

Teaching Assistant



EDUCATION RECRUITMENT SPECIALISTS

Teaching Assistant

VS

HLTA

A complete guide to roles, responsibilities, career pathways and how to get started

SUPPORT GUIDE · 2025

Higher Level Teaching Assistant

INTRODUCTION

Working Within Schools

Teaching Assistant and HLTA roles can be rewarding, flexible and an excellent long-term career within education. This guide explains the differences between the roles, what schools expect, qualifications that may help, salary expectations and how Standby Education can help support you into the right opportunities.

2

Distinct role levels covered in this guide

L3

Highest common TA qualification level

+

Progression from TA to HLTA is a well-defined pathway

THE ROLES EXPLAINED

TA vs HLTA at a Glance



Teaching Assistant

Supporting pupils & teachers in the classroom

- Supporting pupils within lessons
- Working with small groups on targeted activities
- Supporting behaviour and pupil engagement
- Helping pupils access learning and curriculum
- Supporting pupils with additional and SEND needs
- Preparing and organising classroom resources
- Assisting teachers with general classroom tasks



Higher Level Teaching Assistant

Leading learning at a higher level of responsibility

- Leading targeted interventions independently
- Supporting and delivering lesson content
- Delivering planned lessons to whole classes
- Covering classes during teacher absence
- Supporting pupil assessment and tracking progress
- Working more independently across the school
- Mentoring and supporting less experienced support staff

Both roles are vital within schools. Whether you're supporting one pupil or leading a whole class, the difference you make every day is genuinely significant.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

How the Roles Compare

Understanding the differences between TA and HLTA roles will help you identify where you currently sit and where you'd like your career to progress.

Area	Teaching Assistant	HLTA
Main Focus	Supporting learning alongside the teacher	Leading and extending learning independently
Class Cover	Occasional only	Regularly covers classes
Lesson Delivery	Supports the teacher's lesson	Can deliver planned lessons
Responsibility	Support role — directed by teacher	Higher responsibility and more autonomous
Experience Required	Often entry level	Usually experienced TA background
Pay Scale	Lower — typically NJC Grade 3-5	Higher — typically NJC Grade 6-8
Leadership Element	Limited or none	May lead support staff teams
Typical Entry Point	Entry into education	Progression role

CAREER PROGRESSION

Your Path in Education

Education support careers follow a well-established progression pathway. Many successful HLTAs and teachers began as volunteers or general TAs and built from there.


Volunteer / Experience

Build initial school experience


Teaching Assistant

Develop skills & knowledge


Experienced TA

Specialist areas, SEND, leadership


HLTA

Lead learning across school

Beyond HLTA

Some HLTAs go on to pursue School Direct or School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) routes into qualified teaching, particularly if they have a relevant degree. The experience gained in TA and HLTA roles is highly valued during teacher training. Speak to Standby Education about what that journey could look like for you.

WHAT YOU NEED

Qualifications & Experience

Schools can vary significantly in what they require for TA and HLTA positions. Whilst qualifications are helpful, many schools place equal — or greater — value on personality, reliability, patience and hands-on experience with children.



GCSE English & Maths

Grade 4/C or above is commonly requested across both TA and HLTA roles in most schools



Level 3 TA Qualification

Highly beneficial for experienced TAs looking to progress and take on more responsibility



SEND Experience

Highly valued across all levels — working with pupils with additional needs is a major asset



Level 2 TA Qualification

CACHE, NVQ or equivalent — a useful entry-level qualification for aspiring TAs



HLTA Status

Formal HLTA assessment — nationally recognised qualification for Higher Level TAs



Behaviour Management

Experience managing behaviour effectively is often as important as any formal qualification

SEND OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting Pupils with Additional Needs

A significant proportion of TA opportunities involve supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. SEND experience is among the most valued and in-demand skills across Derby's schools.



Autism (ASC)

Supporting pupils on the autistic spectrum with structured learning and social skills



ADHD

Helping pupils maintain focus, manage transitions and access the curriculum effectively



Speech & Language

Supporting communication needs and working alongside speech therapy programmes



SEMH Needs

Social, emotional and mental health support — building relationships and resilience



Physical Disabilities

Supporting physical access to learning and personal care where required



Learning Difficulties

Adapting resources and supporting pupils with dyslexia, dyscalculia and more

PERSONAL QUALITIES

What Schools Really Look For

Schools are often looking beyond qualifications alone. The qualities below are consistently cited by headteachers and school leaders as the most important characteristics in outstanding support staff.

- Strong Punctuality
- Positive Attitude
- Patience & Resilience
- Confidence with Children
- Willingness to Learn
- Professional Communication
- Flexibility & Teamwork
- Reliability & Commitment

Standby Education's View

We have seen candidates with minimal formal qualifications secure excellent long-term placements because their personality, reliability and enthusiasm stood out. Equally, candidates with strong qualifications benefit enormously from our guidance on how to present themselves effectively to schools.

FINDING YOUR FIT

Is TA or HLTA Right for You?

Teaching Assistant

This role may be ideal if you...

- Are new to working in schools or education
- Want flexible day-to-day or part-time hours
- Enjoy supporting pupils on a 1:1 basis
- Have experience working with children informally
- Want to build experience before progressing
- Prefer a support role rather than leading lessons

HLTA

This role may be ideal if you...

- Have several years of TA experience already
- Feel confident leading lessons or interventions
- Want greater responsibility and a higher pay scale
- Are comfortable working more independently
- Have HLTA status or a Level 3-4 qualification
- Want to mentor or lead other support staff

Not Sure Which Route Is Right for You?

That's completely normal — many of the candidates we work with aren't sure where they fit when they first get in touch. Our team takes time to understand your background, your confidence level, your preferred

OUR SUPPORT

How Standby Education Can Help

At Standby Education, we work closely with schools across Derby and the surrounding areas to help Teaching Assistants and HLTAs secure the right opportunities. We take the time to understand your experience, confidence, preferred year groups and long-term goals — before we recommend a single placement.



Long-Term Placements

Stable, longer-term TA and HLTA roles with schools that suit your strengths and goals



Day-to-Day Flexible Work

Build confidence and school experience through flexible daily supply opportunities



SEND Specialist Roles

Access to specialist SEND opportunities across a range of settings and need types



Temp-to-Perm Roles

Start in a temporary position that could lead to a permanent contract within school



CV & Application Support

Practical advice on how to present your experience and skills to appeal to schools



Interview Preparation

Guidance on what schools ask, how to answer confidently, and how to stand out



Honest Guidance

We give you real, straightforward advice — not just what you want to hear



School Matching

We match you to schools based on your personality, experience and preferences

GETTING REGISTERED

What You'll Need to Get Started

- 01 Contact us by phone, email or via the website
- 02 Have an initial conversation about your experience and goals
- 03 Complete our registration and compliance process
- 04 We identify suitable schools and roles for your profile
- 05 We stay in regular contact throughout your placement

Documents Typically Required

Enhanced DBS check (Update Service preferred), photo ID, right to work documentation, National Insurance number, two professional references and any relevant qualification certificates.

Areas We Cover

Derby city, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and surrounding East Midlands areas. Contact us to confirm your postcode is covered.



Interested in Working Within Schools?

Standby Education would love to support your journey into education. Get in touch today — we're friendly, approachable and ready to help.



CALL US

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE

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