Key themes from the TA Progression Board meetings

The planning for the Teaching Assistant Progression Board began on 31 October 2017 at a meeting chaired by Margaret Whellans, Corporate Director Children and Young People’s Services and attended by representatives from Unison and GMB, four Teaching Assistant representatives, the Head of Education and representatives from Human Resources.

This meeting acknowledged the potential of the Board, recognising that there were few, if any, similar forums regionally or nationally, that saw unions, practitioners and local authorities working so closely together with the key objectives of:

- finding solutions through tailored opportunities, training or other suitable support in order to, over time, reduce the number of those financially disadvantaged by the review of terms and conditions;
- establishing, through a training needs audit, a clear understanding of the exact training requirements of teaching assistants, with a commitment to working together to support progression throughout the sector.

It was agreed initially that Board meetings would take place monthly and the first meeting was scheduled to take place on 15 November. 7 further meetings have taken place.

Head teacher representatives from a primary, a secondary and a special school were identified by the Board and invited to attend meetings, which they have done. This has provided a really valuable perspective and allowed a rounded focus on best practice. Across a number of meetings, best practice examples have been shared and discussed, and materials have begun to be collated for use in future training and for distribution at head teacher briefings and similar forums.

Another very valuable contribution to the discussion of best practice was made by Unison’s Head of Education, Jon Richards, who was invited to attend the Board in January 2018. Jon provided an insight into professional development opportunities nationally and some international evidence. Of the four areas in the UK that Jon has had particular engagement with, the University of Durham is one, and the local authority is working closely with the University and will continue its commitment to support research into the effectiveness of best practice. Unison is sponsoring two projects into the effective use of teaching assistants and the Board will make sure that the findings of these are shared in Durham.

Jon has offered to come back to Durham and take part in a training event for head teachers that explores the effective use of teaching assistants in all contexts, including their part in the support for pupils with SEND. This event is proposed for the summer term and the local authority is seeking to engage Professor Rob Coe and others from Durham University to speak and share ongoing research findings.

The Board has been an opportunity to raise concerns around key themes. Key themes have included:

- Mitigation of losses for TAs
- Skills Mapping
- Training Needs
- Training Budgets / Funding
- Inclusion of TAs in School CPD
- Effective use of TAs / HLTAs
• Sharing Good Practice
• Supporting Good Outcomes for Young People
• Staff Wellbeing

Trade Unions and HR continue to work together with schools regarding any concerns.

Many Head Teachers have agreed to consider split contracts to support TAs with a view to mitigate against predicted loss whilst also being of benefit to the school.

Future plans will see the first round of HLTA training made available, and the full training offer for teaching assistants will be advertised early in the New Year.

It is hoped this update is helpful and further updates will be provided as and when agreed through the Progression Board.