

Best Practice Guide: trainee workload and supporting resilience

Helping trainees to manage their workload is a priority across the partnership. These recommendations are collated from ITEC meetings and School Direct Review and Development meetings.

Managing workload

1. Discuss work/life balance at an early point in the course and share strategies for coping.
2. Encourage trainees to discuss their 'non-negotiables' (their commitments and the activities/hobbies that they want to continue doing during the course) and monitor these - if a trainee stops doing these it could flag that they are struggling.
3. Arrange for trainees to talk to former trainees / NQTs about how they managed the workload and look at their IDPs/teaching files near the start of the course.
4. Explicitly discuss how to gather and file evidence efficiently and effectively - 'one touch' policies, setting up a well-organised folder so that evidence can be stored easily, etc.

Consider

- Can you be flexible about the online learning days - can trainees do these from home? Can they be linked to other activities?

Supporting Planning

1. Trainees need to develop confidence through team-planning, planning and teaching short episodes in the first place.
2. Once trainees can confidently plan an episode, invite them to plan a full lesson, working from a provided scheme of work and in consultation with class teachers.
3. A teacher may do a demonstration of planning as one of the weekly training tools.
4. In the developing independence phase, trainees should plan sequences of lessons, with support and guidance and working from a medium term plan overview. These sequence plans may have less detail about delivery, but should still highlight learning objectives, support/challenge and assessment.
5. Planning a full scheme of work should be an enrichment/extension task and not expected until trainees enter that phase.

Consider

- Can you get trainees together for shared planning time?
- Is it possible for the trainee to repeat some of the same lessons with different classes? This would help them to learn about how to tweak/adapt and personalise learning content without requiring a completely new sequence of lessons.
- Are the teaching and learning targets being set encouraging trainees to spend too much time creating additional resources? Do they understand how to differentiate/personalise and scaffold via dialogue, questioning, grouping etc?

Managing feedback and the emotional toll

- 1.** Ensure that as ITEC you are an approachable point of contact and that trainees are encouraged to speak to you if they are struggling.
- 2.** Check that Lead Mentors are comfortable with how to give feedback and set targets (see materials on the partnership website), and that they are happy with how the trainee is responding to them.
- 3.** Regularly check in with trainees and Mentors.

Consider

- Would it be helpful to adapt lesson observation forms to ensure that the observer is focusing their written record on the trainees' development points and evidence needs - not just recording everything but looking for specific things?

See below for suggested information for trainees.

MANAGING THE COURSE

The PGCE year is intensive and challenging. As well as juggling a seemingly endless workload, you will also occasionally be placed in stressful situations. It is important, from the outset, to find strategies which will help you to thrive and enjoy the course.

Managing stress:

Stress *can* be a positive thing - it can heighten your responses, help you to think quickly, to act efficiently, to be alert. It can be motivating, help you to feel ready for a challenge - and succeeding within stressful situations is extremely rewarding. You will definitely feel stress as a teacher, but as long as you are managing it with optimism and enthusiasm for your learning and your teaching, and as long as you feel as though you can cope and achieve, it is likely that this will be positive stress. Feeling nervous or anxious before a lesson or an important meeting is *normal* and can even be beneficial!

However, stress becomes negative when it is chronic, or accompanied by a feeling of being entirely overwhelmed. To avoid this, it is important to pre-emptively think about how to manage the demands of the course, and to think about ways of working which best suit you.

Some recommendations:

- Be selective in your use of social media. You will need to exercise professionalism and caution in line with the expectations of your role as a teacher, but should also be mindful of the impact that interaction on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp might be having on you.
- Switch off notifications on social media and email. You need to make sure that you check your Exeter email at least once per day, but constant checking and notifications can be wearing and stop you from stepping out of your professional role at the end of the day.
- Be organised from the outset. Set up a clear system for your files – both paper and on the computer – and as far as possible try to operate a ‘one touch’ policy – respond to and file paper or electronic documents as soon as possible after you receive them, or if you need to come back to them later, develop a system for where you will put these so that you don’t forget about them.
- Do not underestimate the importance of sleep and exercise - finding ways to wind down and making sure that you get enough sleep are both important.
- Try to ensure that you make a clear distinction between work and home life. Aim to have at least one day at the weekend where you don’t do any work. Consider what activities help you to de-stress and try to ensure that you do them!
- Talk to people about stress or challenges – don’t feel that you have to cope on your own.

Wellbeing Services

There is information in the **Programme Handbook** about how to access Wellbeing support at the university. Please make contact as soon as you can if you feel as though you would benefit from some help. There are many options! Your UVT or personal tutor will also be very happy to help you make contact if you would like additional support.

AccessAbility

If you think you would benefit from an Individual Learning Profile or need any adjustments to the course you must contact AccessAbility. There is information about this in the Programme Handbook. Please note that information shared with Occupational Health through the Fitness to Teach assessment is not automatically shared with your tutors. It is worth having a conversation with us to check the information we have if you have an ILP or would like any additional support. Occasionally people think that we are aware of their medical history when we aren’t.

MANAGING YOUR WORKLOAD

You will need to be **proactive** in managing your workload on the course. This is an intensive year - only 9 months on the course really - and there will be some times of very heavy workload (when you are planning, marking, reflecting on your own learning and completing assignments all at once) and relatively lighter workload. We have done everything we can to minimise what we ask of you, but inevitably there will be times when you feel snowed under.

We would like you to think *now* about what you can do to **instil good habits** before things get tough!

1. Avoid perfectionism - the teaching workload can be endless, so you need to learn when to stop when something is good enough (and that goes particularly for creating resources). That said, you do need to make sure that you know the material you're teaching, and that you plan and mark in line with your school's expectations.
2. Use a single powerpoint template as the basis for planning all lessons, and just tweak it / adapt it (with the caveat that sometimes you will want to teach with no or minimal ppt!).
3. Make your marking more focused and useful - mark less but make it more meaningful, and think about how to use verbal feedback and peer/self assessment effectively.
4. Make use of systems designed to manage your time - e.g. Office 365, Skype.
5. Develop a system for keeping track of and prioritising tasks - anything from a simple list on paper to a complex app - whatever works for you.
6. Learn everything you can about smarter use of IT (e.g. the snipping tool) to help you to work more efficiently.
7. Only cc in people to emails if you think they really need to see it.
8. Turn your email off and only check it at certain times of day - particularly if you need to concentrate on something difficult or important.
9. Designate any 'free' time in school so that there is a clear purpose to it - e.g. your free lesson 2 on a Monday might be for planning two coming lessons, or for reviewing/marketing your year 8 books, or for writing up agenda evaluations...
10. Agree with your Lead Mentor what the expectations are of submitting lesson plans in advance, of when you will check emails etc - and try to make sure that this is realistic and respects work/life balance. You can't expect your Lead Mentor to look at a lesson plan the night before you aim to teach it, and you shouldn't expect school colleagues to respond to emails outside of the working day.
11. Keep your focus on what will help your pupils to learn.

Most importantly, please be aware of your stress levels and be open with your tutors at university and in school about how things are going. **If you're not coping, ask for help - the earlier the better.**