

# How to guide a novice assessor

**Experts in dealing with NQTs Mike Shorten and Graham Soles help a head teacher to encourage best practice in assessment**

**Q** I am head teacher of a large comprehensive, keen to develop the skills and capabilities of our newly qualified teachers – in particular, Ellie, who lacks confidence when assessing her pupils. I should like your advice and guidance on encouraging the NQT's assessment skills. For example, she knows what and when to assess, but is not confident about how to assess. What guidance should we offer? I should like my CPD co-ordinator to establish good practice in assessment among our NQTs and further encourage a positive culture towards assessment in our school.

**A** **Graham Soles replies:** I believe very strongly that a well-planned and structured induction programme is the key to developing the skills of NQTs. Clearly every school has its own assessment and reporting policy that is reviewed on a regular basis. It is important that NQTs such as Ellie are given the confidence in how to assess as well as following school and department policy on what and when to assess.

A highly positive culture in school can certainly be created in this area by developing policies using the framework of assessment for learning, which can promote among pupils the maximum benefit in terms of gaining qualifications.

Assessment for learning can operate on a number of different levels beginning in the classroom with teacher, peer and self-assessment.

Using this approach will familiarise Ellie with different techniques of how to assess pupil work in the classroom.

To develop good practice further, try discussions at induction sessions together



with collaborative observations with more experienced colleagues both within and beyond Ellie's subject area.

In addition, this emphasis on teaching and learning within the induction process and in departmental meeting time will help the NQT to embrace every school's philosophy of raising achievement.

Assessment for learning can certainly assess pupil skills in a range of experiences from oral work to extended pieces of writing. Ellie must then link the principles she has learnt on assessment for learning to more formal marking and moderation of teacher assessment work at key stage 3 and coursework/examinations at KS4 and KS5.

**A** **Mike Shorten replies:** When you are encouraging new teachers in how to assess pupils with the primary intention of enhancing learning it is essential to stick to the ground rules:

- 1 Make the assessment criteria transparent and easily accessible to the pupils.
- 2 Involve pupils themselves in self- and peer assessment.

By following these two rules, the "how to assess" flows more easily.

If the purpose of assessment is to allow the pupil to take the next steps in learning, the "How to assess?" question is more about how to encourage and motivate the pupils within the subject to realise where they are at and to move them on.

On a practical note, we encourage the use of a range of strategies to vary the assessment. Initially a diagnostic piece of work is required; from there various methods are used to generate formative assessment

opportunities such as diamond and card sorting to hot-seating, response partners and modelling.

These methods all focus on the pupils' understanding of a concept rather than testing their knowledge, as well as encouraging their independence and engagement in learning.

It is also helpful to point out to NQTs that there is a need to build in time to pause before the teacher expects a response, avoiding the "hands-up" approach and therefore allowing the teacher greater choice of pupils and increasing the expectation that all pupils should have an answer.

As an NQT the teacher has not yet fallen into following routine methods of assessment. By using the assessment for learning strategies as advocated above, they can develop the climate for assessment in the classroom into one of encouragement, engagement and independence.

### Meet the experts:

**Graham Soles** is head teacher of Brighthouse High, 11-18 Business and Enterprise Specialist comprehensive school, which appears on Ofsted's list of outstanding schools.

**Mike Shorten** is based at Carmel RC College in Darlington, where he is responsible for the Carmel Teacher Training Partnership. The partnership covers 19 schools.

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