

The image features a white computer mouse with a white cord and a black pen with a yellow and green tip. The mouse cord is a thick white line that loops around the left side of the page. The pen is positioned diagonally at the bottom right, with a yellow line trailing from its tip towards the left. The background is a solid purple color.

valuable assets

a general formal investigation into the role and status
of classroom assistants in Scottish schools

SUMMARY REPORT

About this investigation

Valuable Assets is an investigation under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The legislation gives the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) the power to undertake general formal investigations into deep-seated issues of gender equality or discrimination, and to make recommendations about how to achieve equality between men and women.

Since January 2006 we have undertaken:

- A national survey of over 2,000 classroom assistants, teachers and head teachers in primary schools
- Interviews with 15 local education authority Directors of Education
- A national survey of 1,282 classroom assistants about working extra hours/overtime
- Nine focus groups with classroom assistants in secondary and special schools
- A survey of 934 EIS and NASUWT members, who are teachers, about the tasks done by classroom assistants
- A survey of 25 local authorities about their classroom assistant workforce
- Independent job evaluations of 11 classroom assistants working in primary schools across three local authorities, using an equal value assessment tool
- Independent job evaluations of eight classroom assistants working in secondary schools across four local authorities, using an equal value assessment tool

- Consultation meetings with the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Society of Personnel Directors in Scotland (SPDS)
- Consultation meetings with the Scottish Executive Education Department
- Consultation meetings with 5 local authority education and personnel departments
- Consultation meetings with trade unions, occupational and professional regulatory bodies
- Research into Scottish Executive education policy
- Legal research into term-time working practices
- Direct input from over 100 individual classroom assistants from the 'have your say' section on the EOC website
- Four advisory board meetings

This is the summary report of the findings and recommendations from our investigation. The full final report is available on the EOC website: www.eoc.org.uk/valuableassets



The classroom assistant perspective

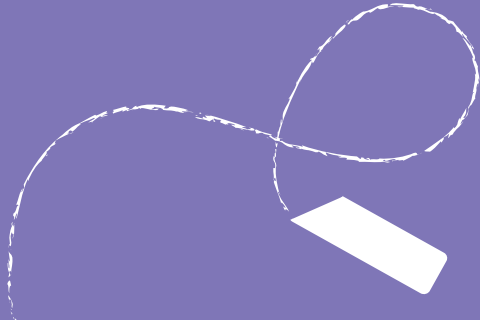
Over 100 classroom assistants ‘had their say’ on the EOC valuable assets website. Here, and at the end of this report, are just a few of the points they wanted to feed into the investigation:

“We are also responsible for assisting children to understand work given by the teacher, thus effectively re-teaching up to 10 pupils at a time. There is a lot more to the job and in no other sector of employment is so much responsibility paid such a low wage.”

“I have been a classroom assistant for eight years in a secondary school and as much as I love my job I feel we are underpaid for the tasks we carry out. I have taken on another job at night to give me a decent monthly income.”

“I really enjoy my job and am not considering leaving. I do feel that the dedication, responsibility and academic abilities that are required for the role and the expectation to provide the support to help children achieve their full potential means we are grossly underpaid. We do not even have permanent contracts.”

Introduction



The EOC has undertaken this first ever Scotland specific general formal investigation because classroom assistants are almost exclusively women, term-time workers and are amongst the lowest paid Scottish local government workers. As a relatively new occupation, in less than ten years since their introduction, numbers of classroom assistants have increased three-fold and the signs are that their numbers are likely to continue to increase.

The work done by classroom assistants provides a valuable contribution to children's learning and development. However, this investigation has found that because of the nature of their work, their desire to work with children and the perfect fit for many working mothers, classroom assistants are a classic illustration of how work associated with women's traditional domestic and/or caring role is undervalued.

Classroom assistants, therefore, can often be described as both 'labourers of love' and 'captives of love.'



About classroom assistants

Since 1998, classroom assistant numbers have expanded from around 1,000 to 15,000 as the government-led national classroom assistant initiative was rolled out across Scottish primary schools and then extended to secondary and special schools. During this time, educational policy has developed considerably in Scotland and as a consequence the work of classroom assistants has evolved significantly.

Across local authorities there are a range of job titles for pupil, learning and classroom support roles. The most common job title is Classroom Assistant, although Learning or Pupil Support Assistant are also increasingly popular titles. To capture all these roles the investigation has used the term classroom assistant.

Classroom assistants are almost exclusively female, typically aged 31-50 years and tend to be concentrated at the top of this age range, in the 41-50 year group, with those in secondary and special schools usually older. They are typically partnered and have children of school age.

Classroom assistant jobs are very popular and there is no shortage of applicants. The job provides an ideal fit for women returning to

**'I don't really see how a classroom
can run without them.'**
(Parent)

employment after having children and looking for an additional second income with hours that match school times and terms.

Having school-age children or liking working with children are the main reasons why many classroom assistants want to do the job. This is also reflected in the description of the necessary characteristics classroom assistants should be able to demonstrate, for example being flexible/adaptable, willing to be directed but having initiative, having empathy and being a good listener. As one parent stated: 'they must have a good knowledge of children as well - mothers really.'

Our investigation has found that there is no doubt among head teachers, teachers, parents and Directors of Education about the significant contribution classroom assistants are making to pupils learning.

**'Sometimes you get a classroom assistant who comes along
and they've got their ECDL or they've got some enhanced
qualification, and they're worth their weight in gold.'**
(Director of Education)



What classroom assistants do?

Classroom assistants work in primary, secondary and special schools carrying out a range of tasks, under the direction of teachers. The 1999 Scottish Office Classroom Assistant Initiative Implementation Guidance set out four general task headings within which classroom assistants were expected to work:

1. Contributing to the effective organisation and use of resources
2. Contributing to the quality of care and welfare of pupils
3. Supporting the needs of pupils in effectively accessing the curriculum
4. Supporting the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom

Task headings one and two were expected to contain more *basic* duties. The tasks within headings three and four were expected to be part of the classroom assistant role if they had the appropriate level of training, experience or qualifications to undertake what are considered to be more *complex* duties.

Since their introduction the focus of classroom assistants' work has moved to become, primarily, about supporting pupils and teachers in the learning process.

**'There were some teachers who saw them as
"clean the paint pots out?"
That doesn't happen [now] ... They are there to support
the learning of the children, the children come first.'
(Head teacher)**

The investigation found that with regard to supporting learning and teaching virtually all classroom assistants are involved in work that *supports* or assists the teacher in the teaching and learning process. Of the 934 teachers responding to the EIS and NASUWT survey:

- 98% agreed that classroom assistants support and encourage pupils in paying attention
- 97% agreed that classroom assistants help pupils organise their work and follow instructions
- 97% agreed that classroom assistants support/guide children with practical activities
- 89% agreed that classroom assistants reinforce learning techniques
- 71% told us that classroom assistants take a group for reading or maths

Evidence of role stretch in supporting learning and teaching

School staff responding to the national survey told us that significant numbers of classroom assistants are undertaking support for learning tasks that are considered to be more complex and require a greater degree of involvement in the learning process.

	REPORTED BY		
	Head teacher	Teacher	Classroom assistant
Tasks: done by classroom assistants			
Assessing the learning and development of pupils	57%	60%	67%
Teaching new concepts	24%	28%	56%
Setting learning tasks	32%	26%	56%
Planning the curriculum	13%	10%	13%

Supporting this, the findings from the EIS and NASUWT survey highlight the considerable numbers of classroom assistants involved in supporting learning and education. Of concern is the suggestion of a small but significant number of classroom assistants undertaking teaching tasks:

- 44% told us they discuss the use of the curriculum with classroom assistants
- 37% told us classroom assistants evaluate pupils' learning and take remedial action
- 30% told us they plan lessons/education tasks with the classroom assistant
- 24% told us they seek the input of classroom assistants in planning lessons
- 29% said classroom assistants mark pupils work
- 20% said classroom assistants look after a class until a teacher arrives
- 17% said classroom assistants explain new learning concepts to individuals or groups
- 5% said classroom assistants help to plan the curriculum

'You are not just working with their education needs, their primary care needs, their special care needs, you are also dealing with their behaviour.'
(Classroom assistant)

Evidence of role stretch in managing pupils' behaviour

Classroom assistants reported that they are increasingly working with disruptive pupils who often have very challenging behaviour and as a consequence may become more involved in the teaching and learning process. Two types of scenarios were reported during our investigation.

'... in our school there is another [classroom assistant] that does the Better Behaved Better Learning Unit which is the room which they send the kids to prevent them from being excluded ... she is left with those kids every day and she is expected to teach them.'

(Classroom assistant)

'We have a behaviour base...there is always a teacher and two members of staff, usually pupil support assistants or auxiliaries, in there at all times regardless of the number of children in there.'

(Classroom assistant)

Classroom assistants who were providing support to pupils with additional support needs reported that they regularly work with pupils with very challenging behaviour.

Evidence of role stretch in providing care and welfare

This investigation has found that as a result of the introduction of the Education (*Additional Support for Learning*) (Scotland) Act 2004 many classroom assistants are now dealing with more complex aspects of care and welfare, especially with regard to pupils with severe ASL needs. In both 'mainstream' and special schools, classroom assistants may offer support in areas such as toileting, changing tracheotomy tubes, tube feeding, administering diazepam, administering oxygen, physiotherapy and applying restraint techniques.

Classroom assistants undertake these, often complex, welfare and care tasks (sometimes with little or no training) without additional pay and often feel a moral obligation or tacit pressure from schools to do these tasks. One classroom assistant recalled how her colleague had learned to work with visually impaired pupils:

'She did it herself in her own time because she thought that would benefit the child that she worked with.'

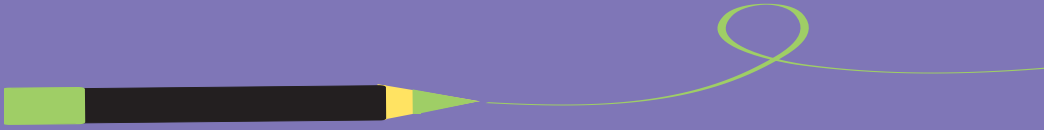
'This wee boy had to be resuscitated about twice a week and given oxygen.'
(Classroom assistant)

Another emphasised the impact on the school or pupils:

'Our school couldn't function unless we were prepared to do a lot of these things, I mean there are some children who wouldn't even be in the school if we weren't prepared to do these things, but it's a huge responsibility on the pay that we are getting.'

Classroom assistants told us of the level of responsibility they felt while undertaking these duties. This is illustrated by one classroom assistant who worked with a child with severe epilepsy and told us of the pressure she felt:

...'if you don't administer [the procedure] at the right time or within a certain time, that child could die...I went on a trip to London with her and I was aware of that the whole time.'



What and how classroom assistants are paid

Classroom assistants reported universal dissatisfaction with their level of pay.

'I have to point out that I and many of my fellow colleagues love our job but we are being exploited.'

(Classroom assistant)

This related in particular to their perception that pay is so low due to the lack of recognition of the complex nature and wide ranging work in which they are involved.

'We all feel undervalued but are so dedicated to the jobs we do. That dedication should and must be rewarded by giving us a living wage. I am not doing this job because it gives me "pocket money". I want to make the difference in helping and caring for the pupils in my care but I also wish to be recognised for the worthwhile job I do.'

(Classroom assistant)

Typically classroom assistants are paid between £5.68 and £7.58 per hour, although pay rates differ within each local authority.

The majority of classroom assistants work term-time, normally between 8.45am - 3.30/4pm, five days a week. Their salary is then spread evenly across 12 months providing a regular monthly income that enables continuity of service and prevents the negative future impact of frequent breaks in their national insurance contributions. Due to their employment status classroom assistants cannot claim unemployment benefits for those weeks of the year when they are not working or on paid annual leave. Therefore, the annual salary of classroom assistants ranges from around £6,810 - £10,089 and between £567 - £841 per month.

The provision of paid annual leave

Classroom assistants, like many female dominated jobs in the education sector, are term-time workers. They do receive paid annual leave entitlement and this has to be taken outside the school term.

The Scottish Joint Council National Agreement on pay and conditions allows local authorities to calculate paid annual leave entitlement, 'where necessary' in hours, rather than days. This may lead to a 'double pro-rating' of classroom assistants' paid annual leave.

Double pro-rating happens when the calculation for entitlement to annual leave is based on hours, rather than days worked. Where this happens, it reduces the amount of days annual leave that classroom assistants are entitled to be paid for, because they work slightly shorter days than normal 'full-time' workers. This practice will have a negative impact on the salary received by classroom assistants.

The potential impact of calculating annual leave entitlement in hours rather than days can be seen using the example of 2 classroom assistants who are both paid £5.68 per hour, working 27.5 hours over a 5 day week, 39 weeks a year.

Annual leave calculated in days	Annual leave calculated in hours
20 days paid annual leave	14.86 days paid annual leave
11 paid public holidays	8.18 days paid public holidays
45.2 weeks paid per year	43.61 weeks paid per year
£7,060 annual salary	£6,821 annual salary

62% of classroom assistants told us they were never paid for working extra hours

Therefore, when annual leave is calculated in hours rather than days the salary difference in this example is £248 less. This would equate to a loss of 3.6% of their annual salary.

Some work is unpaid

During our focus groups a large number of classroom assistants told us that they frequently undertook work outside their contractual hours. This was reinforced by the response to our overtime survey where nearly three-quarters of the 1,282 classroom assistants responding worked extra hours.

- 62% said that they were never paid
- 20% were sometimes paid
- 18% were always paid

In terms of the amount of overtime or extra hours (paid and unpaid) usually worked by classroom assistants, 41% regularly worked extra hours less than 1 day a week, 39% regularly worked extra hours between 1-4 days a week and 19% worked extra hours on 5 or more days per week.

The main activities being done during these extra hours were:

- Liaison with teachers/attending staff/planning meetings (47%)
- Preparation of learning materials (46%)
- Performing clerical work (41%)
- Preparing the classroom and learning environment (47%)
- Personal preparation for lessons/ learning support, for example reading over a subject (36%)

The high number of classroom assistants working extra hours does include participation on school trips and extra-curricular activities, which may not occur frequently. However, the significant numbers of classroom assistants undertaking extra hours for the purposes of planning, preparation and liaison with teaching staff raises questions about the way in which their contractual hours are determined and whether there are sufficient hours in the day to undertake the range of tasks expected.

We wanted to find out the reasons why classroom assistants were working extra hours, in particular to determine if this was

55% classroom assistants worked extra hours because there was not enough time during contracted hours to get their work done

motivated by personal choice or was because of the expectations of teaching staff. There was a mix of responses.

- 56% felt an obligation to the pupils
- 51% did so because they enjoy the work
- 38% did so at the request/expectation of the Senior Management Team
- 30% did so at the request/expectation of the teacher
- 26% did so because of staff shortages in the school

The 'value' of classroom assistant jobs

The Equal Pay Act states that women and men are entitled to equal pay not only when they are doing the same job, but also when they are doing different jobs where the skills, effort and responsibilities involved are of an equivalent level or standard.

As part of our investigation of classroom assistant jobs we undertook a job evaluation exercise of 19 classroom assistants across seven local authorities from both primary and secondary schools. The job evaluation exercise used an independent equal value assessment tool, following the principles outlined in the

Equal Pay Act. This involved evaluating the demands, in terms of skills, effort and responsibility, involved in each classroom assistant job. Of the 19 jobs evaluated:

- 6 (32%) were identified at level 1
- 8 (42%) were identified at level 2
- 4 (21%) were identified at level 3
- 1 (5%) were identified at level 4

Although the sample used in the job evaluation is very small, the findings from the evaluations are consistent with the evidence from the national surveys showing role stretch in support for learning and teaching and care and welfare tasks.

To identify the *relative value* of classroom assistant jobs compared to the skills, effort and responsibilities of other typically male or female dominated jobs in local authorities we used an independent equal value assessment tool. The findings from this comparative assessment indicates that all classroom assistant jobs are of *greater value* (in equal pay terms) than the typical male dominated facilities maintenance assistant/labourer local authority jobs. Therefore, in accordance with the Equal Pay Act, we

would expect classroom assistants to be paid at higher levels than this group of predominantly male local authority employees.

The classroom assistants who are involved in planning, delivering and evaluating learning and/or are providing complex care and welfare and learning support to pupils with additional support needs demonstrated that their jobs are of *equal value* to typical local authority craft workers. Therefore, we would expect the classroom assistants undertaking these tasks to be paid at the same level as this male dominated group of local authority employees.

However, information reported to the EOC during this investigation suggests that in some local authorities, as part of the implementation of the single status agreement, there are proposals to reduce classroom assistant pay and grading. This is contrary to the expectations of our independent job evaluation research.



Developing the workforce

The investigation found that the majority of classroom assistants have qualifications. Some have qualifications directly linked to working with children and education others have a range of specialist qualifications that they have brought with them to the job in areas such as art and design, ICT, foreign languages and music.

- Just under a half of classroom assistants in primary schools and a third in secondary have the Professional Development Award (PDA)
- Over 20% of classroom assistants in primary and 10% in secondary schools have the S/NVQ for classroom assistants
- Around three-quarters of classroom assistants have at least Standard Grades or 'O' Grades
- A significant number also have qualifications beyond compulsory schooling such as Highers and 'A' Levels
- Around a sixth have HNCs or HNDs
- More than one in ten has a degree

The level and type of qualifications available for classroom assistants were criticised by some local authorities because the

qualifications available did not provide further or ongoing development for those classroom assistants who had already obtained their PDA.

Occupational standards

No local authority specifies that classroom assistants must have or be working towards a relevant classroom assistant qualification. It is surprising that despite the nature of the work undertaken by classroom assistants, qualifications or continued professional development are not essential requirements for entry or, more importantly, development in the job.

Furthermore, there is no occupational or professional body regulating the work of classroom assistants, working to raise standards of practice or promote their education and training. While there are UK wide occupational standards for classroom and teaching assistants, in Scotland these standards are only used for developing the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ).

The absence of any requirement for classroom assistants to demonstrate that they have achieved an agreed national standard means that the occupational standards are not being used to their full potential or to the benefit of pupils, parents, teachers, local

authority employers and classroom assistants. In addition, the occupational standards for classroom assistants are not matched, nationally or locally, to agreed standards of education service provision that classroom assistants could be expected to meet.

Training and continued professional development

Despite the lack of regulation or requirements to meet agreed national standards head teachers, teachers, educational professionals and classroom assistants themselves, told us that training is essential and beneficial to classroom assistants, pupils and teachers.

Our overtime survey also provides an indication of the commitment and potential of classroom assistants towards continued professional development and training. 44% of respondents told us they worked extra hours for professional development and only 8% were always paid for this work.

The type of training and professional development reported to be done outside their contractual hours included:

- Studying for the PDA/SVQ for classroom assistants (40%)
- Research/training on dealing with challenging behaviour (36%)

**‘Short of doing the teacher training course,
there’s not a lot.’
(Classroom assistant)**

- Research/training on medical procedures and/or medication (31%)
- Research/training on dealing with autism spectrum disorders (31%)

A ‘sticky floor’

Throughout the investigation classroom assistants also told us of the frustration caused by the lack of formalised career opportunities.

The investigation has found that for the overwhelming majority of the 15,000 classroom assistants in Scotland there are few career development opportunities to progress to more demanding and rewarding work. There is also limited transferability of the skills, qualifications or training they have achieved to and from other areas within the children’s workforce, such as early years practitioners and support workers.

However, in Scotland there is growing interest and recognition of the need to achieve a well-qualified children’s workforce including teachers, early years workers, those working beside teachers and in other children’s care and support services. Despite this, the

children's workforce remains fragmented and classroom assistants, in particular, have not been included in recent initiatives to up-skill parts of the workforce.

Local authorities also told us that the current lack of career opportunities and development is a situation they would like to change.

'... one of the other issues certainly local authorities would like to see is that the Government has invested significant in the McCrone settlement for teachers ... I would like to see that widened to what I'd call an Education Profession for the 21st Century and to look to see how we can give better career progression to all these categories of staff including classroom assistants.'

(Director of Education)



A classic example of the undervaluing of 'women's work'?

Providing equal pay for work of equal value and addressing any undervaluing of jobs requires recognition of the nature of the work carried out by men and women and ensuring that in assessing their work there is no bias or sex discrimination. This involves not only a technical exercise comparing the skills, responsibilities and effort within individual jobs, but also consideration of societal values and pressures that can allow undervaluing to exist.

For classroom assistants, the undervaluing of the work they do may have come about because:

- The work they are doing is not 'visible' in formal job descriptions
- The skills and nature of responsibilities of their work have been inappropriately 'valued'
- The work is seen as a 'vocation' mainly for women who love working with children and will forego equal pay
- The 'value added' by classroom assistants is hard to quantify
- The work 'varies' from their previous formal training and experience but fits with their childcare needs

Time for action - making change happen

Our vision:

All classroom assistants receive equal recognition, for the demands and responsibilities of their work, with other male dominated jobs of equal value.

The role each classroom assistant plays in contributing to the education and learning process is recognised and rewarded fairly and appropriately.

The levels of knowledge and skills required to undertake the range of support for learning tasks that many classroom assistants evolve into, is officially recognised through a career and qualification structure. This structure will allow classroom assistants to demonstrate their knowledge and skills at the same time as securing the highest standard of education in Scottish schools.

It is time to deliver this vision for classroom assistants, teachers, pupils and parents. The only way in which change will happen is if there is a concerted effort of all involved, including: classroom assistants, teachers, unions, local authorities and government.

Central to achieving long-term positive change is:

1. The creation of a national action group led by local authorities in partnership with the Scottish Executive and trade unions to address the factors contributing to the undervaluing of classroom assistants

2. The development of a national framework of job roles providing recognition and clarity about the actual work of classroom assistants
3. The framework of job roles should be used by local authorities to establish career progression routes for classroom assistants with links to job demand, qualifications, training and continued professional development
4. A new 'Support for Learning' Higher National Certificate (HNC) should be developed and promoted to recognise the progression (both actual and potential) to more complex and involved support for learning tasks. Steps should be taken to ensure transferability of this qualification to and from other jobs across the children's workforce
5. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) remit should be expanded to include the development and promotion of skills, qualifications and standards for classroom assistants. The GTCS should also be responsible for developing a system of registration for classroom assistant jobs in Scotland
6. The Scottish Joint Council National Agreement on pay and conditions should be amended to require local authorities to calculate paid annual leave entitlement in days rather than hours
7. Time should be built into classroom assistants' contractual working hours to allow for the appropriate planning, preparation, liaison with colleagues and CPD time necessary to perform their role effectively

8. The national action group should establish a short-life working group to produce and disseminate good practice guidance for local authorities and schools to raise the profile of best practice deployment, team working and school management. The short-life working group should also refresh the Scottish Executive guidance provided to local authorities and schools to address the findings from this investigation and to reflect the clarity brought about by the introduction of a national framework of job roles
9. The EOC and forthcoming Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) should use the evidence gathered from the classroom assistant formal investigation to develop a strategy and action plan to effect policy change and to raise awareness of the undervaluing of women's work with employers and policy makers

It is imperative for local authorities to take action, without delay, to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Gender Equality Duty. Therefore, individual local authorities must consider the findings from this investigation and:

10. Revisit the current evaluation of classroom assistant roles by carrying out equal pay audits using the EOC Equal Pay Review Kit and a non-discriminatory job evaluation system. This exercise should pay particular attention to making sure the job evaluation scheme used is fit for purpose, and whether or not it is being implemented properly



The classroom assistant perspective

"I am involved in a wide variety of support roles. These include taking groups for maths, reading, art, IT and story writing. I also supervise play, get resources, go on outings, mount display work, word process. I am definitely underpaid."

"I am timetabled for 30 periods a week in classes. I support pupils both in class along with the teacher and also on my own at computers or in groups in other rooms. Being timetabled for every period makes it difficult to find time to speak to teachers about pupils or even find out what work they will be doing, so it means a lot of the time I am working on my own initiative. I do think this job is now even more undervalued than it was six years ago with us being expected to carry out more complex tasks and deal with more difficult pupils for not nearly enough pay or recognition."

"As a special needs assistant I want to note that myself and colleagues do feel undervalued financially. More so now, when the result of the single status plans are to freeze my salary for four years because I am at the top of the GS1/2 scale. My years of dedicated service, skills and training seem to count for nothing."

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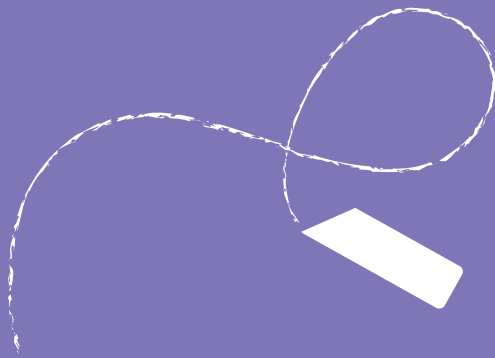
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