



Classroom Assistant Good Work Campaign FAQs

1. How many CAs are on temporary contracts?

Figures obtained by UNISON from the EA in 2025, showed that around 68% of the total classroom assistant workforce working in EA schools are on temporary contracts. Of 21,815 classroom assistants (including nursery assistants), 14,930 are on temporary contracts. Of those on temporary contracts, 2,727 have been employed by the EA in the same post for more than 4 years.

2. What is the EA doing to improve the CA employment model?

Following the interventions made by UNISON, the EA has started a programme of work to review the employment model for all CAs. In early engagement with UNISON and other trade unions, the EA has proposed four workstreams through which to take forward a review:

- *Workstream 1 Stabilise*: Review of factors relating to the stabilisation of the current workforce including blended contracts, temporary contracts and term time agreements.
- *Workstream 2 Employment*: Review and redevelopment of job descriptions, person specifications and development of improvement of central recruitment support provided to schools.
- *Workstream 3 Excellence*: Review and development professional standards, qualifications and development for Classroom Assistants.
- *Workstream 4 Engagement*: Review of requirements and development of a digital non-teaching “NISTR” type bank.

These workstreams are in the early stages of development and no timeframe has yet been agreed for completion.

3. What changes have happened so far that are affecting CAs employment arrangements?

Concrete actions that have been undertaken so far include:

- Schools have been notified of changes to the temporary engagement protocol designed to reduce the tendency to let temporary engagements stretch for long periods. Schools will be expected to indicate an ‘end date’ for each temporary assignment, where this is not provided the system will

default this to the end of the school year. All temporary engagements will be terminated at the end date established by the line manager, or at the default end date of 30 June, whichever occurs first. Schools will be required to recruit posts through normal recruitment processes and should not use the temporary engagement process to recruit to the same post after the summer break.

- EA is writing to CAs on temporary contracts for more than 4 years offering permanent contracts (see more below)
- EA has applied for funding from the NI Executive's digital transformation fund to develop a digital bank of CAs but this has been rejected. They are exploring other options to fund this work.

4. I have received a letter about moving to a temporary contract but it doesn't offer me the option of a 52-week contract. What should I do?

As part of the ongoing UNISON campaign for respect and recognition for the classroom assistant workforce, UNISON has been seeking that the Education Authority (EA) offer permanent contracts to the high number of staff employed on a temporary basis. As the work to do so has progressed, UNISON has made clear to the EA that we expected classroom assistants to be offered the existing, longstanding options that should be available to school based staff in such circumstances, including the option of a 52-week contract or a term-time contract.

In December 2025 and January 2026 the EA issued letters to a group of Classroom Assistants, employed on temporary contracts for more than four years, in Special Schools, Nursery Schools and EOTAS settings, advising that they will transfer to permanent contracts from January. Disappointingly the EA did not include in these letters that staff could choose options.

UNISON and other education support services unions have met with the EA to communicate our strong objections. We have sought that the EA seek whatever funding may be necessary from the Department of Education to ensure that classroom assistants being offered permanent contracts are able to take up the option of a 52-week contract if they wish to do so.

It is clear to UNISON that the EA's approach does not go far enough and risks creating unfairness, inequality and destabilising the classroom assistant workforce. Classroom assistants need a strong employment model that genuinely improves

their situation and this should include the option of a 52-week contract or term-time contract.

If members have received correspondence from the EA advising that you will be moved to a permanent contract, contact your local branch for advice and assistance in responding.

5. Where do CAs fit in the SEN transformation agenda?

The Department of Education published a plan for transforming the SEN system in February 2025. This has come about after years of independent reviews of the system and feedback from families that the system is difficult to navigate and not providing the support their children need.

One of the four outcomes in the SEN Reform Agenda deals directly with CAs as it aims to ensure that 'staff and schools are confident in and capable of meeting needs'. The 2025-30 Delivery Plan sets out the following list of actions under the theme of *investing in classroom assistants*:

- Design & implementation of a new Classroom Assistant employment model
- Design & implementation of a fit for purpose SEN/Inclusion Classroom Assistant qualification
- Design & implementation of a Classroom Assistant career pathway programme
- Design & implementation of a framework of continuing professional development (CPD)
- Design & implementation of a Resource Portal for classroom assistants
- Design & implementation of a Train the Trainer Programme for Classroom Assistants to support/train other educational and community/voluntary settings
- Create an area-based network for Classroom Assistants for peer learning and support

UNISON welcomes these commitments to invest in classroom assistants. However, there are also actions within the Delivery Plan that suggest changes which could negatively impact on the CA role. For example, in relation to 'transforming the support model to children with a statement of SEN, the document proposes:

'Transformation of the support model from one traditionally and predominantly based on almost universal one-to-one support to an evidence-based, whole-school and child-centred model of delivery support that includes greater flexibility for schools in how professional support is provided'.

It is very important that CAs have a voice in the ongoing SEN Transformation Agenda and have their expertise respected by decision makers. The commitments made to

invest in CAs has to be followed up with investment and accountability to make sure they happen.

6. What about CAs that work in non-EA schools?

CAs that work in non-EA schools are employed directly by the school's Board of Governors rather than the Education Authority. These CAs are therefore not part of the EA process for moving on to permanent contracts. However, the EA has issued guidance to these schools which they should be following.

If you work in a non-EA school and you have any questions or concerns about your contract please contact your UNISON representative.

The commitments made by the Department of Education to invest in CAs should be to the benefit of all CAs across all educational settings. UNISON will continue to advocate for every CA regardless of the specific role or setting.

We will continue to add to these FAQs as the campaign develops. If you have any questions that you think should be included, please send them to k.turtle@unison.co.uk