

School learning support worker National Education Workforce Survey 2021 Analysis of open text comments



1. Workload

Overall themes from open text comments - workload

- increased working hours;
- employ more staff to spread the workload;
- more cover staff (i.e. PPA);
- less focus on administration and extra duties;
- utilise individual strengths of staff;
- more support from school leaders.

Total number of responses: 3,424

Total number of open text responses: 443

In response to:

Question 6b - Do you have practical suggestions on what changes would help to make your workload more manageable?

Analysis of comments relating to workload:

1.1. Increased working hours (271 comments)

- Staff are only currently paid for the hours children are at school, and not for all the hours of preparation;
- Extension to 4pm for paid hours suggested as a starting point.

Examples

Having an increase in contracted hours to allow for certain parts of the job ie admin, professional development, displays, preparing work etc to be completed after the children have gone home. This would therefore benefit the children as they would have more support.

More time to complete paperwork tasks/planning/behaviour logs.

1.2. Employ more staff to spread the workload (59 comments)

- Calls for extra numbers generally, not any role in particular;
- The changes to working patterns has led to support workers undertaking many duties that aren't part of their jobs i.e. lunchtime supervision;
- One person is often doing the work of 2-3 people.

Examples

Employ an extra TA and dinner lady. Request a teacher take one assembly a week to lighten my load.

More TAs paid at the same level to spread out workload. Currently a lot of TAs are paid at lower levels.

1.3. More cover staff (i.e. PPA) (56 comments)

- Workload is too big for one member of staff;
- Any extra staff would also need to be qualified, not just a case of increased numbers;
- Cover staff specifically for PPA and CPD.

Examples

We need more people. If I didn't work my lunch hour I would never be prepared for the classroom and/or the classroom displays and teachers lesson material would never be ready.

More support, employ someone else to assist. I am a lone worker.

1.4. Less focus on administration and extra duties (40 comments)

- Fewer paperwork and meetings;
- Relinquish duties such as lunch or break duty to focus on the more prominent aspects of the role;
- Particularly true for HLTAs.

Examples

Reduce the paperwork.

Have a clear role that does not get blurred by extra jobs/roles not in our job description eg. writing ALN plans.

1.5. Utilise individual strengths of staff (28 comments)

- Focus has shifted away from contracted duties during the pandemic;
- Concerns that support workers are picking up some teachers' duties a result of being at the school, but aren't recognised for it.

Examples

To focus on contracted role. Not to undertake lunch and play supervision daily at every break.

1.6. More support from school leaders (26 comments)

- Support workers generally left to their own devices;
- Not treated the same as teachers;
- Often asked to undertake other tasks i.e. cleaning;
- More help needed in KS2.

Examples

Paperwork, evidencing, better IT, effective communication with line managers.

It's mainly the lack of staff, not enough help and I feel that I'm doing work that's meant for 2-3 people on my own. I work over the amount of hours that I'm paid for. I don't get any support from the headteacher whatsoever and I don't think I just speak for myself. It's such a hard job to do and support staff are not treated the same as teachers.

2. Workload - Delivering blended / remote learning

Overall themes from open text comments – delivering blended / remote learning

- administration requirements and / or paperwork and extra duties;
- challenges of online/blended learning delivery and resource development;
- more contact with pupils and parents/guardians;
- engagement from home – pupils/colleagues/employer.

Practical suggestions for improvement:

- sufficient staff – more cover staff (i.e. PPA) required;
- improved ICT – design, reliability and use of IT systems/support available;
- increase support available from management/leaders;
- increase expected working hours;
- additional comments: related to sufficient/increased pay.

Total responses: 3,424

Total open text responses: 610

Total practical suggestions for improvement provided: 132

In response to:

Question 9b - If your workload has increased slightly or significantly, please explain what the additional work has been and any practical suggestions on how this could be improved

Analysis of comments relating to delivering blended / remote learning:

2.1. Administration requirements and / or paperwork and extra duties (158 comments)

- Increased class sizes adds to this issue;
- More emails and meetings between staff now there is less physical contact;
- Correspondence can now arrive at any time, not just during traditional working hours.

Examples

I was not doing any work once left the classroom, nothing was asked of me. Now I mark all day and some days it takes me until 7/8pm to get everyone finished.

Children can submit work at different times of day meaning that marking has been scattered.

2.2. Challenges of online/blended learning delivery and resource development (153 comments)

- Additional preparation and marking;
- Each individual lesson takes more preparation time, which can snowball over weeks and months;
- Planning and setting work should not be in the remit of a TA as they don't have the requisite training;
- Personal problems also get in the way i.e. stress, looking after family;
- Creating videos, websites etc. so that learners can access content at any time.

Examples

Having to learn very fast how to use technology well. I am not IT savvy and it has taken me hours and hours to learn how to prepare work to be shared on Teams / Google Classroom then mark and comment on all the work that has been submitted.

Some pupils in school, others at home, welfare calls, not knowing who's coming in each day. Staff absences.

2.3. More contact with pupils and parents/guardians (151 comments)

- Phone calls with parents can take many extra hours in the evening;
- Having to contact parents to ensure children are engaging;
- Being available all day as contact from pupils is staggered;
- Supervising classes with no teacher present.

Examples

I am having more contact with families and finding myself advising, supporting and taking phone calls into the evening.

Additional time spent contacting parents/carers.

2.4. Engagement from home – pupils/colleagues/employer (27 comments)

- Pupils don't always engage in the 'allocated timetable';
- Even harder to engage with pupils with particular educational needs, i.e. visual or hearing impairment;
- Pupils with behaviour issues are often given less attention and are even less keen to listen and learn;
- 'Substantially higher' number of student wellbeing issues.

Examples

I still have to do all the things I would normally be doing plus I have to contact families who are not engaging in remote learning and helping them to achieve this.

Contacting parents and students to join lessons had the biggest impact.

Analysis of comments relating to practical suggestions on how blended/remote learning can be improved:

2.5. Sufficient staff – more cover staff (i.e. PPA) required (39 comments)

- Insufficient staff numbers has led to extra duties for remaining staff;
- Having to cover for existing colleagues due to the lack of staff.

Examples

We don't have enough TAs so I'm being used to cover every duty. Not getting my breaks as I have small intervention groups a lot.

Being asked to support learners who are not ALN and covering subject/work with learners, without tutor present, as the tutor is teaching other learners elsewhere.

2.6. Improved ICT – design, reliability and use of IT systems/support available (33 comments)

- Due to the pandemic, many registrants are 'self-taught' with the use of technology for blended learning. Formal training would improve efficiency;
- Dealing with students' IT queries is difficult and time consuming;

- Delivering lessons remotely is extremely challenging so further training, or improved software, could make this easier.

Examples

Having to learn very fast how to use technology well. I am not IT savvy and it has taken me hours and hours to learn how to prepare work to be shared on Teams / Google Classroom then mark and comment on all the work that has been submitted.

Lot more work to be uploaded electronically. More training online.

2.7. Increased support available from management/leaders (29 comments)

- Expectations of staff are all the same, despite the changes introduced because of the pandemic and the individual circumstances of each staff member;
- Not enough recognition for the work that is being done at a difficult time;
- Management's focus on the 'bigger picture' has led to issues with everyday delivery.

Examples

Having more than one age group per hub, not enough chrome books and no support from management when concerned about safety on the amount of swapping and changing the adults and hubs on a daily basis.

Reduced hours due to personal reasons, still expected to do same amount of work as other members of staff.

2.8. Increase expected working hours (22 comments)

- More defined 'working hours' should be set out so that specific time can be set aside for extra tasks;
- Current structure means registrants have to prepare on their own unpaid time.

Examples

I think a defined work finish time and a weekly list of work expectations would mean a more structured day as I tend to fill it with extra tasks. I don't want to appear to be shirking my duty!

Working longer days and modifying starting and finishing times to suit the 8.30 to 4 facilities offered.

2.9. Additional comments: related to sufficient/increased pay (4 comments)

- 'Higher level' TAs should be paid accordingly as they are 'in-demand' and expectations are higher – particularly Level 4;
- Currently no incentive for the extra hours worked;
- Paid time specifically set out for planning and preparation.

Examples

Given additional hours, higher rate of pay for Level 4's.

Pay me for additional hours done outside of contracted hours.

3. Professional learning

Overall themes from open text comments – Professional Learning

- ICT skills including digital/blended learning;
- mental health and wellbeing;
- improving Welsh language skills;
- additional learning needs;
- behaviour management and support;
- new curriculum.

Total responses: 3,424

Total open text responses: 1,652

In response to:

Question 16 In which areas would you welcome further development to help you be a more effective education professional? (please list up to three areas)

Analysis of comments relating Professional Learning

3.1. ICT skills including digital/blended learning (301 comments)

- Increased funding for IT training and hardware;
- More support from management with current training;
- More focus on use of IT for online learning;
- Updated IT systems.

Examples

IT equipment for all staff in the workplace, not just having to make use of the children's spare laptop or I Pad to upload learners work onto SeeSaw or Dojo etc.

I would welcome further development in I.C.T to help me be a more effective education professional.

3.2. Mental health and wellbeing (258 comments)

- Training to support the mental wellbeing of students;
- Mental health first aid provision;
- Awareness of self-harm and suicidal tendencies among students;
- 'Specialised educational psychology';
- Post-pandemic mental health support.

Examples

Child mental health and wellbeing. Paediatric first aid. Safeguarding and how to spot signs of abuse.

More understanding of mental health issues. People seem to think it's just feeling low or sad. They don't realise every day is a battle and the small things are actually very big indeed.

3.3. Improving Welsh language skills (192 comments)

- Many calls to be provided with Welsh language training so registrants can speak Welsh or improve existing skills;
- Specific training based on existing level of fluency i.e. beginner, intermediate, fluent;

- Clearer pathway or encouragement for non-fluent speakers in majority Welsh language schools;
- Some calls for Sign Language training to be provided in addition;
- Financial support to be provided for such training;
- Courses specific to schools/education and not just 'general' learners' course;
- Requests to be taught 'conversational' or 'incidental' Welsh.

Examples

Welsh conversational language but not a one day course, it's not long enough, it needs to be an ongoing progression.

Learn how to get the best out of the kids by speaking Welsh – how to stimulate them.

3.4. Additional learning needs (ALN) (186 comments)

- Bigger budget allocation for ALN / SEN services;
- Training for specific needs of pupils i.e. autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD;
- Training on how to implement schools' programmes;
- Further information on new ALN Law to be introduced in September;
- ALN / SEN specific qualifications.

Examples

Specialist training in specific area of ALN.

Identifying and supporting pupils with additional needs.

3.5. Behaviour management and support (177 comments)

- Training to deal with challenging behaviour from students;
- Financial and moral support from management.

Examples

I would like to be more confident at dealing with behaviour management.

Supporting children with challenging behaviour.

3.6. New curriculum (142 comments)

- Provide training/information about the new national curriculum;
- Training in 'pedagogical terminology';
- Quiz staff on the contents of the curriculum – ensuring everyone has the required information;
- Implementation and development.

Examples

A better understanding of the new curriculum.

Professional growth for TAs in regards to the new curriculum, the teaching staff seem to be more involved and understand it better, TAs seem to be included in the odd meeting that goes over our heads.