Agreeing objectives and action plans with newly qualified teachers

Professional development objectives provide a strong sense of purpose and direction to those directly involved in induction. They help newly qualified teachers (NQTs) not only meet the core standards but also look towards their longer-term professional development. Objective-setting is not an end in itself. It is part of an overall professional development process that includes review, planning and action.

Appropriate objectives provide a basis for reviewing an NQT’s progress, and enable the NQT and induction tutor to identify both the aspects of the induction programme that are supporting development and any areas in which improvements may need to be made. Objectives in the induction period need to be carefully thought through and designed to meet the individual needs and circumstances of the NQT.

Developing effective objectives

Objectives vary in a number of significant ways:

- The extent to which they address short-, medium- or long-term needs within the induction period
- The levels and types of support they require (some can be addressed independently while others demand intensive development activity)
- The ways in which they balance the personal priorities of the NQT and the demands of the context in which the NQT is working

Effective objectives are:

- Challenging and realistic
- Precise and focused
- Framed in a way that leads to clear statements about their achievement
- Limited in number and balanced against other professional demands
- Set within clear time frames
- Linked to a programme of monitoring

Broad, long-term objectives may be broken down into smaller achievable targets and tasks. Part of the induction tutor’s skill will lie in helping NQTs to identify these smaller steps.

Agreeing objectives for induction

When agreeing objectives in the induction period, it is helpful to address the need for:

- Early identification of objectives, based on the strengths and priorities for development identified by using the self evaluation tool available to NQTs
- Objectives that lend themselves to the half-termly review cycle and therefore can be either achieved relatively quickly in their entirety or monitored through interim goals
- Planned opportunities related to the organisation’s context, eg preparation for report writing, residential visits
- A balance between building on the NQT’s strengths and addressing areas for development or improvement
- A clear focus on teaching and learning that helps NQTs to maintain high expectations of their own development as well as that of the pupils in their charge
- A recognition of the extent of the individual NQT’s workload and a balance between professional development objectives and the day-to-day needs of pupils’ education
- Flexibility to respond to rapidly changing needs during the induction period and fluctuations in rates of progress

Objectives will often relate to more than one core standard. This is shown in the objectives below, which have been extracted from the action plan for one primary teacher, an on-going and flexible document that reflects the progressive nature of induction. Each objective relates to assessment and was set following either the NQT’s initial discussion with his or her induction tutor or a performance review meeting.
Sample objectives:

- By the end of the first four weeks, to have become familiar with the school’s policies and procedures for assessment, recording and reporting, and to have developed records that are consistent with these policies
- By the end of the first term, to have developed sound knowledge of individual pupil performance and identified trends and patterns in the performance of individuals and the class as a whole
- By the end of [month], to have developed teaching objectives and effective strategies that are explicitly based on your monitoring and assessment information in literacy and numeracy
- By the end of the term, to be able to make independent and accurate assessment of achievement against attainment targets in literacy and numeracy, and to communicate effectively to all pupils and parents about these and about how pupils can progress to their next stage of learning
- By the end of [month], to be able to set individual targets that are challenging, attainable and in line with the school’s approach to target-setting

Objective setting in the induction period helps to prepare NQTs for longer-term objectives to be set for the second and subsequent years of teaching, when performance management arrangements will apply.

Creating an action plan

Some of the headings below could be used with the NQT to create an action plan:

- Objective – what is the intended outcome of the development, for pupils and the NQT?
- Evaluation of current strengths and weakness
- Link to core standards – what is the expected standard?
- Evidence for success – how will the induction tutor know the NQT has achieved the outcome?
- When progress will be reviewed?
- Support and resources, including professional development activities, cost and time