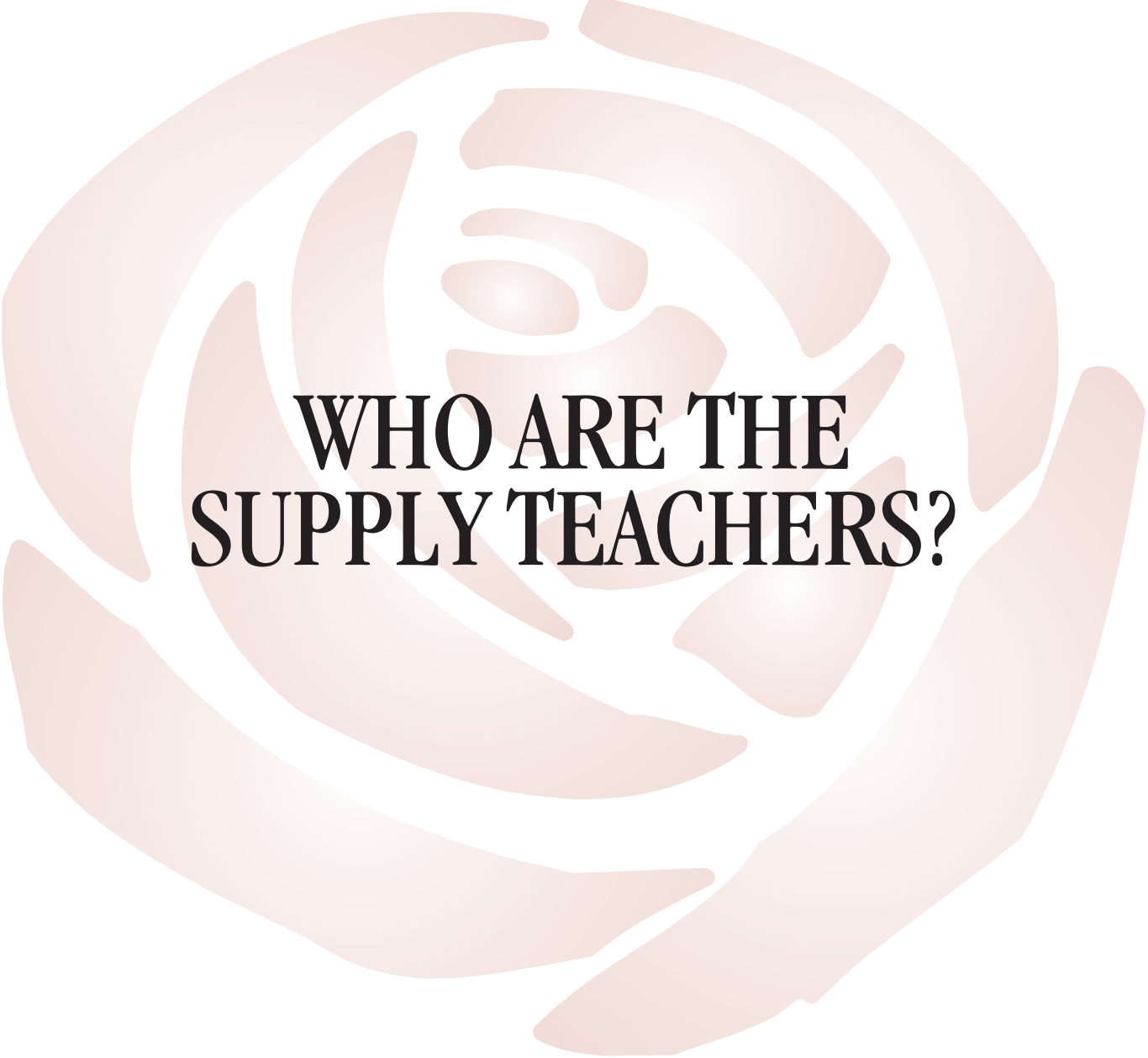# WHO ARE THE SUPPLY TEACHERS?

RESEARCH INTO THE CHARACTERISTICS
OF SUPPLY TEACHERS
AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL NEEDS

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MIRANDANET
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WHO ARE THE SUPPLY TEACHERS?

PREFACE

Supply teachers are the hidden workforce in education today. It would not be an exaggeration to say that without the flexibility and mobility offered by teachers and teaching assistants working on supply, many parts of our education system would have ground to a halt with schools unable to provide continuity of teaching.

Supply teachers cover for full-time teachers who are absent through illness, but they also fill vacancies, often over sustained periods, until a full-time teacher can be found.

In short, supply teachers are a component part of our education system and a vital one at that. They are education's representatives in the marketing of global flexible labour.

However, supply teachers offer more than the convenience of flexibility. As this report shows, they come from a range of backgrounds, experiences and parts of the world.

All this makes their tenure in a school, no matter for how long, a positive experience, rather than just one of necessity.

Supply teachers develop the behavioural management skills to manage classroom situations which vary dramatically from school to school. Their flexibility also means that they tend to use new technologies much more than full-time teachers, often bringing new ICT skills into schools where these are lacking and equipment remains unexploited. Supply teachers from overseas bring a much needed global experience to children who will eventually leave school themselves to enter the global labour market. The movement of supply teachers also provides for a degree of knowledge transferring in and out of schools that would be lost if the workforce were wholly static.

Globally, the watchword in discussions about labour efficiency is flexibility. Education cannot be isolated from labour market trends any more than other professions. A report like this is long overdue in that it emphasises the positive, indeed vital, contribution made by this otherwise hidden workforce.

Bob Wicks
Chief Executive
Select Education Plc

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Executive Summary

The MirandaNet Fellowship is working in partnership with Select Education to build a supportive community of supply teachers. In this research report, which was undertaken as part of a three year research and development project, MirandaNet Fellows worked with supply teachers to identify their main characteristics and their professional needs.

Three research methods were used which provided different kinds of data to give a many-faceted picture of the characteristics of supply teachers, their concerns and the kind of support that they would like. The three sources were: the database held by Select containing data on 6,687 individuals registered with them as supply teachers; answers to a questionnaire sent to all registered supply teachers and teaching assistants which had 1,810 returns, and two different kinds of focus group. One was composed of 32 supply teachers who had answered advertisements asking for their views. The other focus group was a group of 16 supply teachers who were recruited through national advertising to set up an e-mentoring service for their colleagues.

The evidence from the Select database shows that supply teachers cover a wide range of age and experience, from those just starting out in their careers to teachers who have held significant responsibilities in the schools they have served. Over half the registered supply teachers wish to work in secondary schools and over half of these offer shortage subjects. Most supply teachers are well qualified and many have interests and skills that could be harnessed to enrich pupils' and teachers' experience and expertise. This includes the one fifth of supply teachers who are not British nationals and who bring with them experience of other cultures and languages.

The questionnaire responses suggest that a search for permanent work is low on the agenda of most supply teachers: the school environment, pay and conditions are the factors that they rank most highly. The questionnaire also reveals a desire for continuing professional development (CPD) and a particular need for CPD in the areas of the use of ICT, Special Educational Needs, behaviour and classroom management. The focus groups helped to put these findings in the context of supply teachers' experience. While the groups enjoyed being supply teachers they were concerned about the limited opportunities for professional development and worried about their employment rights. They revealed some of the difficulties that they face and proposed some creative solutions.

The focus group evidence indicated that there are several simple steps that schools can take to ensure that supply teachers are able to teach effectively and that pupils benefit from the experience. Most important of these is ensuring that supply teachers have brief but essential information about the pupils and lessons they are to teach. They also need information about practices that are important to the ethos and smooth running of the school, such as the rewards and sanctions used as part of the school's approach to behaviour management.

Overall the findings present supply teachers as a rich pool of available talent which schools can use more effectively if they think more creatively about the way supply teachers are, or could be, deployed instead of seeing them simply as a stop-gap solution to staffing problems. A detailed series of recommendations for practice aimed at helping school managers get the best out of supply teachers is extrapolated from the data analysis.

The report ends with the researchers' discussion about new areas for investigation into teaching assistants and the ways in which the next stages of the research can be extended and improved.

Who are supply teachers?

Supply teachers range from those just starting out in their careers to very experienced teachers who have held significant responsibilities in the schools that they have served. Most supply teachers are British but about a fifth are not, bringing with them experience of other cultures and languages. Some supply teachers are very highly qualified and many have interests that could be harnessed to enrich pupils' and teachers' experience and expertise. The profiles shown illustrate something of the experience and expertise that supply teachers have to offer.

Jacob is 49 and has a BA degree, a PGCE and eight years experience teaching History, English and RE in his homeland of Zimbabwe. Since his arrival he has taught in several London secondary schools and just last year he successfully completed a part-time Masters degree in education. Apart from his main teaching subjects, he is keen to teach citizenship and willing to undertake general cover duties.

Jacob

Gail completed her NQT year last July on a one-year contract and since then has taught on short-term supply in several secondary schools. She is 23, with a BA degree and a PGCE in music. Music is her main love but she also speaks good French and Spanish and is comfortable teaching these subjects or English at Key Stage 3. Gail is an enthusiastic proponent of the value of music for pupils with EBD or MLD and she worked very successfully with groups of such pupils during her NQT year. She would like a position which could offer her the opportunity to extend this area of expertise.

Gail

Jane has taught in primary schools since she completed her BEd eleven years ago. She gained a post graduate certificate in counselling six years ago and for the past three years has undertaken supply teaching to give her

Jane

more time to devote to counselling activities. Now 33, Jane has experience teaching all year groups, from Year 1 to Year 6 and was a special educational needs co-ordinator for two years.

Jill, 48, has had twenty years experience of teaching science. After a break to spend time with her children while they were young, she continued her career, spending five years as head of department in a medium sized secondary school. She gained an MSc three years ago in order to explore different teaching approaches in her subject. Shortly after this, Jill and her husband moved to a new area of the country. Having left her old job, Jill decided that she wanted to reduce her working hours and so has opted to take on supply work rather than look for a full-time teaching post.

Jill

Before Malcolm became a teacher he was an engineer and spent several years working in India. Now 56, he was awarded his PGCE at the age of 45 and has taught maths and science in secondary and middle schools ever since. When his school merged with another last year he decided not to apply for one of the posts but to take on temporary supply work instead, with a view to spending more time at the house he and his wife had recently bought in France. Apart from maths and science, Malcolm is prepared to undertake general cover work or to make use of his linguistic skills in French, German, Urdu and Bengali.

Malcolm

Anna is 31 and Spanish. She gained the Spanish equivalent of a PGCE and is recognised as a qualified teacher by the DfES. She has taught history and Spanish in several secondary schools since she came to the UK two years ago. Because she is keen to extend her experience she is willing to teach Humanities, Key Stage 4 English or to provide general cover in secondary schools.

Anna

Recommendations for practice

MirandaNet Fellows have been working with supply teachers for over a year building a supportive community. From this experience in conjunction with the detailed data held by Select, the questionnaire responses and the themes highlighted by the focus group discussion recommendations for practice emerged. These recommendations are aimed at senior school managers. Some of these recommendations follow directly from the reported research findings, others make more of a creative leap based upon an intuitive response to the findings from experienced teacher educators in the light of discussions with supply teachers and engagement with their world. To give more context to these recommendations we begin the 'Recommendations for practice' section of this report with some profiles of supply teachers.

Getting the best from supply teachers

Engaging supply teachers to provide cover for staff absence sometimes results in someone *minding* rather than *teaching* pupils until their regular teacher returns. With a little forethought, this need not be so. Supply teachers offer a range of expertise and experience which can be employed to the benefit of the pupils and staff in their host schools. In some cases this can be achieved by providing supply teachers with brief but essential information about the pupils they are to teach and important school policies and practices they will be expected to uphold. In others, greater consideration of what supply teachers have to offer can lead to creative deployment that benefits all concerned.

There are a number of things that schools can do to make sure that they, and more importantly their pupils, benefit from having supply teachers working in the school.

◆ Only engage trusted supply teachers who are known to the school or are registered with a reputable teaching agency.

◆ Be specific about your requirements so that the teaching agency can match the supply teacher to your needs.

◆ Provide brief but accurate information about the age of pupils and the subjects/topics to be taught so that the supply teacher can prepare effectively. Don't change these at the last minute.

◆ If possible, provide the supply teacher with lesson plans or outlines of current work so that pupils' progress is not disrupted. If the supply teacher is to be engaged for more than just a few days, ensure that they have relevant schemes of work/syllabi and are involved in normal planning processes.

◆ Consider making it a requirement that regular staff keep basic information, such as pupil groupings, notes on pupils with special educational or medical needs and planning documents in an easily accessible file in the classroom or on the school network.

◆ Ensure someone is tasked to meet the supply teacher on arrival and show him/her the location of key places, e.g. teaching room(s), staffroom, toilets, resource stores.

◆ Make sure the supply teacher has a named contact in the school and that they meet prior to the start of teaching so that responsibilities, important school policies and issues of concern can be explained, e.g. regarding duties, behaviour management, pupils with medical needs, parental custody issues.

◆ Make sure the supply teacher has all the information they need to enable them to be teaching the right pupils the right subject at the right time and in the right place, e.g. school plan, timetables.

◆ Clarify with the supply teacher the resources that are available to support their teaching and how they can access them. Make sure that they are shown how to access ICT resources on the school's systems as the way these are set up varies from school to school.

◆ Find out the strengths and breadth of expertise of your supply teacher, especially if he or she is to be in school for more than a few days. Think creatively about how you can use their expertise and integrate them within the school. Sponsorship of NQT accreditation can be very welcome for example.

◆ Ensure a mechanism is in place for supply teachers to report back on pupils' achievements and on any issues arising which the regular teacher can follow up.

◆ Be aware of pupils' attitudes towards supply teachers and recognise that it may be necessary for a senior or respected teacher to reinforce the behaviour that is expected of them and the sanctions that will operate if they misbehave or treat the supply teacher disrespectfully. Short-term supply teachers do not have the opportunity that permanent staff have to establish a working relationship with pupils. Even the best of them may need support initially.

◆ Invite supply teachers to join in any staff meetings or professional development opportunities provided within the school.

◆ If you engage supply teachers from a teaching agency, provide feedback on their performance.

Supply teachers can choose where they work. If working in your school is not a pleasant experience or they feel unsupported, you are unlikely to be able to encourage the good ones to come back. In the end, it's your pupils who suffer.

Using supply teachers creatively

Typically, supply teachers are employed to provide short-term cover for absences or long-term cover for illness, unfilled vacancies, maternity leave, etc. In some cases, the expertise of the teacher engaged is well-matched to the pupils and lessons to be taught in terms of their subject and sector specialism. In other cases the teacher may be providing general cover, including teaching outside their specialist areas.

Schools can derive significant benefit from using supply teachers creatively. Many supply teachers are well qualified and have a broad range of expertise and experience to offer.

Other forms of deployment, used on their own, or in conjunction with the more typical deployment patterns, can contribute to school improvement plan priorities:

Raising standards

Enable more flexible grouping of pupils, e.g. splitting three classes into four sets.

Boost subject expertise available to the school and possibly share with other schools.

Suitably experienced teachers provide an increased level of specialist teaching to pupils during practical and creative activities.

Improving inclusion by promoting individual achievement

Provide focused teaching for pupils with SEN or EAL or who are gifted or talented in class or in withdrawal groups or releasing existing staff to do this – may involve team-teaching.

Enriching the curriculum

Engage an overseas teacher for specific lessons to add a different dimension, e.g. on citizenship, language and literacy, geography.

Extend the curriculum, e.g. provide foreign language teaching for older primary pupils.

Run before/after school and lunchtime clubs, e.g. in music, a foreign language or environmental activities.

Contributing to curriculum development

Provide subject specialist input to planning.

Release members of staff to undertake curriculum review and revision.

Release members of staff to enable them to implement curricular initiatives.

Supporting management

Provide specialist cover for subject coordinator or head of department to allow him/her to monitor teaching, pupils' standards and achievement, effectiveness of resource provision and deployment, etc.

Provide cover for performance management observations and interviews.

Improving pupils' personal development

Reduce group sizes to give pupils more structured individual teaching.

Conduct individual or group counselling sessions with selected pupils.

Run a lunchtime club for pupils who have difficulty coping with social situations.

Set up a pupil mentoring system and train mentors.

Professional development

Team-teach with a weaker teacher as part of a short-term support mechanism, or to release an expert member of staff to do so.

Provide training for staff on techniques for dealing with pupils experiencing problems.

Provide input to training sessions on different ways of teaching aspects of a subject.

Provide release time for teachers so that they can engage in professional development activities, such as observing others in their own or a different school, teaching alongside a colleague, undertaking research.

Reducing workload

Provide timetabled cover across a range of subjects to help a school implement workforce reforms.

Background to the research

Supply teachers are now an important and growing sector of the professional workforce, especially in cities.

Select Education, an agency that provides temporary or longer term staffing solutions for schools, is working in partnership with the MirandaNet Fellowship to understand the needs of supply teachers. MirandaNet is an international community of teachers, teacher educators, researchers, policy makers and company partners and over three years these two bodies plan to build a supportive community of supply teachers and teacher assistants. This community, which will develop on-line and face-to-face, aims to extend professional development opportunities for supply teachers initially, and later for teaching assistants, who register with the agency. The intention is to provide support for supply and assistant teachers as well as providing helpful information for the staffing managers in schools.

The community has begun with a core group of supply teachers willing to develop their e-mentoring skills through a MirandaNet Academy community leaders' e-moderation course at the Centre for Innovation and Technology (CEIT), Bath Spa University College. The community leaders are providing on-line support to colleagues and helping to create a knowledge base relevant to supply teachers' needs. Resources are being researched and tailored to match these needs and made easily accessible to teachers and teaching assistants on-line.

Research methods

To support and inform these activities, research was undertaken to identify the main characteristics of supply teachers and their professional needs. This entailed analysing and integrating evidence drawn from the following sources:

◆ the extensive data held by Select Education on the supply teachers who are registered with the agency;

◆ the outcomes of questions relevant to the research that were included in a questionnaire survey of supply teachers and teaching assistants conducted by Select Education during the summer 2003;

◆ two supply teacher focus groups organised by MirandaNet in October and December 2003. One group of 32 replied to advertisements asking for their views. The other supply group of 16 was selected from a national campaign to find appropriate supply teachers to form the core of the proposed e-mentoring service. Concept mapping was one of the data collection methods used from the three groups.

The report summarises the main findings of the research arranged according to these three methods. Recommendations for practice emerged from these findings and also from extensive discussions with supply teachers over a year as part of the process of building a supply teacher virtual support community. These have been presented on pages 6-9 as a resource for the managers of supply teachers in schools. There is also a separate leaflet on the website at www.mirandanet.ac.uk/selected-leaflet.
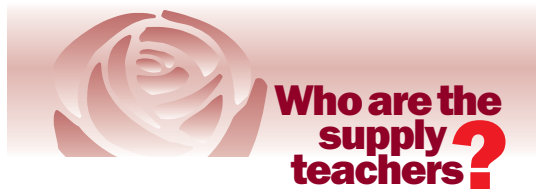
Method One: an analysis of the Select Education database

The overall sample size was 6,687 individuals registered with Select Education as supply teachers. The data was analysed to extract information which is organised under the headings gender and age, nationality, qualifications, expertise, subjects, extra curricular activities, sector preferences and preferences for temporary or permanent employment

Gender and age

Women outnumber men by 2:1 in the data, which reflects the proportions of men and women in the profession as a whole. However, the proportions are not constant across all age bands. The proportion of men to women increases with age. This suggests that a higher percentage of women choose to undertake supply teaching in their twenties and thirties than at other ages, whereas more men choose to do so in their thirties, forties and fifties. A small proportion of males and females, 4% of the sample, wish to continue teaching beyond the applicable retirement age which is 60 for females and 65 for males. It might seem reasonable to assume that some teachers would wish to reduce their workload as they approach retirement by taking up part-time or temporary supply work. However, the low proportion of teachers in the sample who are within five years of their retirement age, just 7%, suggests that this is not a solution that many choose.

Table 1: Percentages of male and female supply teachers, by age

	20's	30's	40's	50's	60's	70's
Males	20%	25%	24%	23%	8%	1%
Females	31%	25%	19%	20%	5%	0%
All	27%	25%	21%	21%	6%	0%

Nationality

By far the majority of teachers in the sample are British nationals or British with dual nationality. Only a very small proportion has not declared their nationality (2.3%). Almost one in five are non-British nationals. Amongst this group, seventy-nine nationalities are represented. The gender profile is the same as for the whole sample, that is, one third are men and two-thirds women. The majority are from the Commonwealth (or recent members) and Europe. The three largest groups, from Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, account for more than a third of all overseas teachers. Almost three-quarters of overseas teachers are in their twenties and thirties.

Nationality	No. of teachers	Nationality	No. of teachers
Australian	164	**Irish**	77
South African	140	**Spanish**	54
Zimbabwean	124	**Indian**	43
New Zealand	89	**Ghanaian**	42
French	88	**Nigerian**	33

Table 2: The ten largest groups of overseas teachers

Most overseas teachers are looking for temporary work, although more than a third are willing to consider permanent work. Only 2% want permanent work.

Qualifications

It has not been possible within this research to provide a reliable indication of the qualifications held by the supply teachers in the sample. Much detailed information is recorded, but it is stored in several different fields and the information in each field is not consistent, so analysis is complex and time-consuming and the potential for error is great. However, detailed record-by-record manual analysis has been undertaken of a subset of the sample: overseas teachers. This reveals that almost nine out of every ten overseas supply teachers, 88%, have a teaching qualification. More than two-thirds have at least a first degree, with 13% also having a higher degree. The graduates include 12 doctors and two professors. The highest declared qualification of almost a third is a certificate, diploma or other qualification that is not equivalent to a degree. It is likely, however, that the number of graduates is higher than the data indicates as several people have a recorded postgraduate certificate or diploma, so are almost certain to have a first degree although there is no record of it. No qualifications were recorded for 1% of the sample.

Expertise

The analysis of this data provided information about newly qualified teachers and extra responsibilities.

◆ **Newly qualified teachers**

Approximately one fifth of teachers are listed as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). The figure is unreliable as the field has not been rigorously maintained and some of the data may be out of date. However, it does indicate that one fifth of the teachers were NQTs when they first registered with Select.

◆ **Extra responsibilities**

There is no data for many teachers about the extra responsibilities which they have held. It is not known whether this is because the information was not declared or recorded, or because the teachers had not taken on extra responsibilities. Thus, the following results need to be treated with some caution. One in nine teachers declared experience of extra responsibilities, over and above their basic teaching duties. Of these, more than two-thirds have been subject co-ordinators or heads of departments and one in ten have held year group, key stage or whole school responsibilities. Although the numbers are relatively small, they indicate that there is much expertise within the supply teacher ranks.

*Table 3: Additional responsibilities held by supply teachers*

Responsibility	Number of teachers
Subject coordinator/Head of Department	520
Form tutor	129
Key Stage coordinator/Head of Year	40
Assessment/Outgoings/Cover/Timetable coordinator	23
First Aider/Health and Safety representative	21

Subjects

Primary teachers have not generally indicated a subject specialism. Just over half of the teachers wish to work in secondary schools and just over half of these offer shortage subjects. A third of the teachers are core subject specialists (English, mathematics and science) while almost a fifth offer other shortage subjects: modern foreign languages, design and technology and information and communications technology.

Table 4: National Curriculum specialisms of secondary teachers (+RE)
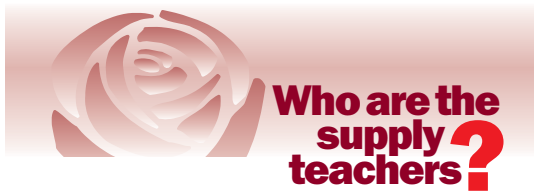
French 273 (8%), Spanish 68 (2%), German 58 (2%)

First choice subject	No. of teachers	% of secondary teachers	No. of shortage subject teachers aged 55+	% of shortage subject teachers aged 55+
English	442	13%	70	16%
Science	416	12%	42	10%
Modern foreign languages	399*	11%*	42	11%
Mathematics	290	8%	43	15%
Art	252	7%		
History	194	6%		
Design and technology	158	5%	21	13%
Geography	142	4%		
Physical education	119	3%		
ICT/Computer studies	103	3%	15	15%
Music	100	3%		
Religious education	67	2%		

Extra-curricular activities

There is no data for many teachers about the extra-curricular activities they offer. It is not known whether this is because the information was not declared or recorded, or because the teachers do not wish to offer additional activities. Thus, the following results need to be treated with some caution.

Approximately one in nine teachers are willing to offer extra-curricular activities. While nearly half of these are able to help schools extend extra-curricular opportunities in the traditional areas of sport and music, a larger proportion could help schools to expand the range of activities to complement and enrich other areas of the curriculum, including pupils' personal development.

Table 5: Extra-curricular activities offered by supply teachers

Extra-curricular activity	No of teachers
Sports	249
Music	123
Drama	84
Art	80
After Hours	58
Computer	30
Homework	26
French	25
Swimming	24
Chess	22
Environmental	19
Craft	18
ICT	9
School Newsletter	7
Gifted Children	1

Total number of teachers 775
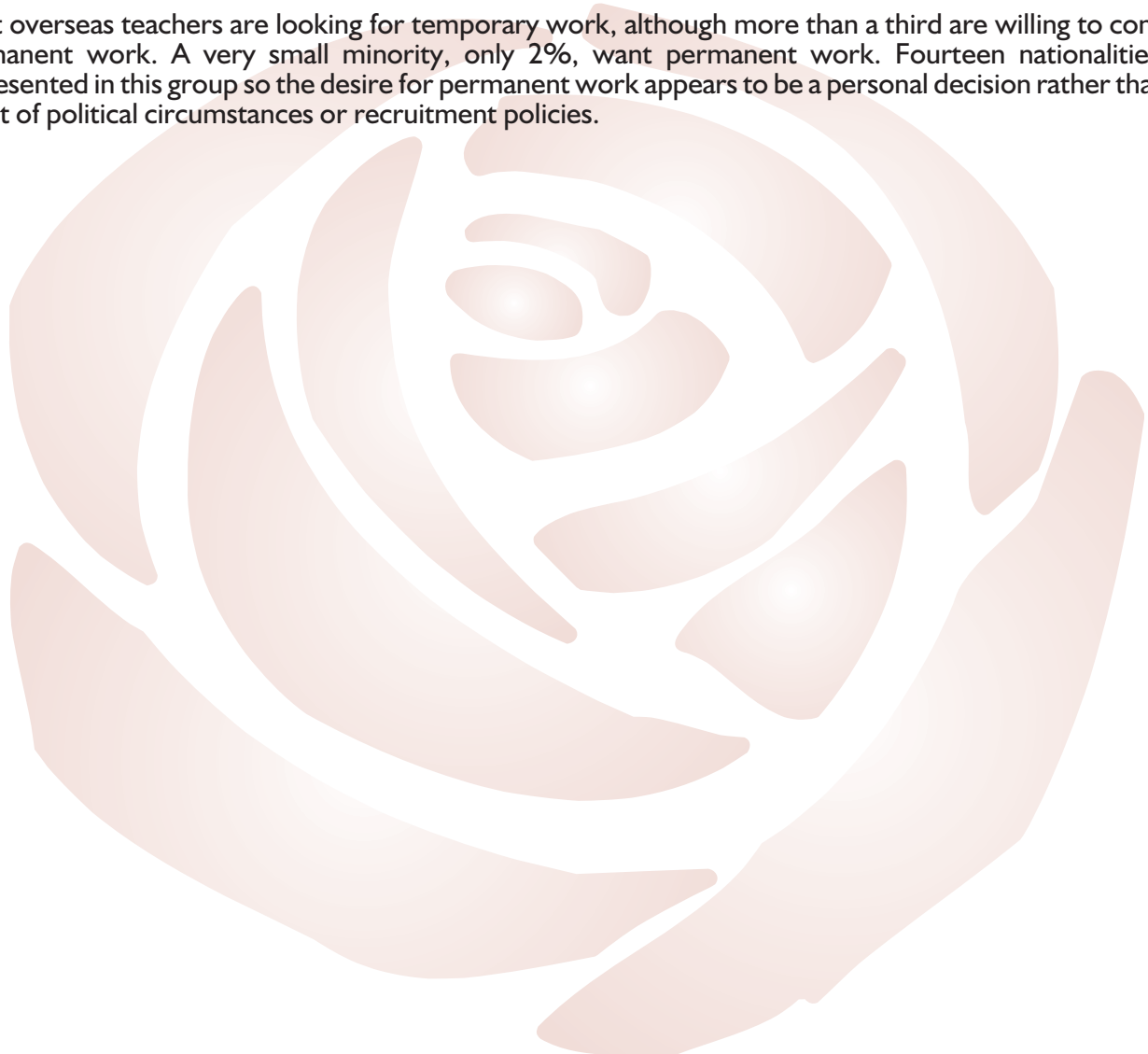
Sector preferences

Just over half of all teachers and almost equal percentages of men and women, prefer to work in secondary schools. Forty-four out of every hundred teachers would like to work in primary schools and most of these are female. 4% wished to work in special schools and again, 69% of these are female. Amongst **males**, three-quarters prefer secondary work, a little under a quarter want primary work and only three in every hundred want to work in special schools. Amongst **females**, the primary-secondary divide is not so great, with more than half opting for primary and four in every ten choosing secondary work. Four out of every hundred would prefer special school work.

Secondary work is the first choice of almost two-thirds of **overseas teachers**, with just over a third preferring primary work and four in every hundred wanting special school work. In relation to all teachers, overseas teachers make up 14% of those wishing to teach in primary schools, 20% of those wishing to teach in secondary schools and 19% of those wanting to work in special schools.

Preferences for temporary or permanent employment

Nearly all teachers are willing to do temporary work, with more than half only wanting temporary work. Only one teacher in every hundred is particularly looking for permanent work, but forty-three out of every hundred teachers are willing to do either temporary or permanent work. Most older teachers want temporary work only, but there is still a minority who are willing to consider permanent work, even some who are in their seventies.

Most overseas teachers are looking for temporary work, although more than a third are willing to consider permanent work. A very small minority, only 2%, want permanent work. Fourteen nationalities are represented in this group so the desire for permanent work appears to be a personal decision rather than the result of political circumstances or recruitment policies.

Method Two : the Select Education survey

During the summer of 2003 all the Select Education supply teachers and teaching assistants who had registered with the agency were surveyed by the company. Two of the questions were particularly relevant to this report: what matters most to supply teachers? and, what professional development is required?

What matters most to supply teachers?

Supply teachers were asked to arrange six given criteria in order, with the most important first. The results were as follows:

❶ **Pay rate**

❷ **Regular supply work**

❸ **The offer of work in suitable school environments**

❹ **Part-time flexible work options**

❺ **Long-term temporary work**

❻ **Assistance in finding a permanent post**

It is clear, therefore from the database analysis and the survey that most teachers and teaching assistants register with the agency for temporary or part-time work. This finding may indicate that teachers seeking permanent work are more likely to use alternative sources.

What professional development is required?

In its survey, Select Education also asked teachers and teaching assistants to rank six given aspects of education on which they would like guidance, updating or training. Based on 1810 returns, the responses were as follows, in priority order:

❶ **Using ICT in teaching**

❷ **Working in special educational needs schools**

❸ **Classroom management**

❹ **Introduction to teaching in the UK/outside the UK**

❺ **Introduction to supply teaching**

❻ **How to be a successful teaching assistant**

There were more than twice as many responses for each of the first three than for any of the others. It is possible that the advances in ICT in schools have left 60% of the respondents feeling unprepared. The difficulties of accessing training that is available to other teachers may well be a factor here. It is somewhat surprising that half of the respondents would like to develop their expertise in working in special schools, although it is possible that some may feel that this would help to equip them better to deal with pupils having special educational needs in mainstream schools. Classroom management is an area for development for just under half the respondents. This has been borne out, too, in discussions with supply teachers, many of whom cite pupils' attitudes towards supply teachers as problematic.

Method Three:
Supply teacher focus groups

MirandaNet hosted two focus groups: thirty two supply teachers in October 2003 and sixteen supply teachers in December 2003. Although they were recruited nationally through Select Education, most came from within the Greater London area. Two thirds of each group were female, and just over half were overseas teachers.

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore the kind of advice services that might be helpful to supply teachers, and to identify the type of supply teachers who would be able to mentor colleagues. During the session, teachers were encouraged to talk about their experiences and about what supply teachers need to know. Sessions were recorded and analysed for emergent themes.

As the advice services will be delivered on-line, a concept mapping activity and discussion were used to assess the core group's knowledge and understanding of computers.

Experiences and needs

The teachers in the group regularly worked as supply teachers and their deployment was a mixture of day-to-day teaching in a variety of schools and longer-term teaching mainly in one school. All of them enjoyed supply teaching and preferred this to regular full-time teaching. Many of the teachers frequently worked outside their area of specialism to provide general cover, and emphasised the importance of being flexible. The teachers represented a wide range of expertise across primary and secondary sectors. Their subject specialisms included mathematics, science, biology, ICT, computer science, geography, PE and dance and movement. Other roles and expertise include deputy headship, special needs and guidance counselling.

Among the challenges supply teachers frequently encounter are:

◆ Between being contacted and arriving at the school, the school has changed its mind about the class/lessons to be taught, e.g. a supply teacher initially asked to teach a Year 1 class finds on arrival that the school now wants him/her to teach Year 6.

◆ No one is available to greet the supply teacher or takes responsibility for ensuring they know which class(es) and subjects they are to teach and where.

◆ The school does not provide essential information about pupils the supply teacher is to teach so their safety is compromised, e.g. about medical problems (asthma, epilepsy, etc) or parental custody.

◆ No information is provided about the school's approach to behaviour management and the system of sanctions and rewards in operation.

◆ Pupils are often openly disrespectful to supply teachers, and so are a few staff.

◆ Overseas teachers are often unprepared for the culture in UK schools, especially pupils' expectations of active involvement and their willingness to challenge teachers, rather than being passive recipients of education.

◆ Lack of support from school when dealing with difficult situations.

Concerns raised and areas of support needed include:

◆ Lack of clarity about the status of supply teachers with regard to health and safety. Who would be responsible if, for example, a significant health and safety issue arose? Access could be provided via a database and online mentors to suggestions of what to do when in vulnerable situations. The database could expand as knowledge and activity develops within the supply teacher community.

◆ Lack of clarity about the employment status of supply teachers. Needs to be resolved and explained.

◆ Exclusion from major training programmes like the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) ICT national training programme for teachers.

◆ The need for the protection of union membership but uncertainty about which one to join.

◆ Access to professional development and updating which is problematic, especially as supply teachers are often not eligible for local training. In addition unlike other teachers, they lose pay if they attend training events during a working day, and they are usually expected to pay for the training themselves. They agreed that easier access to professional development opportunities is needed. Bursaries were suggested as something that would help, like the DfES Best Practice Research Bursaries.

◆ Uncertain pension rights could be resolved if supply teachers had access to clear information about them.

◆ Isolation and lack of mutually supportive interaction with colleagues, especially amongst teachers providing short-term supply emerged as a problem. Sympathetic, but realistic, mentorship and informal access to other supply teacher colleagues would help, as would access to resource banks to help supply teachers prepare lesson kits for a range of age groups and scenarios.

Knowledge and experience of ICT

Most teachers in the first focus group displayed a limited range of experience with ICT. More than half did not have immediate access to a computer and relied on the local library or internet café. Many of them were concerned that they were rarely allowed to use computers in schools and felt left out because of that. However, they were aware of potential dangers that using computers posed for pupils, such as poor posture, plagiarism and access to pornography. The second group had slightly more knowledge about computers and better access, perhaps because they had applied to do an e-mentoring job.

Analysis of the supply teachers' concept maps about ICT in their daily lives shows that all teachers were familiar with the communications aspect of information and communications technology, but few had experience of other uses, such as creating documents or manipulating data. In discussions, teachers showed that they were often aware of a wider range of uses of ICT than they represented in their concept maps, but that they had not included them because they did not make personal use of them. The most common uses they identified were:

◆ email for keeping in touch with family and friends

◆ shopping on-line, e.g. for clothes and household goods

◆ travel information and booking tickets for holidays, visits, etc.

◆ banking

◆ games

◆ school work – worksheets, assignments, etc.

◆ computers in school, although often they were not allowed to use them.

Discussion and conclusions

The three sources of data and research methods used combine to give an overall picture of supply teachers, their concerns and the kind of support that they would like. The evidence from the Select data-base shows that supply teachers cover a wide range of age and experience, from those just starting out in their careers to teachers who have held significant responsibilities in the schools they have served. Most supply teachers are well qualified and many have interests that could be harnessed to enrich pupils' and teachers' experience and expertise. This includes the one fifth of supply teachers who are not British nationals and who bring with them experience of other cultures and languages. The questionnaire responses suggest that a search for permanent work is low on the agenda of most supply teachers: school environment, pay and conditions are the factors that they rank most highly. The questionnaire also reveals a desire for continuing professional development particularly in the use of ICT, Special Educational Needs and classroom management. The findings of the focus group help to put these findings in the context of the experience of supply teachers. While the group enjoyed being supply teachers they were concerned about the limited opportunities for professional development and worried about their employment rights. They revealed some of the difficulties that they faced and proposed some creative solutions.

It emerged from the findings of the focus groups that there are several simple steps that schools could take that would help to ensure supply teachers are able to teach effectively and that pupils benefit from the experience. Most important of these is ensuring that supply teachers have brief but essential information about the pupils and lessons they are to teach and are made aware of practices that are important to the ethos and smooth running of the school, such as the rewards and sanctions used as part of the school's approach to behaviour management. Putting all the findings together it is clear that supply teachers represent a rich pool of available talent which schools might be able to make more use of if they think more creatively about the way supply teachers are, or could be, deployed instead of seeing them simply as a stop-gap solution to staffing problems.

Future directions for research

Much was learnt from this first stage about research into the needs of temporary staff about appropriate research methodologies. For example, although the focus groups were advertised nationally, in the event members were mainly drawn from the Greater London area and this was reflected in the composition of the group. Also two groups from the same area are not enough to draw strongly supported conclusions about how a group feels on any given issue. This is because focus groups can be influenced by group dynamics to give a distorted picture. In the future study several focus groups will be convened covering the whole of the UK. Again, although the Select database is a rich resource of information some of its data was unreliable or difficult to access, particularly the data on qualifications. This is because the database was not originally designed for research purposes. The questionnaire provided useful supporting evidence from a large sample for the findings of the focus groups but it was not specifically developed for this project and so was not designed to shed light on all the issues that concern supply teachers or all their needs. The results of this study will be fed into the design of the next questionnaire that will explore the key issues for supply staff and assistant teachers in future years. The design of the database will also be reconsidered in order to offer better research data.

There is scope for further research into the reasons why people choose to do supply teaching, what their expectations are and the level of commitment and responsibility they wish to make or take on. The outcomes of this kind of research will help Select Education and others, for example the Department for Education and Skills, to tailor the support available to supply teachers so that it more closely matches their

needs and expectations. Teacher assistants also present another group for the exploration of their needs and their talents.

Given the changes being brought about by workforce reform in schools the data analysis will be extended in the next phase to identify also the characteristics and needs of teaching assistants.

There is very little research literature available about supply teachers or teaching assistants. However, a literature review will nonetheless make a useful contribution to current knowledge and help to identify further research needs in the next stages. Much could also be learned about deployment patterns and their impact on the professional development needs of supply teachers and teaching assistants from researching schools' perceptions of school staffing in the future and the changes they propose to implement. If the study were extended to include questionnaire surveys and sample telephone interviews with school managers this could also provide useful information about the support needed by those responsible for staffing.

Potentially, these research ideas could culminate in the development of resources, such as case studies, scenarios and development profiles that might help senior managers plan how best to move from their current position to realising their vision for staffing.

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Evaluating The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) for Educators (2005)

MirandaNet is managing an independent evaluation project, instigated by Aston Swann and supported by the British Computer Society, to investigate teachers' acquisition of ICT skills through the Aston Swann ECDL Training Programme.

**www.astonswann.co.uk www.educatorsecdl.com
www.mirandanet.ac.uk/industry/astonswann.htm**

Learning to use ICT in Classrooms: teachers' and trainers' perspectives (2004)

MirandaNet have conducted an evaluation of the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) ICT teacher training initiative. Funded with £230 million of National Lottery money, the NOF ICT training gave serving teachers and school librarians the chance to increase their expertise in the use of 'ICT in their Subject Teaching'. The emphasis was on pedagogy.

The three evaluation reports are

◆ A summary of the research findings
◆ Emergent trends for teacher educators and staff trainers
◆ The full evaluation report

This evaluation was funded by the Teacher Training Agency which also had the responsibility for Quality Assurance. Details can be found on the MirandaNet website **www.mirandanet.ac.uk/tta**

Transforming Learning Using Interactive Whiteboards (2004)

Sharing our Learning – research and development into the use of interactive whiteboards in the classroom by MirandaNet Fellows supported by Dr. John Cuthell. Funded by Promethean.
www.mirandanet.ac.uk/interactive.htm

Web Resources for Teachers by Teachers (WEBRITTe - 2002)

Since 1998 the Government has invested some £1.8 billion in the National Grid for Learning and NOF teacher training with the aim of helping teachers use ICT to raise standards and to transform teaching and learning. Engaging the profession in the use of the NGfL has proved to be challenging.

The MirandaNet Fellowship in collaboration with TeacherNet at the Department for Education developed a practice based research project to increase teachers' awareness of the National Grid for Learning resources, to promote ownership of this new medium and to consult with teachers by peer review.

The full report includes a Teacher Resource Exchange Research: Copyright in e-Lesson resources: a guide to teachers using web-based learning materials: Copyright Awareness Questionnaire: Copyright Survey Results: Evaluation Overview **www.mirandanet.ac.uk/profdev/webritte.htm**

Teachers as Innovators: an evaluation of what motivates teachers to use ICT (2000)

A study of expert teachers by C. Preston, M. Cox and K. Cox funded by the Teacher Training Agency Special Projects Funding, Compaq and Oracle.

This study focuses on the opinions of about one hundred teachers from a range of subject disciplines who already use ICT in the classroom. Amongst the findings there were indications that the Internet may be the application that fires teachers' intellect and imagination. Membership of communities of practice was also seen as an important contribution to professional growth and ownership of ICT.
www.mirandanet.ac.uk/pubs/tes_art.htm. Copies can be purchased from enquiries@mirandanet.ac.uk

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