

# Assistants in Educational Psychology Services – Who are they and what do they do?

Debra Harland, Kate Kitchingman and Sophie Elder, Assistant Educational Psychologists at Gateshead Psychological Service

## About the research

Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) are increasingly employing assistants as part of their workforce. Assistant posts in EPSs vary in title, remuneration, role and responsibilities. There is a lack of consensus on the remit, role and working conditions of assistant. Gaps also exist in data relating to the demographics of current assistants.

The research aimed to gather an overview of the roles and responsibilities of assistants. It involved an online survey, completed by 96 assistants working in educational psychology contexts in England.

## Implications for policy and practice

### Roles and Responsibilities

- To prevent conflation of the Assistant and EP roles, national organisations might consider creating guidance for leaders to establish a consensus on appropriate tasks for assistants (including casework and assessments).
- EPSs should retain an awareness of the levels of assistants' prior experience so there is no under- or over-expectation of assistants and their input can be maximised.
- Leaders should consider implications of job titles and access to benefits associated with specific titles (e.g., AEP membership and Soulbury Pay Scales).

### Diversity

- EPSs should consider how they can encourage diversity and remove barriers to the profession when recruiting assistants.
  - Roles could be promoted to underrepresented groups.
  - Existing staff from underrepresented groups could share their experiences on social media or at recruitment events such as open evenings.
  - The potential for reasonable adjustments to be made could be highlighted.
- Services should consider the potential impact of short-term contracts and lower paid roles on diversity which; may constitute a barrier for a range of people including parents, older applicants, homeowners, or those with caring responsibilities.

## Key findings

- 76 assistants were employed by local authorities, 17 by private services and 2 by academy trusts.
- 52% of initial contracts for assistant roles were for 1 year or less, 76% for 2 years or less.
- 84.4% of AsEPs were paid in line with Soulbury recommendations, compared with 21.1% of those with a different title. One assistant spoke of feeling 'exploited' as an AP who was not paid on the Soulbury scale. 94% of respondents had 2 years or more prior experience and 50% had 5 years or more.
- 47% of respondents had secured a place on courses beginning in September 2022, 91% had been encouraged by their employers to apply.

## What do assistants do?

- 69% of assistants gained experience in all five functions of the EP according to the Currie matrix.
- The most common activities undertaken were: training for school staff, observations, consulting with school staff, collecting the views of children and young people and participating in review meetings or planning meetings.
- The most common form of assessment completed by assistants was play-based assessment, followed by dynamic assessment. 36 assistants also administered standardized/ psychometric assessments.

***“I'm not a TEP (Trainee EP) or EP so I have not received the appropriate training and raises ethical concerns with me!”***

*A response from an assistant in relation to completing assessments*

Collyer (2012) highlights debates around whether casework falls within the remit of assistants. 51 respondents said they took full individual responsibility for casework with EP oversight, 38 supported EPs with casework and 7 did no casework.

## Demographics

- 6% of participants considered themselves to have a disability, 91% did not, whilst 3% preferred not to say. The proportion who responded yes to considering themselves as having a disability is lower than AEP data (8%) and considerably less than the wider population (21% of working age adults).
- Reflecting on ethnicity, there is an under-representation of Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups and an over-representation of people with a White background compared to the 2021 AEP survey and 2011 census data.

95% of respondents identified as women, 5% as men<sup>1</sup>. This compares to the recent AEP survey and reflects the trend noted in the DfE's 2019 EP workforce report that the proportion of women in the profession is increasing.

## **Further information**

This research was completed by Assistant Educational Psychologists at Gateshead Psychological Service between May and August 2022.

If you would like to read the full report, please follow the link below.

<http://bitly.ws/vfzS>

For any further information or queries please contact Gateshead Psychological Service at [enquiresps@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:enquiresps@gateshead.gov.uk)

## **References**

Association of Educational Psychologists [AEP] (2021). *Report: Member Survey on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Issues*. <https://www.aep.org.uk/resources/member-survey-equality-diversity-inclusion-issues-report>

Collyer, S. (2012). The roles, functions and implications of Assistants in Scottish educational psychology services, a national survey. *Educational Psychology In Practice*, 28:2, 159-176. DOI:10.1080/02667363.2012.665357

---

<sup>1</sup> We used the terms woman and man to report respondent's gender, in line with APA guidance. AEP data on gender is reported as per their own research using the terminology male/female.