



**START
TALKING ABOUT
COMMUNICATION**

Suffolk TA Network
Annual Conference

Impact Report

Trinity Park
Conference &
Events Centre,
Ipswich

Friday 16th
September 2022

By Abi Joachim



Contents

- 3 Introduction – conference background
- 4 Conference programme
- 5 Teaching Assistants' perceptions
- 6 Teaching Assistants' perceptions
- 7 The best thing about the conference
- 8 Areas for improvement
- 9 Future conference themes and training needs
- 10 Acknowledgements and thanks

“We were all together as TAs, we were welcomed and we were made to feel like our job is worthy.”



According to national statistics, there are currently 275,812 FTE teaching assistants employed in England, representing 3 in 10 of the FTE education workforce.

In 2020, funding was secured from the Ipswich Opportunity Area to promote and support the work of teaching assistants in Suffolk through a local TA Network.

Since its launch, the Suffolk TA Network has grown to a membership of over 430 teaching assistants and offers its members a needs led package of training and development opportunities.

As a network, we recognise the need for quality professional development opportunities for teaching assistants to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to effectively support students in school. We also passionately believe that teaching assistants need the same professional opportunities to network and share best practice.

With these aims in mind, the concept of an annual Suffolk TA Network conference was formed.

Conference Background

The charity, I Can, reports that 1 in 10 children in the UK struggle to speak and understand language, and this rises to 1 in 4 for disadvantaged areas. As speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is such a significant area of need in our schools, this was chosen as the theme for the first annual conference entitled 'Start Talking About Communication'.

The Suffolk TA Network was thrilled when Suffolk County Council Education Outreach Service for Speech, Language and Communication and NHS speech and language therapy services in Suffolk agreed to work in collaboration to plan and deliver the conference.

The conference was held on Friday 16th September. This date was specifically selected as it is also National TA Day and highlights the value of teaching assistants as education professionals.

The conference was attended by 189 teaching assistants from across the county (and a couple of guest TAs who run other regional TA Networks).

The day opened with a keynote speech by Ros Somerville, Assistant Director Inclusion at Suffolk County Council. This was then followed by a series of SLCN themed workshops delivered by a range of specialist guest speakers (full programme on page 4).

Teaching assistants were also given the time to network with each other and share ideas and experiences.

As far as we are aware, this is the first education conference targeted specifically at teaching assistants and hopefully begins a movement towards more high quality, relevant professional learning opportunities for teaching assistants nationally.

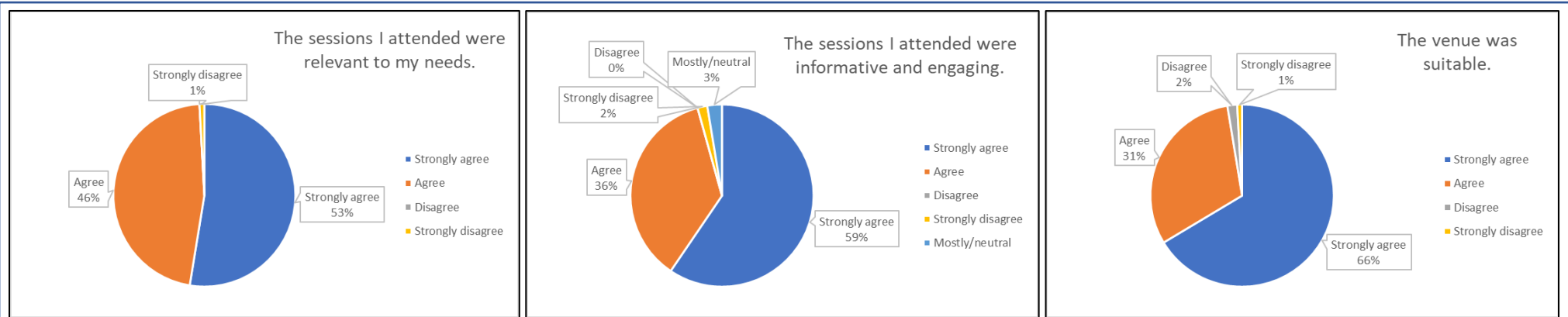
Conference Programme

	<u>Room 1</u>	<u>Room 2</u>	<u>Room 3</u>	<u>Rooms 4</u>
Keynote speech – 9.30-10.00	Conference to be opened by Ros Somerville, Assistant Director Inclusion			
Session 1 – 10.00-10.40	A visual approach to supporting children to express their views Louise Taylor-Hilton, Samantha Wilkins & Eva Thompson	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) Training taster – active listening and reflective conversations Megan Smith & Rachel Sawyer	Becoming a ‘model’ language model Matt Tarr & Lucy Beales	Frogs, Elephants and the Power of Self- Kindness Trish Chilton
10.40-11.00	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
Session 2 – 11.00-11.40	A visual approach to supporting children to express their views Louise Taylor-Hilton, Samantha Wilkins & Eva Thompson	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) Training taster – active listening and reflective conversations Megan Smith & Rachel Sawyer	Becoming a ‘model’ language model Matt Tarr & Lucy Beales	Frogs, Elephants and the Power of Self- Kindness Trish Chilton
Session 3 – 11.40-12.20	Why the words we use are so important when working with Neurodiverse students Annie Clements			
12.20-13.00	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
Session 4 – 13.00-13.40	Phonological Awareness – The foundations of language and literacy Alex Baker, Stacey Banthorpe & Nicky Wilde	Difficulties in understanding the abstract concept of time – experiences of Speech and Language Therapists in Suffolk Eva Thompson	Extra Help for Early Communication Alice Smith	Using Word Maps to Support Vocabulary Learning Rosemary Kelly & Lucy Parker
13.40-14.00	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
Session 5 – 14.00-14.40	Phonological Awareness – The foundations of language and literacy Alex Baker, Stacey Banthorpe & Nicky Wilde	Difficulties in understanding the abstract concept of time – experiences of Speech and Language Therapists in Suffolk Eva Thompson	Extra Help for Early Communication Alice Smith	Using Word Maps to Support Vocabulary Learning Rosemary Kelly & Lucy Parker
Closing – 14.40-15.00	Closing Statement Abi Joachim & Caroline Wells			

“Community feeling!”

Teaching Assistants' Perceptions

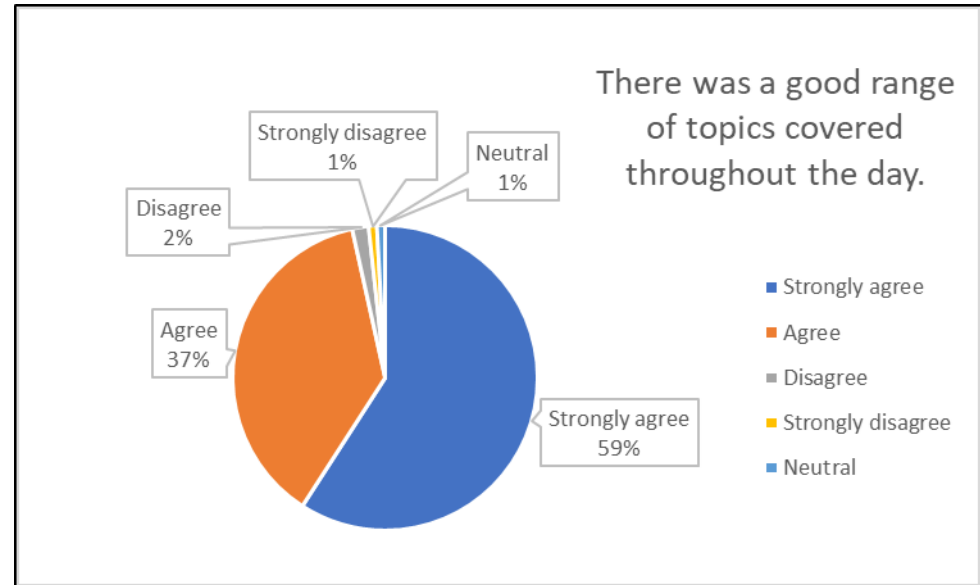
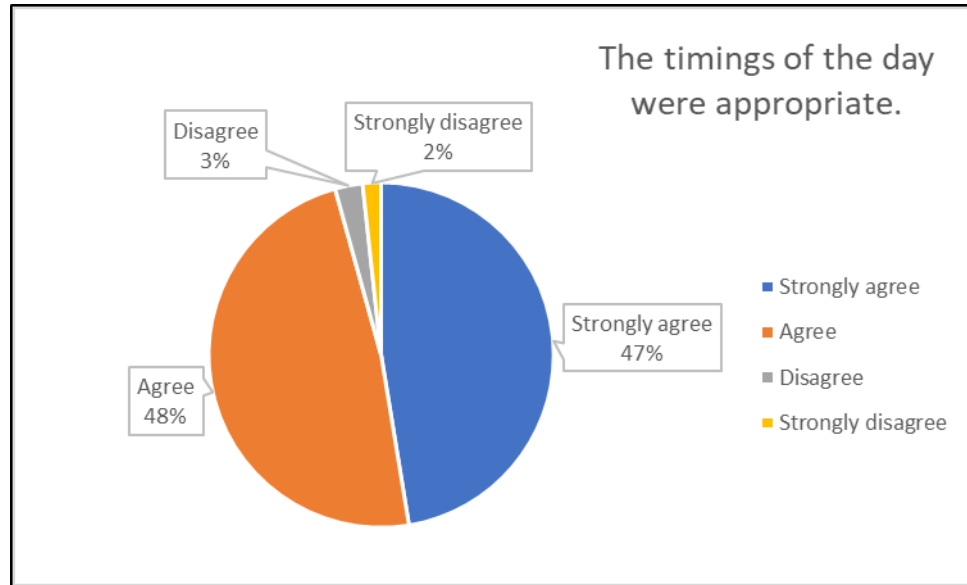
“The speakers were very passionate.”



- 61% of teaching assistants completed the conference evaluation form (116/189)
- Teaching assistants provide positive feedback about the conference in relation to five key areas
- 99% of respondents agree that the sessions they attended were relevant to their needs (53% strongly agree and 46% agree)
- 95% of respondents agree that the sessions they attended were informative and engaging (59% strongly agree and 36% agree)
- 97% of respondents agree that the venue was suitable (66% strongly agree and 31% agree)

“Training suited specifically to our roles which more often than not it isn't so thank you 😊.”

“Informative sessions.” Teaching Assistants’ Perceptions *“Gaining new knowledge.”*

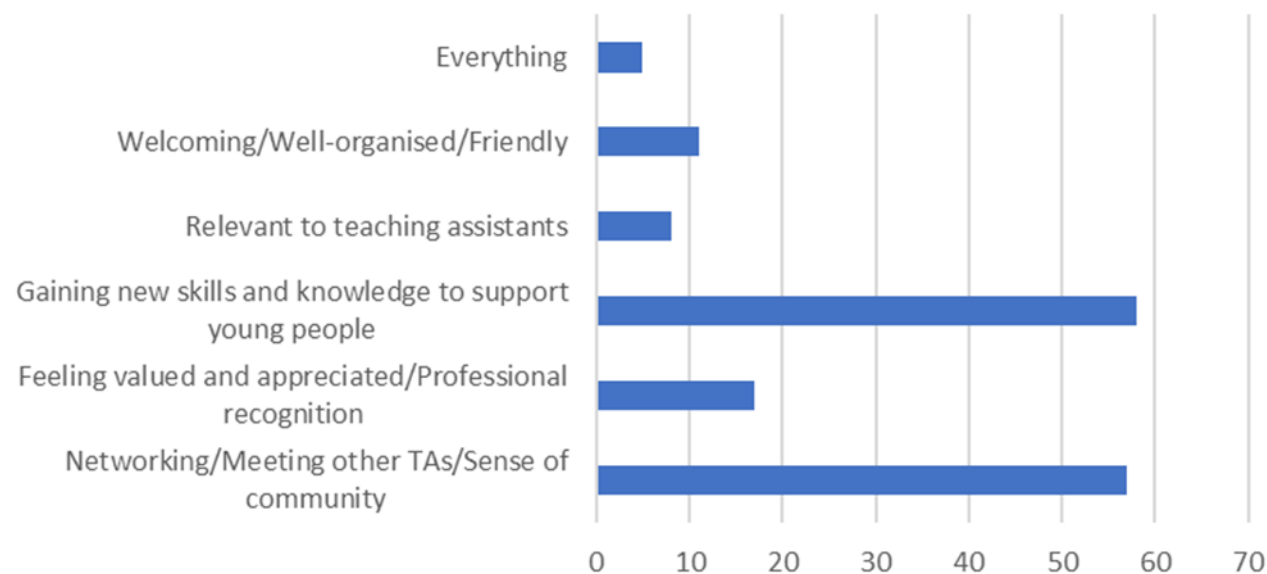


- 95% of respondents agree that the timings of the day were appropriate (47% strongly agree and 48% agree)
- 96% of respondents agree that there was a good range of topics covered throughout the day (59% strongly agree and 37% agree)

“Talking to other TAs, learning new skills, feeling empowered and validated.”

The Best Thing About the Conference

What was the best thing about attending the conference?

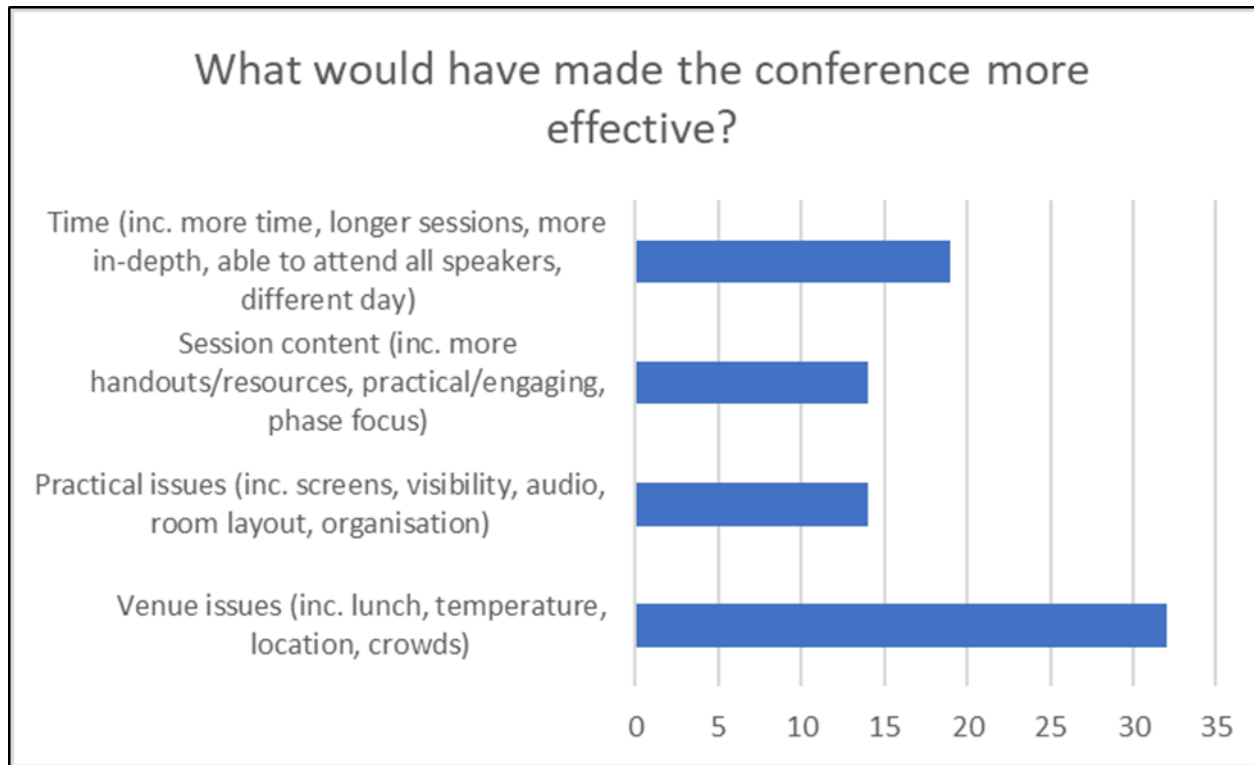


Out of the 116 completed evaluation forms, 90% responded to the question 'What was the best thing about attending the conference?'. In order to analyse these responses effectively, they have been grouped into six categories.

The opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge (58) and the chance to network and meet other teaching assistants (57) were identified most frequently as positive outcomes of attending the conference, while a sense of being valued and appreciated as professionals (17) was the third most common response.

“The conference was really well organised. Very good speakers who know their subjects. Lovely helpful staff. Great lunch.”

Areas for Improvement



Out of the 116 completed evaluation forms, 55% responded to the question ‘What would have made the conference more effective?’.

In order to analyse these responses effectively, they have been grouped into four categories.

The main area for improvement identified by respondents was related to the venue (32) and this was predominantly around issues with lunch arrangements. A suggestion for next conference was to have ‘grab and go’ lunch bags rather than a buffet.

The second most common response related to time (19). For future conferences, considerations will be made regarding session length and programme organisation.

Session content (14) and practical issues (14) will also be considered in future planning.

“If could have done all the workshops, it was so hard to choose 😊.”

Future Conference Themes and Training Needs

“Feeling there’s a lot more support for TAs than I realised.”



“Feeling that I am not alone in the job and combating feeling overwhelmed.”

Acknowledgements and Thanks

The Suffolk TA Network and our first annual conference would not have been possible without the vision of Maxine Abbott, SENDCo at Westbourne Academy, and the support and funding provided by the Ipswich Opportunity Area and Suffolk County Council.

Additional funding from the North West Ipswich Big Local Trust and Suffolk Schools allowed us to deliver the day of professional learning and networking we were dreaming of.

Trinity Park Conference & Events Centre, Ipswich and their staff ensured the smooth running of the conference.

Huge appreciation and gratitude go to our amazing speakers from the following organisations:

- Children & Young People's Directorate, Suffolk County Council
- Suffolk County Council Education Outreach Service for Speech, Language and Communication
 - NHS speech and language therapy services in Suffolk
 - Suffolk County Council Psychology and Therapeutic Services
- Suffolk County Council Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) service
 - Autism & ADHD

I would also like to thank the Suffolk TA Network Assistant Coordinators - Julie Clegg and Carolyn Love, Suffolk TA Network Champions – Emma Pearce and Justine Jacobs, Westbourne staff – Lynne Percival and Richard Hawkes, and Claire Darwin and Caroline Wells from Suffolk County Council for their help and support before and during the conference.

Finally, the biggest thank you goes to all the amazing teaching assistants who attended the conference, and those who were unable to attend, and the schools that believe in the TA profession and the importance of TA CPD.

*“Reminder that actually I know more than I'd remembered I did!
Really good to feel encouraged and re-empowered!”*