to work with TAs and cover supervisors

More than half of the school workforce is made up of support staff, so knowing how to work with them is vital. **Rob Webster** and **Anthony Russell** and colleagues at the **Institute of Education** at the **University of London** share findings from their recent research into how such staff are deployed and what impact they can have on T&L, exploring how the way in which teachers work with TAs and cover supervisors might be improved

School support staff are part of a growing international trend towards the use of paraprofessionals in a range of professional areas (such as healthcare and the police). Schools in England and Wales have seen a significant growth in the employment and deployment of additional pupil- and classroom-based support, in the shape of teaching assistants (in this article we will use the term 'TA' to refer to teaching assistants, higher level teaching assistants, learning support assistants, classroom assistants, and those with similar roles). Support roles have also widened, which can be seen in the recent introduction of higher level teaching assistants and cover supervisors in secondary schools.

The number of TAs has trebled since 1997 (DCSF, 2009b) largely as a result of Government initiatives concerning literacy and numeracy, reducing teacher workload and policies regarding the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. In January 2009, TAs comprised 23% of the overall school workforce (DCSF, 2009b). Cover supervisors can be seen as part of the efforts since 2003 to reduce the burden on teachers to cover classes for absent colleagues. The expansion of support staff in both their number and their role is a key part of the Government-led drive to bolster professionalism within teaching, concerned as much with having an indirect effect on raising standards as with helping to 'free up' time for core teaching tasks.

Studies in the USA, Australia and Finland have called attention to the deployment of TAs (Finn et al, 2000; Takala, 2007). Studies in the UK have done likewise, and highlighted the controversy over the appropriate role of TAs and boundaries between

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teaching and non-teaching roles (Beeson et al, 2003; Farrell et al, 1999; Mistry et al, 2004; Moran and Abbott, 2002; Schlapp, 2003).

Seemingly contradictory messages from Government bodies about TA deployment compound this. For example, in addition to the indirect impact described above, workload-reform policy considers the direct impact support staff can have on pupil learning and attainment, through overtly pedagogical input, in the 'kinds of teaching activity [that] could be delegated to trained, high-level teaching assistants and ... those with further and higher education experience' (DfES, 2002c, p22). These tasks and functions were later defined in the national agreement as 'specified work', which support staff could undertake 'in order to assist or support the work of a qualified teacher in the school' (DfES, 2003b, p9).

There has been little research on the deployment and impact of TAs, and less still on the 'kinds of teaching activity' met by the new HLTAs and cover supervision roles. Little attention has been paid to ways in which schools and teachers need to adapt models of classroom management in order to meet the changed reality in schools (Howes et al, 2003).

Some evidence on impact shows little or no effect (Finn et al, 2000; Reynolds and Mujijs, 2003). Ofsted (2006a) has concluded that the provision of additional resources in the shape of TA support did not ensure good-quality intervention or adequate progress for pupils with learning needs. Critics in the USA have raised concerns regarding negative effects on learner identity (for example, interference with task ownership), and the separation of TA-supported pupils from the teacher, the curriculum and their classmates (Giancreco et al, 1997). Many of these studies have covered small samples or taken too narrow a view of TAs' work; none have provided the much-needed description of all pupil- and classroom-based support staff.

Our Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project for the DCSF produced this rounded description in the wake of the workforce remodelling and restructuring processes. In particular, it produced a rich, contextualised view of the work of TAs and cover supervisors that better articulates the situational and organisational factors within which they work and which affects their impact (Blatchford et al, 2009). This view comprises interconnecting components, such as the decisions made about their deployment by headteachers and teachers, and their conditions of employment (for example, hours of work).

One of these key components is that of what we call

Background to DISS project

The Deployment and Impact of School Support Staff (DISS) project was designed to help fill in the knowledge gaps on the use, deployment and impact of support staff, paying particular attention to TAs and cover supervisors, and the school and classroom processes through which their impact is maximised or inhibited. The DISS project is the largest study of support staff carried out in the UK, if not the world. It makes a unique contribution to educational research, obtaining accurate, systematic and reliable data on a large scale, over a pivotal five-year period (2003–08) of increase and expansion of paraprofessional roles in education. The project was funded by the DCSF and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The DISS project is the first to systematically address the deployment and impact of all categories of support staff across all school sectors (primary, secondary and special). The study was not restricted to pupils with SEN or those on 'school action' or 'school action plus', but covered all pupils who received support from TAs. It is the first study to return data on the new and emerging role of cover supervisors.

Methodology and data collection of DISS project

■ Strand 1 involved three biennial questionnaire surveys – the main school questionnaire, the support staff questionnaire, and the teacher questionnaire. Over the three waves there were around 20,000 responses. We also collected 1,500 detailed timelogs completed by support staff to show the type and extent of their various activities over a school day.

■ Strand 2 used a multi-method and multi-informant approach combining quantitative studies of deployment and impact with rich case studies in more than 50 schools, which articulated the contexts and processes within which TAs and cover supervisors worked. It drew on systematic, moment-by-moment observation analysis of TAs and pupils (more than 34,000 observations on the nature and contexts of TA-pupil interactions). It also provided, for the first time, a fine-grained analysis of TA practice via audio recordings of TA-pupil interactions.

Findings from the DISS data sources were integrated and organised thematically. To explore issues relating to the theme of ‘preparedness’, in this article we draw principally on the data from the DISS Strand 1 surveys on teachers’ exposure to, and experiences of, training for working with TAs and cover supervisors, and opportunities for joint planning, preparation and feedback on lessons, and on detailed evidence from interviews with school staff, based on earlier classroom observations, gathered via the Strand 2 case studies.

‘preparedness’. We will explore here what this involves and look at its relevance to the work of teachers, TAs and cover supervisors. We will do this by drawing together data on teachers’ exposure to, and experiences of, training to work with TAs and cover supervisors, and opportunities for joint planning, preparation and feedback on lessons with them. From this, we will identify implications for teachers’ approaches to planning and classroom-management strategies.

We will also use the DISS project findings to highlight ways in which department heads and teachers can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of TAs who provide support to pupils in their classrooms, and better support the role of cover supervisors.

The box on page 24 gives the background detail on the DISS project, while the box above outlines the methodology we used.

Survey results

The survey data from Strand 1 (see the box above) detailed below refers to support staff as a whole, rather than specific roles. However, for the most part, it is TAs that teachers referred to in their responses to questions about working with support staff.

Our notion of preparedness broadly concerns the:

- longer-term needs of the school and TAs and cover supervisors themselves in the shape of training and development (for example, via Inset and performance appraisal), plus their induction
- day-to-day readiness of TAs and cover supervisors to carry out the tasks given to them.

Training for support staff

For several years, critics have commented on the patchy nature of inservice training for the majority of support staff and the implications for their professional development (Beeson et al, 2003). Results from the support staff questionnaire showed that the majority of support staff had experienced training of some type over the three waves, with just one in five or less having had none. Attendance was most likely at school-based Inset (66%); half had attended non-school based training. Yet less than one-third had attended training that led to a qualification. There are several possible

reasons why staff may have difficulties attending training and Inset, borne out by evidence from the Strand 2 case studies. These included schools’ difficulty releasing staff or funding training, and personal barriers, such as childcare commitments (see also: Ofsted, 2002; Smith et al, 2004).

Training for teachers

At each survey wave in Strand 1, we asked teachers several questions about training and development in relation to support staff. A clear finding was that, at each wave, about three-quarters had never had any. This is troubling, given that the involvement of teachers in training or developing support staff had increased over the three waves, from 40% to 55%, and the vast majority of it was informal support given on the job.

The teachers were also asked an open-ended question regarding the extent and duration of the training or development they had received. Most teachers had received no more than a short course of one day or less. Teachers also commented on the type of training they had received. For most, their only training had been as part of their initial teacher training (ITT) course or part of their NQT training, followed by training during Inset. The school mostly provided training inhouse.

We asked teachers to comment on how useful they found this training or development. At Wave 3, just under half were positive about it, while 11% were negative. We also asked teachers who had not been involved in training or developing support staff, whether they would have found this useful. The majority (74% at Wave 3) said they would have, reflecting the interest there would be in this type of preparation. In answers to open-ended questions about what teachers had gained from the training or development they received, they cited an increased understanding of what support staff could be asked to do, learning how to make the most effective use of them, and what both parties may expect from their working relationship. Along with findings on the lack of planning and feedback time (see below), these results suggest that much still needs to be done in terms of preparing teachers for working with support staff.

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Planning and feedback time

A main finding from this study, consistent across all three waves, is that most teachers do not have allocated planning or feedback time with the class-based support staff they work with: the results showed that, by Wave 3, only 27% of teachers said they had allocated time for planning, and only 22% had allocated time for feedback. It is encouraging that, where it took place, most teachers said that the majority of support staff were paid for planning and feedback time. However, this does not align with other evidence (see below).

The surveys showed that fewer than one in 20 secondary-school teachers had any such time. The case studies not only confirmed this, but suggested that the main reason for this was that teachers worked with several TAs over the course of the week, and so it was difficult and timeconsuming for teachers to meet with each of them.

The answers to open-ended questions showed that teachers were very aware that the lack of time to meet with support staff was a problem, with more than half who responded describing how limited time for planning was a constant issue. Both support staff and teachers reported fitting it in before or after school, or during break- and lunch-times – frequently time for which support staff were not paid. It is only thanks to the goodwill of support staff – the desire to do their best by the pupils they support, and to ensure that they are as prepared as possible for the following day’s tasks – that many teachers have any opportunity for planning and feedback at all.

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Results from case studies

Results from Strand 1 (see the box on page 25) concerning the training and development of teachers to work with and manage TAs, cover supervisors and other support staff, and the results regarding allocated time for communication, all point to a general lack of preparedness for both support staff and teachers alike. The Strand 2 case-study data has been central to developing the notion of preparedness in relation to TAs and cover supervisors.

The evidence on planning and feedback raises important issues about how TAs and cover supervisors are deployed within schools. Difficulties concerning finding enough time for planning and feedback were a persistent theme, and are a factor undermining good practice; any potential positive impact TAs and cover supervisors might have on pupil learning may well be compromised. In particular, TAs can work extremely closely with individual pupils and gain extensive knowledge of them but, to make the most of the learning situations, TAs need to be fully aware of what is being asked of them, and the tasks and concepts being taught. The issue of feedback is also important because it can benefit planning and teachers’ understanding of their pupils and their capabilities. The willingness of TAs to work in their own time in order to be involved in planning or feedback is commendable but questionable, if it has become an essential part of their work.

Through the case studies, we were able to give

particular focus to determining the adequacy of TAs’ and cover supervisors’ subject and pedagogical knowledge – fundamental to their effectiveness, given that they work in overtly pedagogical contexts. However, it is useful to frame this within more detailed findings on the time and opportunities for them to meet and discuss with teachers.

Opportunities for support staff to meet with teachers

Interviews as part of the case studies confirmed the Strand 1 survey findings regarding limited opportunities for teachers to communicate, plan, prepare for and receive feedback on lessons and intervention sessions, and to discuss pupil performance and behaviour with TAs and, where applicable, cover supervisors:

The problem as always, for teachers, is time. They haven’t got time at the end of the lesson necessarily to spend 10 minutes discussing something with the LSA. And then a lot of our staff are part time, so finding people can be a difficulty. As we know, staff are busy at lunchtime and after school. (Teacher)

The additional and more demanding responsibilities teachers had for managing the day-to-day deployment of TAs, in particular, had offset some of the gains made in reducing their workload. Compared with heads and teachers, more secondary school TAs suggested that there was no need for more planning and feedback time, suggesting that their experience and time spent in the role provided the preparation they needed:

Because I’ve been doing the job for so long, and the work rolls over year to year, within five minutes of the lesson I can pick up what’s being done. (TA)

Some school leaders were open about how the lack of time for communication concerned them, yet very few provided timetabled slots within the school day for teachers to meet with TAs or cover supervisors, although a few gave some support staff non-contact time of their own to, for example, write up notes on pupils’ engagement in a lesson or provide written feedback to the teacher on a covered lesson.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a knock-on effect for TAs and cover supervisors in terms of how prepared they felt for their roles, particularly those in secondary schools. In three-quarters of the instances concerning the quality of preparedness, TAs and cover supervisors described receiving minimal or poor guidance from teachers. There was little detail about the specific role teachers wanted TAs to take in a lesson or task when supporting lower-ability/SEN pupils; lesson plans were generally at the whole-class level. Many TAs described how, in the absence of any specific explanation from the teacher, they ‘tuned in’ to the teacher’s whole-class delivery in order to pick up essential content. This means that much of TAs’ work is ‘on the hoof’, and put some under pressure:

If you’re going in and you haven’t got a clue what’s being covered, you’re as blind as the children or even more so sometimes. (TA)

A number of TAs found it frustrating that teachers did not tap into their detailed knowledge of the pupils they supported, as they believed they had a lot to offer

For specific types of support (such as literacy and numeracy interventions), TAs were often expected to rely on prescribed materials, which acted as a substitute for teacher input. There were few instances of TAs gaining subject and pedagogical knowledge via formal and informal training. In fact, long-serving TAs were thought to need less teacher guidance as they were able to draw on their experience (nearly two-thirds of TAs in the Strand 1 surveys reported being in the same post in the same school for at least five years).

The need for subject and pedagogical knowledge had different implications for cover supervisors. Heads, following national guidance, said that cover supervisors were not expected to teach, yet many cover supervisors said that their role encompassed a pedagogic element. Again, as for TAs, this was not supported by training, as this comment from one of the headteachers illustrates:

Through very little fault of their own, the planning done by TAs themselves for intervention sessions can be inadequate, since it is often not pedagogically-based

[Training for cover supervisors] is very much ad hoc ... and it is something that we would benefit from nationally. Because, if cover supervisors are here to stay – and I think most schools use them – we need to look and see if there's some way we can support them. (Headteacher)

In terms of subject knowledge, cover supervisors struggled to support pupil learning in subjects with which they were unfamiliar. But there was evidence that schools were attempting to capitalise on cover supervisors' skills and subject knowledge when assigning cover duties:

Certain [cover supervisors] ... have got specialisms: [X] is very fluent in German; and I'm quite good at art and English; and [Y] is good at performing arts and stuff. I think that is taken into account when assigning the cover. (Cover supervisor)

Improving efficiency and effectiveness of TAs: practical solutions for teachers

Sharing subject and pedagogical knowledge

Issues of levels of subject and pedagogical knowledge, as they apply to TAs, need to be recognised. The Audit Commission (2002) found that curriculum differentiation was seen by SENCOs as a top priority for support staff training. Ofsted warns that the present use of TAs also runs the risk of setting tasks at levels that are not academically challenging (Ofsted, 2006a). Through very little fault of their own, the planning done by TAs themselves for intervention sessions can be inadequate, since it is often not pedagogically-based. TAs can lack subject knowledge and their planning is not necessarily connected to the teacher's wider aims or curriculum planning.

So, share your subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge with the TAs. If timetables allow, use your PPA time to prepare TAs as part of the approach to total lesson preparation. That means informing them about the subject/topic, the lesson content and learning objectives, along with the teaching style or methods you want them to adopt, and teaching aids and materials they will have at their disposal. This is essential if it is the TA, not you, who will be supporting the lower-ability/SEN pupils in your class, and you have differentiated work or expectations in mind.

You could share this knowledge in collaboration with department colleagues by holding, for example, informal 'mini-tutorials' for TAs, where you can brief them on topic information or technical processes (for example, performing more complex mathematical calculations) that they will need for lessons they support. A 'Q&A' session between you and a TA could be particularly useful for those supporting pupils away from the classroom, giving both you and the TA the chance to check their understanding of the subject/topic and instructional techniques.

Planning with TAs in mind

As well as arming TAs with the requisite subject and pedagogical knowledge, ensure that you plan lessons with an awareness of what it is you specifically want them to do. Be specific about the nature and purpose of the tasks you give them, giving them clear expectations in terms of outcomes for the pupils they support. Also be clear about how tasks can be sequenced and the time available to complete them.

Consider the needs of the supported pupils and match TAs' tasks more closely to their needs, especially if they are lower attainers or have SEN. Do not leave TAs to interpret your lesson plans or the instructions you give to the whole class; if you have something specific in mind for the supported pupils, tell the TA what it is.

Department-based TAs can increase the impact of planning; not only will many come to post with background in your subject, but their familiarity with the curriculum content, concepts and skills has more chance to grow and develop. At the same time, their grasp of the pedagogical knowledge and skills you apply when planning, teaching and assessing can also be strengthened. However, it remains your responsibility to monitor how well this on-the-job learning is progressing.

Taking more responsibility for teaching SEN pupils

Be aware of how TA-supported pupils can be separated from the curriculum, their peers and you – the teacher. Ensure that you get feedback from TAs on any out-of-class learning. For example, if you are an English teacher, liaise regularly with the learning support department and the TAs that lead any catch-up or booster sessions for reading or spelling. Make more use of such out-of-class learning by integrating aspects of literacy or numeracy interventions linked to pupil targets in your whole-class delivery.

Work regularly and systematically with lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN; after all, you are accountable for the progress of all the pupils in your class. Deploy your TA to rove the remainder of the class, when you are applying your highly skilled attention to the pupils with the most need. Doing this reduces the risks of pupil separation and it keeps you more aware of, and engaged with, the progress of all pupils. Work this into your planning, and be clear about which adult – teacher or TA – will support which pupils with which tasks, and in which context (for example, in groups, one to one, or whole class).

Mixed ability groups are a useful proxy for adult interaction, so make good use of pupil collaboration, peer teaching and support (Blatchford et al, 2005). Pupil independence can be damaged by over-reliance on TAs and this is one way to avoid that damage.

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TAs were often expected to rely on prescribed materials, which acted as a substitute for teacher input

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Lesson information for cover supervisors relied on written procedures as a way of imparting instructions and/or giving feedback, although the quality of this information varied within schools, with some departments or teachers making more effort than others. All cover supervisors described instances of going in to lessons 'blind' (see the comment below). The implications of such lack of preparedness could be significant in terms of managing behaviour and ensuring that pupils produced some work:

The vast majority of the time you just walk in blind ... It's really, really rare we get someone coming down saying, 'You've got my lesson. This is what I want you to do.' (Cover supervisor)

Involvement of TAs in planning and feedback

The Strand 2 case studies set out to establish the extent to which TAs were involved in lesson planning. In the main, they were not, although many had sole responsibility for planning the learning intervention sessions they delivered to lower-ability/SEN pupils. The teachers of the pupils involved in these programmes were detached from this day-to-day planning, delivery and assessment process. Overall, joint planning with teachers was rare.

One key issue to emerge from the case studies concerned the extent to which information fed back to teachers by TAs was put to use. Many teachers failed to feed such vital information about lower-ability/SEN pupils – their progress, weaknesses, engagement with concepts and tasks and so on – from interventions and other learning contexts, into their wider curriculum planning and assessment, or use it to inform interactions with such pupils in classroom situations.

While all teachers interviewed claimed that feedback from TAs on pupils' learning, progress and behaviour (both in and away from the class) informed further lesson planning, TAs and cover supervisors were almost evenly split in the number that agreed with and disputed this. Some teachers did not ask for information on the pupils that took part in the TA-led intervention sessions, nor did they review the work the pupils did in those sessions.

A number of TAs found it frustrating that teachers did not tap into their detailed knowledge of the pupils they supported, as they believed they had a lot to offer. However, it was reassuring to hear experienced TAs say that where this might once have been attributable to teachers' hostile attitude towards TAs, (what TAs referred to as a 'them and us' situation), this was now a thing of the past:

Over the last two or three years, particularly in secondary schools, I think there is more of a general realisation of the fact that [TAs] are around and that they can be rather more useful than some people might have thought three or four years ago. (TA)

Feedback from cover supervisors largely concerned the degree to which pupils had completed the set work and the behaviour in the lesson. During classroom observations, cover supervisors were seen writing notes on pupils' behaviour and engagement with the tasks set. Some also informed teachers about the quality or quantity of the work they had provided, which again some teachers used to inform further planning:

I'd normally get the lesson plan with a little comment on the bottom as to how it went The following day we don't necessarily have time for a catch-up But you get feedback on the progress

Better supporting role of cover supervisors: practical solutions for teachers

Planned absences

Many teachers avoid planning demanding lessons if they know they will be absent, but that does not mean you should supply your pupils with 'busy work'. If the tasks fail to engage the pupils, this is likely to have a knock-on effect on their behaviour. Cover supervisors should not have to manage misbehaviour brought about by poorly planned lessons. Besides, this may mean work for you on your return if you have to investigate and deal with behaviour incidents.

Your lesson plans should be clear: annotate existing plans or write instructions afresh. Have any textbooks and other materials set out in advance. Think of any circumstances that could occur for which the cover supervisor would need to be ready and leave nothing to chance. If you know in advance which cover supervisor will be taking your lesson seek them out and brief them about your lesson plan. Let them know about any particular pupil needs (for example, those who might need an extra explanation, or those who are likely to be unsettled by the presence of a cover supervisor).

Unplanned absences

Realistically, an unplanned absence is less easy to prepare for, so think about strategies that you can draw on should a colleague go off with a sudden sickness. Cover supervisors can only cover the first three days of an absence, so setting one or two tasks that might divert slightly from previous lessons is unlikely to be damaging in the long term. As a subject department, you could consider building a bank of activities that have worked successfully in your own lessons, and would work well as cover lessons. For example, lessons that required little or no technical knowledge kept pupils engaged and had little emphasis on teaching beyond explaining the task at the start of the lesson.

Appoint somebody in your department as the 'go-to' person for cover supervisors. If you need to phone in sick, try to have in mind the appropriate cover lessons that the 'go-to' person can take from the bank.

that was made and any kind of behavioural issues that need additional support You just adapt it for the next time. I trust [the cover supervisor's judgement] if she says, 'This was too easy for them', or whatever. (Teacher)

The extent to which teachers sought and used this information varied between and within schools. A few teachers – although they received notes about cover lessons – preferred instead to gauge success by the pupils' reactions in the following lesson:

You've got the best people to tell you, in that the next day you've got the kids there and you say to them, 'OK, what did you achieve? What did you do?'

Regardless of what someone has told you or what their perception of it is ... you just say, 'What did you actually learn? Did you watch a video or did you do that worksheet? Let me have a look at it.' And then once you've judged what they've actually got from the lesson – from your point of view – [you can decide to] go over it or carry on. (Teacher)

Translating research findings into practice: advice for teachers

To summarise, in terms of preparedness, we found a lack of attention given to teachers' organisation and supervision of TAs and cover supervisors, including teachers' need for training to work effectively with in-class support staff.

Other findings from the DISS project revealed that TAs and cover supervisors have extensive pedagogical interactions with pupils. Set alongside our findings relating to the lack of training and day-to-day preparation for TAs and cover supervisors to perform these pedagogical roles, this suggests strongly that teachers could benefit from guidance on how to:

- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of TAs who provide support to pupils in their classrooms
- better support the role of cover supervisors.

It is important that studies such as the DISS project translate research findings into practical advice. We have argued elsewhere (Blatchford et al, 2009) that our findings emphasise the urgent need to address training and induction for teachers, TAs and cover supervisors and the lack of time many teachers have to meet with TAs and cover supervisors, before and/or after lessons. As part of the *Your child, your school, our future* White

Paper (DCSF July, 2009a), the DCSF announced that Level 3 qualifications were to be compulsory for all support staff involved in supporting pupils' learning. However, we recognise that these are matters for policymakers at the national, local authority and school levels. For the majority of classroom teachers, these factors are beyond their sphere of control.

So what can teachers do? The box on page 27 presents some practical solutions teachers can work into their everyday practice, which give greater prominence to the needs of TAs and cover supervisors. Some of the ideas for TAs described in the box could be usefully applied to cover supervisors. However, while their role demands less by way of subject and pedagogical preparation, it is important to remember that covered lessons must be planned thoroughly, and that the cover supervisor, who will lead your class in your absence, is informed and clear about what it is you expect them to do. So the box on page 28 offers advice on how to better support the role of cover supervisors.

Sharing innovative practice

It has been our intention to share with practitioners not only the findings of our research from the DISS study, but our ongoing efforts to use these as the springboard to develop effective classroom practice. We would like to encourage teachers, department heads and headteachers to share with us their experiences of working with TAs and/or cover supervisors, and to inform us of any innovative practices that they have developed to make better use of those in these and other school support roles.

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To share your innovative practice, please contact Rob Webster at: r.webster@ioe.ac.uk or Anthony Russell at: a.russell@ioe.ac.uk For more on the DISS project, and to download a copy of the Strand 1, Waves 1-3 report on which this paper is based, plus a summary of the DISS research, see: www.ioe.ac.uk/study/departments/phd/5619.html

Results suggest that much still needs to be done in terms of preparing teachers for working with support staff

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As a subject department, you could consider building a bank of activities that have worked successfully in your own lessons, and would work well as cover lessons