Education briefing note

September 2017

Scope and terms of reference for a Teaching Assistant Career Progression Board

Briefing note by Phil Hodgson, Head of Education (interim)

Context

1. In response to a recognised need for support and structure for teaching assistants and other learning support staff in schools and settings, it is proposed that a ‘Teaching Assistant Career Progression Board’ is established.

2. In different organisations, different terms are used for those classroom-based staff who work with teachers to support the learning of children and young people, including ‘teaching assistant’, ‘learning support worker’, ‘classroom support assistant’, ‘learning mentor’ etc. This document will use the term ‘teaching assistant’ (TA) only, but will be applicable across this section of the workforce.

3. The proposed Board would consider progression matters relating to all persons involved in work of this kind.

Proposed scope and terms of reference for a Teaching Assistant Career Progression Board

4. It is proposed that a Progression Board is set up to look at particular issues for those establishing their careers as TAs, and then progressing either in this role or potentially to the role of teacher.

5. The Board would comprise a group of key individuals drawn from the local authority, unions, head teachers and professionals from across the sector, including at least one experienced TA and at least one TA recently entered to the profession. Final membership will be determined in consultation with head teachers, trade unions and teaching assistants.

6. It is proposed that the Board is chaired by a representative of the County Council.

7. The Board would meet periodically to discuss emerging priorities relating to the TA role, and may consider launching a series of initiatives to promote the effective deployment of TAs. The Board would be committed to continuously looking to expand opportunities for progression for those working in this field, and would consider engaging with enthusiastic people to develop and implement ideas and recommendations.
8. There is a collective commitment that the Progression Board will achieve the following key objectives:
   - to establish, through a training needs audit, a clear understanding of the exact training requirements of County Durham’s teaching assistants;
   - to create connections across multiple disciplines, including government and trade unions that will help determine and clarify the most appropriate progression opportunities for TAs;
   - to find solutions through tailored opportunities, training and other suitable support with a focus on those staff that could potentially be financially disadvantaged;
   - to identify and explore early solutions which would address the business needs of schools and also provide opportunities within the new framework with the aim of also mitigating the potential financial loss within the two year period;
   - to promote employment opportunities and career progression for TAs entering or engaged in the role who could develop as teachers, potentially allowing a platform for TAs in this position to network with senior professionals to gain further insight/experience, or to start mentoring partnerships;
   - to highlight different levels of increasing responsibility of TAs in a fast-moving sector, and to signpost appropriate forms of professional development support suitable for each level.
   - to secure high standards in terms of professional values and practice, knowledge, understanding and skills across the TA workforce by all of the above.

9. The progress towards these objectives, including the number of teaching assistants moved out of the group that are financially disadvantaged by the review of terms and conditions, will be reported quarterly to the County Council’s CYPS senior management team.

10. Terms of reference in addition to purpose, as outlined above (paragraph 8), will need to include:
    - Responsibilities of members including organisation of meetings, reporting back and generating items for agendas;
    - Frequency of meetings: this could be termly, to begin with, but priorities may indicate that more frequent meetings are desirable;
    - Membership (while an indicative membership is mentioned in paragraph 5, above, this would be confirmed);
    - Communicating outcomes, including setting up and managing a web-space.

Conclusion
11. A timeframe for establishing a Progression Board is not determined, but lead-in time would be modest and a Board will be set up and running in October 2017.