

Exploring the vital, specialist role of teaching assistants – two years on

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A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a grey knit cardigan, is leaning over a wooden table. She is pointing with her right index finger at a drawing on a piece of lined paper. A young child with brown hair, wearing a pink shirt, is sitting at the table, looking at the drawing. The drawing appears to be a simple sketch of a face with a flower. In the background, there are stacks of papers and books on the table. The overall scene is warm and educational.

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Introduction

When we spoke to members of the public as part of our teaching assistant campaign, All I Do, two years ago, some of their responses pointed to a misunderstanding of the role. There was a belief that teaching assistants (TAs) are "mostly just helping the teachers rather than helping the children and young people."

The value of specialist intervention from experienced TAs is well known within education, and their role is broadly appreciated. Expectations have evolved over the past decade, and many TAs hold a wide range of skill-based experiences, along with a range of qualifications at Level 3 and above.

Revisiting this survey as part of the 80th anniversary of CACHE qualifications is a fitting moment to once again consider how teaching assistants themselves are feeling, and to learn what more we can do to support them and improve wider awareness of their vital role.

While there are some findings in this report that point to a slight improvement in professional development, including increased confidence in supporting learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities, it's also worrying to see a big increase in the number of TAs actively looking for a new role, and a decrease in those who feel they have complete job security.

This concern has been highlighted in several recent news stories, and we are still seeing TAs as the first resource to be cut as school budgets become tighter. But this lack of security is not only detrimental to the TAs themselves, but to the children and young people they support, and the parents that have come to rely on them.

Cheddar Grove Primary School in Bedminster Down recently hit the headlines as it opened a staff consultation to cut full-time equivalent teaching assistants. One parent described themselves as "heartbroken" and being "filled with fear" as she was worried if one teacher would be able to help with her daughter's additional needs.

What is also striking about the research is that almost two thirds of the TAs we spoke to wouldn't recommend it as a career, or didn't know if they would or not. That's why we're using our [Why Should I Care? campaign](#) to push for further professionalisation and recognition for education, early years and social care, and the essential role each plays in society.

NCFE remains committed to enhancing practice through impactful CPD, tailored training opportunities, and enabling teaching assistants to be deployed appropriately in supporting children and young people to be the best they can possibly be, now and in the future.

While I am hopeful that we can help more people understand the key role teaching assistants play, change needs to happen quickly to improve recruitment and retention. This will ensure all children and young people have access to the specialist support they need and, furthermore, deserve.

Angie Rogers,
Subject Chair (Education and Early Years) at NCFE





Summary of key findings

The teaching assistant survey acts as a pulse check for those currently working in the role. Using a sample size of more than 150 active TAs or equivalent, we asked questions around job security, whether they had considered leaving the profession, and if they had all the tools and resources they need to effectively support learners with SEND.

Our analysis of the survey, compared to the insights gained in 2023, highlight key concerns that teaching assistants from a variety of settings currently share. They are an indicator that change is still needed in the future to attract and retain skilled professionals in the role.

1 The majority of current teaching assistants have thought about, or are actively looking, to change careers.

- Almost three quarters (72%) of teaching assistants indicated that they have thought about moving careers, or were actively looking to do so, in the last 12 months. That's a slight decrease of 1% compared to 2023.
- Although almost a quarter (24%) are now actively looking for a new role. That's an increase of 12% compared to 2023.

"Our pay is atrocious for what we do and I even supplement children not having breakfast at home by buying them things to eat before they start their day. At this moment in time sitting serving customers in a supermarket sounds very appealing!"

2 Just over a third of teaching assistants feel they have complete job security.

- Over a third (37%) of teaching assistants feel they have complete job security. Although this is a decrease of 10% compared to 2023.
- Just over a third (35%) feel they have a little job security. This is an increase of 4% compared to 2023.
- Almost two thirds (63%) of respondents feel they either have a little, none, or didn't know when it came to job security. That's an increase of 9% compared to 2023.

3 Almost all teaching assistants feel confident when supporting learners with specialist educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- Nine out of ten (92%) teaching assistants feel fairly or very confident when it comes to supporting learners with SEND. That's an increase of 4% compared to 2023.
- Almost half (42%) now feel very confident. That's an increase of 4% compared to 2023.

"Anyone who works with disabled children should be trained to do so. I'm not talking about sending an email with information about the health condition. I'm talking about proper and effective training."

4 Less than one in five teaching assistants feel they have everything they need to support learners with SEND.

- Only 15% of teaching assistants have everything they need to support learners with SEND. However, that is an increase of 2% compared to 2023.
- Almost half (45%) said they do not have everything they need. That's an increase of 4% compared to 2023.
- More than one in 10 (12%) answered 'not at all'. That's an increase of 10% compared to 2023.

"The amount of SEN children in our school is increasing and they all have individual needs. It is hard to ensure all their needs are covered, alongside the other children. It feels they are rushed and interventions are squeezed in where we can. Priorities change every week depending on staffing and what is going on in school."



5 Less than one in 10 teaching assistants feel it is a highly respected and valued role.

- Only 9% of teaching assistants surveyed feel their role is highly respected and valued. That's a decrease of 2% compared to 2023.
- More than half (55%) feel it is either not very respected or not respected at all. That's an increase of 6% compared to 2023.
- Just over a third (37%) feel teaching assistants are somewhat respected. That's a decrease of 3% compared to 2023.

"My job used to fill me full of pride as I encouraged young minds to learn, but now I'm cleaning up toilet accidents at an alarming amount, demeaned by parents as I'm informed "isn't that your job?" and very, very, very underpaid. Not a great advertisement for my profession!"

6 Almost half of teaching assistants wouldn't recommend it as a career (new question for 2025)

- Almost half (44%) of respondents said they wouldn't recommend becoming a teaching assistant.
- Almost two thirds (61%) either wouldn't recommend it as a career or didn't know if they would or not.
- More than a third (39%) would recommend teaching assistant as a career.

Key themes

As well as answering the core questions, respondents were also asked to provide anonymous free text responses based on two questions:

- What further support do you require?
- What is your proudest moment as a teaching assistant?

Further support

As part of our analysis of the responses to the question about further support, there were several key themes that emerged.

1. Support and training

Strong demand for more and better training, especially in areas like SEND.

"I am doing an MA but in my own time and self-funded. It would be good if schools gave more training than the occasional inset."

2. Resources and funding

Widespread concern about insufficient resources and funding. Requests for more materials, equipment, and financial support to meet student needs effectively.

3. Workload and time

High workloads and lack of time to prepare or plan are major issues. Many respondents are working beyond their paid hours to meet expectations.

"The workload is unmanageable and has a detrimental effect on the children in our care. I am pulled from class to class and never get enough time to fit the interventions in that need to be done. I feel like I am failing the children in our care."



4. Staffing levels

Inadequate staffing is a recurring theme, with many feeling stretched too thin. More staff are needed to provide effective support, especially for students with complex needs.

5. Parental responsibility

Some frustration with parents not taking responsibility for their children's basic needs. Suggestions for increased parental involvement and accountability.

"Many parents send children to school untrained in using the toilet. I regularly spend half an hour, approximately three times a day cleaning up children who cannot poo in the toilet but who are told and encouraged to go in their underwear by their parents."

Proudest moment

While there were frustrations as highlighted above, in analysing the responses to the second question it was clear that teaching assistants are extremely proud of the work they do and are motivated by the impact they are having on children and young people.

1. Child development and progress

Many responses highlight pride in seeing children grow, learn, and succeed – especially in reading, behaviour, and confidence.

"Getting to spend time with these incredible human beings and seeing them grow. I am very lucky in the sense that I get to work with all of the different children's age ranges in our school. It is a tough job with very little pay reward, but seeing these children reach their potential is something that money can't buy."

2. Support and relationships

A strong theme is the emotional reward of building supportive, trusting relationships with students, particularly those with SEND or behavioural challenges.

3. Moments of realisation

Respondents often describe 'lightbulb moments' when a child understands something for the first time or achieves a personal milestone.

"Any time you can help a child achieve that lightbulb moment makes this the most rewarding job. It doesn't matter if that task is simple or complex, if you can support a child so they can achieve these moments themselves it is priceless and has made a difference."



4. Long-term impact

Several stories reflect on former students returning to express gratitude, showing the lasting influence of teaching assistants.

5. Personal achievement

Some contributors mention their own educational or professional growth, such as completing qualifications or mastering new skills to better support students.

"For me it was achieving my education degree which I did alongside my work in the evenings. I obtained a first-class degree. My practice has improved, and I feel I am a better practitioner thanks to this."

Recommendations

While this survey is only ever intended as a snapshot, as in 2023, the data indicates there are still concerns among teaching assistants when it comes to job security and the long-term sustainability of the role in its current state.

Progress has been made since that last report, including the setting up of a forum for teaching assistants and the development of new qualifications; however, there is also a potential issue emerging with only a minority willing to recommend TA as a career, and what this means for attracting new talent into the role.



1. Continue to professionalise the role, improve access to training and development opportunities, and ensure these skills are reflected in salary.

- Since the last report, NCFE supported the development of the new Level 5 specialist teaching assistant apprenticeship standards which have now been given approval. This is a significant milestone in creating structured, recognised career progression for TAs. The new apprenticeship has three specialist areas to choose from: SEND, social and emotional wellbeing, and curriculum provision.
- The T Level in Education and Early Years is now established as one of the best performing T Levels and a second generation of the qualification will be delivered from September 2025. It offers a broad and comprehensive insight into the role of education and childcare, before providing the opportunity for students to specialise in either early years or assisting teaching.
- However, we must develop a new system that allows schools to prioritise and pay for the development of its existing staff as well, possibly through devolved responsibilities and ringfenced funding. This would improve job satisfaction, career development, and learner outcomes.
- There is also risk of skilled teaching assistants being forced to move into other sectors, such as retail, where the salary expectations are higher. Increasing the base salary would ensure more teaching assistants remain in the role as well as attract new, passionate individuals into the sector.

2. Ensure the role of teaching assistant is fully integrated into educational settings.

- Additional funding is not the answer alone. Educational settings must be more economical and cost-effective at the same time. A step in the right direction would be making schools the experts for their own requirements but ensuring greater accountability.
- We must break the cycle of teaching assistants being one of the first roles under threat when budgets are tightened. We need to be clearer on evidencing the value TAs bring, particularly to underserved groups with additional needs. The parent/carer voice should also be strengthened as a key influencer in achieving person-centred care.

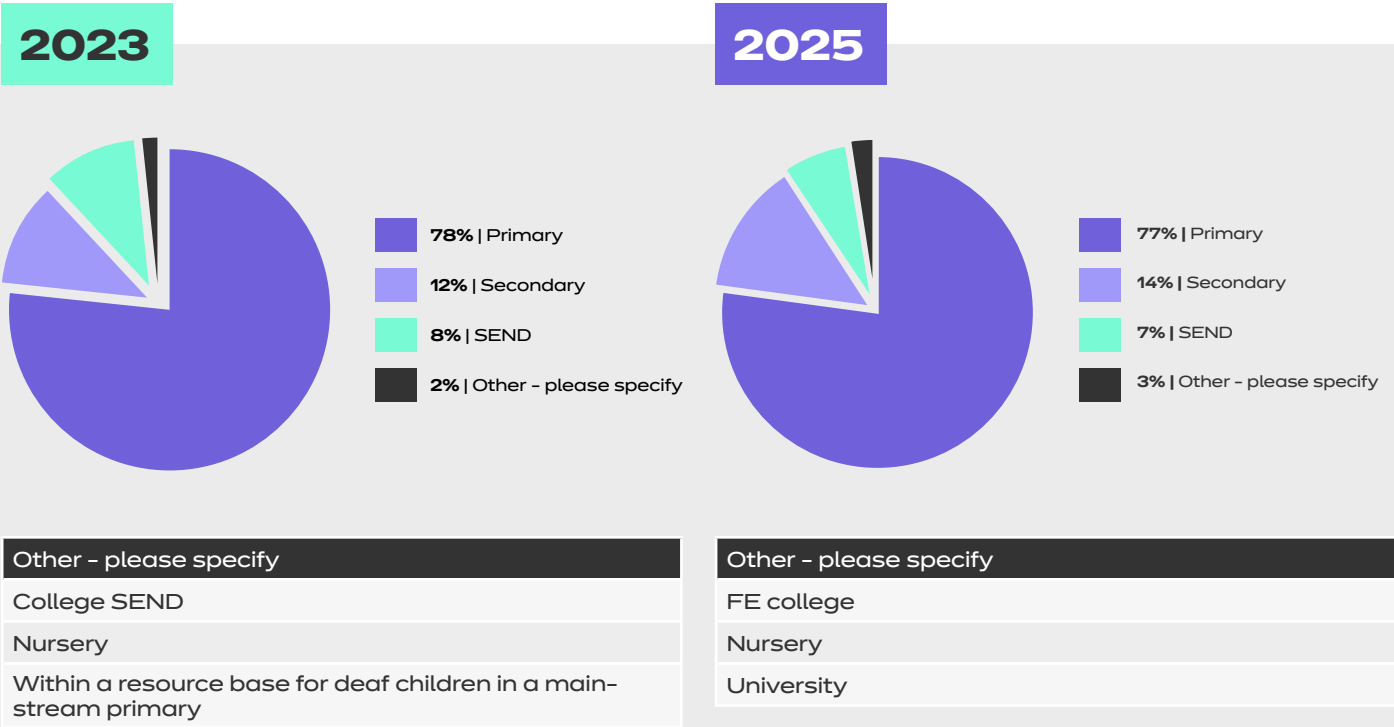


3. Raise the profile of teaching assistants and further develop a platform for them to have a voice.

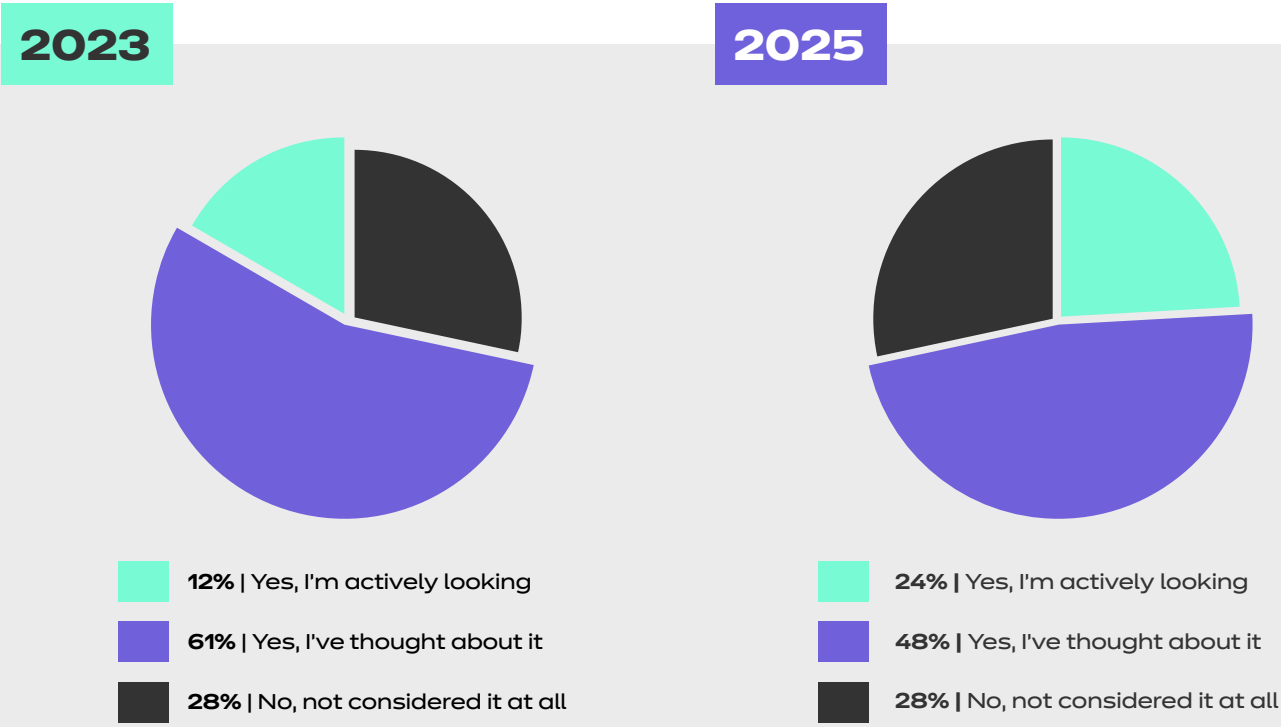
- Since the last report, NCFE established a bi-monthly TA Forum that provides an outlet for the sector. In the forum, TAs share aspects of their practice and help co-develop new professional development activities and resources. It is an opportunity to share good practice as well as a way of supporting their peers.
- We would like this to be developed further into a national network for teaching assistants. This would create a forum for best practice sharing, professional resources and development, as well as a place for peer-to-peer support. It could also act as a joined-up voice for teaching assistants in the sector.
- The Government should also consider a national campaign to help raise awareness of the work teaching assistants do and the vital role they play within the education system, to support understanding, recruitment and retention.

Full findings

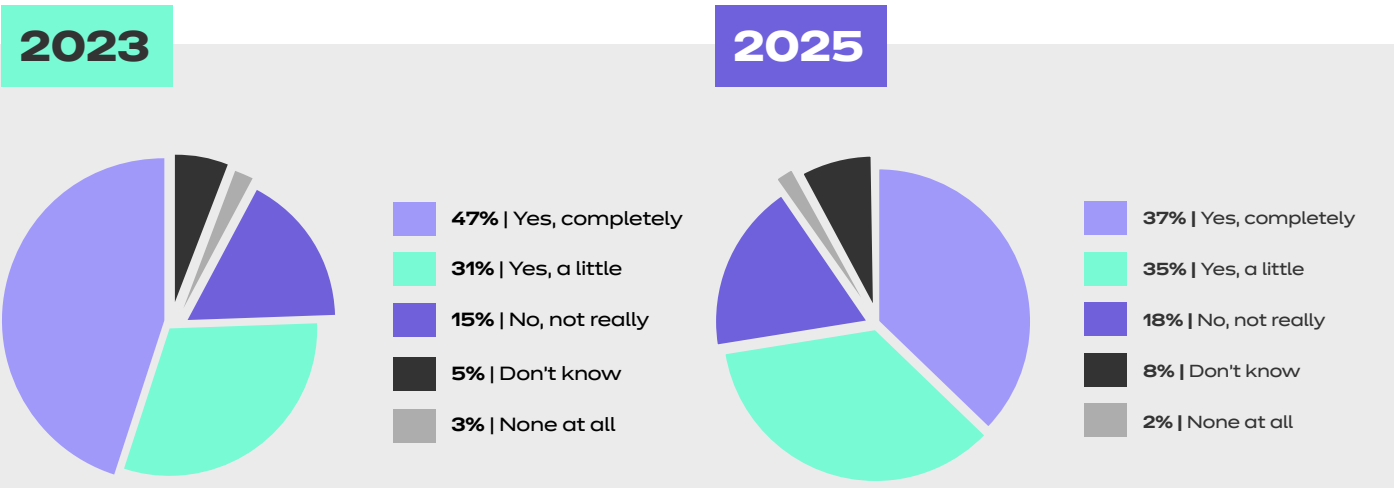
1. What type of setting do you work in?



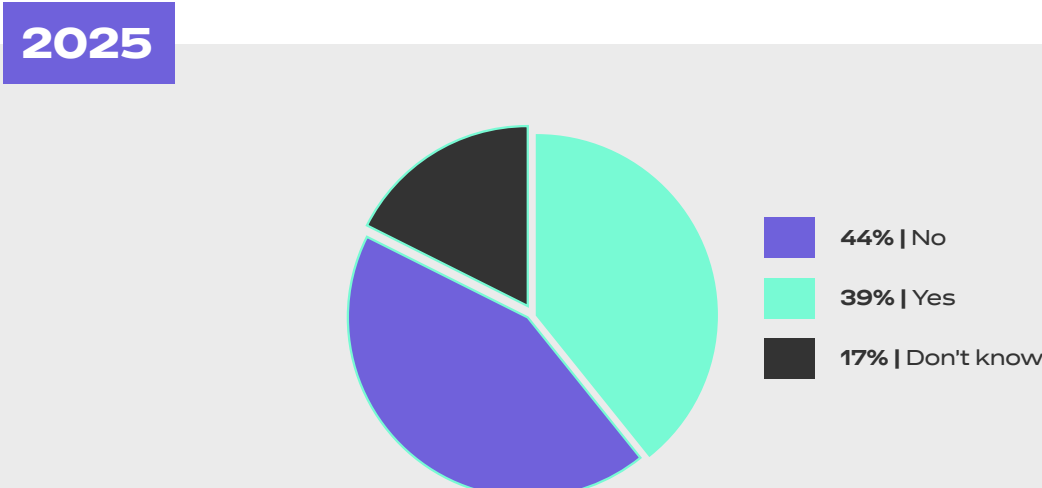
3. Have you considered moving careers in the last year?



2. Do you have job security in your role as a teaching assistant?

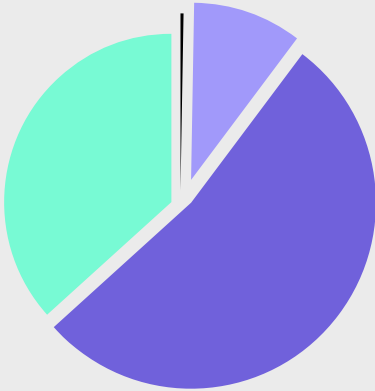


4. Would you recommend being a teaching assistant as a career?



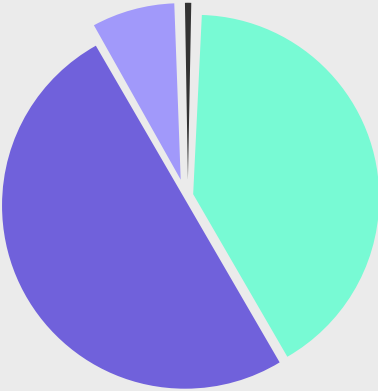
5. How confident do you feel supporting learners with special education needs and disabilities (SEND)?

2023



38% | Very confident
50% | Fairly confident
11% | Not very confident
1% | Not at all confident

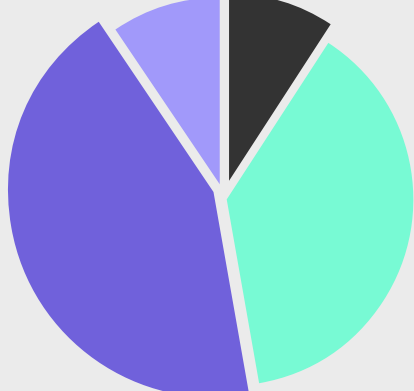
2025



42% | Very confident
50% | Fairly confident
8% | Not very confident
1% | Not at all confident

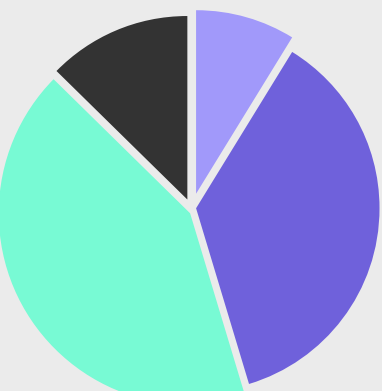
7. How respected and valued do you think the role of a teaching assistant is?

2023



11% | Highly respected and valued
40% | Somewhat respected and valued
38% | Not very respected and valued
11% | Not at all respected and valued

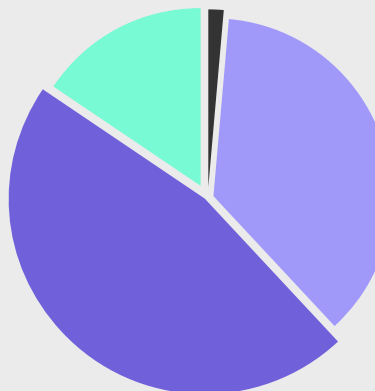
2025



9% | Highly respected and valued
37% | Somewhat respected and valued
42% | Not very respected and valued
13% | Not at all respected and valued

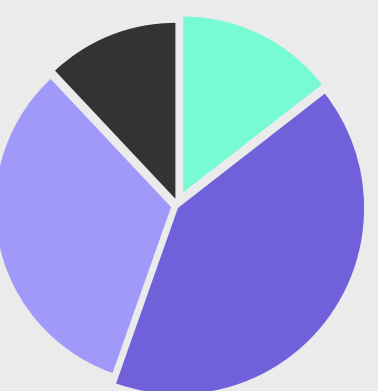
6. Do you have everything you need to support learners with SEND?

2023



13% | Yes, I have everything
46% | Yes, but it could be better
39% | No, but we get by
2% | No, not at all

2025



15% | Yes, I have everything
41% | Yes, but it could be better
33% | No, but we get by
12% | No, not at all