

# Advanced Skills Teachers:

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## Summary Report

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# Advanced Skills Teachers: A review of the Workforce

## Introduction

In many western industrialised countries, significant policy pressure has been directed towards greater accountability of teachers in improving the quality of classroom education and student results. In addition, The McKinsey Report (2007) identified the teacher as the most important variable in high performing educational systems. In recognition of the importance of the teacher, a number of international policy initiatives now acknowledge and reward expert teachers (SMHC, 2009). From the Highly Accomplished Teacher in the USA; the Chartered Teacher in Scotland and the Advanced Skills Teacher in Australia and England, what international policies share in common is an understanding that harnessing the skills of expert teachers within the classroom is essential in educational reform (Hopkins, 1996; Ingvarson, 2009). However, despite a policy focus on teacher expertise in England there has been surprisingly little attention paid to the impact and, in particular, the experiences of Advanced Skills Teachers (AST).

Given that the emphasis of the AST role is very much one of 'impact'<sup>1</sup> this is both surprising and revealing. This report presents the findings from a large scale national study of the AST workforce carried out in England in 2010. The report considers the experiences of these expert teachers and explores factors that help and/or hinder them in the facilitation of their role. In light of a new UK Government and growing uncertainty over the future of the AST, the findings from this report contribute to increased public policy debate around both the value of recognising and rewarding teacher expertise and the value of 'expert teacher' identities as a career route for highly accomplished teachers.

## A Bit of Context

The Advanced Skills Teacher grade was introduced into maintained schools in England in 1998 in response to a growing recognition of the need to attract and retain excellent classroom teachers as well as raise student attainment by broadening the skills and knowledge base of schools. The role and requirements of an AST therefore extends beyond that of normal teaching. Alongside a range of additional responsibilities geared towards increasing the quality of teaching and learning in their own schools, there is also a clear expectation that at least 20% of an ASTs time is spent on 'outreach' work in other schools to focus on improving the practice of other teachers.

Prior to the award of the grade of AST, candidates undergo a comprehensive assessment to satisfy a set of standards which are designed to demonstrate and describe 'an excellent classroom teacher' (CfBT, 2004:4). Once assessed and appointed, ASTs move to a pay scale that is comparable to that of management; designed to reflect the expertise and challenges of the role, whilst offering a realistic alternative to the leadership and management route<sup>2</sup>. Despite initial hostility from teaching unions and school principals in England over concerns that the grade would be divisive, Office for Standards in

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<sup>1</sup> Compared to the Highly Accomplished teacher for example, which has a broader focus on teaching and learning.

<sup>2</sup> Salary range for 2010 is £37,461 to £59,950 for ASTs outside of London (TES Connect, July 2010).

Education studies in 2000 and 2003 and a more thorough review undertaken by CfBT in 2004 were all largely encouraging about the overall value of the AST role. However, they also highlighted some concern over its long term value, in terms of expenditure, and raised a number of issues relating to inconsistencies in how some ASTs are managed, deployed and lack opportunities for training to support their own professional development. Research by Berry (2008) and Smith *et al* (1997) suggests that whilst expert teachers should be well remunerated, policies that focus on salary incentives alone are not enough to attract and retain good teachers. To be most effective, expert teachers require a facilitating environment, supportive colleagues and leadership as well as high-quality professional development if they are to remain in the classroom. This view is also supported in the work of Day (2007).

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of the AST in England from the perspective of the AST. This executive summary reports the findings that relate to the motivations and process of assessment in becoming an AST; the management, deployment and support of ASTs, as well as the training opportunities available.

## **Research Methods**

Data was collected using a mixed method research design, through on-line survey and in-depth interviews with ASTs in England. Using a national database of 1,400 ASTs as our sampling frame, ASTs were invited to participate in the study via email. In total, 829 ASTs from across England participated in the online survey, giving an extremely high response rate of 69%. The national survey draws up a detailed and authoritative picture of ASTs. A further 40 follow up in-depth telephone interviews were then carried out.

Of those included in the survey, 75% were female and 25% male. Forty percent of ASTs work in secondary schools; 33% in primary and 7% in special and 'other' schools, for example Sixth Form, Pupil Referral Unit etc. All curriculum subject areas are captured in the survey, with science (12%), English (9.5%) and maths (9%) most frequently represented – this replicates the main subject areas for ASTs in the English secondary sector. Significantly 85% of AST posts are funded by their Local Authority (LA), with the remaining 15% being funded by their employing school.

The online survey includes closed and open-ended questions. Some chi-square tests on certain key variables, like whether training was provided between assessment and starting the role and since becoming an AST, are included in the findings. Direct interviewee quotes are used in the report to highlight key themes in the complex working lives of ASTs. Forty ASTs were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule devised following an analysis of the survey results. Questions address the main topics of the survey, focusing on particular examples of support, impact, changes to their status and views on the policy instrument overall.

Prior to commencing this study ethical clearance was sought from The University of Reading Ethics Committee and all ethical procedures and guidelines were complied with in carrying out this research.

## Key Findings

### 'Becoming' an AST

**Motivation:** Needing a new challenge was the primary motivator in deciding to become an AST for a quarter of ASTs. Other factors were also important including: an opportunity to stay in the classroom (21%) and a desire to share skills (19%). Teachers opting to undertake the AST route discuss having reached a point in their career development where they needed greater challenge and responsibility; yet remaining connected to the classroom as well as their subject were also very important to the type of professional lives teachers wanted. The AST role was thus seen as an important career opportunity offering professional development without the “*sheer administration...of the Senior Management Route (SMT)*”. This commitment to the classroom is clearly evident in AST future career plans. Although 27% of AST plan to move into management in the future, 66% of ASTs intend to remain in an AST role for the foreseeable future.

*“I always wanted to keep attached to my subject...I never thought of becoming a deputy head. This was a new promotional route for teachers who want to stay connected to their subject area”* Female, Maths, Secondary

*“[I really enjoy the role] ...I get the best of both...I am involved in leadership decisions but I am also in the classroom, which is very important to me”* Female, English, Secondary.

**Assessment and preparation:** 60% of ASTs found the assessment process time consuming and, at worst, a frustrating process for a small minority (7%). More than half of the surveyed ASTs however, felt that the level of assessment ‘*was about right*’. Only a quarter of ASTs received any training before starting their role meaning that most felt ill-prepared. Of this group of ASTs who had training between assessment and starting the role, 91.5% had additional training since becoming an AST. Even though a small proportion received training early on, they are nevertheless more likely than those who did not receive prior training to also go on to additional training (Chi-square test of association 31.482(1df) <0.000 significance). As one might expect, how well prepared teachers consider themselves to be is strongly associated with training and support (Chi-square test of association 34.530 (4 df) <0.001 significance].

*“I seem to remember having an hour’s chat with the co-ordinator and that was my introduction...I tried to take it as a positive challenge but, in all honesty, it would have been good to have had some training”* Male, Secondary.

Twenty per cent of teachers found out about the AST role for themselves. The 80% who were directed towards the post were primarily encouraged by their heads, SLT, Ofsted or LA advisors. Proportionally, teachers whose headteacher suggested they become an AST felt the most prepared.

### 'Being' an AST

Eighty-five per cent of respondents enjoy being an AST ‘most of the time’, with more than two fifths stating that the role is what they expected it to be. However, almost all ASTs find the role demanding,

primarily because of large workloads (24%) and the amount of time it requires (33%). Levels and perceptions of support vary but primarily centre on practical issues that relate to the facilitation of out-reach work and appropriate preparation time. A key focus for the work of an AST is the 20% of teaching time spent on out-reach. However, issues around timetabling, lesson cover, as well as attitudes of the head and the SLT to the role, has an important impact on how well this requirement is facilitated.

*“...sometimes I only have one period for outreach and so for me to travel there and then get back for my next lesson means it’s just not possible for me to go and do it”* Female, primary

*“..how well you are supported in your own school and how your colleagues see you will be very much dependant on the head’s attitudes...the first head I had was completely opposed to out-reach so was not supportive. She wanted my focus to be on my own school. My new head is much more behind out-reach and so it is easier”* Male, primary.

As expected, there is a strong association between how much an AST enjoys the role and these levels of support [Chi-Square 53.928 (4df) < 0.001 significance]. Staff who enjoy the role least are more likely to consider giving up the post or leaving teaching altogether. In addition, whilst most ASTs report feeling that their work and skills are appreciated and respected in school, 13% do not; experiencing either direct negativity from colleagues (15%) or simple ignorance as to about the role (15%).

*“...despite explaining to colleagues, some feel I get paid a high, full time wage for doing less teaching than they do”.*

**Deployment and impact:** It is difficult to definitively outline an ASTs role as much of their work is dependent on Local Authority and school priorities. Focus can range from 1:1 mentoring support for a struggling teacher, INSET training provision to departmental or whole school intervention strategies. Interestingly, just over half of ASTs believe their schools are currently allowing them to make the best use of their skills. In addition, a shift in emphasis over recent years has seen far greater focus on schools on special measures:

*“...the job isn’t what it was when I first started as an AST, it’s a lot harder now. I used to go into any school that asked for my support but now it’s just the schools on Special Measures...and it’s about dealing with either poor teaching or poor leadership...it makes it harder because often they don’t want you there, well not at first. It’s just a really challenging environment and I guess it’s that which makes the role harder than it was.”*

A fifth of ASTs do not feel they are currently doing enough out-reach; with 41% stating they would like to do more than they presently do. However based on feedback, teachers are clear they are having an impact, with support of teachers (38%) and the training provision (31%) being their biggest contribution as an AST:

*“...my greatest impact is with NQTs, because they’ve been successful...from the feedback...they stay in the school”* Female, secondary

*“...well, results have gone up, department wise and [when I work with individuals] teaching quality has gone up...from the informal feedback [I get] from teachers”* Female, secondary

*"I think I've had a huge impact, not just in the county but nationally. I'm invited to give workshops in schools all over the country [and] I've had a lot of people come and observe me and I do training with them: deputy heads, new advisors"* Male, secondary

*"...when you get asked to do things more than once, that feels like they value what I do and get a lot out of it. Some of my work comes as a request from people who have spoken to other people so, it's sort of 'word of mouth'. That feels like a way of measuring impact. The things I organise outside of school time; that are voluntary in terms of attendance, they are repeatedly well attended and people are keen to take part. This is informal evidence to show my role as an AST is effective"* Male, secondary

Quantifying this 'impact' however, is clearly problematic given the diverse ways that ASTs are deployed and utilised:

*"I can't generalise [on my impact] because the role is so varied...and it would depend on how you measure these things"* Female, secondary

In terms of the government's policy initiative and the key aims behind the introduction of the grade of AST, almost all teachers agree that the role is achieving what the government intended it to in terms of raising standards and retaining teachers:

*"...all I can say is that I do really think that ASTs are shaping educational policy in the classroom"*

## **Training**

Just over three quarters of ASTs received additional training in the position (76.5%). Of these ASTs, 88.1% indicated it was valuable; selecting either 'very helpful' (45%) or 'quite helpful' (43.1%). Both men and women are equally likely to receive additional training and there was no real difference between training for primary and secondary school ASTs. Local Authority funded ASTs were more likely to have had training opportunities than school funded ASTs (chi square of association 12.645 (2df) <0.002). Of those who are LA funded, 80.1% had additional training compared with 65.1% of school funded ASTs. Having had additional training or not does not seem to affect how demanding ASTs perceive their role.

Not surprisingly the longer an AST had been in the role the more likely they were to have attended training. Training varied in its frequency and provision. The majority of ASTs (40.6%) attended training 6 times a year, either during term time (30.7%) or in the half term teaching break (9.9%). However, there was another sizeable group of ASTs (39.8%) who received training annually (15.8%) or 'a few times a year' (24%). A small group of ASTs (16.5%) attended more regular, but *ad hoc*, training ranging from 'every now and then' (14.6%) to 'every month' (1.9%).

Many ASTs described at length what type of training they had attended, how it was arranged and immediate benefits from this involvement. The most common type of training was provided by Local Authorities for ASTs (35%); followed by school INSET training (26.4%). Other training includes: coaching/mentoring (17.9%), attending annual AST Conference (10.5%), and subject specific training (7.7%).

Most ASTs saw effective training as consisting of a cluster of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, not just one type or event. Isolated workshop training programmes, for instance, have been widely criticised for being too costly with little real benefit. Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues that teachers at one-off training events are usually not involved in designing the content, rarely interact with each other and, while they may learn a new method, lack the depth and support to effectively implement these ideas when they are back in the classroom.

It follows that teachers require support and instruction from expert teachers over extended period of times (Elmore, 2002: 18-19) for new practices to be incorporated into teaching styles and adapted to subject requirements. Equally, a group of ASTs held strong views on the need for more structured and frequent CPD and training that focused on building their AST networks and collegiality while also regularly sharing their best practices and innovative pedagogical approaches – to maintain their professional excellence and the impact and credibility of the role.

*“I’ve been to conferences and they’ve been interesting but I want something subject specific as well.”*

*“I’ve been to one or two AST conferences over the years. They are quite interesting but they tend to be generic. I’d be happy if there was something for the history ASTs to do...where we can get together and do something specific.”*

Survey respondents and interviews indicate that several core features of training are desired. These are: a *focus on content* that deepens and improves the content knowledge of ASTs rather than focusing on generic methods of teaching. Some thought the AST conference was useful only in terms of its generic information and networking but not in specific curriculum and subject matters; *deliberate active learning opportunities* for ASTs to engage with other ASTs, creating new understandings of their role and an AST professional cultural by leading discussions, practice delivery sessions, being observed or observing others (Hawley and Valli, 1999); *coherent and aligned training* with system-based curriculum standards, and assessments (Ingvarson, 1998) and teachers own classroom and/or leadership goals (Porter *et al*, 2004: 133).

Structural elements of training that need to be addressed include: providing *longer duration activities* that bring together some of these core features of content-specific focus, active learning and expert teachers’ experiences and relationships; offer a *varied form of training* that moves away from over reliance on workshops and annual conferences only, such as action learning research groups across County’s or subject mentoring and networking programmes; consider the *dynamics of participation* and how expert teachers can learn and teacher most in groups of teachers from same professional culture (primary or secondary) or subject compared to individual teachers from multiple locations.

Just over 20% of ASTs surveyed did not receive any training either between assessment and starting the role or after. Over a fifth of ASTs (22.2%) did not attend any additional training since becoming an AST, primarily because it was not offered or available (49.2%). Others viewed the training scheduled as inappropriate to their needs (24.4%) or too difficult to find the time to attend (20.7%). Of these ASTs, the vast majority (76.1%) imagined it would be useful for their role.

CPD for teachers covers all activities, such as training, that enhance their work and raise the professional standards of teaching, student learning and overall school achievement. The Training and Development

Agency for Schools (TDA) Professional Standards for ASTs in England (2007: 4) clearly states the important contribution ASTs make to other teachers training and CPD:

*“ASTs provide models of excellence and innovative teaching and use their skills to enhance teaching and learning by undertaking school improvement activities and CPD for other teachers. They carry out developmental work across a range of workplaces and draw on the experiences they gain elsewhere to improve practice in their own and other schools.”*

While the survey and interview respondents largely agreed with TDAs premise and believed they fulfilled these responsibilities, the professional standards and contractual entitlement to “effective, relevant and professional development throughout their careers” (TDA, 2007: 3) was seen as much less structured and rigorously adhered to. This meant many ASTs enjoyed supporting other teachers but felt their own training and professional development was limited unless they created opportunities for themselves.

Although ASTs have successfully completed the external assessment process, not all felt suitably ‘prepared’ or ‘trained’ to mentor adult colleagues. Different skill sets are required for different learning relationships. Being a role model for one teacher at a special measures school differs from facilitating a curriculum workshop for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) organised by a Local Authority. Some ASTs talked of a ‘taken-for-grantedness’, by Headteachers and Local Authorities, that being an expert teacher implied training was not as necessary and that expertise already featured in all aspects of their teaching life.

*“(We need) more courses where we can meet other ASTs and look into what is available and what models are out there in other schools. I feel very much as if we are given the title and (...) off you go because you are an AST and supposed to know what exactly you are doing.” Female, Maths, Secondary*

*“I thought there might be some training and there hasn’t been. It makes me laugh because I am supposed to know everything and I’ve had no official training on classroom observation. I’ve done some work on coaching and mentoring. But nothing for me – only helping others.”*

*“I do all the delivering (of training). I would love some input and be delivered to. I would love to watch more experienced colleagues and the range of skills they have. And educating masses, large audiences. Most of it comes from gut feeling at this point. There should be standardised training that allows you to do a layer of development before you start. I haven’t had that as an AST.”*

## **Support in the role**

For many interviewees support from their Local Authority had *without a doubt* continued beyond their initial phase of becoming an AST. For some, support was seen as providing a range of opportunities for ASTs to be involved in and to lead on such as extracurricular activities and joint initiatives involving a cross-section of leadership teams. The AST grade has faced numerous challenges and various re-launches by successive Labour Education Ministers. One difficulty centres on the funding configuration – either Local Authority funded or school funded – with the latter having few incentives for the best teachers to be sent to other schools one day a week so as to share their expertise. There was significant divergence in ASTs views on the level and type of support they received within their school, among colleagues and from the LA. However, some recurrent themes did arise:



**Local Authority:** The role of the LA is important for the efficacy of good AST functioning. Management of an AST relates to feedback and facilitation of deployment as well as general opportunities to meet with co-ordinators. Almost three quarters of respondents report that they are managed 'very well' or 'quite well' by their local authority coordinators. Teachers that have been ASTs for more than 5 years feel particularly well supported.

*"Oh yes my coordinator is brilliant. I mean really one of the best coordinators around. There's nothing we don't want for. He's the best man in the borough."* Female, Secondary.

However, 21.5% of ASTs do not feel well managed by their LA co-ordinators. How well an AST is managed by their LA co-ordinator is important and is significantly associated with how supported generally an AST feels [Chi-square 22.296 (8df) <0.05 significance].

**Feedback:** Feedback to ASTs is not systematic and varies from performance management; evaluation sheets; self-evaluation to informal feedback based on conversations. In this research 70% of AST get some form of feedback whilst 30% receive none. Headteachers are responsible for 25% of the feedback received, SLT and heads of departments account for 22.5% and LA coordinators 39% of feedback to ASTs. Of those ASTs who receive no feedback, 87% state they would find it helpful to have some.

*"I do get feedback ... from my line manager and outreach schools and from the performance management of my role."* Male, Secondary.

*"Well I suppose I do... by what teachers and students say."* Male, Primary.

It is interesting that while 61% of headteachers suggested the AST role to teachers, only a quarter are a source of feedback for ASTs:

*"Yes and no in terms of support. Heads are increasingly becoming business people and increasingly that don't have an academic/teaching-pedagogical background and they may not necessarily provide the right kind of support. I would like them to be facilitators—meeting with us from time-to-time, finding out what our projects are, making sure we have enough time available"* Female, Primary.

**Feeling Part of a Team:** As the AST role is so varied, an AST may have some difficulty in locating themselves in the school system and feel included as part of the school team. In this research a reassuring 68% of ASTs do feel part of a team, however 30% do not. Of those ASTs who do not feel part of a team, ASTs with between 7-10 years of teaching experience and who have been ASTs for 2-3 years are proportionally less likely to feel part of a team. Feeling part of a team is strongly associated with how well supported an AST feels [chi-square 99.506 (4df) <0.001 significance]

*It's a great job but being on your own as an AST takes some getting used to and it's been quite difficult".* Female, Secondary

**Advanced Skills Teachers planning to leave the role:** Only a small minority, some 7% of teachers surveyed, plan to cease being an AST or leave teaching altogether, largely because they feel unsupported, stressed or disillusioned.

*"I'm ambitious and want to get on. I love teaching but I need to move on."* Female, Secondary.

*"It's not really my bag the way it's set up and if I leave, that's okay too."* Male, Secondary.

*"Input has kind of dried up now. I did an MA and feel, frustrated I suppose, because no one delivers to us."* Female, Secondary.

*"Before I came here I was an AST and everything worked well but now I've just got to leave. I can't talk about it. I'm just not supported. The head assured me of how it would work but he hasn't been visible at all. I'm going for an assistant headship, in a different school. I've had enough of being an AST."* Female, Secondary.

## **Having Advanced Skills Teacher Status**

Alternatives to the title of 'Advanced Skills Teacher', for example, 'highly accomplished teacher'; 'experienced teacher' or 'expert teacher' were preferable to almost 75% of ASTs. However, over half the teachers agreed that the title sums up well their level of expertise. From interviews it is apparent that the award of advanced skills teacher status confers a sense of professional recognition that is important to teachers, contributing significantly to their sense of professional self esteem and well being:

*"I got through the assessment process so, I do feel recognised' male, primary ,...you feel you have status, you've got it on paper and they can't take that away from you. There is some pressure that comes with it but, in the end, you've earned it" female, secondary*

*"I feel more respected, because of my role"* Female, secondary

*"...you are not in the same position as a deputy or assistant head but you have a range of knowledge and expertise so, yeah, your colleagues hold you with a certain amount of esteem"* Male, secondary

*"...It's nice to be recognised, that I take my job seriously"* Female, primary

*"...I feel recognised and rewarded. Outside of my school I get quite a bit of kudos before I meet anyone. It gives you a head start, which is good. I don't feel I have to prove myself and people trust my word a little bit more"* Female, secondary

*"...my status has grown and I feel good for it' female, secondary ,I know that the parents of my kids like the fact I am an AST, they feel that their children are being taught by an expert and they seem to respect me for it"* Male, primary.

The AST route can clearly be observed to be achieving one of the government's key aims in that these highly skilled teachers remain in the classroom. The ASTs in this research were adamant about their need for career challenges and for professional development. It is highly probable therefore, that without this viable alternative to leadership and management these accomplished teachers may well have been lost from the classroom.

## Discussion

ASTs, by definition, are clearly talented teachers; highly motivated and committed to teaching who, for the large part, enjoy the challenges of being an AST. However, in undertaking the Advanced Teacher role, issues which impact significantly on how well an AST is deployed link importantly to an AST's sense of support and efficacy. For example, inconsistency in terms of what tasks an AST is asked to undertake and how well these are facilitated within school pose particular problems and frustrations. The definition and expectation of the role is clearly highly variable and dependent, in large part, on school and LA priorities as well as the attitudes of the headteacher and SLT.

Recent OECD Country Background Reports note that teacher CPD is "often fragmented, unrelated to teaching practice, and lacking in intensity and follow-up" (2005: 122). The overall conclusion – whether a country is rich or poor – is that there is a "lack of sufficient system support and infrastructure to ensure continuity, follow-up and feedback to teachers." The role of the AST, then, offers real advantages in not only enhancing the quality of teaching of those they work with but also provide opportunities for feedback on how teachers are applying their new practices, adapting their ideas into classroom contexts or more general enquiries about using new material or curriculum examples.

The findings on AST training collaborate much of the General Teaching Council for England's (2008: 19) current policy context for professional development as needing to be accessible, effective, relevant and sustained. Our research recommends that the need to provide a sustained and clear system for training and professional development aligned with support strategies is upon us. Segmented funding arrangements and systems in support and training lead to disconnected teaching and learning from actual school settings and teachers working conditions. Multiple agencies, teachers and unions alike agreed that improvement programmes with key training goals and clear roles are critical. But this consensus lacks a specific national implementation plan for the support of ASTs professional development. Motivators to become an AST like experiencing a new challenge can be enhanced with a clear professional programme of advancement and training.

Similarly, feedback for an AST is an essential part of the role because it provides an important opportunity to reflect on practice as well as gain a sense of how well an AST is doing. Feeling well managed and having appropriate training is also important as a lack of these can have a detrimental effect on both the workplace satisfaction of an AST and how supported they feel. In addition

ASTs do, however, appear to demonstrate high levels of resilience in that, despite the many challenges, most enjoy the role and feel they are having impact. Whilst there are inconsistencies in terms of deployment, feedback, training and management, from interviews it is clear that teachers enjoy the heightened sense of professional status and recognition that the award of AST confers. Most AST agree that the role is addressing the policy focus underpinning the introduction of the grade and they are indeed raising standards in teaching and learning. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the AST role is also clearly keeping '*excellent classroom teachers*' in the classroom. Despite this and the high level of satisfaction in the role, the number of accredited expert classroom teachers has barely changed over the past five years. From 2005 to 2010 the number has increased by only 310 – from 3,780 ASTs in 2005 to 4,090 ASTs in 2010.

## Recommendations

From the analysis of our research findings we make the following recommendations:

1. To have training available between assessment and commencing the AST role to ensure adequate preparation.
2. To have systematic support for an AST as a structural condition of employing an AST, with focused feedback on personal performance. Such support is likely to have a positive impact on an ASTs professional development as well as how well the role is understood and consequently facilitated.
3. Provide greater opportunities to meet other ASTs, engage in collective research projects and work on meaningful long-term programmes.
4. To enhance local authority AST coordination and support so that standards are consistent nationally.
5. To provide training and support appropriate to the level of expertise so that ASTs have access to and opportunities for, on-going professional development.
6. Maintain and extend funding to support the continuation of the AST grade.
7. Embed ASTs into wider learning environments, such as parents, Governors, senior leadership teams, teaching institutions, professional associations and subject groups, schools and Local Authorities.
8. Develop understandings of the reasons ASTs enjoy their role and feel, based on various evidence and anecdotal information, that they are making a real impact on the teaching practices of those they support.
9. Continue to recognise the importance of offering models of extended professional development that offer viable alternatives to leadership and management. Recognising and valuing the role of teachers in raising standards in teaching and learning is important in supporting teacher retention as it allows highly accomplished teachers to remain in the classroom.
10. With funding cuts across educational budgets at Local Authorities, questions remain as to whether AST roles will continue in the same form and current number. Some interviewees expressed concerns about the lack of certainty about their role's funding and had heard rumours from school consultants and improvement officers that their jobs were likely to be cut. For numbers of ASTs to remain stable and to increase, we recommend the Coalition government confirm their support for the role and for Local Authorities to outline where the ASTs role fit within current 'efficiency savings'.

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