



Welcome to *SecEd's* NQT special edition. The next eight pages offer advice for NQTS as they approach the end of their year and for trainee teachers as they prepare for NQT life in September. To begin, **Chris Keates** looks at the entitlements and support that all new teachers should be receiving...

# Stand up for your rights

and guidance you need during your induction year it is essential to seek help and advice from your union.

The NASUWT provides confidential advice, support and representation to assist new teachers in securing their rights and entitlements.

Throughout their first year, we provide new teachers with access to professional development opportunities, forums in which to network with other new teachers, one-to-one advice on professional issues, and information and guidance on the wide range of issues that are critical to teachers' working lives.

This support is on-going throughout your teaching career and for teachers moving into their second year we continue to offer a wide range of professional seminars and training opportunities, as well as advice and representation on workplace issues.

We also work with governments and administrations, inspectorates and other decision-making bodies to lobby for the interests of new and recently qualified teachers.

The NASUWT is continuing to press for action to address the increasingly uncompetitive rates of pay for new and recently qualified teachers.

Since 2010 teachers' starting salaries have fallen well below comparable graduate professions. While all teachers are under financial pressure because of the continuing public sector pay cap and the excessive freedoms and flexibilities schools have been given over pay, we know that for new and young teachers the pressures are even more intense. That is why the NASUWT continues to campaign for a significant above-inflation pay rise for teachers and why we continue to support teachers in every workplace to secure the pay and pay progression to which they are entitled.

Workload remains the top concern of teachers. NASUWT research shows that 90 per cent of NQTS cite workload as their number one concern while 78 per cent of new teachers say the main driver of their workload is assessment and marking, with lesson planning and administrative tasks also cited as significant contributors.

Workload reduction is a key priority for the NASUWT. We have maintained a national dispute with the government over this issue and secured the publication of national recommendations by government which made clear that there is no requirement to deep mark every piece of work, without any regard to the subject you teach or the number of pupils in your class. There is no need for detailed bureaucratic lesson plans and teachers should not be subject to Ofsted-style gradings for their lesson plans.

Thanks to this pressure, governments and administrations have finally woken up to the need to tackle excessive teacher workload. However, the actions put in place have so far made little tangible difference to teachers' working lives and so the NASUWT is continuing the fight against excessive workload.

We believe that tired and exhausted teachers cannot



Image: Abbe Stock

**T**his is the time of year when new teachers will be considering the opportunities and challenges the next academic year will bring – whether you are an NQT coming to the end of your first year in the classroom or you are just completing your initial teacher training and are preparing for your first teaching post.

At the NASUWT, our aim is for every new teacher to enjoy a consistent, high-quality experience which instils confidence and nurtures the enthusiasm and passion new teachers bring to teaching.

Your experience in the early years of teaching is critical for you and for the future of the profession. It is essential that you are valued and supported and given the best possible start to your career.

If you are about to start your induction year in September you should receive your statutory entitlements to:

- A reduction in timetabled teaching in addition to the entitlement all teachers have to a guaranteed minimum of 10 per cent of the timetabled time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA).
- Teach only the age range or subject for which you have been trained.
- An induction tutor or mentor to help advise and support you.
- Not to routinely teach classes or children with especially challenging discipline problems.
- Teach the same class(es) on a regular basis to establish a routine and a rapport with pupils.
- Receive regular feedback and support on progress.
- Be given early warning of any perceived problems or difficulties with progress.
- Professional and timely communication about judgements on performance.

These provisions are intended to lay a firm and positive foundation for the start of your career and it is your right to receive them.

If you find you are not being given the time, support

give their best to the children and young people they teach. Your health and wellbeing is important to the high-quality education provision for all pupils. This is why we are continuing to challenge at national and school level policies and practices which generate excessive workload burdens for teachers and which distract them from focusing on the needs of their pupils.

Pupil indiscipline is also an issue of concern raised by new and recently qualified teachers, with half of new teachers in recent NASUWT research saying they had experienced verbal abuse by a pupil in the last year. Physical assault is thankfully much rarer, but any incident of violence against a teacher is unacceptable and must be challenged.

Online abuse and harassment of teachers by pupils and parents has become an emerging concern in recent years and the NASUWT offers guidance and support to members to deal with this issue and works with partner organisations to call for action to stamp this out.

The NASUWT has a strong record in helping teachers individually and collectively to resolve issues of pupil behaviour. Our belief is that teachers are entitled to teach and pupils are entitled to learn in an environment free from violence and disruption.

New teachers are a precious resource for schools. Teachers have distinct conditions of service, distinct

professional standards and entry qualifications and distinct professional roles and responsibilities.

Teachers are entitled to be recognised and rewarded as highly skilled professionals and have working conditions which enable you to focus on teaching. Without this, talented and committed teachers will not be recruited or retained.

You have right to be treated with dignity and to have your voice heard. We understand that it can be daunting for teachers who are new to the profession to stand up for your rights. That is why with the NASUWT you have the collective strength of the union behind you to support and protect you.

It is important that all teachers recognise that what happens to you affects the quality of the education for the children and young people you teach. When you stand up for your rights you stand up for standards and for children's right to a high-quality education.

You have made the best career choice, teachers change lives and help build nations, but to do that vital work you need working conditions which support you as a highly skilled professional. That is why the NASUWT will be by your side throughout your career to help you every step of the way.

SecEd

• *Chris Keates is general secretary of the NASUWT.*

## How to survive and thrive as a new teacher

As your NQT year comes to an end, **Julian Stanley** offers some advice on workload, behaviour and what you can expect when September comes...

**A**s the end of your first year as an NQT approaches, the chances are you are feeling exhausted and are longing for the holidays and time to rest.

Whatever your situation, my first piece of advice is this – make sure you have a proper break. Please.

You may see the summer holidays as a chance to catch up with work, put a plan in place for next year, do some more learning and resolve to improve.

That's all fine. But the most important thing you can do for your career right now is to have some time off. It is vital that you keep yourself mentally and physically healthy and robust. So try to switch off completely for at least some of the holiday. Do something completely different. Don't just flop and sleep the summer away. Do something for you. Teaching is all about helping others – now is the time to help yourself.

### Losing NQT status

When your next year starts you will no longer be an NQT and you may well lose some of your protected planning time and mentoring support (although I know some schools continue this into your second year). But for the most part, the training wheels come off in September and generally speaking you are expected

to take on more duties and perhaps other roles too. So there's no getting away from it. You're going to be busier. There will be added workload and less support.

However, this also means that you are now trusted as a qualified teacher and you can take on more responsibility. It may feel daunting right now but it is also a chance to prove yourself and make the most out of your teaching.

As such, before you go on your break it is a good idea to formulate a plan for how you're going to cope when you get back. That should make re-entry a little easier. If you are dreading September – and I know some of you probably are – take steps now to try to assuage some of that fear.

### Behaviour

Two of the most common issues we hear about from NQTS are coping with the workload and learning to deal with difficult behaviour.

Coping with challenging behaviour in a classroom is something every teacher will face in their career. In our 2017 YouGov health survey, 32 per cent of teachers who had experienced physical and mental health problems told us that their symptoms were related to problems with student behaviour. So here are some tips on how to cope:

- Be authoritative in your speech and body language.

- Fake it until you make it – be absolutely confident and in control even if you don't feel it.
- Get out of the habit of sitting behind the desk. You should also try the PEP approach – proximity, eye-contact, posing questions:
- Proximity: walk around the classroom and stand by a pupil that may be about to misbehave. Stand a "little too close for comfort" but don't invade personal space. A difficult judgement sometimes. You don't want to come over as aggressive or intimidating.
- Eye-contact: holding eye contact expresses dominance. What you say will be taken more seriously if you can maintain eye contact before, during and after speaking.
- Posing questions: rather than telling a pupil off pose a question with proximity and eye-contact such as: "Why have you not started your work?"

### Workload

Many NQTS will face increased work next year. The autumn term is often the toughest with nights drawing in making us feel less energetic – the hibernation instinct is strong as the days get shorter.

There's also extra pressures around Christmas activities for which you'll be expected to play your part. Being prepared can be a big help.

Again though I urge you take regular breaks. Staying at school longer to mark papers or working through your lunch break is not the best way to manage a workload that can at times feel overwhelming.

One of the best ways to prevent burn-out is setting boundaries. Leave work on time. Don't allow work to bleed into every aspect of your life. Don't talk or worry about work every evening when you get home.

Be disciplined and set a cut-off time. Saying "Right. I'm putting that up on the shelf for the rest of the evening. What's on telly?" can really help. Accept that most to-do lists never get completely done and don't beat yourself up over it.

Organise something for your time off so you're forced to do it rather than just flopping on the sofa all night. Think of things you enjoy but which also take your mind off work. Your brain never switches off but it can switch activities.

### Conclusion

As you approach your second year of teaching even though you may no longer have a mentor or official support it is certainly still okay to reach out for help. You won't know what help is available unless you ask.

And remember our counsellors are available round the clock if you need someone to talk to about any issue – work or home. It is free and confidential and we are urging teachers to get in touch as soon as they feel they need something extra to help them get through.

Congratulations on completing your NQT year. Give yourself a reward for getting through it. You deserve it. And now have a well-earned rest and I do hope you can come back in September refreshed and reinvigorated.

SecEd

• *Julian Stanley is CEO of the Education Support Partnership*

### Further information

For help or advice on any issue facing those working in education, contact the Education Support Partnership's free 24-hour helpline on 08000 562 561 or visit [www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk](http://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk)





Your NQT year is almost over. It is time to reflect on what went well and areas for improvement and – after taking a well-earned break – plan for September. **Dr Bernard Trafford** advises



## Reflecting on your NQT year

Image: Adobe Stock

**C**ongratulations! You've made it to the end of your first year, completing your year's induction. Not for you the two-year probation proposed by government for the future. It is all over – all bar the shouting, at any rate. Indeed, you may want to shout a bit at the end of term, in celebration of your achievement.

That first year of teaching is a tough one, no matter how much support you've received. Everything hits you for the first time and, however well-prepared you have been (and you will have been), there will have been moments when you've been living on your wits, making snap decisions and praying that your judgement doesn't let you down.

### Evaluating your first year

Given the quality of training and support that you received, you probably have got most things right. Nonetheless, if you can find a moment before the end of term, it would be advisable to sit down, first with your mentor and subsequently on your own, and make a list...

### What went well? Cause for celebration

The first column on your list should be "things that went well". This will be a long one! It's not the time for false modesty or excessive self-criticism. Yes, there will be things you want to do better next time, because real professionals are always seeking to improve their practice. But give yourself credit for doing them well the first time, even though they might be better next year, and write them down in this column, not as a reproach to yourself as things to work on – even though you will. Being satisfied isn't being complacent: make sure you spot the difference.

### What caught you out?

#### Avoiding the elephant traps

The second column is not the things that went badly! They can wait. This one, vital while they are still fresh in your mind, comprises the surprises you encountered, things that you weren't expecting to have to do, or that took you longer than expected.

An obvious example would be your first set of reports or grades. Were you ready? Or did you get yourself in the classic beginner's pickle, feeling you must set tests, which you then had to mark, in order to make a judgement about your pupils' progress in that short period of time?

Unless you were fantastically well-advised by your

mentor and/or head of department, you may have been surprised by how long it took to make decisions on grades or other measures of attainment, effort or prediction for public exams: next year you'll ensure your data is complete well in advance so that the work of marking, assessing and writing up doesn't overwhelm you.

Thinking about your teaching and preparation, were there particular times where, again, you felt inundated by a tsunami of work? You will never again face quite such a burden of preparation, having been through the annual cycle once. Nonetheless, are there alternative ways of anticipating or spreading the load, perhaps so that Sunday evening is not such a burdensome prospect every weekend?

Are there some resolutions you can make in order to avoid those elephant traps in future years?

Can you organise things with your home circumstances so that, even if some of the weekend has to be spent on work, that precious Sunday evening can be devoted to watching Poldark and enjoying a glass of wine?

If you remember, during the year, saying to yourself, "I'm damned if I'm going to do that again", write that down here, too: whatever it was, ensure that you don't find yourself going round the same loop next year.

### The shortest list!

#### What you could have done better

I guess we can't put it off any longer, so must finally embark on this third column. But don't lose heart! No excessive self-criticism, please: and remind yourself that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. You won't be caught out next time: so whatever it is that you find difficult or hate doing, if you can't modify or avoid it, at least you will be better prepared for coping with it.

### Planning the future: building a career

Now it is time for a fourth, and vital, column. This one is about planning your future, developing your professional skills and building a career. Take a look at the government's response to its consultation on *Strengthening Qualified Teacher Status and improving career progression for teachers*. Overall, although any measures ultimately introduced will arrive too late for your own induction, the proposals might give you some useful hints for looking after your own professional development.

You will note that government proposes a two-year induction period. You've completed the single one required of you: but what about next year? Who will support you? There may not be a formal structure: but

we all need a friend to turn to, a supportive colleague who understands what it's like and can give that word of sage advice or simple encouragement when we're struggling.

It is not necessarily about big problems or even specific issues: very often a beer and a chat are all that's required to keep sane, and remind yourself that any problems you face are not unique to you or your school.

In terms of building your professional skills, how about putting something back? If you've been well mentored, why not offer in turn to mentor an NQT who joins your school in September. Don't think that you lack the experience to help: on the contrary, you've just been through it, and those lists you've been making at my behest will furnish fantastic material not only for guiding yourself to the next year, but for helping others. You will be of immense value to anyone you mentor, and it will be beneficial to you as well: remember that the best way to learn something is to teach it, and that goes for mentoring your colleagues, too!

Be aware that you won't be allowed that extra 10 per cent of NQT non-contact time in September: so the teaching week will be that much more intense and gruelling. On the other hand, everything will be a little more familiar, less remorselessly challenging, and you will have gained confidence from having survived that first year.

Don't forget your own professional development. The coming year is the one in which firmly to establish a personal habit of deliberate, purposeful practice, of evaluating your work, thinking through each lesson, planning better resources – in other words, just growing as a professional.

Join in (or initiate) critical discourse in your department. "How do you tackle topic X?" "I find this way works." "I like your approach: how do you get round that tricky bit?" It's a great habit to form such conversations.

Think where your interests lie: where would you like to hone or broaden your skills? Make sure that the courses you go on about becoming a better pastoral leader, a more effective teacher, even a better mentor, are worthwhile. Whatever you do, don't only go to those tedious but necessary exam board briefings. They may be necessary, but they don't improve your skills, nor make you more of the excellent professional teacher that you want to be, and will be.

### And take a break

Don't try to get all of next year planned before this term finishes! Life's too short, and your energy levels are low now. When the holidays come, stop. Book a proper holiday: go away, relax, catch some sun and laze about. And have fun. After that, yes, you can start that planning for next term. But enjoy that holiday first. You deserve it!

SecEd

• *Dr Bernard Trafford is a writer and educationist, a former head and past chair of HMC. He is currently interim head at The Purcell School in Hertfordshire. Follow him on Twitter at @bernardtrafford*

### Further information

*Strengthening Qualified Teacher Status and improving career progression for teachers, Consultation response*, Department for Education, May 2018: <http://bit.ly/2lhZerk>

Last year's *SecEd* NQT diarist is now in her second year at the chalkface. We asked her to advise this year's NQTS on making a success of their second year of teaching

## Year 2: Preparing for September

had great intentions of attending every staff social and every student concert this year, but these fell by the wayside as soon as the realities of NQT life hit.

I'm not suggesting that next year will be so chilled that you will be volunteering at all the weekly evening recitals, but it is something to consider. The more you show your commitment to the staff and students, the more they will start to see you as part of the institution.

This will help your wellbeing (it is always nice for people around school to smile and know your name), but it will also help your behaviour management with students and your visibility with senior leaders.

You may not have promotion in your immediate plan, but it is always good for the headteacher to notice you at extra-curricular events.

My second piece of advice links to this – now you have got into the flow of your school and you know what's going on, it is a great time to take on some extra small responsibilities.

I am not talking about getting yourself a huge TLR budget or taking over a whole department, but some small duties to show your extra competency could be great for your career.

I took on the more able and talented coordinator role within my faculty (not whole school). This was a great (and fairly easy) step where people would notice if I did it well, but it wouldn't have awful long-term impacts if I was rubbish! Look out for these roles as you become more comfortable and don't ever agree to anything unless you are completely sure that you are happy to do it.

This leads me to my third nugget – don't say yes to everything. If your colleagues and line managers smell a whiff of a keen and high-achieving young teacher, they will pounce.

It can sometimes be hard to say no once the barrage of favours and pleas start sliding into your inbox. But remember – it is not (always) your job. Do not let someone take advantage of your hard-working attitude. Do what you can to help people, but if it is getting too much, don't be afraid to say no.

It is important to remember that you are still new at this. The past two years probably feel like a

whirlwind and you have learnt so much, but you are not supposed to be perfect (yet). If you still need to ask your head of department "silly" questions, do it (and don't feel too bad about it).

I am at the end of my second year and I still wander through to my head of faculty's room to ask about school policies and procedures. There's no way that you will have covered every little policy in your school so far, so don't feel silly if you still have to ask.

My final piece of advice may be hard to stick to, but it will be worth it if you can manage it. Continue to plan your lessons as if you are new. I don't mean plan every lesson as if it is being observed by the head, but try not to pick up bad habits.

The teacher next door may have been there for 20 years and be one of the best in the school, but just because she doesn't use a PowerPoint or a lesson plan to teach her lessons, doesn't mean you can (all the time).

It can be tempting to ease off on the planning and feel confident enough to wing it, but ultimately, you're probably a better teacher when you have spent time planning a good lesson.

Overall, you should enjoy the coming year. It may still have its challenges, but it should be a lot easier than the last two years of your life!

SecEd

**‘Don't say yes to everything. If your colleagues and line managers smell a whiff of a keen and high-achieving young teacher, they will pounce’**



Continuing his regular series, **Steve Burnage** talks us through CPD ideas that can be adapted. He offers a template for a 45-minute workshop with free handouts and slides on our website. This instalment looks at reflecting on your NQT year, making the step up to RQT, and preparing for whatever lies ahead

# CPD: Moving from NQT to RQT



Image: Adobe Stock

## CPD workshop: Moving from NQT to RQT

To deliver this 45-minute CPD training in your school, follow the advice and structure in the article below and download the free supporting handout and the PowerPoint presentation from the SecEd website: <http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/cpd-workshop-moving-from-nqt-to-rqt>

**T**he purpose of this article is to provide a summary of a 45-minute interactive training session that could be suitable for an NQT meeting, development group, small group CPD session or for individual study.

The training outline is included here while the PowerPoint slides and an accompanying participants' handout is available to download from the SecEd website (see above).

### Slides 1 & 2: Welcome

By the end of this training you will be able to:

- Reflect on your learning from your NQT year.
- Share best practice and lessons learned.
- Plan for the year ahead both professionally and personally.

Begin by discussing: As you become an RQT (recently qualified teacher) and there is greater expectation of you, a little less support and, yes, perhaps an even greater workload, what can you do to make the transition from NQT to RQT as smooth as possible?

### Slide 3: Practise the craft of the classroom

New techniques are only useful if they don't add extra stress to your workload, are simple for students to understand, and improve the atmosphere and rate of learning in your classroom. In short, always keep the quality of students' learning and progress at the forefront. What highly effective classroom techniques would you share with colleagues. What evidence do you have that they are highly effective? How do you plan to develop them next year?

### Slide 4: Plan, plan and plan

It is tempting to assume that, now the pressure of your NQT year is coming to an end, you can relax a bit on the relentless planning and preparation. Taking down time is important but don't take your eye off the ball:

- Ensure you prepare exciting, engaging and challenging lessons.
- Experiment and take risks with a strategy or technique.
- Be your own teacher and keep learning through self-reflection and the sharing of good practice.
- Try to make your subject relevant to your pupils.
- Share your passion for your subject – it is passion that will engage your students above content.
- Be guided but not controlled by whoever has curriculum responsibility for your subjects.

### Slide 5: Marking

Having gotten to the end of your NQT year, you will know all too well that marking can take up so much time and yet so much of it is ineffective and makes little difference to the learning and progress of your students. So:

- Ensure written feedback is as succinct and meaningful as possible.
- For each piece of in-depth marking – perhaps two pieces of work every six to eight lessons – write two “WWWs” (what went well) and one “EBI” (even better if). Give your students a short task so that they have to address their EBI.

- Consider ordering stamps and stickers to save you repeatedly writing the same comments.
  - Devise a coding system where you write short symbols on work, produce a key and then make students copy down the comments that correspond with the specific codes and symbols that you've written. This is not only a more economical use of your time but it forces students to engage with written feedback.
- What marking and feedback tips have you learned this year that you would pass on to the new cohort of NQTs in the autumn?

**Be assertive and courteous – you might say: I'm sorry I can't right now but will let you know when and if I can'. This approach is polite and puts you in a position of power by changing the dynamic**

### Slide 6: We all make mistakes

Reflect on how you can improve and allocate some time each week to your own development by:

- Revisiting key learning theories.
- Talking with and observing colleagues.
- Reflecting on and evaluating your own practice.

### Slide 7: Time is precious – manage it well

What have you learned from your NQT year that has enabled you to manage your time well? Consider your approaches to time management. Can you make good use of your time by:

- Organising the day by priorities – do the worse task first and then tackle the urgent, and then the important. Leave the stuff you enjoy until last since it will take less time.
- Avoiding “loaded” procrastination – we can fill

- our time with thinking about what needs to be done and talking about what needs to be done. Don't – just do it!
- Planning for potential crises – always have a back-up plan. What happens if you plan to write reports on a Friday afternoon and, for some reason you lose that free time. How will they get done?
- Setting aside personal time – remember to plan time for you as well as planning time for work. We work to live...

### Slide 8: Work/life balance is important

As you near the end of your NQT year, what will you plan to do to better manage your work/life balance in the year ahead?

Your work/life balance has to be important so that you can prioritise your life over anything else. So, what can you do to manage your work/life balance in the future:

- Sort out your priorities – make a list of the things that are important to you and decide when you are going to give them some time.
- Tell people firmly and politely that you won't have time or be able to do something at work.
- Put aside some time every week where you can just be yourself.
- Remember, you may enjoy it but school is work. It is great to enjoy your job, but if you keep on putting that extra effort in, you will start to resent it, and so will the people around you.
- Live in the present moment, not the future. Anxiety about the future is one of the chief causes of stress. We can all spend hours worrying about what ifs – better to focus on the things you know are real and true, not things that you cannot determine or influence.
- Talk to people you trust about a particular situation or issue you are concerned with.
- Don't sweat about the small stuff. If the borders on your display are crooked – well so what? They won't actually stop the children from learning. Time is precious in teaching so make use of all the resources and tools that you have available to you.
- Steer clear of staffroom politics and gossip.

### Slide 9: Learning to say 'no'

How successful have you been at saying “no” to colleagues who have tried to add to your work or commitments? As you move onward from your NQT year, it will remain difficult to say “no”, as you don't want to seem unwilling. So what can you do?

- Say it – don't beat around the bush or offer weak excuses: just say “no”.
- Be assertive and courteous – you might say: “I'm sorry I can't right now but will let you know

when and if I can.” This approach is polite and puts you in a position of power by changing the dynamic.

- Set boundaries – people sometimes have a hard time saying no because they haven't taken the time to evaluate their relationships and understand their role within the relationship. When you truly understand the dynamic and your role, you won't feel as worried about the consequences of saying no.
- Put the question back on the person asking – this is highly effective in a work situation. You might say: “I'm happy to do X, Y, and Z; however, I would need three weeks, rather than two, to do a good job. How would you like me to prioritise them?”
- Be firm – if someone can't accept your polite “no”, then stand firm and don't feel compelled to give in just because that person is feeling uncomfortable.
- Be selfish – put your needs first. Not those of the person asking you for something. So, what are you going to do to say “no” more effectively in the year ahead?

### Slide 10: Get to know the school community

As you become more confident with the basic delivery of your subject you may feel you have time to get involved with students' events outside your subject and get to know your colleagues well.

- Ask colleagues about their plans and if there is a staff football team, gym or routine visits to the pub then ask if you can pop along.
- Another way to get to know colleagues is to ask them for a favour. For example, ask art for colouring pens or PE for stop clocks.
- Never be afraid to ask for help.

What do you plan to do to get to know your school community better? What will stop you doing this, and how might you overcome this barrier?

### Slide 11: Making it work at work

Activity: What will you do as a result of this workshop? Working in groups, look at the action sheet you have produced during the training: what are the three key learning points for you? **SecEd**

• Steve Burnage has experience leading challenging inner city and urban secondary schools. He now works as a freelance trainer, consultant and author for staff development, strategic development, performance management and coaching and mentoring. Visit [www.simplyinset.co.uk](http://www.simplyinset.co.uk) and read his previous articles for SecEd, including his previous CPD workshop overviews, at <http://bit.ly/2u1KW9e>





Trainee teachers will currently be honing their teaching practice in readiness for September. **Matt Bromley** discusses why he prefers to follow a four-step teaching sequence in the classroom

**R**esearch by Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006) compared guided models of teaching, such as direct instruction, with discovery learning methods, such as problem-based learning, inquiry learning, experiential learning, and constructivist learning, and found that the latter methods didn't work as well as the former.

It didn't matter, they argued, if pupils preferred less guided methods, they still learned less from them (see also Clark, 1989).

In his book, *Visible Learning*, Professor John Hattie found that the average effect size for teaching strategies which involved the teacher as a "facilitator" was 0.17, whereas the average effect size for strategies where the teacher acted as an "activator" was 0.60.

Direct instruction had an effect size of 0.59 compared to problem-based learning with an effect size of just 0.15. Therefore, direct instruction – it seems – is more effective than discovery learning approaches. But what, exactly, does good direct instruction look like in practice?

Personally, I think direct instruction works best when it follows this four-step sequence:

- 1 Telling.
- 2 Showing.
- 3 Doing.
- 4 Practising.

Telling – or teacher explanation – works best when the teacher presents new material to pupils in small "chunks" and provides scaffolds and targeted support.

Showing – or teacher modelling – works best when the teacher models a new procedure by, among other strategies, thinking aloud, guiding pupils' initial practice and providing pupils with cues.

Doing – or co-construction – works best when the teacher provides pupils with "fix-up" strategies – corrections and "live" feedback.

Practising – or independent work – works best when the teacher provides planned opportunities in class for extensive independent practice.

Of course, the learning process does not end here. Rather, pupils need to garner feedback on their independent practice and then act on that feedback in order to improve by increments. We'll return to the importance of this "feedback loop" later. But first, let's take a look at each of the four steps in our teaching sequence.

### Telling

The most effective, expedient way for pupils to acquire new information is for the teacher – that educated, experienced expert at the front of class – to tell them what they need to know.

This is not to suggest that sometimes, for some purposes, other approaches are not also effective, but teacher explanations remain the most efficient method of teaching – not to mention the least likely to lead to misconceptions among pupils and a misunderstanding by the teacher of what pupils can and cannot do. So what are good explanations made of?

First, good explanations involve metaphors and analogies because this enables the teacher to contextualise new information so that abstract ideas or hitherto alien concepts are made concrete, tangible, and real, and so that they are related to pupils' own lives and experiences.

Second, good explanations make effective use of dual coding. In other words, teachers' verbal instructions, as well as any text-based explanations displayed on the board or in handouts are paired with and complemented by visuals such as diagrams, charts, graphics and moving images.

And finally, good explanations are reciprocated, with pupils explaining concepts back to the teacher as well as to each other. This works on the basis that only once you teach something have you truly learned it. Learning by teaching works because, by teaching, pupils gain feedback and make better sense of a topic. Learning by teaching also works because it is a form of learning by doing, of practising, and thus provides a source of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

### Showing

Once teachers have explained something, they should make effective and plentiful use of models – exemplars of both good and bad work, as well as exemplars from a range of different contexts – which show pupils what a final product should look like and what makes such products work.



# A four-step teaching sequence

Good models demonstrate what works as well as what doesn't. It is important to show pupils what excellence looks like by sharing models of the very best work, giving them something to aspire to, and an understanding of how to produce high-quality work of their own.

But it is equally important to show pupils models of ineffective work, work that isn't quite the best (or perhaps is so very far from being the best) so that pupils can learn what not to do and how to avoid making the same mistakes themselves.

All the models that are shared should be dissected in front of pupils, with the teacher demonstrating the dissection process. For example, if a model of a persuasive speech is shown on the board, the teacher should analyse it using text marking, pointing out and then annotating how it works, what makes it effective, breaking it apart to identify and discuss each of its component parts. Then the teacher should reconstruct the speech, explaining how the component parts hang together to create an effective argument, how the whole becomes something much greater than the sum of its parts.

Once pupils know how to dissect models, they should be afforded the opportunity to do so without the teacher's guidance, perhaps by teaching other pupils. In order to prepare pupils for this, it is important that the teacher offers encouragement, gives specific instructions, uses thought or sentence stems to provide pupils with the right language, and – as I say above – directly demonstrates the process first.

### Doing

Once the teacher has modelled something at the front of class, it is important to do so again but, this time, with pupils' help. Co-construction (or joint-construction) works well because the teacher engages pupils' thought processes and helps them by questioning their decisions and by prompting further decision-making.

The teacher's role is not to construct another model herself but to ask targeted questions of pupils to encourage them to complete the model together, as well as to provide corrections and feedback along the way, and drip-feed key vocabulary into the mix.

For instance, and to return to the example above, if a teacher has explained to a class how to write a persuasive speech and then modelled doing so on the whiteboard while thinking aloud, she might then ask the class to produce a persuasive speech of their own.

The teacher may begin by asking the class to determine an audience and purpose for the speech, then prompt pupils to debate and decide upon the tone of the writing.

The teacher might ask a pupil to come up and write the first sentence and then ask other pupils to comment on it. She might drip-feed technical vocabulary into the conversation where appropriate (reminding pupils, for example, that placing two contrasting ideas side-by-side is called "juxtaposition") and she might encourage pupils to repeat it and use the correct term in future.

She might ask pupils to model their thought processes, thinking aloud as they write, explaining the reasons for their choices.

The teacher, therefore, will mostly be engaged in asking open questions, such as: "Why did you choose that word? Is there another word which might fit better or have more impact? Why is this word better than this one? Should we use a short sentence here? Why/why not? What is the effect of this, do you think?"

### Practising

Once the class has constructed a model together, they need to do so independently.

Independent practice not only provides a crucial third opportunity for pupils to practise – after teacher modelling and co-construction – it also enables pupils to demonstrate their own understanding and for the teacher to assess the extent to which they have "got it". Until a pupil completes a task by themselves, we – and perhaps they – cannot be certain that they can do it or that information has been encoded in long-term memory.

If pupils succeed, the teacher can move on. If not, the teacher can use the feedback information to guide further teaching of the subject, perhaps re-teaching key elements of it or engaging those pupils who have succeeded in teaching those who have not.

**‘Until a pupil completes a task by themselves, we – and perhaps they – cannot be certain that they can do it or that information has been encoded in long-term memory’**

### The feedback loop

The four-part teaching sequence is not the end of the learning process, because once pupils have practised new learning we need to provide planned opportunities for them to be assessed (by themselves, by each other, or by us) and receive feedback on what they have mastered and what they still need to practise. Then, crucially, we need to provide planned opportunities in class for them to act upon that feedback.

Failure is the best teacher. Pupils learn through practice, by making mistakes, and by experimenting.

They also learn best when engaged in a process of trial and error and when they repeat actions several times, making incremental improvements each time.

If we do not provide lesson time for pupils to respond to feedback and improve their work, we send a negative message about the importance of redrafting work and learning from our mistakes. What's more, if pupils do not respond to feedback in class, the teacher cannot see progress being made and cannot, therefore, recognise and celebrate it.

### So what feedback works best?

Feedback needs to motivate pupils to make progress. In this regard, short verbal feedback is often more motivational than long written comments on pupils' work. Indeed, some pupils find written comments demotivating because they ruin the presentation of their work, are confusing or overwhelming. Feedback should also prompt further thinking and drafting, perhaps by posing questions on which the pupil has to ruminate and act, as opposed to ready-made suggestions and solutions.

I think it is useful to remember (as I explained in my recent series on feedback: <http://bit.ly/2yqimEL>) that the term "feedback" originated from the field of engineering where it formed part of a loop: feedback in engineering terms was about the discrepancy between the current state and the desired state of something, but this alone was deemed useless unless there was also a mechanism within the feedback loop to bring the current state closer to the desired state. In other words, feedback was about correction and progress.

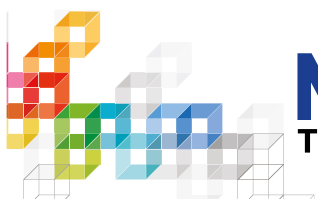
As such, simply telling pupils that their current performance falls short of where they need to be isn't feedback in the original engineering sense of the term. Rather, to be effective, feedback must also embody a mode of progression for pupils.

The best feedback causes thinking. In practice, this means that the teacher should be clear and constructive about pupils' weaknesses, offering suggestions on how they might be addressed, identify pupils' strengths and offer advice on how to develop them, and then – crucially – provide planned opportunities in class for pupils to improve upon their work.

And that is the four-part teaching sequence I recommend you follow, no matter what you're teaching and to whom. Tell pupils what you need them to know, show them what it looks like and how it works, produce a model of excellence together, plan opportunities for pupils to practise their learning independently, then make sure practice leads to quality feedback that pupils act upon in class so that progress becomes visible for all and the importance of learning from mistakes is writ large.

• Matt Bromley is an education journalist and author with 18 years' experience in teaching and leadership. Visit [www.bromleyeducation.co.uk](http://www.bromleyeducation.co.uk) and follow @mj\_bromley. To read Matt's archive of best practice articles for SecEd, visit <http://bit.ly/1Uobmsl>.





# Applying for that dream post



Image: Adobe Stock

Two crucial elements when applying for a teaching post are the quality of your CV/personal statement, as well as how you perform in the interview lesson.

**Robyn Johnstone** offers some advice...

**M**any teachers do not realise that an effective CV can make the difference between being shortlisted for the job of their dreams and not making it past the first stage of recruitment.

Often NQTS and teaching graduates struggle the most because they may have not written a CV before and they lack the experience to stand out. By following these guidelines you can ensure you are giving yourself the best possible chance of success.

## A dedicated teaching CV

Teachers need to understand the importance of a teaching CV to help them focus on what experience they have and what skills they have developed. This needs to be refined into a succinct and concise document. Once you have a strong teaching CV, it makes it easy to quickly market yourself to prospective schools. Employers often know there

is no ideal match but through a CV you can present yourself as close a fit as possible.

If you are currently completing your PGCE or Bachelors in Education, you can actively seek employment before you graduate by sending your CV to agencies who are constantly proactively searching for suitable teaching candidates. It will also enable you to attend recruitment agency events throughout the year, allowing you to meet with several hiring schools in one evening.

## Constructing a winning teaching CV

A successful candidate's CV will document experience to date, highlight their achievements and how they have developed and improved over time.

When writing a CV you should put yourself in the hirer's shoes. Does your CV confirm you are qualified to fulfil the job? Does your experience meet the job specification? Most importantly, will the person reading it want to find out more by inviting you to interview?

Your CV should include your teaching qualification – typically a PGCE or Bachelor of Education (BEd), your start and finish dates, the college or university at which you studied, and a brief overview of the course.

If you have studied another subject to degree level then provide details in the same format as your teaching qualification and link your degree to relevant aspects of teaching. Be sure to also include any additional qualifications that are relevant to the role.

Include any interesting hobbies or interests you have to demonstrate how transferable skills developed through such pastimes can also be valuable work skills. Be mindful that this is not just a list of your favourite hobbies but an illustration of how these activities have improved your teaching ability.

## Personal statement

When writing your CV it is important to include a personal statement. A personal statement is usually situated at the top of your CV, under your personal information, and is one of the first sections that the school will read.

A personal statement allows you to personalise your message to prospective schools or agencies. Look carefully at the school's website and demonstrate that you understand the ethos of the school.

Take time also to check out that school's

performance information and news reports published in local papers.

A personal statement should demonstrate your passion for teaching, supported by the skills and extra-curricular opportunities you can bring. Briefly give evidence of your teaching successes, where you can bring added value and, if applicable, where you have helped raise attainment.

It should be no more than one short paragraph so do not try to cover everything that you have studied or all your achievements. Again, make sure you proof-read your personal statement carefully.

## Career summary

State the roles, schools and dates in your employment history, regardless of your level of experience. Provide a brief summary of specific teaching responsibilities, and highlight achievements and any extra responsibilities you have been given as well as extra-curricular activities. If relevant, include techniques and methods you use to effectively control and teach your class.

## Formatting your CV

It is important to follow the correct formatting to make it easy for the recruiter to read. You may love the casual typeface Comic Sans and think you will stand out using it, but your future employers won't be impressed!

It is recommended to use Times New Roman for hard copies and Arial for electronic copies. Ensure that you use the same font throughout and only black.

Go easy on the bold and italics. Only use bold for section headings and italics for job titles. Make sure your formatting is consistent and, above all, easy to read. Many employers allocate only a short amount of time to read each CV, therefore your impressive experience and skills need to be easy to pick out.

Punctuation and grammar is the simplest step to check yet the easiest and most common to slip up on. Do not be complacent and make sure you and a friend check your CV before sending it to a school.

## References

In line with the Department for Education's statutory guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, you will need to supply two referees. One of these must be from your most recent teaching post or placement.

Make sure you inform your referees that they will be contacted. Aside from being polite, it will ensure that they are returned in a timely manner.

Make sure you also include the following in your application and highlight how they have influenced and developed you as a teacher:

- Any other teaching experience (e.g. sports coaching, summer camps or youth groups).
- Relevant voluntary experience.
- Any other interests you may have that are relevant to teaching.
- Skills that will be useful in the role (e.g. leadership, IT and languages).

SecEd

**M**any UK teaching job interviews frequently include the candidate conducting a live lesson with a class of students, which is observed by some or all members of the selection panel. This is what is known as an observation lesson.

Rather than being nervous about this part of the interview, try to think of it as your chance to impress. After all, teaching children is what you're here for. It is also an opportunity for you to assess whether the school is a good fit for you and your personal teaching philosophy and style. For those of you who feel nervous about teaching in an unfamiliar environment, here are some tips on how to triumph in an observation lesson:

## Preparing for the lesson

Check with the school to ensure you know the key stage and content you are required to teach, as well as how long you will be expected to teach for. Some schools only observe 20 to 30 minutes of teaching while others observe a full lesson. If you can, find out the seating plan in advance, as well as any important student information, so you can use it in planning your lesson.

Find out if you will be expected to take the register and be sure to build in time for this before you begin the lesson, or take the register while students are involved in their starter activity.

Write out a lesson plan and print out copies for the observers to follow. Make sure you use a lesson plan template and link the lesson content to the relevant sections of the curriculum.

It is crucial to plan ahead for the use of key

technology and ICT and remember to have a back-up plan, should your ICT fail. It is often advised to avoid using technology where possible to prevent any chances of failure, followed by unnecessary time wasting as you try to fix it (when you could be showing off your teaching ability).

## Getting started

At the start of the lesson be sure to introduce yourself and write your name and lesson objectives on the board so that learners understand the context of the lesson, and how it fits into the big picture. Don't forget to take the register, if it has not been done by another member of staff. If there are any difficult names, check their pronunciation beforehand.

What's your hook? Plan an interesting starter activity to get the students immediately engaged. Remember classroom management starts from when students arrive at the door.

Check with the school if there is a typical procedure on how to start a lesson, such as getting the students to line up outside. Also ensure that you know your cue to start and end, often through the school bell, but not always.

## Keep it simple

Don't try to cram in too much or plan complicated activities that eat into the limited time you have to display your teaching prowess. Try to focus your lesson on one tight learning objective or key theme to keep students engaged. Ensure you plan to reactivate key learning from previous lessons, if appropriate.

Follow the typical lesson pattern of using a starter activity to engage students, a main activity that develops through the lesson and end with a plenary to summarise and reinforce learning. Consider using

an exit activity which you can use as an assessment for learning exercise as well.

If the school has asked you to provide an exercise for homework, ensure that it is well prepared, relevant to the lesson and suitable for all learning abilities.

## Classroom management

If possible, find out the school's behaviour management policy and code of conduct ahead of your lesson. Students can often play up when taught by an unfamiliar member of staff. It is important you plan ahead and think about how you might manage:

- Low-level behaviour challenges.
- Escalating behaviour challenges.
- Transitions between activities.
- Group work dynamics.
- Resource distribution.

Try to involve as many students as possible when moving from one activity to another. Plan how and when you will check levels of understanding throughout the lesson and make sure you vary your techniques to show your breadth of skills when managing a class.

Keep a close eye on your timings, as the observers will want to see you running the lesson on schedule while still ensuring students are engaged and progressing with the learning activity.

## Be explicit in your differentiation

You need your observers to be able to see you can change your behaviour and communication when working with other staff members, compared to the children. Interact with the teaching assistant, if you have one, by briefing them before the lesson on what you plan to do, listening to their feedback on students, and explaining clearly how you would like

them to support you in the lesson. Ensure you also maintain interaction during the lesson.

Use open and closed questioning techniques to suit different students, and be prepared with extension questions for more able learners. Make sure you have alternative explanations to scaffold learning when required.

A simple solution to this is to use graphic organisers, such as a concept map or Venn diagram. These can be used to help students quickly identify areas of focus within a broad topic, reducing the time you must spend introducing key themes. If possible, use small group questioning techniques which allow all students to play an active role in answering.

## What are the observers looking for?

Typically, the observation and selection team will judge you on the following:

- Subject knowledge.
- Classroom management.
- Rapport with students.
- Innovation and potential.
- Student engagement and progress.

Many of these skills will be part of your natural style of teaching and you will have developed tried and tested methods that work for you. However if you are unsuccessful in securing the role, schools will often give prompt and meaningful feedback so you can understand what you need to improve for your next interview.

Overall, remember to smile, be confident, listen to the students and respect their learning environment.

SecEd

• Robyn Johnstone is CEO of Education Placement Group



Time-management is a vital skill for teachers, especially those new to the profession and certainly for those beginning life as an NQT or RQT. **John Dabell** offers some advice

**M**any of the teachers I know are good at stealing. In fact, some are really good at it, prolific even. They say that stealing is good for their wellbeing because it helps them manage their workload and keep life in balance.

Becoming a professional time-stealer is an essential part of being a teacher, as teaching is so multi-faceted and demanding. If you are regularly working 12-hour days then you are not doing yourself nor your school any favours. To be a time-stealer means taking back what belongs to you – your life! This is especially important for NQTs and early career teachers.

Time-management skills also come with experience and as you move into your second year you will begin to learn how to steal and do it well. Every teacher will have different personal and professional demands that “eat” into their time, but there are some tips we can share:

#### Pressed for time

Teaching is inherently busy with no real finishing line to flop over, which is why we have to make time-management our business and learn some ways of surviving and thriving. We can either waste it, make it, save it, spend it or abuse it.

I have a colleague who appears to have all the time in the world. He never gets in a flap, he has time for everyone and I've never heard him complain about being “snowed under” or say he “doesn't have time to breathe”. He even manages to find time for a social life and he enjoys his weekends.

What is his secret? He puts himself first, not students. He openly shares his passion for good mental, physical and emotional health. He is fully focused and prepared, he is fit and he has a positive outlook and attitude. All these make a difference to how he approaches his work and how he manages his day.

He avoids the toxic conversations, moans and groans and he gets on with the business of teaching with a smile on his face. He gets by using natural chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine rather than overdosing on caffeine.

Is he superhuman? No but he is an expert in unbusy himself and stealing minutes here, there and everywhere. He works damn hard, he's a change agent, strives for challenge, evaluates his impact –and he's also lazy. He saves time by live marking, giving verbal feedback, using marking codes and making clever use of his highlighter. He leverages free and online resources, recruits his own students as teaching assistants and doesn't complicate things with over-administration or over-committing.

#### It's high time

We all need to be lazy teachers not workaholic burn-outs. If this troubles you then perhaps your view of laziness is associated with being idle and slothful. This isn't the same sort of lazy.

The *Really Lazy Teacher's Handbook* by Jim Smith (Crown House Publishing, 2017) is a must-read for any teacher and the premise is simple. This isn't about cutting corners or kicking back, but working more intelligently so that you are in control of your workload and your stresses, and crucially, learners are working harder than you are. The idea is that students go home exhausted, not you.

Being a lazy teacher, is being a “canny teacher” who employs a variety of strategies and techniques that get the learners to do what they should be doing: learning.

#### 'Eisenhower' yourself

There are never enough hours in the day but you can prioritise and reclaim control by stealing time. Lazy teachers are good time-stealers because they decide which tasks need doing.

There will be lots things we just have to live with because we can't change them, but there are parts of the day we can have a greater influence over.

Your core activity is the students' learning and so tasks that take priority are those that will have a direct, positive and visible impact on this learning. Make a clear distinction between what is urgent and what is important and weigh up the demands.

The Eisenhower Matrix and the 4D strategy is an excellent approach – a time-management system named after Dwight D Eisenhower, the 34th president of the United States from 1953 until 1961.

As president, Eisenhower had to unceasingly make some exceptionally tough decisions about which tasks he should focus on each day. He invented the Eisenhower



# Effective time-management

principle and this is something we can all use to help us prioritise by urgency and importance and whether we do, decide, delegate or delete. As Eisenhower once said: “What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important.”

Learn to practise the four Ds of do, delegate, ditch and delay for prioritising tasks and take a look at this video for an explanation of the Eisenhower Matrix: [www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/](http://www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/)

#### Eat that frog

For fast-acting relief, eat a frog. In the words of the author Mark Twain: “If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first.”

Brian Tracy has adapted this idea and written about it in his book, called *Eat That Frog* (Berret-Koehler Publishers, 2007). He says: “What is your ‘frog’? What is the one task that you despise doing each day? Once

**Make it an addiction:** The book also suggests that we commit to “doing” because we feel better about ourselves and this positive mindset is addictive. When we “eat that frog” each day we start to automatically do what needs to be done. Teachers always have 101 things to do but there will be plenty that can be put on the back-burner. There are also plenty of frogs that need eating. So take the advice and get your day off to a good start and eat the biggest and ugliest frog, because once it is out of the way you will be on top of the day rather than being victim to it.

#### Use a Pomodoro

The “Pomodoro Technique” is a time-management method that was developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s. “Pomodoro” is the Italian word for tomato.

This technique might come in handy for managing your marking or assessment projects. It's also a good one to share with students when studying. The methodology

productive and this boosts your motivation and keeps you creative. Frequent breaks keep your mind fresh and focused. It eliminates multi-tasking, gets you to focus on the task in hand and avoid fine-tuning everything. See <https://francescocirillo.com/pages/pomodoro-technique>

#### Be more Toyota

Toyota can teach us a thing or two about being time efficient. Professor Jeffrey Liker in his book *The Toyota Way* (McGraw-Hill, 2004) lists 14 principles that make up the car manufacturer's way of working and these make a lot of sense to time-starved teachers.

One of these is not to run around like a headless chicken trying to do everything. Haste makes waste, slow and steady wins the race. Principle 4 states: “Level out the workload (work like the tortoise, not the hare).”

Trying to do too much and plate-spinning every day will ensure you have a smashing time but will have you picking up the pieces in the process. Procrastination is not really an option, but a little creative delaying is sometimes necessary to get other things done right.

#### Time to say 'no'

This is easier said than done when you are in the first few years of teaching but it is doable and requires nerve. Saying “yes” to everything isn't good for your health. Learning to say “no” early in your career is worth it and will mean that you won't be taken advantage of or seen as a soft touch.

Obviously there has to be a balance and we can't say no to everything, but the importance of speaking out and standing your ground to safeguard your own wellbeing cannot be emphasised enough. This also means purging a few tasks, such as mega-detailed lesson plans.

#### No time to waste

If you are looking for a time-management toolkit then good luck with the search as there isn't one.

The good times will roll – but only if you manage your commitments and learn what works best for you. Remember, not everything needs doing at the same time and perfection is a time-waster; sometimes a job only has to be done well enough.

Being a perfectionist means you can put in too much effort, energy and time into minor things that have minimal value. When something needs doing, focus on the most critical aspects rather than the trivial pieces. Unreasonable self-expectations can gobble up your time and accepting less than perfection will steal your hours.

Out of all the professional skills that enable teachers to be effective and operational then time-management is probably the most critical.

SecEd

“He saves time by live marking, giving verbal feedback, using marking codes and making clever use of his highlighter. He leverages free and online resources, recruits his own students as teaching assistants and doesn't complicate things with over-administration or over-committing”

you have chosen your ‘frog’ make it a habit to wake up every morning and do that task first.” The Eat That Frog approach involves three aspects:

**Don't dwell:** If you want to get something done then get on and do it. Looking at the frog isn't going to help so we just need to eat it up without delay. Brian Tracy says we need to get in the habit of attacking what's most important – eating the major task helps us reach high levels of performance and productivity.

**Eat the ugliest frog first:** Sometimes we have a monster task in front of us and it takes no working out that this is the frog we need to consume first. But then there are plenty of times when we have a couple of big jobs to do – which one do we tackle first? *Eat That Frog* suggests, in the spirit of Mark Twain, that we get rid of the ugliest one first. He says: “Discipline yourself to begin immediately and then to persist until the task is complete before you go on to something else.”

is simple – when faced with any large task or series of tasks, break the work down into short timed intervals spaced out by short breaks. To get started, all you need is a timer that can count down from 25 minutes (you can use your phone or computer) then follow these steps:

- 1 Choose a task (marking, planning, answering emails etc) to work on.
- 2 Set the timer for 25 minutes and start working.
- 3 Keep working on your task until the timer goes off and try to avoid switching tasks or getting distracted.
- 4 When the timer goes off, take a five-minute break to stretch or grab a drink. This built-in break helps ensure that you don't get burned out on a particular task.

Each 25-minute block of work is a pomodoro. Once you've completed four pomodoros, take a longer break of around 20 to 30 minutes. This will help your brain to relax and refocus. The time you set can be less than this.

This is a cyclical system and because you work in short sprints and take regular breaks, you are consistently

• *John Dabell is a teacher, teacher trainer and writer. He has been teaching for 20 years and is the author of 10 books. Visit [www.johndabell.co.uk](http://www.johndabell.co.uk) and read his previous best practice articles for SecEd via <http://bit.ly/2gBiaXv>*





# Handling lesson observations

Lesson drop-ins and observations are commonplace for new teachers. School leader **Allen Hall** advises on how you can handle these to ensure they support your professional development

**A** teacher's job is unique in that it brings great stress yet reward and humour (although the humour found in the classroom is more likely to be appreciated on reflection as opposed to during the moment). As any teacher will confess, this is magnified enormously during your NQT year.

The first few weeks as a new teacher can be overwhelming but exciting. However, once the shine of the new school year has slightly dulled and the dark days of autumn take root term one can be tough.

There is a quick realisation that work/life balance does not exist as everything blurs into a mirage of meetings, trainings, assessments and lesson observations. Nothing appears to go to plan and the unexpected also seems to show its face at the worst possible time.

The initial experience of failure or the perception of failure can sit deep and heavy as a dull pain in the pit of your stomach. It clouds your judgement and tarnishes the perfection you seek. But before you register with a recruitment agency, I can assure that such experiences are merely the foundation building for a long and successful career.

I cannot say that my NQT started in the best possible way. I was timetabled between two departments and my classroom was not in the safe comforts of the main building surrounded by colleagues but outside in a pod of mobile units. There was a no bell system and timing was not one of my strengths and I found behaviour support difficult being separated from the main building.

I'll start with the strangest but not most memorable of my classroom fails. The class was a top set but they were my most difficult. Behaviour was erratic and challenging and they quickly became my highest detention issued class. I can't say it was all bad as there was a strong core of great students who just wanted to learn. However, the stars aligned and this class were chosen for an NQT lesson observation by one of my subject leaders. The words "nervous" and "terrified" were understatement. It felt as though my entire career hinged on ensuring that I could make progress with the majority of the group in 60 minutes without anything crazy happening. The day came, and then the lesson and it started surprisingly smoothly.

The first part of the lesson was fantastic. There was a good interaction among the pupils, my toughest boys

were participating and class discussion was provoking and challenging. It was pleasing to see how the pupils respected the situation and it demonstrated a year of hard work setting a positive classroom culture.

In the mist of my eternal sunshine a noise from the middle of the class roared out piercing the tranquil learning environment. At first I thought it was merely a figment of my imagination until it roared again this time bringing the cascading laughter of hyenas.

I shuddered as reality began to creep in that my "notorious pupil" had reared her head. She was now standing up with her arms tucked up imitating a velociraptor. My career began to crumble under each of her steps as she moved stealthily around the classroom and then stood firmly in front of my subject leader.

This was a moment of truth. Will my dinosaur pupil respond compliantly to my boss and return to her seat or will she continue to roam about her new domain? The stand-off lasted for a few seconds before the mighty raptor roared loudly and scurried under a desk. The next 10 minutes were surreal as senior leaders poured into my classroom to end my nightmare. My dinosaur did not go quietly or easily but she soon was removed. I can't say normality reasserted itself but I was able to complete the end of the lesson with something approaching success.

As the pupils were dismissed I watched them leave one by one thinking that this was the end. My subject leader sat me down and said little. There was no mention of our prehistoric friend or the ensuing armada of school support. The feedback was constructive and there were many positives that reminded me that teaching is difficult.

Too many times lesson observations bring anxiety, stress and an unnecessary worry. I know that this can be a result of school culture, which is why school leaders need to ensure that observations are not seen as a grade of teachers' capability but as a tool to support the development of teachers. This is why I have moved my school away from individual lesson grading and shifted the objective of observations to challenge and support with a focus on developing positive classroom habits.

Athletes watch video play-backs intently to study their form, composure and execution of a skill and to evaluate their performance. It is a formative exercise that helps them identify key areas for improvement to develop in practice and execute in the next game.



Image: Adobe Stock

For me, lesson observations are similar. It may be a colleague, line manager or a video system but the outcome is the same – the observation experience can help shape our classroom practice and improve teaching.

Therefore, instead of dreading the word observation, DARE to see it as development tool.

- 1 Deliberate practice.
- 2 Ask questions.
- 3 Reflect.
- 4 Expect feedback.

### Deliberate practice

Have a clear focus for your lesson observation – presumably on a habit or strategy that you have been working on. Teaching is busy but setting a clear focus will help you refine individual development goals. For instance, you have been practising engaging all learners with questioning. Your observation gives you chances to show it and receive feedback on its implementation and the impact it has on pupil learning in the lesson.

### Ask questions

Sometimes observations can feel one way. Usually it's the observer feeding back and the observed nodding while thinking "what the heck, am I really this bad!". But the process should be a two-way model of communication. You may want to know more about how certain groups responded to instructions or you may be struggling to understand the feedback. This is not about being confrontational with the observer, but about ensuring that you maximise the learning opportunities.

### Reflect

Whether the observer feedback was supportive, constructive or critical, find some space to reflect

on it. Thinking about the impact your planning and teaching has on pupil learning is important. What were the successes and why? What are your development points and why? And what changes to your planning need to take place next lesson and why? Even better to talk through these questions with a colleague or subject mentor.

### Expect feedback

Expect feedback and ask for it. To improve, good constructive feedback is needed that drills down to the core of your teaching. In basketball, feedback is regular and incisive with a clear focus on one area to improve in practice. The same should be expected in the classroom. Feedback can be a gift that is not always pleasant but can have a positive impact on your teaching.

### Conclusion

I highly recommend viewing lesson observation as an opportunity to grow and develop as a teacher. Some of your lessons will be great, a few may feel like failures. But by adopting a fixed mindset you ignore the importance of deliberate practice, asking questions, reflection and feedback. I firmly believe that my dinosaur observation disaster and the many other moments of what seemed like failure have helped and enriched me as a teacher and a leader.

Master Yoda once said "the greatest teacher, failure is". I would have to agree. Stay positive and keep learning as each moment makes the next brighter. **SecEd**

• *Allen Hall is vice-principal for curriculum and assessment at Waterhead Academy as part of the South Pennine Academies in North West England. He comes from Kentucky in America and has been teaching in the UK for 11 years. He blogs at [www.allenhalledu.com](http://www.allenhalledu.com) and tweets @ahalledu*

SecEd's NQT diarist is at the end of his first year at the chalkface. He reflects on his highs and lows – and his priorities for year 2...

## Reflecting on my NQT year

Schools are complicated machines with many different parts working in tandem, and strong communication is vital to ensure that everyone is striving towards the same goal.

Despite any dramas that may arise, my main focus has always been the students who enter my classroom day after day. I have written before about the importance of relationships and am very happy with the atmosphere of mutual respect that I have built with my students. I have a strong rapport with every class that I teach and feel a great sense of pride when looking back over the work they have done this year.

My head of department recently gave me very positive feedback about the academic progress of my students, which makes all the hard work seem worthwhile.

However, I will never treat any of my students as a percentage on a spreadsheet; each one is an individual whose needs must be met at all times. I hope that every student I have taught has benefited from being under my tutelage and will remember our time working together fondly. In the case of my key stage 3 students, I look forward to seeing them grow into young adults and sincerely hope that our paths will cross again as they move up the school.

Early on in my NQT year, I wrote about struggling to maintain a good work/life balance. This has improved over time, although I still have the odd sleepless night where thoughts of school preoccupy my mind. These thoughts are rarely negative, but I do need to learn to switch off more effectively. After

all, thinking about the order in which I'm going to mark my assessments while lying awake at one in the morning has very little practical benefit.

Despite not always getting the work/life balance right, I have never felt overwhelmed by the workload this year. I think the trick to surviving your NQT year (and beyond) is to compartmentalise jobs and be very strict when prioritising what needs to be done. My advice is to prioritise and just get on with things – and, very soon, your list of jobs will begin

to shrink. Of course, it will soon start to grow again, but that is what makes the job so fast-paced and satisfying. There really is never a dull moment in this profession.

As I look forward to my second year of teaching, I am determined to build on my successes during my NQT year, and explore new ways to engage and inspire my students. I now feel wholly invested in the wellbeing of my students and the school community as a whole. I have been lucky to gain employment in an institution where I want to stay for many years to come.

I recently spoke to a valued colleague and friend who will retire this summer after nearly 30 years of teaching at the school. As she prepares for the freedom of retirement, I am just starting out on my career. After such a long time at the chalkface, this colleague still speaks highly of both the school and the profession. Indeed, if age were not a factor, I suspect she might insist on doing another 30 years. I can only hope that, when I reach retirement age, I will have retained that feeling of pride and joy at being a member of the teaching profession.

During my training year, the headteacher that I worked under during my first placement told me that teaching is the best job in the world. One year into my career, I wholeheartedly agree. **SecEd**

• *Our NQT diarist this year is a teacher of history at a comprehensive school in the North of England. To read his previous entries this year, visit <http://bit.ly/2K0xABK>*

**“I still have the odd sleepless night where thoughts of school preoccupy my mind. These thoughts are rarely negative, but I do need to learn to switch off more effectively”**

## ARE YOU A NEW TEACHER?

**Do you want to benefit from an extensive programme of support for newly qualified teachers?**

Join the NASUWT to receive your FREE membership, followed by reduced subscription rates.

### **New teacher membership includes:**

- **Starting Out** – a FREE, quick guide to essential information you need on appointment, including salary, conditions of service and registration.
- **A personal Induction Planner** – FREE, to support you through the key milestones of induction – unique and only available through the NASUWT.
- A FREE advice and support service – local networks of serving teachers and a dedicated advice line only a phone call away between 8am and 6.30pm weekdays.
- FREE seminars for new teachers, with a particular focus on positive pupil behaviour management.
- FREE information, advice booklets and briefings on issues affecting teachers.

**For more information, visit [www.nasuw.org.uk](http://www.nasuw.org.uk).**

**Join the NASUWT today.  
Quick and easy, no hassle. Tel: 03330 145550 or  
online: [www.nasuw.org.uk](http://www.nasuw.org.uk).**