

Teaching on the cheap? The extent and impact of teaching assistants covering classes and leading lessons

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Abstract

This study provides a detailed picture of how the on-going challenge of teacher shortages in England and Wales is driving the deployment of teaching assistants (TAs) to cover classes in place of teachers. Analyses of data from a survey of nearly 6000 TAs in mainstream and special schools found that TAs cover classes for up to 4 h a week, with one in four covering classes because schools do not have enough teachers and/or are unable to get external supply teachers. The conditions under which TAs cover classes are challenging and a cause of stress and anxiety. Unlike teachers, TAs cover classes without a lesson plan or support from another TA. The majority of TAs said that covering classes inevitably involves them having to teach pupils – despite national guidance stipulating that cover by TAs should not involve ‘active teaching’. Three in four TAs report that their own role is not covered when they cover for teachers. Being deployed to cover classes disrupts and diverts TAs from carrying out their regular duties of delivering curriculum interventions and providing classroom support. Consequently, TAs feel that undertaking cover negatively impacts the quality of learning and provision for pupils with additional needs, as well as their workload, wellbeing, sense of effectiveness and job satisfaction. The conclusion that TAs actively teach lessons to whole classes has potentially significant real-world consequences and implications for policy and practice. This paper calls for an urgent policy

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response to what is, in essence, a troubling symptom of the current teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

KEYWORDS

teaching assistants, teachers, workforce development

Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

This paper details the extent and impact of schools' deployment of teaching assistants to cover classes in place of teachers, in the context of an on-going challenge of teacher shortage and supply in England and Wales.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

This paper shows how teaching assistants are plugging gaps in the teacher workforce at the cost of creating gaps in provision for pupils with special educational needs, and to teaching assistants' personal and professional detriment.

BACKGROUND

With targets for teacher recruitment repeatedly missed, persistently problematic teacher retention rates (McLean et al., 2023, 2024) and the cost of external supply teachers becoming increasingly unaffordable (Norden, 2024a; Martin & Norden, 2024), recent reports suggest that schools in England and Wales are increasingly turning to teaching assistants (TAs)ⁱ to address the on-going challenges of teacher shortages and supply.

A survey of 2800 school leaders and teachers found that over three-quarters of schools had changed the ways TAs are being deployed in response to these pressures, with cover for teacher absence and unfilled vacancies a marked example (Lucas et al., 2023). A National Education Union (NEU) survey of ~7500 support staff found that 41% undertake cover (NEU, 2023), while a UNISON survey of 8360 TAs found that for two-thirds, cover is a principal driver of additional workload (UNISON, 2023).

These indicative findings suggest a potentially decisive and consequential shift in the way that pupils are taught and the curriculum is covered, and requires further and urgent scrutiny.

Cover supervision and specified work

The deployment of TAs to cover classes in teachers' absence is not new. The National Agreement – signed by the government and the school workforce unions in January 2003 to address excessive teacher workload – contained two major reforms to teachers' working practices: (i) limiting the amount of lesson cover teachers could do for absent colleagues,ⁱⁱ and (ii) guaranteeing teachers weekly non-contact time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) (DfES, 2003). The Agreement sanctioned the deployment of TAs to cover

classes in these circumstances, on the basis it would mitigate the effects of teacher absence, including disruption to classroom routines and classes being led by people (e.g. supply teachers) that lacked knowledge of, and meaningful relationships with, pupils (Miller et al., 2008).

Central to delivering the cover measures were two TA new roles: higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and cover supervisors. In order to protect teachers' professional realm and guard against the misuse or exploitation of TAs, the committee of signatories overseeing the implementation of the Agreement also introduced two carefully defined terms to describe the new cover roles – 'cover supervision' and 'specified work' – and explained how these functions were distinct from 'teaching' (UNISON, 2009).

'Cover supervision' refers to cover owing to short-term teacher absences, which may be anticipated (e.g. attending training) or unexpected (e.g. sickness). It 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, p17). 'Specified work' describes the planning, preparation and delivery of lessons on a routine basis (e.g. as part of PPA arrangements). It involves an 'appropriate' member of support staff *delivering* a lesson planned by or with a teacher (The Education (Specified Work) (England) Regulations, 2012).

Support staff role profiles developed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) – a body comprising local government employers' organisations and support staff unions (UNISON, Unite and GMB) – provided further delineation. It recommended that cover supervision only be carried out by support staff at Level 3 and specified work only by those at Level 4 (NJC, 2003, 2013). These activities mapped on to the new cover roles: cover supervisor is a Level 3 role and HLTA a Level 4 role. In practice, only cover supervisors, Level 3 TAs and HLTAs should undertake cover supervision, while only HLTAs and Level 4 TAs should undertake specified work. To clarify, not all TAs in all schools cover classes. Those that do, undertake it as part of their overall role. Cover supervisors, however, tend only to do cover supervision.

If teaching is the apex activity, undertaken only by qualified teachers, specified work is next in the hierarchy, with cover supervision underneath. Yet in the drafting stage of the National Agreement, the largest teacher union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), expressed concerns about how this would be operationalised. The-then General Secretary, Doug McAvoy, said 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 Agreement.

Support staff 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 carried out from an industrial relations perspective, involving TAs from 10 primary schools, found 'universal opposition' to TAs being in sole charge of classes (Bach et al., 2006, p. 17). Barkham (2008, p. 850) found that TAs were 'unhappy at the prospect of supervising whole classes', nor were they keen to seek HLTA status.

The experiences, implications and impact of support staff covering classes

The limited research on TAs' experiences of covering classes and the implications and impact of cover is over a decade old. A 2006 survey of 1560 HLTAs found that a third of respondents took whole classes every day, with 41% of primary HLTAs and 22% of secondary HLTAs taking whole classes once a week (Wilson et al., 2008). A large-scale, mixed-methods study

conducted in 2008 involving 2315 mainstream and special schools found that over 80% deployed TAs to cover classes (Hutchings et al., 2009). A 2013 inquiry by the Welsh school inspectorate involving 23 schools estimated that just under 10% of lessons were 'covered by staff who are not the usual class teacher' (Estyn, 2013, p. 3).

While these studies provide evidence that deploying TAs to cover classes mitigates some effects of teacher absence, there have been wider, unintended downsides. Estyn, for example, found that the pace of TA-led lessons was 'often too slow and expectations are too low' (Estyn, 2013, p. 3). This, it concluded, led to pupils making 'less progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding' (Estyn, 2013, p. 3). Fewer than half of headteachers in the Hutchings et al. study agreed that cover arrangements led to greater continuity for pupils, and the majority said that they had not improved pupil behaviour or academic outcomes.ⁱⁱⁱ

The longitudinal, multimethod Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project – the largest ever UK study of TAs, conducted between 2003 and 2009 and involving over 6000 schools in England and Wales – suggested that one reason for this was that the limits of TAs' subject knowledge prompted teachers to set less demanding tasks for pupils during cover classes. However, it was also common for TAs to go in to cover lessons without a plan or briefing from a teacher (Blatchford et al., 2009, 2012).

Adherence to the operational terms of cover supervision and specified work seems to have dissolved fairly early on in the implementation of the National Agreement. Hutchings et al. (2009, p. 17) concluded that 'most schools do not make a clear distinction between cover supervision and specified work'. Furthermore, only half of the support staff 'who ever took responsibility for whole classes' in secondary schools were in a Level 4 role or above (Hutchings et al., 2009, p. 4). However, there are no data on which to make a judgement about whether this situation persists today.

For all the nuanced terminology intended to avoid the pretence that support staff 'teach', a consistent finding from the limited research on cover is the blurriness of the line between 'teaching' and 'not teaching'. Hancock et al. (2010, p. 104) make the pragmatic point that 'no active teaching taking place' seems an unlikely scenario for a whole lesson in a primary school. Indeed, TAs in the DISS project reported that covering classes inevitably had a pedagogic element (Blatchford et al., 2012), and 30% of TAs in Hutchings et al.'s (2009, p. 11) study said that they 'regularly taught the class, delivering a complete lesson'. More than a decade on, three-quarters of support staff in a 2023 survey described cover as 'teaching' (NEU, 2023).

The current iteration of the teacher recruitment, retention and workload crunch is occurring in a more challenging context. Indeed, some of the contextual elements – on-going fallout from the pandemic, ever-tightening school budgets and the high-stakes nature of school accountability – actively contribute to the crisis (McLean et al., 2023, 2024). Capacity across schools is stretched, and deploying TAs to plug gaps in the teacher workforce is likely to disrupt provision for pupils that they commonly support – specifically those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or (in Wales) additional learning needs (ALN) (Merrick, 2024).

There is consistent and compelling evidence – mainly from the UK and USA – that participation in 'catch-up' or 'booster' programmes delivered by TAs, typically outside mainstream classes/lessons, can improve pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy (Alborz et al., 2009; Nickow et al., 2020). In contrast, the results of the DISS project show that deploying TAs in less structured ways and without adequate training and preparation can lead to negative effects on pupil attainment (Blatchford et al., 2012).

Therefore, diverting TAs 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 trigger a recruitment, retention and workload crisis within the TA workforce itself.

AIMS AND PURPOSES

The present study was designed to address and update gaps in the existing evidence. The main aims were: (i) to provide a detailed picture of how on-going teacher shortages in England and Wales is driving the deployment of TAs to cover classes; and (ii) to characterise the extent and impact of these arrangements on pupils, schools and TAs. Incorporated in these aims was a question concerning the extent to which schools' deployment decisions are consistent and commensurate with national guidance on cover supervision and specified work. This study takes a more expansive view of impact than previous research, by considering the indirect effects of deploying TAs to cover classes, as well as the direct effects. For example, a working assumption was that, owing to general staff shortages, TAs are unlikely to have their own role/duties covered when they fill in for teachers, thereby creating gaps in support provision.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Data were collected via an online survey, conducted between late January and mid February 2024, using a convenience sampling approach. The survey was emailed to members of UNISON – a UK trade union representing people working in support roles in state schools in England and Wales, and which commissioned and funded the survey. A link to the survey was posted on the UNISON in Schools Facebook page allowing non-members to take part.

The survey took around 5 min to complete, and consisted of closed-ended items designed to elicit numerical data on: (i) the amount of, and reasons for, cover undertaken by TAs; (ii) the extent to which cover aligned with the expectations and requirements set out in the guidance on cover supervision and specified work; (iii) TAs' experiences of covering classes, including whether their duties were covered; and (iv) perceptions of the impact of cover on pupils, school provision (including for pupils with SEND/ALN) and TAs themselves. These overarching themes emerged from a preparatory analysis of unpublished data, collected as part of a large annual survey of UNISON members working in school support roles (UNISON, 2023). This analysis indicated that the issue of cover merited further and more detailed investigation. The present survey contained an optional open question, which captured qualitative data on respondents' views and experiences of covering classes and the impact on them, their colleagues, school and/or pupils.

SAMPLE

The analyses reported here are based on responses from nearly 6000 TAs and HLTAs in England and Wales. A breakdown of the sample by role and school type is shown in [Table 1](#). For the purposes of comparison, during the period of data collection, the proportions of TAs in England and Wales working in the respective settings were: primary/infant, 66%; secondary, 17%; and special schools, 16% (DfE, 2024a; Welsh Government, 2024).

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 to obtain a measure of role seniority and experience. Two-thirds of TAs (67%) reported their role level. Half of these TAs (34% overall) were in Level 3 roles, 17% were in Level 1 or 2 roles and 16% were in Level 4 or 5 roles. Just under a quarter of the sample were HLTAs (a Level 4 role). It is worth noting that 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 individual

TABLE 1 Respondents by role and school type.

	Primary/infant		Secondary		Special		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Teaching assistants	3852	64	185	3	540	9	4577	76
Higher level TAs	1172	20	111	2	129	2	1412	24
Total TAs	5024	84	296	5	669	11	5989	100

Abbreviations: TA, Teaching assistant.

school leaders. The category 'HLTA' is, therefore, not as consistent and reliable an indicator of a verifiable higher level of training, skills, knowledge or expertise as it was pre-2012. For this reason, some caution is advised in the interpretation of some of the results that follow.

In terms of other key characteristics, 79% of all TAs in the sample worked full-time (31+ h per week) or near full-time (26+ h per week), and the same proportion had been in their current role for at least 6 years. Seven in 10 TAs had worked in their current setting for at least 6 years. The vast majority of respondents were members of UNISON (94%) working in England (93% vs. 7% in Wales).

The analysis of qualitative data from the optional open item was based on a subsample of survey respondents. Just under a third of TAs (31%, or 1840 TAs) provided a comment. A sampling frame was drawn up to inform the random selection of 1000 responses (54% of all responses), designed to reflect the proportions of TAs and HLTAs and types of school in the main sample (see Table 1). The requisite quota of comments was drawn from the middle of each relevant dataset. For example, a total of 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.

The comments were screened prior to analysis. Comments that did not directly address issues relating to covering classes (14%) or that replicated a response to another survey item (29%) were excluded. The analysis was, therefore, based on 565 comments, the bulk of which were from TAs in primary/infant settings (80%). A coding frame was developed via an open-ended inductive analysis of all comments. 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 prevalences 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.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Data for TAs and HLTAs are presented together, with results for HLTAs only highlighted where they diverge notably. Results and findings are presently thematically. For each theme, quantitative data are presented first, followed by a summary of findings from the qualitative data, including indicative quotes from respondents.

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

Amount of cover

Teaching assistants were asked to estimate how many hours per week, on average, they spend covering classes. The results, summarised in [Table 2](#), show that 61% of TAs cover classes for up to 4 h per week, and 39% of TAs cover classes for at least 5 h per week. Five hours is roughly equivalent to one school day. The average amount of time spent covering classes was lowest for secondary TAs (around 2 h per week), and highest for special school TAs, where 20% of TAs cover for at least 11 h per week. Higher level teaching assistants were found to have a heavier cover load, with 69% covering classes for at least 5 h per week (vs. 29% TAs).

Teaching assistants who worked in the same school in 2022/2023 (96% of the sample) were asked to compare their estimate with the previous year. Overall, 45% of all TAs (41% TAs; 51% HLTAs) reported an increase in cover, including those who did not cover previously. Some 18% of TAs reported doing less cover than the year before, while 37% reported no change.

Reasons for cover

In order to discern the extent to which TAs were deployed to cover classes owing to challenges associated with teacher shortages and supply, respondents were asked to identify up to six common reasons for which, as far as they were aware, they had covered classes so far this school year. The results are summarised in [Table 3](#).

The most common reasons for covering classes were: short-notice sickness (68%); short-term release for PPA time (67%); attending training/continuous professional development (56%); and senior leadership duties/meetings (55%). These results are broadly in line with expectations, as it is for these specific, limited-term purposes that schools can deploy TAs as cover.^{iv}

In terms of teacher shortages and supply, 28% of TAs reported covering classes because their school does not have enough teachers and 25% because their school does not, or is unable to, bring in external supply teachers. Thirteen per cent of TAs cover classes owing to long-term sickness – a third cause of extended teacher absence.

There were marked differences between settings. Half of the TAs in secondary and special schools (51% per setting) reported covering classes because the school does not have

TABLE 2 Amount of cover (estimated average hours per week) by role and school type.

	TAs (%)	HLTAs (%)	Total (%)	Primary/infant (%)	Secondary (%)	Special (%)	Total (%)
1 h or less	19	4	15	15	21	12	15
1–2h	28	10	24	24	31	21	24
3–4h	23	17	22	22	22	22	22
5–7h	15	18	15	16	11	15	15
8–10h	6	13	8	8	6	10	8
11–13h	3	10	5	5	3	5	5
14h or more	5	28	11	10	6	15	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Abbreviations: HLTA, Higher level teaching assistant; TA, teaching assistant.

TABLE 3 Reasons for covering classes by school type.

	Primary/infant (%)	Secondary (%)	Special (%)	Total (%)
Short term sickness	68	60	69	68
PPA	72	9	55	67
Attending CPD/training	59	31	40	56
Senior leadership duty/meeting	58	38	41	55
Medical appointment	43	27	32	41
Teacher shortage	24	51	51	28
Unable to get supply	25	42	23	25
Early career teacher non-contact	25	6	12	22
Long-term sickness	10	32	29	13
Other reasons ^a	26	39	21	26

^aIncludes: covering for teachers taking wellbeing days (8%); pregnancy-related cover (6%); and other unspecified reasons (12%).

Abbreviations: CPD, Continuous professional development; PPA, planning, preparation and assessment.

enough teachers (vs. 24% primary/infant TAs). Cover owing to an inability to get supply teachers was greatest in secondary schools (42% vs. ~24% for other settings). Covering teachers on long-term sickness was more prevalent in secondary and special schools.

Teaching assistants and HLTAs were equally likely to cover classes for reasons owing to teacher shortages (TAs, 29% vs. HLTAs, 26%) and supply teacher issues (TAs, 25% vs. HLTAs, 26%). HLTAs, however, were slightly more likely to cover classes owing to a long-term sickness (17% vs. 12% TAs).

Open comments

The open comments contained examples of marked increases in the amount of cover undertaken by TAs, in some cases for durations far in excess of the weekly average (3–4 h).

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 [senior leadership team] 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% of my time was covering absent teachers.

(Secondary HLTA)

The low availability and/or high cost of external supply teachers was mentioned in 4% of comments. Some TAs reported school leaders leveraging the unaffordability of supply teachers in order to get them to cover classes.

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

(Primary/infant TA)

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

A striking refrain, found in 11% of the comments, was the sense that covering classes is 'expected' of TAs or 'assumed'.

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

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

Teaching assistants said they are preferred to supply teachers, not just for reasons of cost-effectiveness, but because they have established relationships with classes and pupils (3% of comments).

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)

Yet some TAs felt they should not cover classes, especially for extended periods, as it compromises the quality of education. Several TAs suggested there is a lack of public awareness of the extent to which they fill in for teachers.

TAs should not be used to cover teachers lessons. We are not qualified teachers and the students deserve a good quality education.
(Special school 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)

Cover supervision and specified work

Teaching assistants estimated the extent to which they undertake cover supervision and specified work, and the extent to which each type of cover corresponds with the expectations of what it should and should not involve. The results, summarised in [Table 4](#), show that TAs do specified work basis slightly more frequently (i.e. often or always) than cover supervision (51% vs. 46%). Results by school type found primary/infant TAs do specified work more than cover supervision (53% vs. 45%), while the reverse was the case for secondary TAs (31% vs. 53%) and TAs in special schools (37% vs. 57%). Responses for HLTAs and TAs were similar for cover supervision, although 72% of HLTAs do specified work often or always (vs. 44% TAs).

Cover supervision

In terms of how experiences of cover supervision corresponded with the guidance (see [Table 4](#)), half of all TAs (51%) report being provided with a lesson plan. Primary/infant TAs

TABLE 4 Conditions, experiences and effects of covering classes.

	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	N/A ^a (%)
Types of cover						
To what extent is cover 'cover supervision'	2	12	39	36	10	–
To what extent is cover 'specified work'	10	15	25	35	16	–
Cover supervision ^a						
Lesson plans provided	5	10	33	29	22	–
Supervise pupils complete work set	7	8	24	27	34	–
Respond to pupils questions about what to do	1	<1	9	20	70	–
Actively teach	2	4	19	28	47	–
Specified work ^b						
Plan and prepare lessons/courses	26	23	26	13	12	–
Deliver lessons	1	2	20	24	53	–
Assess pupils' development, progress and attainment	10	16	29	23	22	–
Report pupils' development, progress and attainment	7	10	28	25	29	–
Specified work by level ^c						
Level 1/2	13	21	28	27	11	–
Level 3	8	15	28	34	15	–
Level 4/5	6	9	19	44	23	–
Support for TAs						
Given time to plan and prepare specified work ^d	49	31	13	4	2	–
Backfilling (role covered when covering class)	52	22	15	4	3	4 ^e
Additional TA support	22	24	29	12	13	–
Effects on TAs' regular duties						
Pupils miss in-class support	4	6	25	30	33	4
Pupils with EHCP/IP miss one-to-one support	9	9	23	25	27	7
Pupils miss curriculum intervention sessions	7	8	24	27	31	4
Pupils miss therapy sessions	25	16	19	12	11	16

^aBased on respondents that undertake cover supervision either sometimes, often or always = 86% of sample.

^bBased on respondents that undertake specified work either sometimes, often or always = 76% of sample.

^cBased on respondents that indicated their role level = 67% of sample.

^dBased on respondents that reported planning and preparing lessons/courses for specified work either sometimes, often or always = 39% of sample.

^eFor example: TAs that report only undertaking cover supervision.

Abbreviations: EHCP, Education, Health and Care Plan; IP, Individual Plan; TA, teaching assistant.

were more likely to be provided with a plan (often/always, 55% vs. rarely/never, 13%), while secondary and special school TAs were as likely to be provided with one as not (often/always, ~33% vs. rarely/never, ~33%).

Across the settings, 61% of TAs reported that cover supervision often or always involves supervising pupils to complete work set, and 90% said it often or always involves responding to pupils' questions about what to do. However, three-quarters of TAs said cover supervision often or always involves active teaching (which it should not). Half of primary/infant TAs (51%) said that it always involves active teaching, while only a quarter of secondary TAs (26%) said the same. Just under a third of special school TAs (31%) said that cover supervision always involves active teaching. Across the settings, 55% of HLTAs said that it always involves actively teaching (vs. 36% TAs).

Specified work

In terms of how experiences of specified work corresponded with the guidance (see [Table 4](#)), 49% of TAs said they are rarely or never required to plan and prepare lessons and/or courses for pupils. However, 39% of all HLTAs and secondary school TAs planned and prepared lessons/courses often or always, compared with (respectively) 12% of all TAs and 25% of TAs in other settings.

Over half of all TAs (53%) said that specified work always involves delivering lessons, and a further 24% said that it often does. Higher level teaching assistants were more likely than TAs to report this (often/always, 64% vs. 33%), as were primary/infant TAs (often/always, 78% vs. 68% in other settings). Overall, TAs were often or always required to assess and/or report on pupils' development, progress and attainment as part of specified work, with TAs in special schools the most likely to do this often or always. Higher level teaching assistants were far more likely than TAs to do these things (57% vs. 32%).

An analysis to determine the extent to which TAs at Level 3 or below are deployed to undertake specified work found that 72% of TAs at Level 1, 2 or 3 undertake specified work (a Level 4 task) at least sometimes, and 44% do so either often or always (see [Table 4](#)). Half of Level 3 TAs (49%) and 38% of TAs at Level 1 or 2 report doing specified work often or always. In primary/infant schools, 69% of TAs at Level 1 or 2 and 79% of Level 3 TAs do specified work at least sometimes. Put another way, 68% of TAs that routinely undertake specified work are not in a Level 4 role. A fifth of TAs (20%) are in a Level 1 or 2 role, and 48% are in a Level 3 role.

Open comments

The open comments revealed a preference among TAs for doing PPA cover for teachers (specified work) over short-notice cover (cover supervision) (6% of all comments). Cover for PPA was generally predictable and planned in advanced, whereas short-notice cover was not. This difference seemed to inform TAs' experiences of, and views about, the two types of 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)

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 deployment of TAs to undertake specified work appears to stretch further than the guidance intended, with some TAs reporting planning, teaching and assessing curriculum subjects on a full-time basis.

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)

Many of the comments conveyed the view that covering classes involves actively teaching.

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)

Support for TAs

Time to plan and prepare

Half of the TAs (49%) that plan and prepare lessons/courses for specified work either sometimes, often or always said they are never provided with time to do this. A further 31% of TAs were rarely given time (see [Table 4](#)). It was clear from the analysis of open comments that the increase in the amount of cover TAs undertake has not been matched by paid time in which to plan and/or prepare cover lessons, and/or mark pupils' work completed in these lessons (8% of comments).

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)

Backfilling

Almost three-quarters of all TAs (74%) report their role/duties are rarely or never covered – or backfilled – by somebody else (e.g. another TA) when they cover classes in place of teachers (see [Table 4](#)). Over half of primary/infant TAs (54%) and 60% of secondary TAs said their role/duties are never backfilled. Just 2% of TAs in mainstream settings said their role/duties are always covered. Backfilling for TAs was somewhat more common in special schools, with 15% of TAs saying that their role/duties were often or always covered. Nevertheless, the majority of TAs said that their role/duties were rarely (25%) or never (34%) backfilled when they covered a class elsewhere.

The lack of backfilling was prominent in the open comments, and often tied to an effect on workload (8% of comments). Some TAs report being expected to complete their regular duties, as well as cover classes.

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

(Secondary HLTA)

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 they were neglecting their regular duties.

[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 support

Given the infrequency of backfilling, it is perhaps not surprising that TAs do not have support from another TA when they cover classes – especially in mainstream settings. Instead, TAs typically cover classes alone, while the class they have been deployed from is left without a TA. As [Table 4](#) shows, 46% of TAs rarely or never have extra TA support in classes they cover. This proportion rises to 67% for secondary TAs. Classes in special schools typically have several TAs present; therefore, fewer TAs in these settings reported being without support when covering. Teaching assistants were slightly more likely to have additional support when they cover than HLTAs (often/always: 26% vs. 20%).

The issue of covering classes without additional support came up frequently in the open comments (5% of comments), with TAs drawing particular attention to the idiosyncrasy of teachers having TA support in the classes they teach, while they do not.

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)

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)

Additional pay for cover

Teaching assistants were asked if they are paid at their usual (hourly) rate of pay or at a higher rate when covering classes on either a cover supervision or specified work basis. A

clear majority of TAs in each type of school said that they are paid their usual rate. Only 25% of TAs receive a pay uplift for undertaking cover.

Many TAs used the open comment to report the actual amount of additional pay they receive for cover (13% of comments). Typically, this was less than £1 per hour. The following comments are from primary/infant TAs.

We get paid 17 pence per hour. This is embarrassing and shows we are not appreciated.

A measly 40p an hour extra.

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

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

A number of TAs compared their uplift with the payments for external supply teachers, and/or described the situation in which they found themselves as 'teaching on the cheap' (6% of comments).

A supply teacher would get sometimes in excess of £100 per day, whereas we get barely £1 an hour additional. It doesn't seem fair.

(Primary/infant TA)

We have become 'cheap teachers'.

(Primary/infant TA)

The impact of covering classes on pupils

The results summarised in [Table 5](#) reveal the effects of TAs' role/duties not being backfilled when they cover classes, in terms of the extent to which pupils miss out on in-class support and/or individual support. Sixty-three per cent of TAs said pupils often or always miss out on in-class support, and 52% said pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or Individual Plan (IP) often or always miss out on one-to-one support.

Two-thirds of primary/infant TAs (66%) reported that pupils miss out on support often or always, compared with 51% of secondary TAs. Half of TAs in mainstream settings said pupils with an EHCP/IP were left without one-to-one support often or always when TAs covered classes (primary/infant: 53%; secondary: 49%). The comparatively higher ratios of staff in special schools mean that pupils in these settings (all of whom have an EHCP/IP) miss out on support somewhat less frequently than their peers in mainstream settings, but still 42% of TAs said they miss out often or always. Eighteen per cent said this rarely or never happens.

Over half of all TAs (58%) reported that cover disrupts the routine delivery of curriculum interventions, with sessions missed often or always when TAs cover classes (see [Table 5](#)). This situation was particularly acute in primary/infant schools, with 63% of TAs saying that pupils often or always miss sessions owing to cover (vs. ~35% in secondary and special schools). Pupils were, in contrast, less likely to miss sessions for therapy programmes (e.g. for speech and language) as a consequence of cover. Across the settings, 41% of TAs said that therapy sessions are rarely (16%) or never (25%) missed.

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

TABLE 5 Impact of covering classes on school provision and TAs.

	Large negative (%)	Moderate negative (%)	Small negative (%)	No impact (%)	Small positive (%)	Moderate positive (%)	Large positive (%)	Don't know (%)
Quality of learning	15	28	25	10	4	5	2	11
Quality of SEND/ALN provision	33	28	20	9	2	2	1	6
Workload	34	30	21	7	2	2	3	1
Health and wellbeing	32	28	22	10	3	3	3	1
Sense of effectiveness	17	27	22	12	7	8	4	4
Job satisfaction	19	22	17	11	11	10	7	1

Abbreviations: ALN, Additional learning needs; SEND, special educational needs and disabilities; TA, teaching assistant.

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

(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)

In terms of the broader effect on school provision, 68% of TAs said covering classes had some degree of negative impact on the overall quality of learning in their school, and 81% said it had some degree of negative impact on the quality of provision for pupils with SEND/ALN. A third of TAs (33%) said it had a large negative impact on SEND/ALN provision (see [Table 5](#)).

The view that cover has a negative impact on SEND/ALN provision was strongest among TAs in special and secondary schools (~75% in each setting vs. 65% primary/infant TAs). Higher level teaching assistants were more likely than TAs to report that covering classes had a positive impact on the quality of learning (20% vs. 9%) and SEND/ALN provision, albeit to a slightly lesser extent (7% vs. 3%).

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

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)

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)

The impact of covering classes on TAs

Finally, TAs were asked about the impact of covering classes on their workload, health and wellbeing, sense of effectiveness, and job satisfaction. The results for TAs in each type of school were in a negative direction for each of these aspects (see [Table 5](#)). Four out of five TAs reported that covering classes had some degree of negative impact on their workload (85%) and/or their health and wellbeing (82%).

Two-thirds of TAs said cover had some degree of negative impact on their sense of effectiveness, with HLTAs slightly more likely than TAs to say cover had a positive impact (23% vs. 17%). Over half of TAs (58%) said covering classes had a negative impact on their job satisfaction, with this feeling slightly stronger among TAs than HLTAs (61% vs. 54%). Over a quarter of TAs (28%) said cover had some kind of positive impact on their job satisfaction.

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

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

(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 (4% of comments). Both the short-notice nature of cover supervision and the more predictable, planned nature of PPA cover were causes of stress and negative feelings.

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)

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)

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

I am happy to cover classes but it leaves me feeling put upon and undervalued.

(Primary/infant TA)

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

(Primary/infant TA)

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

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)

DISCUSSION

This study explored how the on-going shortage and supply of teachers in England and Wales is driving the deployment of TAs to cover classes, and the impact of this on pupils, schools and TAs. It gathered evidence to test assumptions about the practical limits of cover supervision and specified work, and potential gaps in provision precipitated by the insufficient backfilling of TAs' roles and duties. The concluding part of this paper begins with an overarching summary of the study's main findings, then discusses their implications, before providing recommendations for policymakers.

This study provides evidence that TAs are routinely deployed to cover classes because schools do not have enough teachers and/or are unable to get in external supply teachers. This is a need that was not envisaged by, and goes beyond, the scope and scale of the 2003 National Agreement. In many cases, the conditions under which TAs cover classes are challenging. The short-notice nature of unplanned cover and the expectation of having to plan, actively teach and assess a curriculum subject over an extended period (e.g. owing to an unfilled vacancy) are sources of stress and anxiety. Additional sources of pressure and worry stem from not being provided with a lesson plan, not having additional support from a TA, and an awareness that cover disrupts both the completion of their regular duties and the provision for pupils, whom TAs feel they are letting down.

Overall, TAs consider that being deployed to cover classes has a negative impact on the provision for pupils with SEND/ALN and the quality of learning more broadly. It is little wonder that all of this, together with there being no meaningful financial uplift available for stepping up, has a detrimental impact on TAs' 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.

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

Limitations

Before going further, it is necessary to address some of the study's limitations, and how these may affect the generalisability of the results and findings. First, the survey was not a systematic audit on the proportions of TAs who do and do not cover classes. On the basis of the results presented here, it is not possible to say to what extent the amount and frequency of cover undertaken by TAs is indicative of the wider TA workforces in England or Wales. The study makes no claims to representativeness. 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 results are, at least, consistent with the evidence from the large-scale DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2012) and the large-scale study by Hutchings et al. (2009). Given that the data for these studies were collected in the mid-2000s, 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.

Secondly, the category 'HLTA' cannot be considered a consistent and reliable indicator of a verifiable higher level of training, skills, knowledge or expertise – unlike, for example, qualified teacher status. The results relating to HLTAs only, therefore, should be treated with caution.

The third mitigation concerns the way in which the distribution of the survey prioritised members of UNISON. 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.

Finally, this study only presents the views and experiences of TAs. A holistic picture of the extent and impact of, and issues surrounding the deployment of support staff to cover classes is urgently needed, with data from school leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils in a representative range of settings and contexts. The present survey, for example, asked respondents to identify the common reasons for cover. In some circumstances, the rationale behind these deployment decisions may be opaque or multifaceted, known only perhaps to school 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, staff and pupils.

IMPLICATIONS

A key inference from this study echoes the conclusion by Hutchings et al. (2009, p. 17) that 'most schools do not make a clear distinction between cover supervision and specified work'. A striking finding from the study is this: in TAs' estimation, the function they perform in covering classes is synonymous with teaching. It is a conclusion that has important implications.

The central issue is not whether TAs 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 responses 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 during 2010s. To that end, what follows is directed at policymakers.

It is not trivial to conclude that a seemingly significant proportion of TAs 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.

When trained, supported and deployed appropriately, 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). Consistent with the evidence (Alborz et al., 2009; Nickow et al., 2020), this guidance places a particular emphasis on training and deploying TAs to deliver curriculum intervention programmes.

Yet this study has found evidence of TAs 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 in terms of pay. This situation should alarm policymakers. The debate about who teaches and who does not – and indeed, what does and what does not constitute teaching – necessary though it was for 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 results from the most recent robust research on this topic, by Blatchford et al. (2009, 2012) and Hutchings et al. (2009), and results from the present 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 in terms of improving teachers' perceptions of workload, stress and job satisfaction (Blatchford et al., 2009, 2012). Introducing PPA time and reducing the amount of lesson cover teachers were expected to do had benefits for teachers' work–life balance, but TAs and the consistency and quality of school provision appears to have borne the cost.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Given the severity, scale and persistence of the wider contextual challenges relating to teacher shortage and supply, teacher workload and school funding, this paper can only echo the urgent appeals made by professional associations, trade unions, researchers and other stakeholders 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 two suggestions that policymakers ought to consider.

A coordinated national strategy for TAs

There is unignorable evidence that the role of many TAs now incorporates the active teaching of classes, lessons and pupils; however, it is unclear whether the implications and consequences that flow from acknowledging this situation have been considered and debated by policymakers, professional associations, trade unions and 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.

It is perhaps time to revisit the language and legacy of the National Agreement, and to formulate a comprehensive, integrated and fully funded package of investment in the TA workforce. A good outcome would be a coordinated national strategy, reflecting the role, value and contribution of TAs, updating the NJC role profiles, and ensuring TAs are paid appropriately for the work they do. Naturally, TAs and the organisations that represent them must be central to shaping and leading this effort.

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 the results on the amount of cover TAs are doing is difficult, because there are no longitudinal or representative data on this – or indeed, any other aspects of TAs' life in school.

Around three in 10 people working in schools in England are TAs (DfE, 2024a). This is a significant proportion of the school workforce about which very little routine data are collected. 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 also informing the design of policies to support TAs and schools. A good model is the longitudinal survey, commissioned by the Department for Education (in England) of the working lives of teachers and school leaders.^v

In addition, the DfE ought to 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.

CONCLUSION

This study adds 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 provides 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, p. 2). Crucially, 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 pupils with SEND/ALN, 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.

A potential 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 same crisis involving teachers, and efforts to resolve both must include a comprehensive and coordinated programme to acknowledge, support and reward TAs. 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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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

FUNDING INFORMATION

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The survey was conducted and disseminated in line with UNISON's [privacy policy](#). All data were supplied anonymously and with the consent of participants. No data were collected that could be used to identify individuals or schools.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱFor 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.

ⁱⁱInitially set at 38h per year, this provision has been incorporated into subsequent guidance, but without a defined upper limit. Paragraph 52.7 of the School teachers' pay and conditions document states that teachers should be required to provide cover 'only rarely, and only in circumstances that are not foreseeable' (DfE, 2024b, p. 51). 'Only rarely' is not quantified (i.e. in terms of hours).

ⁱⁱⁱSome additional context is helpful. International research shows that classes covered by supply/substitute teachers are associated with a reduction in teaching quality and achievement scores. Herrmann and Rock-off's (2012, p. 749) 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, p. 3) innovative analysis matching absent teachers with their replacements in French secondary schools, found 'the expected loss in daily productivity from non-replaced 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.

^{iv}PPA arrangements for secondary school teachers are generally timetabled during their non-contact time, hence the relatively low proportion of TAs in these settings citing PPA as a reason for cover.

^v<https://www.workinglivesofteachers.com>.

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