



ADVANCED SKILLS TEACHERS: appointment, deployment and impact

Inspected Autumn 1999 and Summer 2000

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Reference number: HMI 273

CONTENTS

Introduction	1–3
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MAIN FINDINGS

The advanced skills teachers	4–5
Advanced skills teachers' duties	6–7
Work in advanced skills teachers' own schools	8–12
Advanced skills teachers' outreach work	13–20
Appointments	21–22
Pay and conditions of service	23–26
Attitudes towards advanced skills teachers	27–28
Impact on pay structure and organisation of school	29–31
Motivation, retention, and teachers' career paths	32–33
Job descriptions and annual review	35–37
Issues	38

INTRODUCTION

1. This report describes a survey of advanced skills teachers (ASTs) by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) in the academic year 1999/2000. The purpose of the survey was to examine how the skills of ASTs had been used to raise the standards of teaching and learning within their own schools, and also in outreach settings in other schools. The impact on the pay and management structures of the schools was also assessed, as was the degree of support ASTs were receiving. The survey was in two parts. Preliminary visits took place in the autumn term of 1999. At this point all established ASTs were in secondary pilot schools (all of which were Specialist Colleges) and very few primary ASTs had been appointed. The second stage of the inspection took place in the summer term of 2000 and covered a range of both primary and secondary schools. The inspection was completed before the introduction of the new performance management and threshold arrangements for teachers.

2. Visits were made to 35 schools, 22 secondary and 13 primary, in which one or more ASTs had been appointed. In addition, supplementary visits were made to eleven primary schools and one secondary school where outreach work by ASTs had taken place. Individual discussions took place with a total of 70 ASTs, sixteen in primary schools and 54 in secondary schools. Forty of the teachers had been appointed under the initial pilot arrangements where the whole of the funding came from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and 30 under Standards Fund 3b, where 50 per cent of the funding came from the local education authority (LEA). Four ASTs were appointments which schools had made with their own funding. For one Design and Technology AST there was also some external funding from industry.

3. Discussions also took place with headteachers other than those of the schools employing the ASTs, LEA officers, the head of a pupil referral unit, and the education officer of a large company that was part-funding an AST. In addition, a visit was made to a school in special measures where, at the time of the visit, vigorous but unsuccessful efforts had been made to make AST appointments from other schools. Information was also drawn from a number of visits paid to LEAs and from Section 10 inspections.

MAIN FINDINGS

- The ASTs were experienced, skilled and conscientious teachers who were able to provide effective support for other teachers.

- Individual ASTs performed a range of the duties as defined in the DfEE Pay and Conditions Document which sets out all teachers' statutory responsibilities. The principal duty by far was that of advising other teachers on classroom management and teaching. Some of the work done as an AST was a continuation of work previously carried out, for example the mentoring of trainee teachers. Some schools and headteachers wrongly interpreted the AST role as including specialist teaching of pupils without parallel training of other teachers.

- In about two-thirds of the schools the ASTs were using at least half, and sometimes all, their dedicated time for AST work (equivalent to one day a week) on support within their own school. This pattern was particularly evident among most of the longer established ASTs in schools in the introductory phase, with a consequent reduction in time available for outreach work.

- For half of the ASTs, their impact on teaching and learning in their own school was judged as good, and for just over a further third it was judged as very good or excellent.
 - Some schools in special measures reported great difficulties in making AST appointments. In the one school in special measures visited in which an AST had been appointed, the impact of the AST had been very considerable, leading to notable improvements in the practice of other teachers.
 - In many cases, ASTs had found it difficult to establish outreach work. Rather fewer than half were using more than 80 per cent of their earmarked time for outreach. The extent of the outreach work depended crucially on the outside links that schools had established, as well as the planning that had been done by heads and LEAs to support the ASTs. Pilot schools (Specialist Colleges) tended to focus on links with their feeder primary schools. In spite of the difficulties, valuable outreach work had been established in some LEAs and Education Action Zones (EAZs) where there had been good planning by officers or advisers and where effective liaison with other schools had been established.
 - The impact of the outreach work of two-thirds of the ASTs was judged at least good and for two-fifths it was very good or excellent. Where the impact was judged to be less than satisfactory this was principally because of the limited amount of work which had taken place.
 - All of the teachers had been placed on the AST pay spine, and most had received a significant increase in pay on appointment. There was, however, little evidence of movement along the pay spine as a result of a review.
 - Performance criteria were in place for less than half of the ASTs.
 - Half the ASTs had retained significant previous responsibilities, for example as heads of department in secondary schools. In virtually all cases, ASTs had a workload which had significantly increased after appointment.
 - The appointment of ASTs had had little effect on the schools' pay structures. This was because of the "bolt-on" nature of appointments. Schools and ASTs were concerned about the long-term funding of posts and the relationship of their remuneration to that of teachers passing the threshold to the upper pay spine.
 - The support for ASTs from their school or LEA was at least adequate in two-thirds of cases, and was sometimes good. However, ASTs often felt isolated and welcomed opportunities for "networking" with others in similar posts elsewhere.
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THE ADVANCED SKILLS TEACHERS

4. The sample of ASTs contained equal numbers of men and women. Rather more than half were aged over 35. The teachers varied considerably in their length of teaching experience. The most experienced had been teaching for 30 years while five each had only about five years' experience. However, in two of these latter cases the ASTs had previously had substantial experience outside teaching. Most commonly the secondary ASTs had been successful heads of year or heads of department before appointment, and had held two or three responsibility points before transferring to the AST spine. Two had worked for a while as advisory teachers for their LEA. Three teachers had previously been paid on the deputy head scale. One primary teacher had been an acting deputy head. A number had been attracted to the AST post because it provided an alternative career route to the normal one that culminated in headship.

5. The ASTs were all very capable teachers. While the visits were not designed to check the assessments that had been made on the ASTs, HMI considered that all those seen were at the very least good appointments, and that most were very good or excellent. They were skilled, experienced, conscientious and committed teachers, who were able to negotiate their role skilfully with others, with a readiness to work through others rather than to overwhelm them with their own expertise. They were hard-working, flexible and prepared to work unsocial hours. Frequently, ASTs were highly respected by other staff in the school and were able to work well across departments. In one case, however, the AST, while generally well thought of, was young and relatively inexperienced, and this limited their capacity to influence others.

ADVANCED SKILLS TEACHERS' DUTIES

6. The ASTs were asked to categorise their duties in terms of the descriptions in the Pay and Conditions Document. This revealed the following rank order of duties in terms of their relative importance (measured by the time or the effort devoted to them):

- advising other teachers on classroom organisation and teaching;
- outreach work (although recognising that this subsumes all of the other duties);
- producing high quality teaching materials;
- disseminating to other teachers materials relating to best practice in educational research;
- participating in the mentoring of newly qualified teachers;
- producing high quality materials including video recordings;
- participating in initial teacher training (ITT);
- advising on the provision of in-service training;
- helping teachers who are experiencing difficulties;
- participating in the appraisal of other teachers.

The following paragraphs set out the extent of these different types of work, listed in the order of the Pay and Conditions Document, with outreach work considered separately later.

a. **Participation in initial teacher training.** Although more than half of the sample were involved in ITT, it was generally only as a school mentor and as an extension of their previous role. Three ASTs had been involved in occasional ITT work in a higher education institution. None of the work was an explicit core task of their role as an AST. Wider evidence from the inspection of ITT suggests that ASTs are only occasionally given more prominent roles in ITT partnerships. On the rare occasions where they are, it is usually where the school is involved in a school centred initial teacher training (SCITT) scheme.

b. **The mentoring of newly qualified teachers (NQTs).** Three-quarters of the ASTs had a role in the induction of NQTs. While in some cases this was a substantial new role and included responsibility for setting up an induction programme to meet the requirements of Circular 5/99, for others it was a continuation of a role they had had before becoming ASTs. There was good evidence of the effectiveness of the support ASTs had given to NQTs in many of the schools.

c. **Advising other teachers on classroom organisation and teaching methods.** More than three quarters of the ASTs and schools appeared to regard this as the core of the AST role. Even so, the type of work varied very considerably. Apart from outreach work, described below, the work in the teachers' own schools depended on how this aspect was interpreted. For some ASTs, especially those in primary schools, the work involved close discussion with and observation of other teachers, with a specific focus, for example on early years, literacy, or aspects of classroom management. Secondary ASTs sometimes had a wider role which involved individual support, for example of non-specialist teachers, but also the carrying out of school audits, for example on ICT or basic literacy, and the giving of advice to the senior management team. One secondary science AST had a major role in training the staff of his department in the skills and methods needed to implement the Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education (CASE) project as part of a strategy to raise attainment in the subject. Teachers who had benefited from this type of support spoke positively and enthusiastically of the advice they had received.

d. **The production of high quality teaching materials.** Although many of the ASTs identified work under this heading not all of this appeared correctly classified. Appropriately identified activities included the production of materials to support the use of writing frames across the curriculum, the development of an art website, the writing of teaching software, support materials for ICT, and the development of guidance on drug education. In one school, for example, the preferred approach of the AST in supporting other teachers in classroom management and appropriate teaching methods was to follow up advice with the production of high quality teaching materials. Several ASTs had been heavily involved in writing policy statements and in this way contributing to the management of their school, but it is questionable whether this should be considered legitimate AST activity under this heading. There are similar doubts about the classification of activities of others who, through their outreach work, gave talks and contributed to conferences which involved considerable amounts of time in the preparation of supporting papers.

e. **Disseminating to other teachers materials relating to best practice in educational research.** This was a principal activity of about a quarter of the ASTs. Examples of work under this heading included training in features of the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies, disseminating the CASE project (referred to above), and disseminating materials to promote better classroom management. No teachers were planning to disseminate educational research per se, although one AST had produced some research in the form of a paper written collaboratively with a teacher he had been supporting.

- f. **Advising on the provision of in-service training.** Although several ASTs claimed to be involved in support of this kind, it was difficult to be sure about its relative importance as some seemed to confuse this aspect of their work with the actual provision of INSET.
- g. **Participating in the appraisal of other teachers.** Few ASTs did this as a core part of their role. One-third were involved in appraisal, but as work continued from their previous post.
- h. **Helping teachers who are experiencing difficulties.** Surprisingly few of the ASTs acknowledged that they were formally engaged in helping teachers who were experiencing difficulties. Schools and ASTs seemed to prefer to describe this as 'advising teachers' (see section (c) above), although it is very evident that some of this support was for teachers who were struggling.
- i. **Producing high quality resources and materials, including video recordings of lessons for dissemination in their own schools.** None of the ASTs were producing video recordings. Some cited work under this heading which might otherwise have been listed under (d).

WORK IN ADVANCED SKILLS TEACHERS' OWN SCHOOLS

8. Inspectors attempted to gauge how much of the earmarked time allowed for AST work, equivalent to one day per week, was being used for work in the AST's own school, as against time for 'outreach' work in other schools. Two-thirds of the schools and ASTs were using at least half, and sometimes up to 100 per cent, of their time on ASTs' duties in their own schools. In most of the cases where a substantial proportion of the time was being used in this way, the ASTs had been in post for twelve months or less. However, all but one of the ASTs in post for a year or more, at the time of the visits, were still spending 50 per cent or more of their time in their own schools to the neglect of possible outreach work.

9. In several cases the ASTs acknowledged that carrying out this work placed additional demands upon their time. They did not comment adversely about workloads but noted that, without guidance from their headteacher, an AST could spend extra time trying to address a range of objectives with insufficient regard to the balancing of old and new responsibilities. Many ASTs noted that the work undertaken often involved unsocial hours such as Saturday mornings, lunchtimes and evening work.

10. Where ASTs are working in a school in special measures they can, exceptionally, use all of their earmarked time for support in their own school. One primary school in special measures with an AST on the staff was visited and here the impact of the AST had been excellent. The teacher's work had been a major component of the action taken to improve the performance of the school. The LEA acknowledged the outstanding contribution of this AST and was planning to use her in outreach in other schools of the authority.

11. In order to assess the impact of the ASTs' activities in their own schools, other staff, the headteacher and pupils were interviewed and evidence of improved examination and test data was sought. For just under half of the ASTs, the impact on teaching and learning was judged to be good and for a third the impact was very good or excellent. The evidence for impact was stronger on teaching than learning. Teachers who had received support from ASTs spoke consistently of the benefits that had accrued to their teaching. A number of the schools expected subsequent examination and test results to substantiate the impact of the ASTs' activities.

12. Where ASTs had undertaken, as part of their role, additional work with particular groups of pupils there had been a direct impact on pupils' learning. For example, in one secondary school two ASTs had done substantial amounts of extra teaching with targeted pupils, together with master classes for A-level students during holidays or at weekends. In another school, the AST's role had been in part that of running master classes in revision clubs. In a third school, there had been tuition in English after the normal

finishing time, but also after the regular teacher had departed. Whilst evidently valuable in itself, such direct work with pupils represents a departure from DfEE policy. Where no other teachers are present, which is usually the case, there is a missed opportunity for sharing good practice with other teachers.

ADVANCED SKILLS TEACHERS' OUTREACH WORK

13. The survey found a picture of varied success in initiating appropriate outreach work. Fewer than half of the ASTs were using more than 80 per cent of the time earmarked for outreach work for this purpose. In the most extreme case, a primary school where no outreach had been undertaken since the AST was appointed in September 1999, the headteacher had made no time available for the AST to be released to work outside the school. In another primary school, in an authority which had been assessed by OFSTED as being poor at managing its support to schools, the AST had worked hard to promote meetings with staff in other schools in the same "consortium", with the aim of developing Early Years practice. However, progress in getting beyond liaison meetings had been very slow and there had been little tangible achievement at the time of the visit. In a third primary school, there had been little outreach in the first term of the AST's appointment, in part because the LEA had been slow to develop any programme for supporting the AST. However, by the second term in post, some links with other schools had been established, largely through the energy and enthusiasm of the headteacher, and the AST had given some much-needed demonstration lessons in numeracy and literacy in these schools.

14. The setting up of outreach work had been particularly difficult for teachers in some of the Specialist Colleges, notably where the recent history of the school had been one of isolation from other schools in the locality. In one of these schools, for example, an explicit task given to the ASTs had been that of building bridges with other schools.

15. In most cases the ASTs, once assessed, had had to consider how best to establish and carry out outreach work. Frequently these teachers had had some anxieties about what they might do, how they might make themselves known, and how they might be received in schools. One teacher described the situation as being similar to that of someone setting themselves up in business on their own. One LEA had recognised this and had organised its ASTs within a project to develop teaching materials for other teachers in which there was an element of training for ASTs.

16. Lack of interest from neighbouring schools can significantly hamper the development of outreach work. For example, in a recently amalgamated secondary school in a metropolitan area, the natural links were to four secondary schools in an LEA "cluster". But three of these schools had been preoccupied with local issues of reorganisation and amalgamation, and the fourth had shown little interest in being a beneficiary of the AST programme. The AST had, appropriately, used half a day per week in planning or attending LEA cluster meetings. Although he had worked closely with LEA officers, little outreach work had been achieved by the time of the visit, although it was hoped that city-wide initiatives related to gifted and talented pupils and the Excellence in Cities programme would provide scope for successful outreach in the next academic year.

17. Eight of the secondary schools had engaged in successful outreach work with local feeder primary schools. For example, in one school there was good support of primary science by an AST who was a secondary science specialist. Whilst this type of outreach seldom took up all the AST's earmarked time, its value was generally good. Typical comments from primary teachers were:

'AST X has been instrumental in improving the confidence of non-specialist staff.'

'AST Y brought knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm. Demonstration lessons disseminated good practice. The AST provided a positive role model. He gave access to a wider variety of equipment and resources and helped with an ICT club. Areas for staff development were highlighted.'

18. Outreach was most successfully achieved where there were local clusters of schools promoted by the LEA or an EAZ, or where there was a high degree of support and initiative on the part of the LEA or EAZ. In one south London LEA, a primary school AST had worked for a whole term in each of two schools identified by one of the authority's inspectors. Her contribution was highly valued. In the case of an AST in a second primary school in a different authority, the LEA had set an agenda of suitable work with a number of other schools. This included the support of a weak teacher in a school in special measures. The headmaster of that school said that the weak teacher would have abandoned teaching completely had it not been for the support of the AST. In two EAZs there had been collective agreements amongst the primary schools to programmes of outreach work by the ASTs. The benefits of this approach were that it set clear objectives for the work of the ASTs, ensured a rolling programme of work which enabled a degree of medium and long-term planning, and provided an environment in which other teachers were welcoming and accepting of the ASTs' work.

19. In five of the secondary schools the ASTs had established effective outreach activities largely through the liaison provided by the LEA. Examples included contributions to LEA INSET in modern foreign languages, the support of individual teachers in other schools, and a variety of support for particular LEA projects in science. In one case an AST who had previously been an LEA advisory teacher for mathematics was able to capitalise on his previous contacts. His outreach work in training teachers for the National Numeracy Strategy was, on its own, more than filling the allocation of outreach time for a whole term. Two other LEAs had interesting programmes of work in the planning stage at the time of the survey, one on the establishment of a secondary school improvement programme and the other in auditing the skills of ASTs with a view to optimising their outreach.

20. For two-thirds of the ASTs, the impact of outreach work was judged at least good and in two out of five cases it was very good or excellent. For a quarter of ASTs, outreach was less than satisfactory, principally because of its limited extent.

APPOINTMENTS

21. All the ASTs in this survey had been appointed from within their own schools. Visits were made to a school and an LEA where there had been unsuccessful attempts to appoint ASTs externally. In both cases the intention had been to recruit ASTs to work and be based in schools with serious weaknesses or in special measures. The increased salary and the status as an AST had been insufficient to attract enough suitable applicants. In the secondary school, a narrow field of applicants had been produced but not all were eligible. Some potential applicants were teachers working as advisers and therefore not working in schools on a regular and daily basis in which they could demonstrate their teaching competence. Of the remaining two, one was unsuccessful in the assessment and, in the case of the other, the teacher's school was too late in preparing the papers for an assessment and for an appointment to be made.

22. The LEA visited had surveyed the teachers who had not proceeded with applications. A third of these teachers cited the short-term (three-year) nature of the contract, and a third the salary offered by the school, which they saw as inadequate. Teachers also had some anxiety about their own experience and whether it was appropriate for a move to a school in special measures. It was also felt that the linkage of the posts to weak schools in the job advertisement had led to a negative association of ASTs with failure, and that this might have dissuaded potential applicants.

PAY AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

23. All the teachers had been placed on the AST pay spine. The position on the scale varied considerably. Two teachers were placed at point 1 on the spine, a significant increase as they had both been at point 7 on the classroom teachers' spine with no responsibility points. The level of pay increase which they had received was in line with that of most of the ASTs visited. Experienced secondary teachers were typically being placed on point 8 of the AST scale, equivalent to +4 points on the teachers' scale. The outcome was that the majority of the ASTs had had a substantial pay increase on appointment, typically of between £3,000 and £5,000. A small number of the ASTs had very much smaller increases, because of caution on the part of the governing bodies concerned and an uncertainty about what might be considered a "normal" increase.

24. Ten of the ASTs visited had been in post for over a year and hence were technically eligible for a performance increment. However, only one of these teachers had received such an increment. There was no evidence, therefore, of systematic movement along the spine as a result of review.

25. Half of the ASTs were retaining significant previous managerial responsibilities. There was considerable reluctance on the part of many ASTs, for career and other reasons, to relinquish previously held responsibilities and, in small primary schools in particular, it would have been often difficult for them to do so. Where ASTs were continuing to hold such responsibilities, this naturally placed additional pressures on their time. On the other hand, ASTs who had relinquished their previous responsibilities felt strongly that the time freed by this was fully needed for the additional work to be undertaken as an AST. In virtually all cases, the overall effect of the appointment was judged by the ASTs to represent an increase in workload. In about 20 per cent of cases the full allocation of time had not been given and in the case of one AST, as already noted, no additional time had been made available. When ASTs had been appointed in the middle of the academic year, after schools had set their timetables, it was difficult to arrange the required release of time; even when this had been possible, organising release so that a whole day was free for effective outreach was problematic.

26. Overall, the survey indicated that headteachers understood clearly the requirement to give ASTs time for their duties and were anxious not to overburden them. Nevertheless the wish of many ASTs to hold on to previous responsibilities represents a departure from the initial policy of the DfEE and can lead to very heavy workloads.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVANCED SKILLS TEACHERS

27. In ASTs' own schools the attitudes towards them of other teachers, of headteachers and of members of the leadership team, were largely good or very good. Positive attitudes usually derived from the ASTs' existing strong reputations in their schools. Where there was some opposition it was on the part of other teachers said by colleagues to be performing weakly. The reactions of teachers in schools which were in receipt of outreach work were more mixed. Whilst most reactions were positive, a minority of teachers had been hostile or sceptical until the role of the AST had been fully explained. In the case of at least one secondary AST, negative attitudes had blocked some important opportunities for outreach.

28. The survey clearly showed that the enthusiasm, support and commitment of the headteacher are crucially important to the success of an AST. Headteachers need to have the vision to recognise the value of outreach both to the wider education community and to their own school, and the determination to support the AST in having a timetable unlocked to enable them to do outreach work. The AST frequently also needs considerable support in setting up an outreach programme. The headteacher is the member of a school staff most likely to have links that can be fostered, and is also the one most likely to be able to ensure the AST is accorded a necessary degree of seniority in the school and in relations with schools outside. Above all, the headteacher needs to be able to take a long-sighted view of the post and its potential.

IMPACT ON PAY STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION OF SCHOOL

29. In none of the schools visited had the appointment of one or more ASTs yet had an impact on the pay structure. Uncertainties about the long-term funding of ASTs had meant that no plans were in place for a restructuring of the pay arrangements of the school with ASTs as a key element. In pay terms, ASTs were in essence a 'bolt-on' element in the school. One school was planning to review its pay structure in order to better incorporate the AST post it had initiated, but this was unusual.

30. The effect of ASTs on the organisational structure of the school was slightly more evident. In about a quarter of the schools, one or more ASTs had been appointed to the senior management team (SMT) and in one other school an AST was seen by the headteacher as equivalent in status to the members of the SMT. Where ASTs had joined the SMT, it was often reported that there had been a significant shift in the focus of the work of that team to teaching and learning. Looking ahead, headteachers indicated that they also saw an important role for ASTs in performance management.

31. One school had a "ginger" group working to enhance teaching, and its three ASTs were key members. In another school, the appointment of the ASTs had added flexibility to the staffing and encouraged professional development, the second teacher in the science department having moved up to the position of acting head of department, and the third in the English department having become acting second. In one primary school the headteacher said she would have liked to have given the AST a monitoring role but there had been no timetabling opportunities to do this with all staff. In half the schools visited, however, there had been no significant effects on the organisation. In one school, the head reported that the AST post had simply been established as a reward for good performance.

MOTIVATION, RETENTION, AND TEACHERS' CAREER PATHS

32. The motivational effects of the appointments have been considerable. One described being an AST as "having a dream job"; another said that it had considerable advantages over being an LEA adviser. These self-evaluative comments were typical. Clearly the variety of work, coupled with the additional financial reward for most, had been effective in giving the ASTs' careers a new impetus. However, in one case where the additional financial reward was only modest, the hard-working AST felt that too much was expected of her. There was a small number of cases in which ASTs were already moving on to further promotions.

33. Longer-term career planning, however, is a matter which exercised many ASTs and their headteachers in two ways. Several ASTs raised concerns about what the post might lead to, a legitimate question in view of the "bolt-on" nature of the appointments. Many others were concerned about the likely continuation of funding for their posts and the relative pay and status of ASTs compared to teachers who might pass the threshold.

34. A further concern was that of isolation, especially on the part of those who were the only ASTs in their schools (including all the primary ASTs). All were anxious to make links with other ASTs, in order to share ideas and working practices. Secondary subject specialists were particularly keen to make links with others in their subject.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND ANNUAL REVIEW

35. In rather more than half the schools the posts had been clearly planned and defined in advance of the AST assessments. In these schools the broad scope of the posts had been defined, although not so narrowly as to exclude all but a small cross-section of candidates. In the pilot programme, the initial information had come from the DfEE; in other cases it had come from the LEA. In four schools the headteachers had acted to retain the teachers by means of a more attractive salary. This policy was some-

times cloaked by the wording of the advertisement. For example in the case of one secondary school, the job was restricted to the science faculty in line with School Development Plan and LEA Education Development Plan priorities; however, it was clear to the staff that effectively only one member of staff was eligible. In two other cases the way in which the job description was written in relation to the whole school objectives narrowed the opportunity down to a single candidate.

36. Half the schools had set out a detailed job description. The others had produced broader descriptions of the role. In only one school was there a finalised contract of employment. The Pay and Conditions Circular suggests that job descriptions should be written so that the descriptors of the post can be used for review purposes at the end of the year. Only a quarter of schools were able to demonstrate that this had been done. However, where it had, the descriptors were reasonable, although ASTs said that it was difficult to write job descriptions for outreach work. This was because the scope was dependent upon the extent to which offers of outreach help were taken up by other schools, as well as uncertainty about the balance of time needed between preparation and delivery.

37. During the summer term visits, inspectors examined the procedures and outcomes of annual reviews. For just over three-quarters of these ASTs some element of self-evaluation was in place, but only two in five were the subject of more formal reviews against performance criteria. In the best practice there were reviews by the headteacher to check that developments reflected the agreed targets, and feedback was regularly sought on the work of ASTs from the recipients of outreach. Even where there were regular reviews, a sharpness in the evaluation was sometimes missing. Outcomes were frequently too "soft", for example being couched in terms such as the raising of awareness or the degree of co-operation received, rather than in specific and measurable forms of evaluation which attempted to measure pupils' progress. In the worst cases, no planning for evaluation had occurred.

ISSUES

38. Several issues merit further consideration:

- In some schools there are misunderstandings about what the 20 per cent of earmarked AST time should be used for. The guidance needs to be reviewed in order to clarify that this is time for outreach and not for tasks that ASTs carry out in their own schools. There also needs to be clarification that, unless ASTs are simultaneously training other teachers, the time should not be used for the specialist teaching of pupils. It needs to be recognised, however, that there is often a tension between work in the AST's own school and outreach. Schools which are keen to use ASTs internally for duties which are listed in the Pay and Conditions Document may equally be reluctant to see them working elsewhere for a whole day per week.
 - The wish of many ASTs to carry on with existing responsibilities needs further consideration. Where ASTs fear that their appointment may be only for the short term, it is understandable that they may wish to hold on to these responsibilities. Any retained responsibilities should certainly not carry a significant administrative burden, but might, arguably, be those associated with curriculum leadership. On the other hand, it is essential that they retain sufficient time for the AST role to be carried out properly. Further guidance in this area would be helpful.
 - Take-up through external appointments has been very discouraging. The barriers to recruitment appear to include salary and transfer to a new and possibly difficult environment. Attention might usefully be given to these matters, including a specification of the support and training to which an AST might be entitled.
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- The difficulties of setting up and carrying out appropriate outreach work are evident and there is a pressing need to ensure that the AST resource is used effectively. There is a small but growing number of examples of good planning of outreach work, and this expertise could be more widely disseminated. Consideration needs to be given to what is an appropriate balance between work identified by the LEA and the preferences of an individual AST and their school.
- Urgent attention is needed to the medium and long-term funding arrangements and to the long-term relationship that levels of pay for ASTs will have to those of teachers on the upper pay spine. Uncertainty about these matters is likely to hamper recruitment of ASTs in the short term.
- At least in the early stages of AST development, the role of the LEA is important in linking the ASTs into work in other schools. LEAs need to be active in facilitating links between ASTs and other schools. Good models of developing practice, where LEAs are anticipating and defining the work of ASTs, need to be shared.
- ASTs have a number of training and communication needs. They often need further guidance on what is, and what is not, appropriate AST work and how to go about carrying it out. Consideration needs to be given to establishing a national network which might go a long way to alleviating the isolation felt by many ASTs.
- There is relatively little evidence of use being made of ASTs by teacher training partnerships. ASTs provide a rich potential resource for initial teacher training and ways of capitalising on this need to be explored.
- Schools need help in defining good practice in reviewing the performance of ASTs, particularly in terms of their impact on teaching and pupils' learning.