

# **Recognition for the contribution made by Teaching Support Staff to Learning and Teaching in Schools**

## **John Smith describes the initiation of the new Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) qualification**

In late 2003/early 2004 an important element of the government's policy on remodelling the school workforce was initiated by the Teacher Training Agency. This was the national pilot for the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) 'Assessment Only Route'. Across the country, eleven providers were appointed to recruit, select, brief and assess the first cohort of 334 Teaching Assistants; and to pilot, evaluate and improve the proposed process and materials.

This was a potentially sensitive project, one of a number of initiatives being developed under the auspices of the National Remodelling Team and scrutinised closely by the Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG). WAMG is an historic and unique body, comprised of key stakeholders in the Education system (with the exception of the NUT), its role is to oversee the implementation of the various phases of the Government's Workforce Agreement, in the Education sector.

After an open competition, CCDU were chosen by the TTA to be one of the approved providers and in late 2003 we set about identifying 30 candidates to participate in the HLTA pilot. A key requirement for the Assessment Only Route was (and is) that candidates should be already achieving in the course of their work, the thirty-one HLTA standards.

These Standards set out what an individual should know, understand and be able to do to be awarded HLTA status. They are organised in three inter-related sections:

### **Professional values and practice**

These Standards set out the attitudes and commitment to be expected from those trained as HLTAs.

### **Knowledge and understanding**

These Standards require HLTAs to demonstrate they have sufficient knowledge, expertise and awareness of the pupils' curriculum to work effectively with teachers as part of a professional team. They also require HLTAs to demonstrate that they know how to use their skills, expertise and experience to advance pupils' learning.

### **Teaching and learning activities**

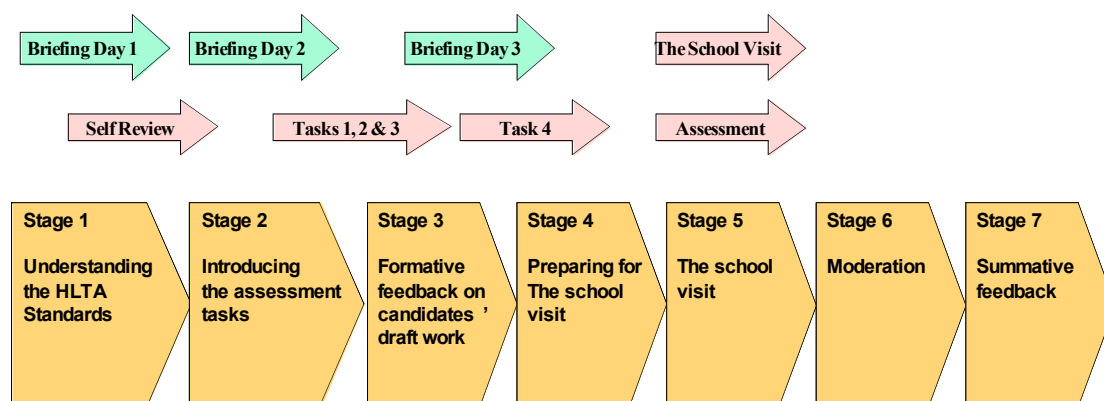
These Standards require all HLTAs to demonstrate that they can work effectively with individual pupils, small groups and whole classes under the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher, and that they can contribute to a range of teaching and learning activities in the areas where they have expertise. They require all HLTAs to demonstrate skills in planning, monitoring, assessment and class management.

The Standards apply to HLTAs working in all phases of education and in all areas of school life. They have been designed to be applicable to the diversity of roles in which school support staff work to support pupils' learning. The Standards are also

designed to support smooth progression to QTS for those HLTAs with the potential and interest to go on to qualify as teachers.

## □ Progress through the pilot project

Because of the very tight timescales on the Pilot we sought nominations and recommendations from LEAs and Headteachers and in this way identified rapidly 31 candidates who in the view of their sponsors were already achieving the standards. The 31 candidates embarked upon the following briefing and assessment process:



- Assessment is about enabling candidates to demonstrate that they meet the Standards
- It is based on what TAs normally do in the classroom and school
- It is not intended to demand more from headteachers and other colleagues than normal arrangements for management and performance review

### Briefing Day 1

The first briefing day is focussed upon building a general understanding of the requirements for HLTA status and in particular the completion of the 'Self Review'. This document is completed by candidates and provides an individual self-assessment against each of the standards. This serves two purposes: firstly, it identifies areas where candidates are not yet achieving the standards (and therefore those not eligible for the assessment only route); secondly, it familiarises candidates with the standards and the kind of evidence that will be required as part of their assessment.

### Briefing Day 2

The second briefing day prepares candidates for their assessment tasks, as follows:

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| Task 1 | An example of an occasion when the candidate has worked with an individual child to support the child's learning |
| Task 2 | An example of an occasion when the candidate has worked with a small group of children to support their learning |
| Task 3 | An example of an occasion when the candidate has worked with a whole class to support their learning             |

Task 4 Candidates can choose up to 5 school 'situations' in which they have been involved, to provide further evidence in areas where they feel that particular standards have not been fully evidenced by Tasks 1-3

Candidates also have the opportunity to create a file of supporting documentary evidence. During the pilot, the tutors encouraged and advised candidates to ensure that the size of this file was minimised, that any documents were directly relevant to the assessment, annotated and clearly cross referenced to the HLTA standards.

The first two briefing days are run either consecutively or close together but separated from Briefing day 3 by a period of several weeks (in the case of the pilot some 6-8 weeks) to allow for candidates to work on their assessment tasks and assemble supporting documents.

### **Briefing Day 3**

For the third briefing day candidates are asked to bring with them their completed Tasks 1-3 and an outline of their proposed Task 4. The intention of the day is to provide candidates with 'formative' feedback on their work. This is quite a sensitive point in the assessment process as there is a risk that feedback and personal advice from tutors might be seen as directive, partial and a potential source of inequity in the process. Providers at the pilot stage worked hard to ensure that briefing and feedback were clearly separated from assessment. Most maintained the line that, wherever possible, Tutors should not assess candidates whom they had briefed. In most cases, providers designed the day such that direct feedback came from candidates working together in groups and any feedback from Tutors was generic rather than specific and directed towards groups rather than individuals.

### **School Visit**

The school visit follows as rapidly as possible after the 3rd briefing day and the assessment is a structured half-day (3hrs total), as follows:

- Introduction to the Headteacher
- First meeting with candidate; this is the candidate's opportunity to talk the assessor through their assessment tasks and their file of supporting documentary evidence. Candidate comments and responses to assessor questions are recorded during this first meeting.
- Assessor preparation time, during which the assessor will scrutinise the documentary evidence, refresh his/her understanding of the assessment tasks and integrate any evidence/queries gathered during the first candidate meeting.
- Meeting with the Class Teacher or other teacher with direct knowledge of the candidate's Learning and Teaching practice (up to two people). The Class Teacher's comments and responses to assessor questions are recorded during this meeting.
- Meeting with the Headteacher or appropriate senior member of school staff. The Headteacher's comments and responses to assessor questions are recorded during this meeting.
- Second meeting with candidate; this is the assessor's opportunity to ask the candidate any questions that have arisen as a result of scrutiny of assessment

tasks, assessment file or the meetings with the Headteacher and Class Teacher. Candidate comments and responses to assessor questions are recorded during this second meeting.

The above process is tightly timed and whilst there is some flexibility around the order of the interviews with Head and Class Teacher(s) the stages are adhered to strictly. Where the candidate chooses to have two Class Teachers providing evidence no additional time is allowed and the candidates have to decide how the interview time is to be split.

At the end of the assessment process the assessor completes a brief assessment report including his/her recommendations. At this point the recommendation will be one of the following three options:

- Award
- Not award
- Partial re-submission

All assessor recommendations are subject to internal and external moderation prior to formal confirmation of results by the TTA. The assessors have therefore, been given clear instructions to ensure that under no circumstances do they share their recommendations with the candidate or member of school staff.

#### **Lessons learned from the pilot**

Candidate choice of school staff to provide/verify evidence can be crucial to the assessment process. In particular it is essential that interviewees are familiar with, have direct contact with and be in a position to answer, potentially detailed questions relating to the work of the HLTA candidate.

As mentioned earlier our initial cohort for the Assessment Only Route Pilot was 31 Teaching Assistants whom Heads and LEAs had nominated as already achieving the HLTA Standards within the delivery of their role(s) in school. One candidate dropped out after the Day 1 Briefing believing that she would be unable to meet standard 3.3.5 (see below). Her school has a policy which specifically precludes Teaching Assistants taking responsibility for classes in the absence of the Class Teacher and because of this she felt unable to proceed to assessment.

In addition to 3.3.5 there were a small number of other standards with which some candidates needed support in understanding how they were meeting the standards and how they might provide evidence to the assessors.

## Standards for which Candidates may require support in providing evidence

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| 1.1   | They have high expectations of all pupils; respect the backgrounds; and are committed to raising their educational achievement   | in social, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity |
| 1.5   | They are able to liaise sensitively and effectively with pupils' learning  | with parents and carers, recognising their roles in             |
| 1.6   | They are able to improve their own practice, including with colleagues   | through observation, evaluation and discussion                  |
| 2.6   | They have achieved a qualification in English/literacy Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework.   | and mathematics/ numeracy, equivalent to at least               |
| 2.7   | They are aware of the statutory frameworks relevant to   | their role  |
| 2.8   | They know the legal definition of Special Educational about meeting SEN given in the SEN Code of Practice  | Needs (SEN), and are familiar with the guidance                 |
| 3.3.5 | They advance pupils' learning in a range of classroom settings, including working with small groups and whole classes where the assigned teacher is not present.   | with individuals,   |
| 3.3.6 | They are able, where relevant, to guide the work of other  | adults supporting teaching and learning in the classroom        |
| 3.3.7 | They recognise and respond effectively to equal opportunities issues as they arise, including by challenging stereotyped views, and by challenging bullying or harassment, following relevant policies and procedures. |   |

### □ How the pilot was experienced

CCDU's involvement in the HLTA pilot was a highly positive one for all the team assessors, tutors and administrative staff alike. The briefing and assessment processes proved to be workable, rigorous and at the same time candidate friendly and 'felt fair'. The detailed scrutiny provided by National Moderation added a high level of credibility to the quality of assessments and sustainability of outcomes. Relationships between providers and the TTA were excellent throughout the pilot. The TTA team was extremely responsive to the concerns and anxieties of providers and to suggestions for improvements to both the process and documentation. This has been strongly reflected in the training materials available to the new generation of HLTA Providers of the Assessment Only and Full Training Routes and in the assessment process and documentation.

All who participated in the pilot were hugely impressed by the HLTA candidates, their enthusiasm and the major contribution that most are making to the learning environment in their schools. More than that (in view of the sensitivities) we were pleasantly surprised by the encouragement and support offered by almost all the staff in almost all the schools in which we worked as part of the project. Most headteachers gladly gave up their own offices for the school visits or arranged other dedicated space to ensure that the assessment process was as stress free as possible for the candidates.

### □ Celebration Time

Towards the end of June we held a celebration event in what used to be the Royal Station Hotel in York. We invited all 30 candidates, their headteachers and LEA staff

involved in the pilot. On the night, around 50 people travelled to York for the event. Gillian Metcalfe, the Head of Normanton and Freeston Business and Enterprise College even arranged for a 'stretch limo' to transport her two HLTAs to the celebration in style!

The event was attended by Kate James from the HLTA Team at the TTA and certificates were presented by Dr Gillian Tricoglus the Programme Leader for the Pilot Project.

### □ **What next?**

In partnership with Northumbria University, CCDU successfully bid for the delivery of the HLTA Assessment Only and Full Training Routes in the North East region. Because of the huge effort required of LEAs to recruit, screen and select applicants, initial uptake in the region is slow. There is however, strong interest in schools and LEAs across the region and we do anticipate a significant increase in numbers after the summer break.

Recently, CCDU were selected by the TTA to design and deliver six National training events for Senior Assessors from the newly appointed approved providers and a further two events for those involved in the pilot Foundation Degree Route to HLTA status. Additionally, five of our team are providing, through the TTA, a variety of support services to providers, schools and LEAs who are preparing for their involvement in the HLTA initiative. These services include speaking at conferences, briefing groups of candidates and sponsors, training assessors and the design and delivery of moderation processes.

We have also been successful, again in partnership with Northumbria University, in becoming a pilot provider for 'Tailored Routes' to HLTA status. That is, diagnosis of need followed by individually tailored, training, development and experience based upon personal development needs of candidates. We believe that this will become an increasingly attractive route for those candidates who are not yet quite achieving the HLTA standards.

**For further information please contact john on 0113 394 3916 or email [john@ccdu.co.uk](mailto:john@ccdu.co.uk) or visit [www.hlta.gov.uk](http://www.hlta.gov.uk)**