# Workforce Re-modelling and pastoral care in schools: a diversification of roles or a de-professionalisation of functions?

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## Abstract

Recent years have seen dramatic change in the composition of the workforce of schools in England and Wales. Policy initiatives associated with inclusion, tackling teacher workloads and the reformation and integration of children and young people’s services have resulted in a proliferation and diversification of work roles in schools with the creation of new ‘associate professional’ roles such as ‘Higher Level Teaching Assistants’, ‘cover supervisors’, ‘learning mentors’ and ‘parent support advisors’. The ‘extended schools agenda’ has also seen groups previously seen as in the social care domain (for example, counsellors, mental health workers, and social workers) brought into schools. In a context of modernisation and workforce remodelling there has also been a blurring of boundaries between previously distinct roles.

This paper provides an analysis of these developments and considers the implications for notions of expertise and professionalism in the children and young people’s workforce and for pastoral care in schools in particular. Professional development and accreditation for these roles, present a mixed picture in which Foundation Degrees have an important part to play, but for which there is equivocal government support. The use of ‘professional standards’ premised on a model of competence deriving from work-based learning raises important questions about the nature of professional expertise in professional practice relating to pastoral issues.

At the same time as it is proposed to raise the status of teaching to ‘Masters’ level, the neediest and most problematic children in schools are increasingly likely to be working with lower paid, lower status staff who may have no formally recognised qualifications. The implications of this for the pastoral care function in schools are explored.

## Background and context

The presence of staff supporting teachers and learners in schools in England and Wales has a long history. The first reference to support staff consistently assisting primary class teachers was in the Plowden Report forty years ago (Aylen 2007). In recent years the number of these ‘additional staff’ has grown significantly. In the school workforce in England and Wales in 2007, teacher numbers had reached 434,900 (in Local Authority maintained schools) but the number of Teaching Assistants was 175,700 full time equivalent (f.t.e.) i.e. across the maintained school sector as a whole there was a ratio of 1 TA for every 2.5 teachers . This compares with 60,600 TAs, a ratio of 1 TA to every 6.6 teachers in 1997 (DfES 2007).

There is consensus (see for example Goddard et al (2007) that a number of policy factors have been pivotal in the development of the role of adults other than teachers in schools. The policy of inclusion initiated in the DfEE Green Paper “Excellence for All Children” (DfEE 1997) gave rise to a growing number of adults in classrooms paid to support individual learners. More recently, the 'School Teachers' Review Body (2001 ) recognised teacher stress and workloads and recommended increasing use of additional adults to support teachers. Similarly, in the concern to raise standards of attainment support staff has been seen as a vital professional resource for meeting objectives (DfES 2003; DfES 2004). Estelle Morris for example, then Secretary of State for Education announced that "schools of the future would be rich in trained adults available to support learning to new higher standards" (Morris 2001). These different pressures have all resulted in a growth in numbers of support staff in school and also in the development of their role to include more pedagogical functions (Edmond 2008)

The advent of the Every Child Matters policy agenda (DfES 2003) has ushered in radical changes to the children’s workforce in terms of both structure and practice which have built on these developments. The conception of a “children and young people’s workforce” fundamental to the ECM agenda, results in a reconceptualising of the pastoral care function of schools as part of what might be termed a wider ‘social’ care function. This has provided the context for the creation of new job roles to support the meeting of the five ECM outcomes in and out of schools and an increase in the phenomenon of “non-teachers moving into roles traditionally undertaken by teachers” (Andrews 2006). This paper argues that this is particularly apparent in relation to pastoral care functions and critiques the model of ‘professionalisation’ of staff contributing to this function in schools.

## Development and Diversification of Roles in Schools

It has been argued that “Pastoral care is not something set apart from the daily work of the teacher. It is that element of the teaching process which centres around the personality of the pupil and the forces of his (sic) environment which either facilitate or impede the development of intellectual and social skills and foster or retard emotional stability.” (Hamblin 1978)

This quotation communicates a view of pastoral care as not so much an activity separate from, or peripheral to, the teaching of the curriculum but as integral to teaching practice which recognises that intellectual and social development cannot be accomplished without taking account of both internal forces and external factors. In this conception, the learner is construed as a ‘whole person’ and not segmented for the purposes of instruction, care and discipline as has sometimes been the case in the organisation of secondary schools (Power 1996). This ‘segmentation’ can be seen as, at least in part, a result of the temptation to exclude children and young people or pass problems off to others which has long been recognised and arguably has intensified with the advent of published league tables and an overemphasis on competition between local schools (Best 2007). It is pertinent to ask then, whether the creation of new roles in schools, occupied by new categories of staff, contributes to or challenges this dynamic of segmentation of functions.

The development and diversification of roles in schools is part of the current government’s ‘modernisation’ agenda. Within the fields of health, social care and education, and public services more generally, there has been a reappraisal of roles and responsibilities. As Edmond and Price (2007) have argued, within health and education in particular, this is leading to a weakening of the traditional job boundaries which have previously defined the work of support staff. This redefinition of jobs is rapidly becoming the cornerstone of the modernisation and remodelling of the workforce (Butt and Lance 2005).

This theme of ‘modernisation’ is well illustrated by the question “how many support staff have the talent and drive to ramp up their contribution to learning but are prevented from doing so by old-fashioned demarcations and working practices?” (Miliband 2003). This modernisation project is made explicit in the National Agreement and subsequent documentation (Ofsted 2004; Ofsted 2005) and the development and diversification of roles was signalled when the Department for Education and Skills issued a consultation paper entitled ‘Developing the role of school support staff’ (DfES 2002). This paper set out a range of activities and proposals to be taken forward in relation to school support staff and notably proposed three broad "career progression routes" for school support staff; the “pedagogical route” for teaching assistants and others working to support the learning of children (DfES 2002: 27) the “administrative and organisation route” and the “behaviour and guidance route” for those staff with pastoral and guidance roles such as ‘learning mentors’

The significance of these different ‘routes’ is that they are premised on both segmentation between and continuity within these functions. Within the ‘routes’ there is the idea of progression to professional status for people working in such roles and by extension the notion of intermediate or ‘associate’ professional roles. This model of the ‘associate-professional’ contributing to a ‘pedagogical team’ is apparently modelled on medical teams, as can be seen in “the school team is now as diverse and flexible as the best multi-disciplinary teams found in any leading profession, including medicine”(DfES, 2004b:109). This idea of ‘pedagogical teams’ is one that started to emerge in the literature from the early 1990s onwards (see for example Thomas, 1991, Thomas 1992)and which is consistent with the idea of diversification of roles and ‘specialisms’ within teams of school staff. The creation of such teams in schools was consolidated in the ‘National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload’ signed by the Government, employers and school workforce unions on 15th January 2003 (ATL, DfES et al. 2003). This sets out plans to remodel the school workforce and free teachers “from the shackles of excessive and inappropriate workload” (ATL et al 2003: 1).

What this has meant in practice is a growth not just in the numbers of TAs and other support staff but a development of their pedagogical role. TAs, for example, have seen the pedagogical dimension of their role continue to grow as they have been co-opted to support the implementation of government policy. TAs have had a key part to play in the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies although this contribution, it has been argued (see Hancock and Eyres, 2004) has gone largely unacknowledged. Hancock and Eyres’ evidence (Ibid) indicates that TAs are providing 'remedial' support for up to 25% of children in English primary schools and that they provide an important contribution to the functioning of the Strategies. TAs can now provide cover for teacher’s Planning Preparation and Assessment time and in this context TAs have seen the range of activities associated with their role grow to include assisting the teacher with the delivery of the curriculum, in particular an increase in the time spent working with groups and individual children and in some cases whole classes, as well as, for some, the management of teams of TAs (DfES 2002:44).

This taking on of broad pedagogical functions has also included specific pastoral functions, TAs run “nurture groups” in schools (see for example Bailey, 2007)or otherwise take on specifically ‘emotional support’ roles such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (Teacher’s TV 2008) or are given responsibility for forging links between parents and school (see for example Logan and Feiler, 2006).

In addition to teaching assistants taking on these functions as part of their role, specific roles such as that of ‘ Learning Mentors’ and ‘Parent Support Advisors’ have been created. ‘Learning mentors’ were introduced in 1999 through Excellence in Cities (EiC), a government programme seeking to improve standards and achievement in schools. They were a key element of EiC and they worked with pupils who were experiencing barriers to learning. They helped to identify the barriers and to construct strategies to overcome them. Ofsted found that ‘the most successful and popular of EIC strands is learning mentors. Learning mentor provision is now established as a mainstream option for all schools (Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) 2003; Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) 2004).

The new role of Parent Support Adviser (PSA) was announced in the Chancellor’s pre budget report, Support for Parents: the Best Start for Children (HM Treasury and DfES, 2005) This document places PSAs within the governments’ strategy to improve the life chances of children and young people and to deliver equality of opportunity (Lindsay, Band et al. 2007).

There is clearly overlap and blurring of functions between these various roles and it is difficult to interpret DfES statistical information about support staff when many teaching assistants may be providing the functions of learning mentors or parental support advisors but learning mentors (and we can assume PSAs) as a category of staff are included in the category “other education support staff”. The table below shows how the number of teaching assistants and ‘other education support staff’ has grown in schools in the 1997-2007 period.

Table 1 here

Workforce modernisation and remodelling in schools, has, as we can see, resulted in a massive influx of new staff undertaking new roles, with a particular emphasis on pastoral aspects and this raises questions about the professional development, accreditation and status of these workers in school and their qualifications for the roles they undertake.

## Professional Development, Accreditation and Professionalisation in the children and young people’s workforce.

In much of the children and young people’s workforce the ‘professionalisation’ of roles has been associated with professional development, qualification requirements and link to graduate status. Foundation Degrees introduced in 2002 as an intermediate sub-degree level qualification designed for the professional development of ‘higher technician’ and ‘associate professional’ roles, have had a key role to play (Edmond, Hiller et al. 2007). In the case of workers in Early Years Childcare and Education the achievement of a ‘Surestart’ endorsed Foundation Degree has been a condition of gaining ‘Senior Practitioner’ status and more recently, the government’s response to the consultation about the Children’s Workforce Strategy document has been to adopt a new “Early Years Professional” status which requires graduate status (Miller 2008). Youth workers have seen professional endorsement by the National Youth Agency move from requiring an HE level 2 award (Dip HE or Foundation Degree) to requiring a Honours Degree (NYA, 2007). Similarly, the CWDC endorsed “Working with Young People and young people’s services” Foundation Degree is both a generic professional development programme for a range of emerging and developing associate professional roles (learning mentors, educational welfare officers,) and one of a range of required professional development programmes from which Connexions service providers may choose to ensure Personal Advisers have ‘qualified professional’ status. Current proposals (DCSF 2008)indicate a move towards graduate professional status across the range of youth workforce roles which parallels the roll out of the ‘Early Years Professional Status’.

However, the picture is far from uniform with the ‘professional status’ of some roles quite explicitly independent of a higher education award. Whereas the accreditation (and ‘professionalisation’) of Early Years practitioners (CWDC 2006) and Youth Workers has been explicitly linked to graduate status, the status of HLTA is dependent on meeting competence based “professional standards” not linked to higher education (Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) 2008). Gaining HLTA status is premised on the assumption that all the ‘professional’ knowledge TAs may require in this role can be acquired ‘on the job’ and the status of HLTA is described as independent of any qualification. In an evaluation of the HLTA training and assessment programme, the programme was described as “designed to enable candidates to meet the Professional Standards, equating to **a status, rather than a qualification”** (authors’ emphasis).(Pye Tait Ltd 2006)

“Training for HLTA status is not prescribed and is flexible, recognising that some support staff are closer to meeting the HLTA standards than others. Those who are already working at the level of the standards may be able to progress immediately to preparation for assessment.”   
(Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) 2006)

This validation of prior experience as preparation and de facto ‘qualification’ for taking on of ‘professional’ roles is also a feature of the employment of learning mentors and Parent School Advisors. A recent study of learning mentors (Roper Marshall 2006) reported that the majority (20 out of 25) came from a school background but that preparation for the role appeared to be limited and specific training (for example related to visiting children in their homes) lacking. A similar picture emerges from a much larger study of Parent Support Advisors which found that many of the PSAs had been teaching assistants or learning mentors but many felt under-prepared for, and under- supported in, their new role (Lindsay, Band et al. 2007:16-20).

There is no national requirement for support staff to have a qualification. Although the TDA have created a career development framework designed to provide support staff with information about the training and qualifications available and have endorsed ‘occupational’ and ‘professional’ standards to form the basis of a range of vocational qualifications, these have had relatively little penetration in schools (Ofsted 2008:18).

Evaluations of the effectiveness of these roles emphasise the nature of relationships with children, their parents, teachers and other professionals. It can be argued that life experience and shared background with children and parents emerge as significant factors in the development of successful relationships with these groups (see for example, Lindsay, Cullen et al.2008; Davies and Thurston 2005; Rose and Doveston 2008) but the evidence is that training and qualification for roles is not given a high priority. A recent Ofsted survey of the deployment , training and development of the wider school workforce concluded that “access to training continued to rely on the extent to which individual members of staff identified and requested professional development for themselves” (OfSTED 2008:18) .

The absence of a qualification requirement for these roles has a number of consequences for the ‘professionalisation’ of these roles. There is evidence that it can limit relationships with teachers and other professionals. Close study of relationships between teaching assistants running nurture groups and teachers (see for example Bayley 2007) show how differential status precludes inter-professional dialogue and joint decision making. In the case of Parent Support Advisors their capacity to advocate for children and parents was found to be undermined by status differentials and “ensuring PSAs have sufficient status within, or independence from, schools to be able to advocate for parents where necessary;” was identified as an issue (Lindsay, Cullen et al. 2008).

Another consequence is the impact on progression opportunities. The consultation on developing the role of school support staff (DfES 2002) proposed a “pedagogical progression route” in which HLTA status would provide a potential route to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (Pye Tait Ltd 2006) and a “behaviour and guidance progression route” that similarly would provide “opportunities for progression within support services such as Connexions or the Education Welfare Service” (DfES 2002:28). In practice the distinction between ‘professional status’ and qualification in terms of HLTA and these other roles has meant that there is no such clear progression route.

## Diversification of roles or de-professionalisation of functions? The future of Pastoral Care in schools

The picture that emerges from studies of current practice is one of diversification of roles in schools with much of the growth in the wider school workforce concerned with addressing pastoral care issues consistent with to the kind of segmentation referred to earlier. According to OfSTED (2008), the substantial expansion of the wider workforce at all levels is allowing schools to provide more care, guidance and support for pupils and is also enabling teachers’ time to be focused more directly on teaching and learning. In this context, the TDA discourse of ‘professionalisation’ associated with this segmentation of functions within schools is one of competence and standards. The original intention that HLTA status should correspond to National Qualifications level 4 (first year of undergraduate study) (Woodward and Peart 2005)has been fudged by the notion of ‘equivalence’ and undermined by the distinction between status and qualification.

In other sections of the children and young people’s workforce, ‘professionalisation’ has been linked explicitly to rising levels of qualification and parity (at least in qualification terms) with teachers but in schools, it could be argued that a more accurate representation of what is happening is a ‘de-professionalisation’ of the pastoral care function. The ‘professional status’ of HLTA standards is related to their role in support of teaching and learning rather than any pastoral role they may take on and is based on the principle that teachers must have responsibility for ensuring high standards of teaching and learning. Head teachers and teachers need to be satisfied about the skills, expertise and experience of the HLTA before delegating teaching activities(Pye Tait Ltd 2006) but nothing is said about similar requirements for the delegation of pastoral care activities. In the policy discourse we see pastoral care separated from teaching and learning and becoming an area of activity teachers do not have time for if they are to concentrate on teaching and learning. The notion of a limit to the teacher’s responsibility for pastoral care is explicit in the professional standards which include “Know how to identify and support children and young people whose progress, development or well-being is affected by changes or difficulties in their personal circumstances, and when to refer them to colleagues for specialist support” (TDA 2007). What are we to make of the absence of any requirements for qualification (competence based or otherwise) for support staff who are increasingly providing this ‘specialist support’ in schools?

In the 1998 Green Paper, the Government set out their vision for the modernisation of the teaching force with the development of what they called a ‘new professionalism’(DfEE. 1998) which Furlong has argued marks the final completion of a 30 year shift from the ‘individualised professionalism’ of the past to new forms of ‘managed’ and ‘networked’ professionalism(Furlong 2005). A common thread tying ‘new professionalisms’ in education and other areas together , is a shift of power away from the professions to a situation in which “professionalism may be interpreted as what is effectively a representation of a service level agreement, imposed from above” (Evans 2007) undermining one of the defining characteristic of professionalisation i.e. autonomy.

We would argue that workforce remodelling and modernisation can be seen as resulting in a further development of this ‘new professionalism’ in which we can interpret the absence of qualification requirements for new pastoral ‘professional’ roles as informed by a paradigm of professional formation whose deep structure is what Bernstein called ‘trainability’(Bernstein 2000). ‘Trainability’ restricts access to those elaborated forms of academic study that would equip aspiring professionals to become more critically reflexive about their formation and their practice. It has been proposed that this paradigm has informed the development of teacher training (Beck page 136). We see it reach its logical conclusion in the new ‘professional’ roles discussed here.

Both the TDA and the CWDC are claiming these new roles as falling within their remit. Thus, the recent Sector qualifications strategy for schools support staff (TDA 2008) includes in occupations covered, “pupil support roles” (including learning mentors, behaviour mentors and parent support advisors) and “learning support roles” (including teaching assistants and higher level teaching assistants). The CWDC also includes Learning Mentors, Education Welfare Officers and Connexions Personal Advisers within its areas of work. It is to be hoped that in resolving this overlap in responsibilities these respective bodies will consider and address the segmentation of functions emerging in schools and the professional development and support needs of these workers. It is clear that committed individuals in a range of roles are making a very real and positive difference to children, young people and their families. Nevertheless, if the creation of these roles is to lead to a real enhancement of pastoral care integrated into the work of schools and not simply be a relegating of pastoral care to a marginal support function the professionalism of the roles needs to be acknowledged and promoted. Pastoral care workers need to be appropriately empowered in their professional roles within integrated professional teams in schools by quality professional development and supervision.

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Table 1

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1997 | 2007 | 1997 | 2007 |
|  | Nursery and Primary | Nursery and Primary | Secondary | Secondary |
| Teaching assistants | 24,300 | 77,600  (319% increase) | Not recorded | 23,100 |
| Other education support staff | 14,300 | 27,700  (193% increase) | 3,800 | 18,900  (497% increase) |
| Total | 38,600 | 105,300 | 3,800 | 42,000 |

(From DfES 2007)