

# Petitions Committee: Pay for teaching assistants

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## Introduction

The Petitions Committee ran an online survey to inform a debate on Monday 17 July 2023 on pay for teaching assistants. The survey asked petitioners about their views on wages for teaching assistants, and their workload and responsibilities.

The survey was shared on social media, via the [UK Parliament Newsletter](#) and stakeholder organisations, and with signatories of the following petition, which triggered the debate:

- [Recognise Teaching Assistants as an important asset to schools by raising wage](#)

The contents of this brief should be read as reflecting only the experiences of those who responded to the survey.

## Response

**22,506** survey responses.

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About the respondents

- **84%** were teaching assistants and **3%** were former teaching assistants
- **5%** were teachers or headteachers and **4%** were other staff who worked in a school
- **2%** were close friends or family members of a teaching assistant
- **1%** were parents or guardians of a school-age child

## Salaries

Of the teaching assistants who told us their salary:

- **19%** said their full-time equivalent salary was under £13,000 per year.
- **23%** said it was between £13,000 and £15,000 per year.
- **15%** said it was between £15,000 and £17,000 per year.
- **14%** said it was between £17,000 and £19,000 per year.
- **13%** said it was between £19,000 and £21,000 per year.
- **12%** said it was over £21,000 per year.

## Experience

- **69%** of teaching assistants who responded to the survey had over 5 years of experience.

Of these:

- **18%** said their full-time equivalent salary was under £13,000 per year.
- **58%** said it was under £17,000 per year.
- Only **1%** said it was over £26,000 per year.

Salaries were often less than this in practice, because many teaching assistants are employed on term-time contracts, which means that they are

only paid for term-time hours, and not the school holidays.

- **48%** of teaching assistants said they were on a full-time term-time contract
- **23%** were on a part-time term-time contract
- **17%** on a full-time year-round contract
- **9%** were on a part-time year-round contract

Teachers in certain roles are automatically entitled to a special educational needs (SEN) allowance, which is added to their salary.

- **94%** of teaching assistants said they did not receive any extra financial allowances for additional responsibilities, qualifications or experience, such as the SEN allowance.

## Quotes

- Former teaching assistant: "Jobs are advertised as paid 52 weeks of the year when in reality you're only paid 39 weeks and this is not mentioned until interview. You need a partner or living with your parents to be able to do things other than pay for petrol and food."
- Teacher or headteacher: "As most teaching assistant pay is pro rata, they don't get a liveable wage. Our school has lost 5 amazing teaching assistants who get a better wage working in retail."

- Teaching assistant: "Poor pay is now a real concern. Due to my hours being term time only and this is pro rata over the year. I actually only bring home around £14k which is a very poor salary in today's situation. Even my full-time equivalent is low compared to the average living wage. This is causing huge financial distress for me."
- Teaching assistant: "I am on a scale 6 – which sounded very well paid as I plan, cover and have a specific lead designation [...] However, it's not so well paid when you compare it to someone else on the pay scale who doesn't have to plan, cover etc because in real terms that equates to around £25 a week more – and the tax man gets some of that. The reality is for most support staff at higher pay scales [...] are only on around £14,000 – essentially a half price teacher."

## The cost of living

Teaching assistants said they were struggling to afford essentials and other spending:

- **60%** said it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford food.
- **63%** said it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford energy and water.
- **69%** said it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford clothing.

- **64%** said it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford transport, including fuel.
- **55%** said it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford telecommunications (phone and/or internet access).
- **75%** said it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford household goods including furniture and appliances.
- **76%** said it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford leisure and social activities.
- **12%** said they had visited a food bank and **22%** said they were considering it. **4%** preferred not to say.

Financial concerns were the main reason why teaching assistants had left or were considering leaving the profession.

- Of the teaching assistants who said they had considered leaving their role, **90%** said financial worries were a factor.
- Of former teaching assistants, **71%** said they left their role due to financial worries.

### Quotes

- Teaching assistant: "The wages have hardly changed since I started thirty years ago. Everything is rocketing in price, but our wages have remained the same. I have not been able to afford a day out or holiday in the past five years. [...] I have considered leaving a job that I love as I have no money to

myself after all the bills, food mortgage have gone out [...] I have had to rely on food banks and help from my parents, who are pensioners, just to survive."

- Teaching assistant: "I work in a school as an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant. I see around 30 children a week and plan individual sessions for these vulnerable children in my own time, approximately 3 hours a week. My take home pay is £1,256 a month, and I honestly cannot make ends meet due to the cost-of-living increases in all aspects of life. I am seriously considering leaving the job I love so that I can afford to pay my bills, a situation that many of my colleagues are also in, which will have an extremely detrimental effect on education in general."

### Additional jobs

**Many teaching assistants said they had second or third jobs.**

### Quotes

- Teaching assistant: "I have colleagues who are single mothers who work two or three different jobs at school so are at school all day but then have to have second and third jobs out of school hours cleaning and in retail."
- Teaching assistant: "I have to get a second job in the school holidays just to earn more

money as my wage is diabolical.”

- Teaching assistant: “I work as an HLTA [higher level teaching assistant] and then have a second evening job stacking shelves. This means some days I am working from 8am to 10pm pretty much straight through [...] I am working two jobs and do not have enough money.”

## Career changes

**The majority of teaching assistants who answered the survey said they had considered leaving – or had left – the profession for better paid roles elsewhere.**

- **90%** of teaching assistants said they had considered leaving their role.
- Of the teaching assistants who said they had considered leaving their role, **85%** cited workplace stress, **84%** a sense of being underappreciated, and **78%** the heavy workload.

## Quotes

- Former teaching assistant: “I left recently looking for more pay & a better work life balance. It was a difficult decision especially as I’d worked SO hard to gain my teaching assistant qualification.”
- Former teaching assistant: “I was employed as a 1:1 but very quickly had to move past those

duties and become a whole class assistant which isn't fair on the child that I was hired to support. The salary just wasn't sustainable. I was using over 80% of my salary (even though I was part of the London wage) on rent and bills and travel. I would usually have about £200 for food and my hobbies [...] There were days when I would have to be the main go between for the school and the parents, even though I wasn't employed or paid for that. I left the job and became a worker in a laundry because it paid better.”

- Teacher or headteacher: “It is soul destroying when you see excellent, experienced, and hard-working TAs who really care about the children leave to go and work in Lidl or Tesco as they are paid so much better there, and these places now offer more flexible hours [...] so can attract mums with school aged children. It is criminal how low paid TAs are!”
- Teaching assistant: “We work extremely hard, most are overqualified and are paid less than shop workers and other private sector workers. We love our jobs but it's unfair to be paid £18,000 for 37+ hours per week, term time only.”
- Teaching assistant: “It is increasingly impossible to live on this wage yet my work has never been more demanding or necessary. I will be attending

evening classes from September for three years to retrain as a counsellor and hopefully increase my earnings.”

## **Workload and responsibilities**

**Many teaching assistants said their responsibilities and workload had increased over the years, putting more pressure on them. Many spoke about the importance of their roles for children’s education.**

**Many current and former teaching assistants said they often had to cover the work of teachers.**

- **96%** of teaching assistants said they ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that their salary fairly reflects their workload.

### **Quotes**

- Teaching assistant: “Teaching assistants do not only ‘just’ listen to children read and do display boards. We now should be classed as assistant teachers. We cover classes, mark work, treat first aid, help with reports, help lesson plan, teach groups of SEN [Special Educational Needs] pupils, do breakfast and after school clubs and numerous break and lunchtime duties.”
- Teacher: “I have been a teacher for 25 years. During that time, I have seen the expectations of teaching assistants change significantly [...] Without a full-

time teaching assistant in my year two classroom I would not be able to do my job properly and ultimately the children would not learn as well as they do.”

- Teaching assistant: “Teaching assistants do not just sit in classrooms as an extra person. They take groups for interventions, they are crucial to the progress of pupils within their class. Teaching assistants organise and sort the paperwork, books, reading books, homework, activities etc, after the initial planning has been done by the classroom teacher. Teaching assistants now cover whole class lessons [...] [they] have extra qualifications giving them specialised subject knowledge, or skills to support SEN pupils, which is not recognised and taken for granted. Teaching assistants provide first aid, emotional support for pupils and for the classroom teacher, ensuring that everyone is okay and taken care of when in school [...] Our pay does not reflect the work we do, the skills we have or the working conditions we can be exposed to.”
- Teaching assistant: “Schools are being stretched even more, meaning that the TAs who are lucky enough to still have a job are being used to cover teachers but at the fraction of the price.”

- Teaching assistant: "We are covering classes for teachers with less support than they get (they take two teachers out and replace with only one TA if one is available) we cover classes constantly, teaching at the drop of a hat often with little explanation to what we are teaching."

## Feeling undervalued

**Many current and former teaching assistants said they were highly qualified and felt undervalued, with important responsibilities but a low wage.**

- **41%** of teaching assistants and former teaching assistants who responded said that they were qualified at degree level or higher.

## Quotes

- Former teaching assistant: "I can safely say this is a thankless job, heavily under paid and not appreciated. I've worked in education for nearly 20 years and my salary from 2004 has barely risen. Teaching assistants are hugely underrated as they are an important staple to the schools across the UK. You'll find teaching assistants may even know the pupils better than the teachers a lot of time, knowing their specific needs to the point where some pupils won't enter a school without the teaching assistant present."
- Teaching assistant: "The majority of the teaching assistants that I work with are university educated, skilled, knowledgeable people who have previously been in jobs that pay higher wages. The fact that they can bring their skills and expertise to assist children is so undervalued. I would like to know why expectations are so high for employees to fulfil the role but the monetary reward is so small."
- School staff member: "Teaching Assistants are undervalued by the Government which is strongly reflected in their pay and needs to be reviewed urgently. The school would not run effectively or safely without their vital input. Many of the TAs I know work full time but have a second job to be able to pay their bills."
- Teaching assistant: "I feel overqualified. I am vastly underpaid against the qualifications I have and my peers employed after me with less responsibility are paid more. I find this insulting. Furthermore there is little career progression, regularly false promises made towards expectations and responsibility. I also find the lack of respect from parents and wider staff for my expertise rather distasteful."

## **Challenging circumstances**

**Many respondents said that teaching assistants' salaries do not take into account the stressful situations they encounter.**

### **Quotes**

- Teacher or headteacher: "Our staff have been physically attacked by children as young as six due to lack of spaces in specialist schools. They come in daily and get scratched, bitten and beaten for measly pay. They stay longer hours than they're meant to, they complete additional training, take part in after school clubs, and are there for our children when the teacher is trying to teach. If you value our children then pay the people working with them a liveable wage."
- Teaching assistant: "The amount of children coming into mainstream schools with behavioural problems is increasing and some are very violent which is hard to cope with physically and mentally. It also has an impact on the rest of the children in the class as it disrupts their learning, and they also get very distressed. It falls on TAs to work with these children without any training. It's unfair on staff and children as there is no support for us. The government must look at opening more special schools where these troubled children can be cared for in a better environment."

## **Supporting SEND Students**

**Many teaching assistants spoke about their expertise in supporting students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).**

**They also spoke about increased pressure on them to support students due to a lack of funding for schools and poor mental health services.**

### **Quotes**

- Teacher: "Schools are dealing with many of society's failings and teaching assistants are crucial in supporting children with mental health challenges, those who come from very difficult homes etc. SEND provision at county level is inadequate and schools are having to support more children without additional funding [...] [TAs] are professional people who run learning interventions, need to have an in depth understanding of multiple SEND including ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder], PDA [Pathological Demand Avoidance], ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] and they deserve to be paid a wage that is not insulting, as their pay currently is."
- Teacher: "I work in a special needs school and the teaching assistants there are also health care workers and have specific medical training dependent on the class they are allocated to work in. Our teaching assistants

are still however getting the same level of pay as a mainstream teaching assistant. I have worked in both mainstream and special needs and the role of a special needs teaching assistant is far more complex and difficult and this is not reflected in their pay."

## **The SEN allowance**

**Teachers in certain roles are automatically entitled to a special educational needs (SEN) allowance, which is added to their salary.**

- **97%** of teaching assistants who answered said they thought that teaching assistants who work with children with SEN should be entitled to an allowance in the same way as teachers.
- **94%** of teaching assistants who answered said they did not receive any extra financial allowances for additional responsibilities, qualifications or experience, such as the SEN allowance.

## **Quotes**

- Teaching assistant: "Teaching assistants need to be recognised for the important role they play in helping SEN children to access the national curriculum together with the SEN work package and other important interventions carried out like speech & language programmes, physiotherapy

exercises etc. We are not valued at all, and our salaries need to be increased to reflect the essential role we do in a school, children's education and how we improve the child's life. We are so undervalued by the government."

- Teaching assistant: "I am responsible for planning and supporting teaching of the SEN child I am with, yet I receive no additional pay and am paid very poorly. In effect, I am a class teacher many times a week when the teacher leaves me in charge. We often see things that teachers don't and have to deal with this too."

## **The importance of teaching assistants**

**Teachers, headteachers and parents spoke of the benefits of having teaching assistants in classrooms.**

- **95%** of teachers and headteachers who responded said that the work of teaching assistants was 'very important' to the successful running of a school. **80%** said they 'strongly disagree' that salaries for teaching assistants fairly reflect their workload.
- **93%** of parents and guardians of a school age child who answered said their child has a teaching assistant in their class. **89%** said the work of teaching assistants is 'very important' to



their child's education and social development.

### Quotes

- Parent: "The previous school my son attended had no teaching assistant. None of the children had support in class as the teacher was constantly dealing with behaviour. Most children have not made targets for last year. (Another year lost- especially as they are catching up from Covid)."
- Teacher or headteacher: "Teaching assistants are one of the most important resources in my school. I am losing highly skilled, trained, experienced TAs who are leaving to take up posts in supermarkets and other work which is paid better. My school is a small school with large mixed-age classes. TAs are invaluable in supporting delivery of the curriculum, supporting pupils emotionally and pastorally and are key in helping reduce teacher workload with admin tasks. TAs must be recognised for their place in our schools and paid accordingly."
- Teacher or headteacher: "I have never been able to do my job without a teaching assistant in mainstream or special needs. They are the backbone of a school and they provide an essential service."
- Teacher or headteacher: "[Teaching assistants] are all too often the only reason a

student will stay in school. Their nurturing nature and patience is priceless, their ability to break down work so a student can understand is phenomenal. Pay them what they deserve!"

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### Methodology

Committee staff manually reviewed hundreds of individual comments and answers, using both subject searches and randomised selection. They also analysed survey questions which produced statistical results.