Support roles in schools

Introduction

Schools in England benefit from a variety of different staff that support the learning and welfare of pupils. In addition to the main teacher in each classroom, there are many other jobs inside and outside of lessons that contribute to how a school runs and how pupils learn. These jobs are typically called support roles or wider workforce roles.

What is a support role?

A support role is any role in a school which is not done by the classroom teacher, and which does not involve being involved in teaching the class alone. The amount of support roles has increased a lot over the last ten years, and now there are around 230,000 full-time teaching assistants, in addition to the wide range or other roles employed in schools. In total there are over 500,000 people working in support roles in schools.

Support roles will all be slightly different depending on the type of school you are employed in or volunteering, and the particular needs of pupils and parents in the area. People can also take on more than one type of role in one school, for example working as a Bilingual Teaching Assistant in the classroom part time, while also working as a Parent Support Advisor to their particular language community, or working as an Examinations Officer during the examining period.

What types of support roles are available?

Support roles are split into different types of general roles depending on their focus. They can normally be split into the following areas:

Learning support roles
These are roles in the classroom working with the main teacher to deliver the national curriculum to pupils and help them learn.

Pupil support and welfare roles
These are roles which may take place inside and outside of school, and often deal with parents and carers as well as pupils to make sure a pupil can learn to their full potential.

Technical roles
These roles take place in the classroom where more technical skill is needed, for example in science or Information and Communication Technology (ICT), making sure lessons are safe for the teacher and pupils.
Administrative roles
These roles may not be involved directly with pupil learning, but help with the running of a school in other ways.

Why work in a support role?

Support roles are a great way to gain experience of the English education system and understand how teaching and learning work in England.

They are a good way to return to the classroom in a gradual way after a prolonged absence. They can help improve confidence and skills to continue on to further study to become a fully qualified classroom teacher. This is particularly the case for those without experience in an English school.

For others they offer useful working hours for those with children or who want to work part time. They are also a good place to start for those without a teaching background. Finally, they offer a sometimes more accessible alternative to working with children than being a qualified classroom teacher, particularly if you do not have an undergraduate degree.

How do I find out more?

This booklet will give you further information about the different types of roles available, and who they are most suited for. It will also explain the different types of qualifications available, and where and how to find support roles jobs. It will also give you examples of personal specifications for certain popular jobs.

Making a decision on which role

What role you should focus on depends on your personal circumstances, your previous work experience, and your aspirations for the future. Asking yourself the following questions may help you focus on particular roles:

Do you want to work only in a classroom?

Learning support roles spend the majority of their time in the classroom assisting the main teacher.

Are you happy to work in a variety of different settings?

Pupil support and welfare roles work in schools, but mostly outside the classroom. They are also sometimes based outside a school in another organisation, and may involve community visits.
Do you want to work with very young children?

If you are only interested in working with children under 5, a Nursery Nurse may be a good option. This may be attached to a school, or it could be separate. Normally if people wish to teach very young children, they focus on this age group, rather than moving between age groups, which does not normally happen.

Are you interested in a particular subject, such as maths, science or ICT?

There are specific jobs which focus on your area of preference, either supporting learning or in a more technical way, such as a Science Technician.

Do you speak languages other than English, and would you like to use these in a school setting? Do you have interpreting experience?

Your language skills can be a great asset to a school, so make the most of them. This is particularly the case if you have formal or informal experience in interpreting. Bilingual Teaching Assistants are a natural choice, but your language skills may also be very useful for support and welfare roles.

Would you like to work full time, part time, in term time only, or occasionally for short amounts of time?

Not all roles are full time, and sometimes people combine jobs, for example working as a Teaching Assistant and a Parent Support Advisor in one school. Similarly, many roles only take place during term time, so this is something to take into account when looking at salaries.

Would you like to progress to doing Initial Teacher Training at some stage?

If you are thinking of taking your support role experience a step further and applying for Initial Teacher Training in the future, think about getting experience at the level you want to teach, and with a subject you would like to teach. For example, working as a science technician can help in your application for secondary science.

Does the area you live in have a shortage of a particular role?

It is a good idea to check what the availability of jobs is like in your local area. For example, although you may want to find work as a Special Needs Teaching Assistant, there may not be a great need for it, but they may have many openings for an Education Welfare Officer with community language skills. If you don’t see any SEN TA jobs advertised, it gives you an idea of what is available.
What type of salary are you looking for?

The salaries for support roles are not as high as those for fully qualified classroom teachers, which reflects the lower entry levels for support roles. However, they do offer a great chance to be back in the classroom or school environment, engaging with pupils, and learning more about the English education system. While the starting salaries for some are lower, there are opportunities to progress to higher pay scales with Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Having a lower salary at the start may mean you can get the right experience to go on to a PGCE, and progress to a higher salary in the future.

Types of qualifications

Unlike the prerequisite qualifications for working as fully qualified classroom teacher (a postgraduate profession), the qualifications needed for support roles vary, and you do not normally need to have a degree or teacher training to apply.

The vocational and academic qualifications in England have been mapped so they fall into different levels from 1-8. This is called the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). While there are many different types of qualifications with different names, support roles normally ask for qualifications at level 2 (equivalent to GCSE A - C level) or level 3 (equivalent to A level). They will also normally ask for skills in literacy and numeracy, which you can evidence either with previous qualifications from your home country and their UK NARIC equivalent, or by qualifications you have completed in England, such as Skills for Life courses, ESOL courses or other courses in adult literacy and numeracy.

When should I do a course?

There are a variety of courses you can do where you learn on the job. These can normally only be done while you are volunteering or working, as they involve assessment of your work as you do it. Therefore, you can either pursue one while you are volunteering somewhere, or you can do one as part of your continuing professional development once you are in a paid job.

It is best to consider a specific course once you have found a job or voluntary position. The place where you are working may be able to cover the costs for you, but not always. Similarly, many courses require a letter from the school where you are working or volunteering, saying they are happy to support you on the course.

What course should I choose?

It is always a good idea to ask your supervisor at the school you volunteer or work in for their advice. Other staff members will also have completed courses, so ask your colleagues for advice on what they would recommend.
Using the QCF learners can build up units at their own pace and put them towards a full qualification. They can bank all their achievements over time and keep them as they move from education into a job or from one job to another. They don’t have to study anything they already know. All qualifications in the QCF are built from smaller units of learning.

Every unit and qualification in the QCF has a credit value that tells you how long, on average, it will take to complete – one credit represents 10 hours of learning and assessment. Each unit and qualification also has a level, between entry level and level 8 to show how difficult it is.

There are three sizes of qualification in the QCF:

- Award (1 to 12 credits)
- Certificate (13 to 36 credits)
- Diploma (37 credits or more)

The following 7 qualifications replace qualifications from the previous system, and relate to support work:

**Level 2**
- Award in support work in schools
- Certificate in supporting teaching and learning in schools
- Certificate in supporting the wider curriculum in schools

**Level 3**
- Award in supporting teaching and learning in schools
- Certificate in supporting teaching and learning in schools
- Certificate in cover supervision of pupils in schools
- Diploma in specialist support for teaching and learning in schools

Further information on what is involved in the course can be found at:

[http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/careers/traininganddevelopment/staff/b00202859/qualifications](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/careers/traininganddevelopment/staff/b00202859/qualifications)

All of the courses are run by different people, it’s quite confusing. Which ones are the best?

There are six main awarding bodies that administer level 2 and 3 qualifications relevant to support staff (they also do a variety of other courses, including GCSEs and other academic qualifications, as well as vocational qualifications for other areas, such as advice and guidance or health and social care). These are listed below:

- [www.cache.org.uk](http://www.cache.org.uk)
- [www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com)
These are the organisations offering the specific courses explained above, which are the most tailored to support roles. They will be well known to and recognisable to schools. For some other relevant courses, additional organisations may run them, such as PAA/VQ-SET who administer courses on laboratory skills:

http://www.paa-uk.org/Qualifications/Qualifications%20Index.htm

Or www.signature.org.uk who administer courses on British Sign Language relevant for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Teaching Assistants.

If you are thinking of doing another type of course, check with your colleagues and your manager/supervisor, as they may be able to offer help and advice on which other courses are particularly relevant to you.

Where and how to find jobs

There is no centralised way of finding support role jobs in schools. Support role jobs are advertised in a variety of places, including:

National and Local press

The national newspapers below have a large selection of jobs online which are updated regularly. The positions also appear in print on particular education focused days.

The Guardian - http://jobs.theguardian.com/
The Times Educational Supplement - www.tes.co.uk
The Independent - http://ijobs.independent.co.uk/

Local newspapers in your area may also run job advertisements, either online or in print, for example the Sheffield Star http://www.thestar.co.uk/ or the Ham and High in north London http://www.hamhigh.co.uk/home

The internet

Sometimes searching for specific key words like “learning mentor and Liverpool” can be beneficial, and can lead you to useful schools or employment agencies.
Alternatively, there are a wide range of online recruitment companies that advertise for support staff across England.

http://www.academicsltd.co.uk/
http://www.capitaresourcing.co.uk/
http://www.careerjet.co.uk/
http://www.education-jobs.co.uk/
http://www.eteach.com/
http://www.jobsgopublic.com/
http://www.jobsineducation.co.uk/
http://www.theeducationjob.com/
http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/

You can sign up for a weekly or daily digest of jobs relevant to you, to make sure you don’t miss out on any jobs with a short advertisement time.

**Education employment agencies**

There are specific recruitment agencies that work with support staff for long and short term assignments, such as the ones below:

http://www.protocol-education.com/
http://www.twrecruitment.com/
http://www.capitaeducation.co.uk/

**Local Authorities**

In some areas, the Local Authority is directly responsible for support role recruitment, and is very active in advertising jobs. Visit your Local Authority website for further information. If you are not sure what Local Authority you belong to, you can find out through the link below:

http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/Start.do?mode=1
Jobs are sometimes not advertised for long, so check back regularly to make sure you don’t miss a deadline.

**Contacting schools directly**

Sometimes schools may not advertise a job directly, but may contact people whose details they already have on file that have shown an interest in work. Alternatively they may have upcoming work which they have not yet advertised. If you are contacting a school directly, visit in person rather than email. Take with you a high quality and up to date CV printed out, along with a covering letter outlining exactly why you would like to work in that particular school. Dress smartly and ask for a named person or job title that fits the work you want to do, for example the Ethnic Minority Achievement Officer if you would like work as a Bilingual Teaching Assistant.

**Word of mouth**

Finally, ask around through any school connections you might have, starting with schools your children may go to, or the children of friends or people you know in the community.