



6. Choosing the assistant

When choosing a teaching assistant, their personal qualities, skills, and experience are generally more important than qualifications.

You can establish whether they are suitable by:

- Considering a candidate's curriculum vitae
- Contacting references
- Having a discussion at the interview

Trial or probationary periods can be particularly useful to observe the teaching assistant working, and to provide the teaching assistant with the opportunity to see if the job is right for them.

As we have seen, an enthusiasm for working with children and an interest in education is essential. A responsible attitude, patience, fairness, flexibility and the ability to cope with stressful situations are all important qualities. Experience that illustrates these qualities can come from a variety of settings.

Any experience working with children is particularly useful, whether in a paid or voluntary setting. Experience working with people, experience of responsibility, and of dealing with a range of situations will also prove useful. Both pupils and teachers can learn from teaching assistants who can share varied and interesting experiences.

Useful skills include literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills, although more important is a willingness to undertake any necessary training.

The motivations of a teaching assistant can usually be effectively determined at interview. It's useful to discuss both the teaching assistant's motivations, and their career goals.

Many prospective teaching assistants are parents, who have developed an interest in education through having children. Working as a teaching assistant can fit well with parental responsibilities, although it should be made clear that teaching assistants are sometimes required to work after pupils have left school at the end of the day, and can be required to attend training in the school holidays.