

Driving up standards with ASTs

Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) are considered to be among the most able teachers in the country. They have the professional attributes, skills and knowledge to drive up standards in teaching and learning. **They are creative teachers who actively help headteachers to bring about change in schools - change for the better!**



ASTs are excellent classroom practitioners, always prepared to walk the extra mile for their pupils. Consequently, they help their pupils to surpass expectations. They work with colleagues to improve practice right across the school. Howard Lay, Headteacher at Samuel Ward Academy, appoints ASTs strategically as part of his staffing structure. He says,

“ASTs have had a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning from good to outstanding. They have led the cross-school teaching and learning strategy, supported individual teachers and helped create a culture of high expectations and challenge.”

Many headteachers recognise that their ASTs are having a real and visible impact on their school. They understand that having innovative and committed teachers on site to work alongside the leadership team is a force to inspire staff and pupils alike. Kate Abbott at Great Barr School in Birmingham calls them,

“A powerhouse of pedagogical professionals!”



“An AST creates energy in your school. They share their skills and expertise, and encourage and support others. They are excellence in action!” Caitlin Yapp, Headteacher, Barcombe Primary School, East Sussex.

Tell me about AST Status

To achieve AST status, a candidate must demonstrate to an external assessor that he or she meets all the necessary teaching standards set out in the professional standards for teachers. The standards to be met will depend on where the candidate is currently on the pay-scale: Main-Scale, Post-Threshold or Excellent Teacher. Any teacher who has gained QTS status and successfully completed an induction year can apply for AST status, although a minimum of two years results must be available to the assessor.

As ASTs are considered to be at the forefront and pinnacle of teaching and learning, candidates are externally assessed by one of the assessors from the National Assessment Agency for ASTs and ETs. This ensures that there is a national consistency in measuring the professional attributes, knowledge and skills of all ASTs.

ASTs must demonstrate that, prior to assessment, they have shown a willingness to work closely with leadership and management teams and take a strategic lead in developing practice and policies. For example, an AST in Walsall addressed poor take-up in English A-Level by creating a new approach to the Sixth Form curriculum in the subject and 'English Demystified' was born. In 2005 only 18 students in the school took A-Level English. That number has risen to 74 students in the current year (over one-third of the Sixth Form) with a team of six teachers delivering lessons.

But why should I have an AST?

ASTs bring many benefits to a school, not least the retention of the school's best teachers. AST status allows the most able teachers to climb the teaching ladder, but at the same time to spend the majority of their time in the classroom, where they are most effective. As well as being excellent classroom practitioners, ASTs work with colleagues, both in their own and in other schools, to drive up standards. It is expected that ASTs will spend 20% of their time in outreach (unless there are special circumstances in the school). This makes your AST a valuable asset, as you may be in a position to broker their outreach, see our Leadership and Management of ASTs in Schools Tool Kit.

Headteachers find that releasing their AST for one day a week is a very positive and rewarding initiative. For example, Elizabeth Phillips, Headteacher at The St Marylebone CE School, Westminster says, "The ASTs are fully involved in the local authority's strategic support programme for school improvement which has made an excellent, sustained impact on many of the local authority's schools. The ASTs positively thrive on this aspect of their work and have justifiably earned great respect throughout the authority. Similarly Ian Colling, Headteacher at Magdalen College School Northampton says, "The outreach work helps them to keep a broad perspective on their own practice and that of colleagues in our own school."



"ASTs positively thrive on their outreach work." Elizabeth Phillips, Headteacher at The St Marylebone CE School, Westminster

How do I know that ASTs really do drive up standards?

AST assessment is rigorous but fair. As part of their evidence, candidates must show at least two years of excellent outcomes for their pupils. ASTs devise the most creative approaches to lessons. Personalised learning and differentiation are central. They stretch their pupils so that each one reaches his/her full potential. Lessons are so well planned that often learning happens seamlessly.

AST input drives up Level 4 achievement in maths by 33% in one year.

The impact of an AST in London working with his outreach school, that had been struggling in maths, provides evidence that ASTs really do drive up standards. In the previous academic year just 46% of pupils in Year 6 had gained a Level 4 or above. A plan of action, backed by senior management, was agreed and was part of a whole-school approach. The resulting outcomes were an improved view of mathematics within the community and 79% of pupils gaining Level 4 and above.

Pupils generally love being in class with an AST. For example, an AST in Kent, working to improve staff confidence and pupil engagement in science, received pupil endorsements of "I feel like a proper scientist." "Science is fun – love it." An AST working with Gifted and Talented Children from Years 3, 5 and 6 to achieve their inspirational targets devised a project where the pupils planned a journey around the UK. The AST says, "As the children took more ownership of the project, they became more enthusiastic and real life problem-solving was taking place. They were so enthusiastic that they wanted to stay in during playtime to prepare for the whole-school assembly."

Training staff in school

ASTs provide cost-effective continuing professional development and training for staff within the school. This training is highly effective as the ASTs know the needs of both the staff and the pupils. They coach and mentor their colleagues so that they can improve their performance. For example, an AST in Birmingham coaches staff at her own school, including NQTs, TeachFirst graduates, aspiring ASTs and Heads of Department who want to move from good to outstanding. An English teacher, who joined the school just two years earlier as part of TeachFirst and who had received coaching and mentoring from the AST, received an **Outstanding** during a recent Ofsted visit.



"The most effective way to make significant improvements in teaching and learning in any school setting is to deploy ASTs to lead from the front."
Mike O'Sullivan,
Headteacher,
St Martin's School,
Essex.

OK, but how much is it going to cost me?

If your AST is going to be local authority-funded, the local authority will provide a contribution to towards the AST's salary. If the AST is going to be school-funded, the full cost of the AST's salary is borne by the school. The costs and benefits of an AST can be spread across a federation or cluster of schools. See details for ASTs' Pay Spine on page 66 of School Teachers' Pay and Conditions.

There is no one fixed starting place for ASTs on the pay scale. The starting place will be decided depending on the AST's level of responsibility and experience. However, the starting point should be discussed with the aspiring AST and should be agreed before the AST assessment takes place. There is no charge to the school or the local authority for the AST assessment.

Headteachers believe that the benefits of an AST go far beyond their cost. Roger Legate, OBE, Principal at Linden Lodge and Executive Head at Oak Lodge School in Wandsworth agrees.



"Investing in ASTs has supported school improvement, collaborative learning, the growth of partnerships and made a real difference to children's learning experiences. Our ASTs enrich children's learning, maximise opportunities and unlock the potential of children with SEN." Roger Legate, OBE,
Principal at Linden Lodge School.

ASTs are a valuable asset and the brokerage of their outreach work may provide an income to your school. Ingrid Abrahams, Deputy Headteacher at Great Barr School in Birmingham describes how they manage the brokerage of their ASTs, "Local and national tendering arrangements are made for schools wishing to enter into training partnerships with the host school. Full coaching programmes can be established across a number of departments/schools, with support based on school development plans."

How do I identify a potential AST?

Recognising potential ASTs should not be difficult. They are the teachers whose lessons are well-prepared and who engage 100 per cent of their pupils. They are the teachers whose pupils do well and whose results are better than the school average. They are the teachers who will spend time with a colleague who is experiencing difficulty. They are the teachers who are likely to pick up whole-school issues and produce research and creative approaches to solve problems.

As Margaret Cooke, Primary Strategy Manager, Hertfordshire says,
"ASTs are a group of highly skilled and passionate professionals who are forever seeking new techniques and pushing the boundaries within their own practice. They are a joy to work with."



Leadership and Management of ASTs in Schools Tool Kit available from the National Assessment Agency for ASTs and ETs.

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ASTs – How will they fit in to the new scheme of things?

There is very good evidence that ASTs are and will continue to be valued by the people who are creating the new educational landscape.

- In its recent White Paper, The Importance of Teaching, the government set out its vision for Teaching Schools. In this vision the government stated that it planned to pull together outstanding teachers, including Advanced Skills Teachers, who are committed to supporting other schools.
- Referring to the new SLE role, Andy Buck who is leading the National College's work on teaching schools says on the National College website, "The new designation of SLEs will sit alongside other designations such as AST and Excellent Teacher."
- With regard to the independent review of teaching standards, it is the expectation of the DfE that any revisions to the professional standards of ASTs will not take effect until September 2012. We fully expect that, following the review, AST status will be maintained, possibly under another name, but nevertheless maintained.



The future for ASTs is positive. ASTs are a most valued and valuable asset for any headteacher. Don't hold back on moving forward!

Where can I find out more about AST assessment?

- National Assessment Agency for ASTs and ETs website, www.advancedskillsteachers.com, for practical tips and links to guidance and AST application forms
- See our DVD-ROM, Advanced Skills Teachers: Making a Difference, available from the National Assessment Agency for ASTs and ETs, ASTandET@babcock.co.uk.
- For the AST guidance booklet, Advanced Skills Teachers: Promoting Excellence, go to the DfE website, www.education.gov.uk
- For application forms go to the DfE website, www.education.gov.uk
- For Teachers Pay and Conditions go to www.education.gov.uk.
- AST National Network, www.nationalcollege.org.uk. Contact ASTandET@babcock.co.uk for joining details.

Are there any resources for Headteachers?

- www.advancedskillsteachers.com, see AST resources
- Leadership and Management of ASTs in Schools Tool Kit
- Q and A about the AST assessment process
- DVD-ROMs from the National Assessment Agency: ASTs: Making a Difference
ASTs: Inspiring Excellence
- AST Newsletter
- AST Forum on the National College website
all available from the National Assessment Agency for ASTs and ETs.

The National Assessment Agency has carried out over 11,400 assessments in all phases of education. We are very happy to provide information about the status, the assessment process and best practice in deployment. Please do not hesitate to contact us on 01372 824282.