

A companion to DfE Advice to ITE providers (November 2018) *Addressing teacher workload in Initial Teacher Education*

In November 2018 the Department for Education (DfE) published **Addressing teacher workload in Initial Teacher Education**, advising Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers about ways to reduce the burden of workload on trainee teachers. The impetus behind this publication is to be welcomed. Discretion is needed however in the ways in which providers respond to one of its key recommendations, which advises there should be a reduced focus on planning individual lessons. As the trainee progresses, the DfE advice is that they should plan lesson sequences instead. Most high quality ITE programmes incorporate the principle that lesson planning is an essential *professional skill* that trainee teachers need to develop, in order to teach lessons that are increasingly effective - planning towards achieving specific learning objectives and outcomes, in detail, with actual pupils in mind. This takes time. The DfE suggests that ITE providers review with their partners the purpose of lesson planning and this document provides some additional context for those discussions.

Discrimination is needed about which practices are ‘burdensome’ in ITE

Further scrutiny is needed of the DfE’s classification of individual lesson planning alongside other activities which are identified as ‘burdensome’ for trainees. This places it on a par with chores that lack direct impact on developing the ability to teach. Time spent on other activities – multiple assessments, recording and reporting administration, data management or covering for other teachers - are an appropriate focus for discussions about reducing workload. All stakeholders want to help ensure that positive change regarding these kinds of practices is embedded in the culture of schools. Alongside this, ITE partnerships need to clearly articulate the role of lesson planning in effective learning and teaching and how it is vital to the learning of trainee teachers. Being explicit about the purposes of lesson planning can be a prompt for all involved to scrutinise our own practice and pedagogy. This is a good opportunity for ITE providers to foster discussion about the importance of planning, in order to best support our newest teachers to plan well.

A most productive use of time is when a mentor spends time planning *with* the trainee, co-teaching and reviewing the lesson, looking back to the plan as the basis for understanding what has been effective or otherwise. This is where real changes in workload are needed, to facilitate the use of time – by all teachers – to grow the profession, from within. Dialogue within partnerships needs to address what is important if teaching is to remain an expert profession while careful decisions are made about reducing workload in ITE. The **Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy** (January 2019) provides further urgent impetus for such discussions.

Clarifying the purpose of lesson planning

The DfE advice regarding planning is based on recommendations from the **Independent Teacher Workload Review Group** and reducing teachers’ workload is a serious priority. That is separate from the fact that trainee teachers are *learners* and protected time should be spent on learning. ITE providers do need to be explicit about the purposes of individual lesson planning alongside planning sequences of lessons. Lesson planning should not be used to produce burgeoning evidence files or to satisfy misguided beliefs that this is ‘what Ofsted wants’. Lesson plans are far more important than that. This is an important conversation to have within ITE partnerships.

Learning to be a qualified teacher includes developing a wider, more adventurous range of teaching approaches that motivate pupils and increasingly address their diverse needs. This is

not the same as implementing template guides or 'off the peg' schemes of work, no matter how good they are. Becoming a qualified teacher means being able to go further than that. Planning lessons requires trainee teachers to think deeply about important aspects of effective teaching. It is a key professional skill that underpins nearly all of the Teachers' Standards. Quite apart from needing to learn how to 'Plan and teach well-structured lessons' (Standard 4) it is hard to find any of Part One of the Standards that does not indicate the importance of lesson planning - including planning individual lessons - in supporting the growing competence of trainees. This is further demonstrated in the clear direction given by the **Early Career Framework** that new teachers need to 'Learn how to...' develop specific practices across the range of Standards, nearly all of which cannot be achieved without learning to plan well.

Expectations grow as the training year develops and mentors are key to that development. Trainees need to respond to dialogue with mentors and other experienced teachers following lesson observations and learn to adapt their planning and teaching based on this. It is part of the process by which new teachers learn, which is frequently captured in various forms of a cycle - 'review-plan-teach-review', encouraging trainees to be reflexive. This is a cycle that is supportive and responsive to increasing expectations of the trainee's quality of teaching.

What is meant by *progression* in planning for trainee teachers?

The DfE document asks providers to review their provision to focus on trainees planning a sequence of lessons rather than preparing individual lesson plans (Principle 1, p. 4). Two case studies within the advice propose that trainees should replace focusing on individual lessons with a focus on planning sequences of lessons, one suggesting that this reflects growing confidence. There is an assumption here that warrants scrutiny - that *progression* for a trainee means moving away from planning individual lessons. There is an impetus here for ITE partnerships to deepen their shared understandings of *progression*. Our best teachers engage with a plan for each lesson in some form, to ensure that all groups of learners can make progress within that session. There is skill in knowing where to focus in a plan and where to generalise; when to revisit a previous plan to select objectives and when to rewrite; who to seek for advice on tackling an obstacle to the class learning and who can be relied on to share a good outline plan. These are all skills that need to be learnt as a trainee and within an early career. Many teachers who struggle, even in later career, have not acquired these skills successfully. Without these skills, even 'off the peg' plans won't have the best impact on pupils' learning. Disappointing progress by a trainee teacher is very often rooted in surface-level knowledge of how to plan, or inconsistent planning. For those who struggle to teach effectively, difficulties are frequently rooted in a flawed understanding of what needs to be in place to help the pupils to learn. This is shown most tangibly in poor quality lesson planning. A professional culture of planning is needed to help alleviate this and to develop all trainees to fulfil their potential. For trainees who learn relatively quickly how to plan for successful lessons, the rhythm of the training year presents continuous opportunities to develop teaching - a new curriculum focus, more adventurous teaching strategies and better ways to meet individual needs. Only a reductive view of teaching can be satisfied that a trainee has 'done' their learning to plan lessons part way through the ITE year. This is not to say that teachers must always 'reinvent the wheel' and plan every lesson from scratch. The point is that planning lessons is core to how teachers learn to teach with increasing effectiveness, throughout their training year.

Collaborative planning

It is unhelpful for teachers to become over-reliant on particular planning formats; without strong pedagogical understanding of what difference it is making, any format becomes formulaic and loses its effectiveness. Trainees need to be inducted into a range of possible ways of planning, including collaborative approaches. The recent project **Reducing teachers' unnecessary workload: the promise of collaborative planning** investigated the effects of whole days dedicated to collaborative planning. It found that 'Teachers valued the dedicated time given to planning and felt that they produced more high quality planning as a result.' Participating schools agreed that it is important for teachers to engage with effective planning processes. Case studies developed by teachers include examples of how to evaluate the effectiveness of planning and its impact on pupil outcomes. The cases model how collaborative, action research approaches can help to build alternative ways of developing and evaluating planning.

Investing in the teaching profession

Clearly, it is important to discuss the DfE reports on reducing teacher workload, including planning, among ITE partners. This means considering the details they contain, sharing views of

learning to teach and carefully considering how we respond to headlines that suggest trainees should be directed to use more text books and 'off-the-shelf' schemes. These resources should of course be acknowledged as useful: trainees should be introduced to valuable teaching materials and develop the capacity to select those which are high quality, and when and how to incorporate such materials into their teaching. The **Reducing teachers' unnecessary workload: the promise of collaborative planning** project emphasises the importance of adapting plans to meet the needs of pupils and the difference that subject expertise can make. Standard planning formats are questioned. It is also recognised that as teachers progress in their career, most are able to spend less time on planning. **Supporting teachers in the early stages of their career** (DfE, 2018) identifies lesson planning, including 'medium and long term planning, for the first time' as a key factor impacting on workload. However, workload and wellbeing have a complex relationship. Time needs to be invested with any new learning, so that efficacy, efficiency and esteem can boost wellbeing once the learner is proficient. In order to plan effectively to teach well, teachers need to have learnt approaches that work and that make a difference to their learners. It is an important investment.

Trainee teachers need to learn how to teach, and not take on burdensome tasks that are not about developing classroom practice. This is an issue which is further complicated because so many student teachers are, of course, employed within our schools. We need to protect the time needed to learn to plan lessons and to be able to identify where problems in trainees' teaching may originate. The DfE advice is well-intentioned and can help partnerships to achieve this. Deeply thoughtful discussion is needed however, about the purposes of planning and its role in the learning of new teachers.

Some questions that may promote further discussion for providers and their partners:

- *How do we ensure high expectations of effective planning? How do we support trainee teachers to focus on the detail of what their learners need to do to learn effectively?*
- *Is there a shared understanding about the purpose of lesson planning for trainee teachers within ITE partnerships?*
- *How do mentors view their role in planning lessons with trainees? What expectations are there that regular mentor dialogue is an opportunity to extend skills in planning for effective teaching?*
- *Are ITE partnerships satisfied with how progression for a trainee teacher is understood and assessed with regard to planning for pupils to learn?*
- *Do partners discuss progression in terms of increasing, nuanced adaptations in new teachers' plans that will make a difference to pupils' learning?*
- *What opportunities do ITE providers give to trainees to adapt existing schemes of work? How do ITE providers ensure trainees can make considered choices from a range of effective planning formats?*
- *Is one indication of progression being able to increasingly incorporate 'off the peg' lesson plans into one's teaching? What are the advantages and the pitfalls?*
- *Is there scope to prioritise a short collaborative project within the ITE curriculum to evaluate the difference planning can make to an individual; a group; a whole class that better demonstrates the effectiveness of good planning to trainees?*

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References

DfE (2016) **Independent Teacher Workload Review Group**

DfE (2018a) **Supporting teachers in the early stages of their career**

DfE (2018b) **Addressing teacher workload in Initial Teacher Education**

Gu, Q., Heesom, S., Williamson, R. and Crowther, K. (2018). **Reducing teachers' unnecessary workload: the promise of collaborative planning** Transform Teaching School Alliance.

DfE (2019) **Early Career Framework**

DfE (2019) **Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy**