

Support Staff Update

November 2005

This has certainly been a growth area particularly in the way that we acknowledge and recognise the contribution that all staff make to enable our schools to run effectively and efficiently. To mark this there have been a number of national initiatives which we have been able to develop in South Gloucestershire to support this. The new generic Vocational Qualification Support Staff in Schools and the Higher Level Teaching Assistant Assessment are two that we have been busily involved with this year.

SUPPORT WORK IN SCHOOLS V.Q. (Pilot)

Staple Hill Primary School has been the first School in South Gloucestershire to achieve this qualification, and we learn from our awarding body that nationally we are 'among the first candidates to receive certificates' (CACHE) for this new qualification.

13 Lunchbreak supervisors from Staple Hill came into school weekly, giving up their own time, for portfolio building and some teaching sessions.

They also gained First Aid certificates and attended a Child Protection Session. Because it is a new qualification we were all learning as we went along and they did a wonderful job in sustaining interest and eventually presenting evidence for assessment. All the candidates who submitted bulging portfolios achieved the certificate.

Who is it for?

This qualification is suitable for all support roles in school and has units that cover supporting Numeracy and Literacy (excellent for Teaching Assistants who have just completed their induction), maintenance, health and safety, office skills and technical support.

How can all schools access this?

I am preparing in-house assessors so that this award can be gained at minimum cost (free at the moment). Support Staff may do the Assessors Award so that they can co-ordinate assessment and lead training of this award in their own schools or within the cluster.

The Assessors Award is a Level 3 / 4 award. We are working in close partnership with Pete Kendall at Filton College to make this immediately available. Further information session dates will be circulated soon.



HIGHER LEVEL TEACHING ASSISTANTS

South Gloucestershire has been at the forefront in engaging Teaching Assistants to go forward to take up this opportunity to raise their status to this higher level. The assessment is rigorous and involves TAs in preparing focussed tasks and analysis. They are prepared and assessed for this by an approved organisation, we have been working with Best Practice Network who have worked largely to our dates and venues so that it has been convenient for our Teaching Assistants to access.



Diane, Chris, Kim, Jane and Gerry were among the first to achieve this and are working in roles in their schools that reflect recent changes and their skills in adapting to this. We have 61 Teaching Assistants who have been assessed at Higher Level and so far we can boast 100% success rate. The fifth cohort of 15 TAs have just had their two days preparation and will

be planning for assessment in December/ January. Sarah and I try to keep in touch with the groups to offer support and encouragement and we are already recruiting for Cohort 6 in the Spring. I think this is indicative of the high quality of our Teaching Assistants in South Gloucestershire and the support they receive from staff to gain qualification and have opportunities to develop within school. Thank you for your continued support.

What next for HLTAs?

The Assessor Award

Higher Level Teaching Assistants have the opportunity with the introduction of the Assessors Award to contribute to support staff training in school while continuing their own development. With this award they can assess others for the Support Work in Schools VQ at Level 2 and begin the process of self improvement for other members of staff. The Support Work in School VQ can start the process and raise the confidence of members in the workforce who might otherwise be reluctant to follow the conventional routes of centre-based training. They can gain a qualification for the work that they do, and hopefully in the process reflect on their good practice and improve!

The Foundation Degree

A Foundation Degree at City of Bristol College has existed for some time for Early Years Specialists. We have been working for the last year or so with UWE Education Faculty to develop a Foundation Degree which would specifically recognise the competences of the HLTA. The degree was approved by the submission panel in July 2005 and the first cohort will start in January 2006. Initially, there will be 15 places for us to fill with Bristol. The modular programme has been set for Wednesday afternoons and evenings over two years it can lead to an Honours degree and the PGCE for Primary Teaching.

Teaching Assistants wishing to pursue a career in Secondary Teaching would still need a main subject at Degree Level. This is currently being considered to establish a next step in their career development opportunities.



NETWORKS

An early support staff network has been the **Secondary Teaching Assistants** Good Practice Network which has continued to meet regularly and address a wide range of topics. The most recent of these, Supporting Design Technology recognises the broadening role of the Teaching Assistant in schools across the curriculum and the need for increased subject knowledge to support effectively. Much of this knowledge is gained with the children in the classroom but it is important for the Teaching Assistant to be aware of the framework and context in which they are offering support.

The South Gloucestershire **School Librarians** have continued to meet regularly for sharing ideas and innovations. The group offers support to colleagues who are often operating alone in a school and can feel quite isolated in some of their challenges.

At the beginning of the year we had an away day together to look at the impact of the Key Stage 3 curriculum on their work. The day was led by Marion Hobbs English Consultant and was an excellent opportunity to consider some of the issues in depth.



Science Technicians have met regularly at annual conferences arranged through the old Avon arrangements. We have now established a group in South Gloucestershire which plans to meet three times a year and held their first meeting at Patchway Community College. Curriculum change has a direct impact on the role of the technician and it is valuable to have support from colleagues to find the best ways forward

School Bursars and Heads' PAs hold regular meetings and find these particularly supportive in their roles in school. Many of them are taking on new and extended roles with greater management responsibilities. They benefit from the enrichment of sharing processes and systems and learning from each others' experiences.



The role of the **Learning Mentor** is a fairly new and developing role in our schools. Their work is with vulnerable young people often dealing with sensitive issues and in stressful situations. A high level of interpersonal skills is vital but they also benefit from the support they gain from meeting together. We held an inset day on Friday 18th November 2005 to consider their roles, the similarities and differences to achieve their common purpose. Bernard Fairhurst supported this day and we are planning to develop this further through CPD next year.

Cover Supervisors are working in schools to provide cover for planned absence. They are not qualified teachers and, therefore, should only be supervising work that has been prepared by teachers when it is appropriate and offers the best alternative for the pupils. We have met for our first network meeting and look forward to further opportunities to meet.

CLUSTER GROUPS

This has been an important link in the chain to give schools on-going support but also to engage new people in accessing training. Clusters give the opportunity to locate training and development in the community and enable networks of support to develop.

Teaching Assistants

This is a clearly defined group for whom we have built up a good programme of Continuing Professional Development over the last 6 or 7 years. The purpose of these clusters is to engage more people in the opportunity to meet regularly for support with Teaching Assistants from other schools, to foster a climate for development and perhaps a desire to seek further training opportunities.



Each cluster will develop to meet a different set of needs. Some have focussed on sharing resources, others have invited guest speakers into the group to talk about various aspects relevant to their work. Marion Dumbell gave an inspiring hour on resources for dyslexia to Cluster 1 while the small schools cluster focussed on sharing resources to support spelling needs

Certificate for Teaching Assistants

This is delivered through CPD and for the last five years has been offered at no cost to schools. This year we have recruited 60 Teaching Assistants on three different courses. Sarah Jones runs the mandatory Unit 1 and Unit 3 Teaching and Learning while Angela Feltham facilitates Unit 2 for Supporting Individuals with particular learning needs. This enables Teaching Assistants to gain a level 3 qualification.



Each unit has an assignment to be completed and all Teaching Assistants are offered tutorial support to achieve. Our achievement rate is high and the courses are very popular.

Future Developments

There is a need to draw together staff from the administration and secretarial groups in school. The purpose of these forums would be similar, to share good practice and to define training needs. It is planned to start these groups in the New Year. There are some opportunities at the moment, through the CPD programme to take part in the more generic areas of training. Effective Listening, Effective Communication has been attended by support staff and found to be very useful. Many members of support staff have also attended Child Protection, Drugs Awareness and First Aid, both by application to CPD and also as whole school training.