

Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 23 Education		
Title of case study: Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA)		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003–2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Peter Blatchford	Professor in Psychology and Education	October 1981 to September 2020
Jonathan Sharples	Professorial Research Fellow	November 2016 to present
Rob Webster	Associate Professor	September 2005 to present
Paula Bosanquet	Senior Teaching Fellow	September 2017 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 to 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA) is based on the largest programme of research on Teaching Assistants (TAs) worldwide, unique in scale and impact. The research led to an explanatory framework which guided a coherent approach to school improvement and professional development. It has resulted in: substantial changes in national awareness, attitudes and culture regarding TA deployment; impacts on regional, national and international policymaking; changes in school practices and pupil outcomes; and the development of evidence-informed education systems regionally, nationally and internationally.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Context TAs have been part of a growing international trend toward the use of paraprofessionals in public services. This is particularly marked in England, where the number of TAs in mainstream schools has more than trebled since 2000 from 79,046 (full time equivalent) to 265,167 in 2019/20. In 2019 TAs comprised 28% of the school workforce at an annual expense of approximately GBP5,000,000,000. The implementation of policies for inclusion and provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) rely heavily on TAs. The underpinning research for this impact case study is a large scale integrated programme of four research projects, which have fundamentally transformed knowledge of, and practice relating to, TA deployment and impact (directed by Professor Peter Blatchford, Dr Rob Webster and Dr Paula Bosanquet from the UCL Institute of Education).</p> <p>1. TA deployment: DISS project</p> <p>Common perceptions of the use and value of TAs were transformed by findings from the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (2003–2009), funded by the Department for Education in England and the Welsh Assembly Government. This is the largest study worldwide of TAs, and involved a longitudinal study of TA support on pupil progress, along with national questionnaire surveys, systematic observations, recordings of classroom interactions, and case studies. DISS was recognised by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) as one of the top 40 educational research projects in the last 40 years. The DISS findings were clear, robust and provocative. <i>Key insight 1: routinely used approaches to deploying and supporting TAs have a negative impact on pupils' academic progress, especially pupils with SEND (R1).</i> An explanatory Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model with three</p>		

components - deployment, preparedness and practice - was developed (**R2**), which accounted for the results and underpinned subsequent knowledge mobilisation for school workforce improvement.

2. Support for pupils with SEND: MAST and SENSE studies

Two further complementary projects (funded by the Nuffield Foundation) focused on the pupils that TAs support, and together comprise the largest UK observational research study of the everyday experiences of pupils with SEND. It contrasted 100 pupils with SEND and 230 typically developing pupils in primary schools (Making a Statement [MAST] study; 2011–2013), and secondary mainstream and special schools (Special Education Needs in Secondary Education [SENSE] study; 2014–2016). *Key insight 2: the education of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools is heavily reliant on TAs, and such pupils experience high degrees of separation and segregation.* The study raised worrying questions about the appropriateness of classroom contexts for pupils with SEND and the central role of TAs in facilitating inclusion (**R3**; **R4**).

3. The nature and quality of TA talk

These studies were supplemented by research, which for the first time used conversation analysis to study the moment-by-moment interactions between TAs and pupils. *Key insight 3: TAs tend to over-support pupils and focus on task completion and correction, rather than learning.* This work led to a conceptual framework for scaffolding interactions with pupils, which is a key component of the knowledge mobilisation work (**R5**).

4. From research to school improvement

Following DISS, there was an urgent need for schools to fundamentally reassess and change the way they use TAs. The Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project (2010–2012), funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, developed, in collaboration with schools, guidance for reconceptualising the TA role. *Key insight 4: with appropriate leadership support, schools can develop productive, alternative ways of deploying TAs that add value to teachers, not replace them* (**R6**). The resulting handbook for schools formed the basis of national guidance co-written with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), plus another handbook for TAs (see references in Section 5).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1** Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A. & Webster, R. (2011) The impact of support staff on pupils' 'positive approaches to learning' and their academic progress, *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), 443–464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411921003734645>
- R2** Blatchford, P., Russell, A. & Webster, R. (2012) *Reassessing the Impact of Teaching Assistants: How Research Challenges Practice and Policy*. Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203151969> Book available on request.
- R3** Webster, R., & Blatchford, P. (2015) Worlds apart? The nature and quality of the educational experiences of pupils with a Statement for special educational needs in mainstream primary schools, *British Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 324–342. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3144>
- R4** Blatchford, P. & Webster, R. (2018) Classroom contexts for learning at primary and secondary school: class size, groupings, interactions and special educational needs, *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), 681–703. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3454>
- R5** Radford, J., Bosanquet, P., Webster, R. & Blatchford, P. (2014) Scaffolding learning for independence: clarifying teacher and teaching assistant roles for children with special educational needs, *Learning and Instruction*, 36, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2014.10.005>
- R6** Webster, R., Blatchford, P. & Russell, A. (2013) Challenging and changing how schools use teaching assistants: Findings from the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants project, *School Leadership and Management*, 33(1), 78–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2012.724672>

Research quality indicators: publications that have been through a rigorous peer review process; BERA recognised the quality and importance of the team's research into teaching assistants' support of pupils as part of the top 40 educational research projects in the last 40 years.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

MITA has had a substantial and extensive impact on practice, policy and attitudes, nationally and internationally, and has improved pupil outcomes. In recognition of these impacts, BERA awarded MITA the Public Engagement & Impact Team Award in 2019. The foundation for this impact is a suite of accessible resources that translate the research into actionable strategies:

- *Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants* (MITA) handbook (Webster et al., 2016)
- *The Teaching Assistant's Guide to Effective Interaction* handbook (Bosanquet et al., 2016)
- *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants* (MBUTA) guidance report, Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (Sharples et al., 2018) (190,000 downloads, 2014-2020)
- *The Teaching Assistant Deployment Review Guide*, Whole School SEND (2017)
- Supplementary implementation resources e.g. audit tools, video case studies, planning templates (EEF, 2019).

There are four main types of impact:

1. Changes in national awareness, attitudes and culture relating to TA deployment

Between 2014–2017, the research team partnered with the EEF on a national campaign, Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants (MBUTA), to change the way English schools think and act regarding TA deployment. The research cited above was mobilised using a range of targeted dissemination and engagement activities. These included: distributing hard copies of the MBUTA guidance report to all schools in England (~20,000); promoting MBUTA guidance and the MITA programme through national and regional stakeholders e.g. Unison, Local Authorities, Ofsted; delivering 200+ presentations to teachers, TAs and school leaders; as well as providing professional development programmes for approximately 1500 schools. Extensive press/media coverage followed - e.g. The Economist (2016), Radio 4 Today Programme (2015), TES (2017) – plus social media activity.

This sustained mobilisation effort has led to widespread national awareness of the DISS (**R1, R2**), MAST/SENSE (**R3, R4**), and EDTA (**R6**) research. A recent national Government survey, weighted to be nationally representative by school and by teacher demographics (N = 802), shows that 80% of headteachers in England have read the MBUTA report (**S1**). Independent evaluations show that this widespread awareness, and focus on the unintended impact of ineffective TA use, has resulted in substantial changes in attitudes and cultures relating to TA deployment (**S2, S3**). The vast majority (88%) of head teachers in schools with the highest proportions of disadvantaged pupils say that the guidance has influenced their school practice (**S1**). For example, schools better recognise: (i) the need for TAs not to work exclusively with lower attaining pupils and those with SEND; and (ii) the value of broadening their role in the classroom (**S2, S3**). MITA is regularly cited as the catalyst for improving TA deployment, as one primary head teacher commented:

'Teachers reviewed the MITA guidance together and developed action plans for their own deployment of staff. Teachers developed a shared understanding of the role of support professionals in the classroom, no longer being tied to a particular group and having increased flexibility' (S4).

2. Impacts on regional, national and international policy making

Recognising the lack of a clear policy position on TA deployment by the UK government, we have influenced policy making by building relationships with key decision makers, including with senior officials in Local Authorities, the Department for Education and Ofsted. This has led to the MITA research and MBUTA recommendations being cited in national policy documents and debates, including:

- Debate in House of Commons on the use of TAs in English schools (2014)
- *Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants* (2015)
- Ofsted's November 2016 School Inspection Update (2016)
- Department for Education (DfE)'s *School workforce planning guidance* (2017)
- Policy briefings to No.10, HM Treasury and DfE on effective spending of the Pupil Premium
- Teaching School Council's review, *Effective Primary Teaching* (2017)
- Evidence Policy Institute report, *Analysis: school funding - Budget 2020* (2020)
- DfE's post-COVID guidance for schools, *Guidance for full opening: Schools* (2020).

This activity has influenced policy, which in turn has influenced school behaviours. The reference to the MBUTA guidance in the Ofsted School Inspection Update (2016) led to increased downloads of the guidance report and explicit references to the role of MITA in Ofsted inspection reports and ratings: *'it was the specific change in the classroom dynamics that really caught the eye of the judges...the MITA programme involved completely reimagining the TA role and putting it at the heart of school life'* (S5).

The Director of Children's Services at Lincolnshire County Council illustrates the impact that the MITA research and MBUTA guidance has had on regional policy (2016 - present) (S6): *'As a result of engaging with the MBUTA guidance we have a more evidence-informed approach to TA deployment across our Local Authority. Research led improvement initiatives are now delivered with the Lincolnshire Learning Partnership and almost all of our 355 schools have been involved, positively impacting upon education outcomes in terms of progress and attainment'*.

The research has also impacted on international policies relating to TA deployment and practice. The New Zealand government used the MBUTA guidance to inform national policy on paraprofessionals and training for more than 3,500 teachers, with a demonstrable impact on practice (S7). The MBUTA guidance has also been disseminated in Australia and used for training in over 500 schools. The Director for Education and Skills at the OECD highlights the impact that the IOE's research has had on international policy (S8): *'The IOE's work on Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants is a great example of the importance of a systemic plan to effectively support schools to put evidence into action. The example is from the UK but the challenge - and the effectiveness of this programme - resonates internationally'*.

3. Direct changes in school practices and pupil outcomes

a) *Impact on pupil outcomes* – To support the implementation of the MBUTA guidance in schools, we ran an extensive programme of training and professional development. Two year-long collaborations with partners across Yorkshire and Lincolnshire reached 780 schools and over 150,000 pupils. The Institute for Fiscal Studies evaluated the impact of this training on pupil attainment across South and West Yorkshire, and reported a small, but extensive, impact on English outcomes at Key Stage 2, equivalent to an average of three additional weeks' progress (S9). This is the first evidence of a UK research mobilisation initiative impacting on pupil attainment at regional scale. Equivalent training programmes, with an even more extensive reach, have been delivered in 16 Local Authority regions (2014–2020).

b) *Impact on school and teacher practices* – Two independent evaluations, undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University, have shown statistically significant in-school changes to TA deployment in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (S2, S3). Outcomes for TAs and teachers include increased confidence and self-efficacy; enhanced knowledge and pedagogic understanding and

better understanding of the TA role, with a clearer sense of purpose and more flexible approaches.

These formal evaluations are supported by numerous personal testimonials from school leaders, teachers and TAs. As one primary head teacher reports:

'External advisors have commented on the impact MITA has had on our school, not only from seeing the increase in children's independence but the effects it has had on my teaching assistants feeling valued. As a consequence of the project, my internal results for SEND show a significant increase in progress for a number of children and predictions for end of key stage SATs are also showing the same' (S4).

4. Development of evidence-informed education systems at regional, national and international level

In addition to impacting on TA deployment, the MBUTA scale-up campaign has influenced the way that research evidence is translated and mobilised, nationally and internationally. The MBUTA guidance was EEF's first attempt to create clear, actionable evidence-based guidance for schools, which then underpinned a national scale-up campaign. Its success led to it becoming a foundation for EEF's overall scale-up strategy. There are now 15 similar guidance reports, covering key areas of interest for schools. EEF's Deputy CEO has said (S10):

'This research has added immense public value, not only in shaping the EEF's and the broader What Works movement's approach to mobilising evidence across large service systems, but in very practical terms, to the day-to-day work of many thousands of Teaching Assistants across the country'.

The MBUTA scale-up campaign is shaping policy internationally, with the work being presented as an innovative system-based approach to using evidence, including at the White House, OECD and EU Commission (S8). What Works Centres in fields outside of education, such as the Early Intervention Foundation, are adopting strategies from the MBUTA scale-up campaign to mobilise their evidence.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1 Department for Education (2020) [The School Snapshot Survey: Winter 2019 2: Workforce](#).

S2 Maxwell et al. (2019a) *Formative evaluation of the Lincolnshire teaching assistants scale-up campaign*, EEF: London.

S3 Maxwell et al. (2019b) *Formative evaluation of the South & West Yorkshire teaching assistants scale-up campaign*, EEF: London. Section 5.

S4 Testimonial from the Head Teacher, Shirley Manor Primary Academy, Methuen Oval, Wyke, Bradford.

S5 [Report on how one school overhauled the traditional role of TAs, which contributed to an increase in Ofsted rating and being crowned School of the Year in the Bradford and District Education Awards](#).

S6 Testimonial from the Director of Children's Services, Lincolnshire County Council, Lincoln.

S7 Testimonial from the Senior Communication Advisor at the Ministry of Education, New Zealand government.

S8 Testimonial from the Director for Education and Skills, OECD.

S9 Sibieta, L. (2019) [Improving the impact of teaching assistants: EEF commissioned scale-up campaign – Impact evaluation](#), EEF: London.

S10 Testimonial from the Deputy CEO, Education Endowment Foundation.