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**Creators:** Devecchi, C. and Brown, J.

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# **Perspectives on the 'preparedness' of teaching assistants: What gets in the way?**

BERA 2013, 3-5 September, University of Sussex, UK

**Cristina Devecchi and Julian Brown**

School of Education,

University of Northampton, UK

# How are Teaching Assistants prepared for what they do?



Is this possible when considering the diversity of the role?  
How is training evaluated and shared?  
Are there any barriers to training?

# Overview of presentation

- Introduction to the study
- Methodology
- Processes for planning TAs' training opportunities
- Review and dissemination of training
- Perceived barriers to training opportunities
- Recommendations

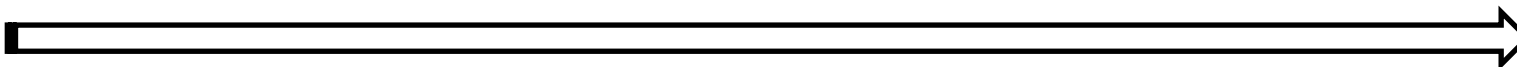
# A timeline of development

Plowden Report (1967) first to acknowledge classroom assistants' support. Welfare assistants working with children with disabilities. Mainly recruited amongst mothers. No formal status or recognition.

Warnock Report & 1981 Education Act – opening the road towards mainstreaming. Role mainly to support children with SEN.

Remodeling of the school workforce; Literacy & Numeracy strategy; inclusion and Every Child Matters Agenda, but also concerns about the effectiveness of the SEN system and the impact of TAs' support. Towards professionalisation.

Major changes, widespread education reform by the backdoor and through marketisation. SEN Green Paper. Contrasting messages about professional training but also budget cuts. Future uncertain.



*Mum's army & Jills of all trades*

*Para-professionals*

?



*'I think teaching assistants in general, play a big role in schools, especially now, we've got a lot more responsibility, a lot more than people realise. We don't just come in and support the odd child or wash a few paint pots up. We are more involved, we are doing a lot more, and I just think it just needs recognising that little bit more.'*

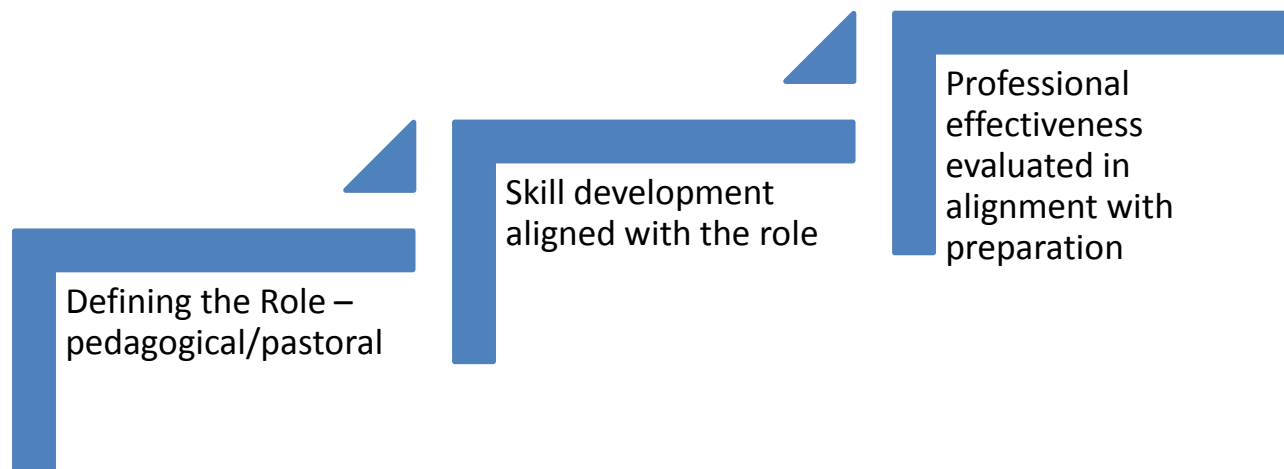
[TA, infants School]

*'Schools can't survive without support workers and it doesn't have to directly relate back to a standard. They (schools) just simply can't function.'*

[Head teacher, primary school]

# Effectiveness through 'preparedness'

- Literature has primarily focused on the deployment and effectiveness of Teaching Assistants (Cajkler et al., 2006; Blatchford et al., 2009; Balshaw, 2010; Farrell et al., 2010; Giangreco et al., 2012)
- 'Preparedness' that is utilised to improve effectiveness (Devecchi and Rouse, 2010; Webster et al., 2011)



# **METHODOLOGY**



# Research design

## Methods

- Attendance at TA conference to raise awareness;
- Cross-sectional survey of teaching assistants and school staff who are responsible for continuing professional development (CPD) and/or TAs' management in the form of self-administered questionnaires (electronic and paper versions);
- Distribution coordinated by LA;
- Follow-up semi-structured interviews with a voluntary sample of TAs (n=15) and school staff responsible for teaching assistants' training (n=8), following analysis of survey data.

## Sample

- All TAs employed in the LA at mainstream infant, primary, secondary, and special schools
- All representatives of senior leadership team with responsibility for TAs' professional development

## Survey response rate

- 243 TAs (15%)
- 23 CPD managers (13%)

# Question foci

Who are they?

- Demographic data about the school
- Demographic data about themselves

What do they do?

- Identification of roles and responsibilities
- Perceived effectiveness of their role

How are they prepared?

- Perceived impact of training
- Identification of barriers to training

What are the processes for deciding on what training a TA will have?

How is the training reviewed and disseminated?

Are there any barriers to training from the perspectives of TAs and their managers?

**PROCESSES FOR PLANNING TAS'  
TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

# Types of qualifications held by TAs

Type of qualifications	No of respondents
GCSE/CSE/O-level	186 (76.5%)
Qualification with equivalence to level 2 in literacy and numeracy	115 (47.3%)
NVQ3 in Supporting Teaching and Learning	81 (33.3%)
Certificate for Teaching Assistants	79 (32.5%)
NVQ2 in Supporting Teaching and Learning	60 (24.7%)
HL T A status	54 (22.2%)
A-level	51 (21.0%)
STAA course	46 (18.9%)
BTEC National Diploma	32 (13.2%)
Certificate of HE/ONC/HND/diploma	25 (10.3%)
BA (hons) other	24 (9.5%)
Foundation Degree	19 (7.8%)
NNEB	16 (6.5%)
CACHE Diploma in Childhood Studies	15 (6.2%)
Unspecified level	15 (6.2%)
BA (hons) Education Studies	11 (4.5%)
Foundation Degree (in progress)	6 (2.4%)
Various Level 2	6 (2.4%)
Various Level 3	4 (1.6%)
BSc	3 (1.2%)
MA/MPhil	2 (0.8%)
Qualified Teacher Status	2 (0.8%)
Various Level 4	1 (0.4%)
Not specified 'other'	17 (7.0%)
Blank	5 (2.0%)

# Training received



Type of training received	No of Respondents
Mentoring, coaching	16 (8.0%)
TA study groups	23 (11.5%)
Conferences	54 (27.1%)
Non-university accredited courses	54 (27.1%)
University accredited courses	59 (29.6%)
Independent study	68 (34.1%)
Out-of-school workshops or seminars	87 (43.7%)
TA workshops	99 (49.7%)
In school workshop	146 (73.3%)

# Responsibility for training

TA who knows whether the school has a CPD manager	Number of respondents
Yes	116 (47.7%)
No	23 (9.5%)
Don't know	96 (39.5%)



# Decision-making processes

How do you find out about training?

Means to know about courses	No of respondents
Details on school notice board	132 (54.3%)
Suggestion from senior staff, line manager	99 (40.7%)
General advertising from training providers	50 (20.6%)
Suggestion from colleagues	46 (18.9%)
Advertisement from local authority	40 (16.5%)
Web-site	21 (8.6%)
Other	35 (14.4%)

How has your training been funded?

Funding body	No of respondents
Your school /employer	136 (67.0%)
Local Authority	47 (23.2%)
Self-funded	41 (20.2%)
Split funding	8 (3.9%)
Don't know	4 (2.0%)
Other	6 (3.0%)

Is your training part of the School Development Plan?

TA training as part of the school development plan	Number of respondents
Yes	140 (57.6%)
No	24 (9.9%)
Don't know	75 (30.9%)

# **REVIEW AND DISSEMINATION OF TRAINING**



# Annual review

TAs who have an annual review	Number of respondents
Yes	124 (51.0%)
No	12 (4.9%)
No reply	107 (44.1%)

‘I’ve only had one appraisal within five years.’

[TA, special school]

‘The CPD thing that we had, we used to have a meeting once a year with the head teacher, of where you think your skills are now, are there any courses you think you’d like to do, that would help you support the children better, what those courses were, and then at the end of the year, you’d have another review, say, did you manage to get on any courses, did you feel they helped you, where do you see yourself in the next six months, or where would you think you need training in the future, and that used to happen twice a year, every year with the previous head teacher but that doesn’t happen now and it hasn’t been done for the last three years, so myself and a lot of other TAs are feeling very sort of like, ‘well does anybody really care?’

[TA, secondary school]

‘...performance management is something that we perhaps should be thinking but the capacity to do it has been the issue’

[ Head teacher, primary school]

Performance management is ...‘within my own head’

[Head teacher, primary school]

# Systems for monitoring

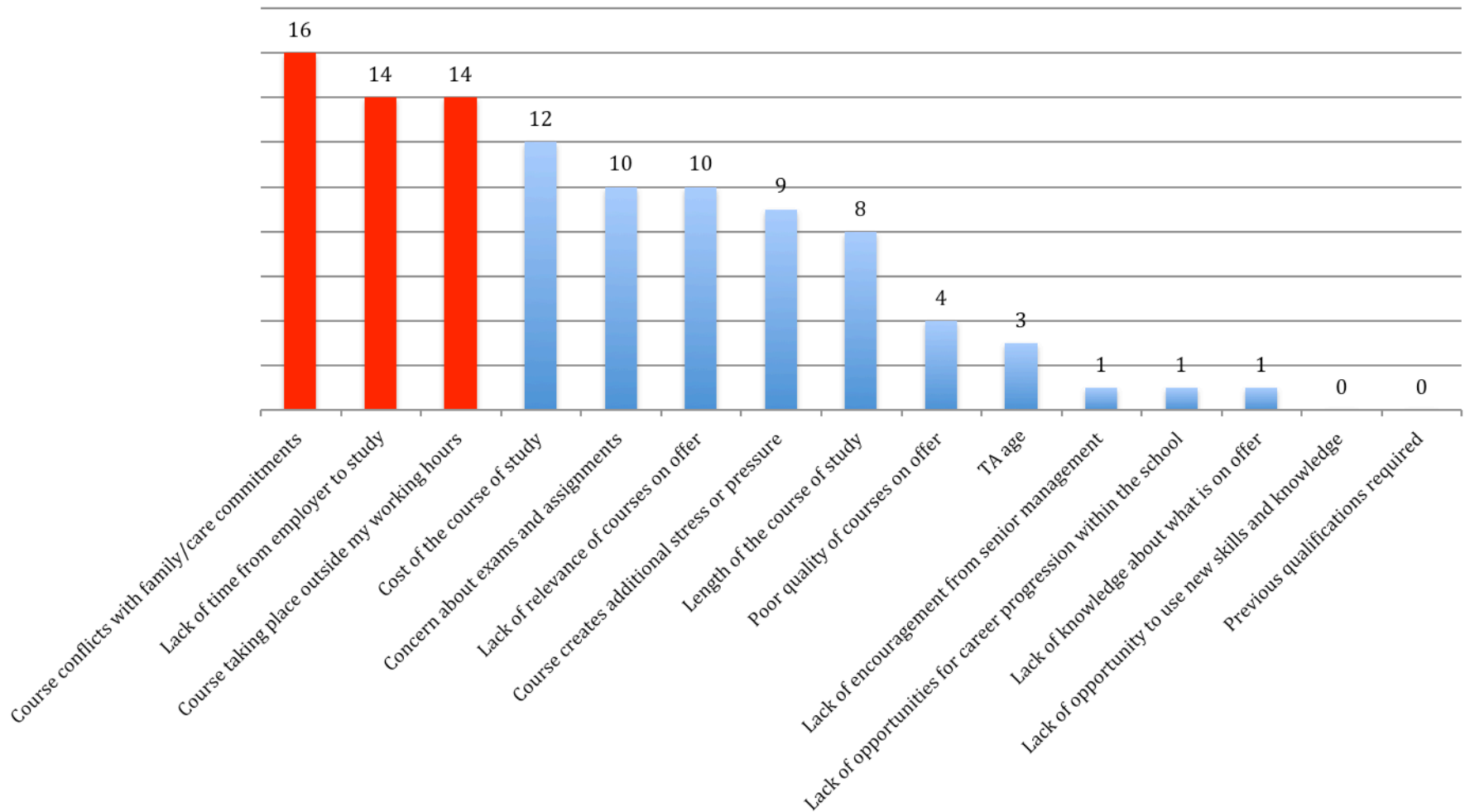
CPD Managers		
System for monitoring impact of TAs and training	No of schools	Type of monitoring
No	12	
Yes	11	Observations (2) Tracking achievement (1) Inclusion tracking (1) SENCO report (1) End of year course evaluation (1)

Teaching Assistants	
Opportunities for sharing knowledge gained through training	Number of respondents
Yes	123 (50.6%)
No	77 (31.1%)
No reply	43 (17.6%)

# **PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

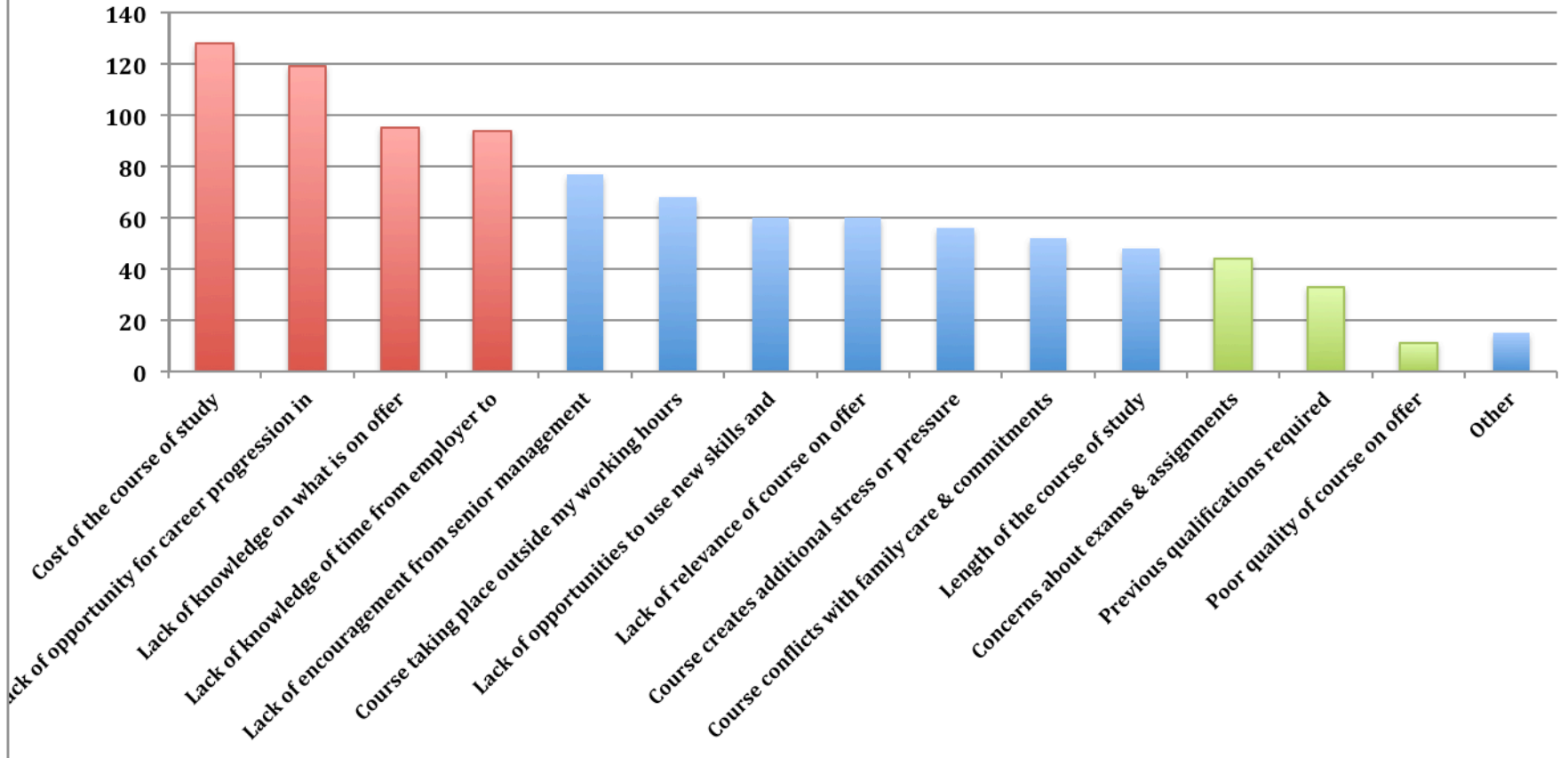
# Perceived barriers to training

Fig. 4.5: Barriers to training according to CPD managers



# Perceived barriers to training

**Fig. 3.13: Barriers to taking up training according to TAs**



# Perceived barriers

## Cover and being released from the classroom

CPD managers	Teaching Assistants
'We need them to do the job at hand. If we keep on sending people out on courses it defeats the whole object of having support workers.' [Head teacher, primary school]	'We are really tied to the classroom, we really are.' [TA, special school]
'The trouble that we have is because we value them and we need them, sending them out onto an external training programme, means that they're not in the classroom.' [Head teacher, primary school]	'This school doesn't allow, doesn't really want you to go out and have a whole day out at doing a course when you could be in here, doing your job, teaching the children you teach.' [TA, junior school]
'How many children it's going to benefit, because sometimes you think well actually they're more valuable doing something else, to be supporting in a class, or is it more valuable for them to take a withdrawal group?' [TA Line Manager, primary school]	'I do think it's taking TAs out of the important role that they do within the school, they're being taken away from that, but there again, teachers go on training courses all the time, and they're on management time and PPA time.' [TA, infants school]

## Motivation, ability, family commitments or cost?

CPD managers	Teaching Assistants
'They don't want to have accredited things, because they don't want to have to put hours in outside of school hours, they're very happy to do things in school hours, but they can't possibly do it out of school hours.' [TA line manager, primary school]	'So it all boils down to cost, I really believe it's down to cost more than anything. And I think now, unless it's an absolute need, the head or whoever's in charge of that, decides there's an absolute need for it, then it's something of a no go.' [TA, infants school]
'There is certainly a level of TA that we use in school and going back a couple of years now, because we've developed them over time, where they would feel out of their depth with some training.' [Head teacher, infants school]	'I think that was available for the teachers, but I think because of timing or finance, the funding, I don't know, it wasn't available to us. So I suppose their need was greater than ours!' [TA, primary school]
'The barriers to try and provide training are obviously their own personal life.' [Head teacher, primary school]	'I think the money tends to stop with the lower people, the people lower down, because I know teachers go on courses all the time.' [TA, secondary school]

# **LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

# Future training considerations

How will training be revised as a result of policy changes?

Impact on school budget	No of respondents
Major adjustments	4 (17.4%)
Little adjustments	11 (47.8%)
No change	2 (8.7%)
Don't know	6 (26.1%)

What future training needs will TAs in your school require?

Training topic	No of respondents
Supporting the needs of SEN pupils	15 (71.4%)
Supporting the needs of diverse pupils	15 (71.4%)
Approaches to assessment	14 (66.7%)
Curriculum	13 (61.9%)
Literacy	12 (57.1%)
Numeracy	11 (52.4%)
Behaviour management	11 (52.4%)
Use of ICT	4 (19.0%)
Consulting with pupils	3 (14.3%)
English as an additional language (EAL)	1 (5.9%)



# Recommendations

- Ensure a clear line of management responsible for planning and implementing TAs' training;
- Ensure that review meetings occur regularly throughout the year and that TAs' training is part of the overall school development plan;
- Match the training the school needs to develop an effective response to what TAs need in relation to their experience, competencies, and professional aspirations;
- Create systematic mechanisms for TAs to share and disseminate the knowledge and expertise gained through training;
- Overcome barriers to training for TAs by making their on-going 'preparedness' a requirement of their professional role which is supported by time and funding in proportion to the professional development of teachers.