

**We
are
the
NEU
join
us**

The NEU is the largest union for teachers and education professionals in the UK. Together we will shape the future of education.

Join FREE as a trainee or for just £1 if you are newly qualified*



Join us today

neu.org.uk/join
0345 811 8111

*Terms and conditions at neu.org.uk/neu-membership-tcs

NEU3976/0625

SecEd

THE VOICE FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

SUPPLEMENT June 2025


www.sec-ed.co.uk



A guide to success as an early career teacher

Teaching is tough, yet incredibly rewarding. If you are to survive and thrive as an early career teacher and set yourself up for a long and happy career then you must build healthy habits from day one. From wellbeing and workload to teaching ideas, behaviour tips and safeguarding advice, this free 21-page SecEd guide is here to help you...

With support from  national education union

 Sign up for our free weekly ebulletins. Visit www.sec-ed.co.uk

Navigating your first years at the chalkface

Teaching is tough, and you will need to set in place good wellbeing and work/life balance habits now if you are to thrive in the future

Just like learning to drive, learning to teach only really starts in earnest when you are finally qualified to be “on the road”. The fast and furious demands on your time will continue to come in many guises and unforeseen circumstances will be commonplace, because (thankfully!) the children we teach are not numbers on a spreadsheet or AI-generated.

Those who choose to join the profession do so because they want a rewarding career that matters – but sadly it is well-known, and borne out by the annual Department for Education school workforce census, that approximately one-third of new teachers leave the profession within five years.

We know that there is always more that schools and government can, and should, do to ease the pressure on teachers. However, prioritising your mental health and adopting some practical strategies can make a huge difference when navigating the first part of your teaching journey.

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, I hope that some of the strategies below, shared by experienced colleagues, will help

Adam Jones

...has more than 20 years of experience in secondary education and has held a range of leadership roles at various schools including head of department, director of sixth form, and assistant head. He currently works as a senior mental health lead

you manage your wellbeing throughout your career.

Belief and support

You are a qualified professional doing an excellent job in often difficult circumstances. But sometimes your inner critic's voice can become overwhelming. You could name and shame them, give it a name that makes you laugh (Voldemort works for me!) and when they rear their ugly head, call them out – tell them to get back in their box. Making conscious our self-doubt can help us beat it.

With this reinforced confidence, do not be afraid to speak up if a deadline is unrealistic or you're not comfortable with what you have been asked to do.

We ask our students to do this all the time, as clear communication makes everything easier, so why not us? It is better to be realistic with what you can achieve within a given timeframe.

Saying no and creating boundaries will give you space to

breathe and can change how colleagues interact with you. Be solution-focused when discussing workload with colleagues and line managers – who knows, you may find a way forward that is better for everyone involved.

A good place for tips and advice is Education Support's free guide on how to say no and set boundaries (see further information).

Share your concerns and seek support when you need to. You may be new to teaching, but you are a valued member of the team just like everyone else. Seek out more experienced colleagues as they will have practical advice and reassurance in abundance.

Remember too that some lessons just won't hit the mark for whatever reason. That's okay, you're only human. Reflect on what could be done differently next time. Tomorrow is another day.

Protect your time

Try not to bring work home, dedicate non-negotiable “no school work” time, especially at weekends. This will help replenish your energy levels so that when you do sit down to tackle that marking you will be more efficient and effective.

Plan break times throughout the week that are “non-negotiable” and put them into your timetable at the start of the year – they will be something to look forward to during the week. And planning your life outside of work is just as important, making time for

yourself, family and interests. When you write your to-do list on a Monday morning make sure you put personal to-dos in there too. Another useful Education Support resource is their exercise to help teaching staff “recharge in three minutes or less”.

Work smarter not harder

Front-load resources as much as reasonably possible. For example, preparing worksheets or resources at the start of each half-term can give you an extra couple of minutes most days with your morning brew.

Utilise technology to your advantage – but only when it saves you time. This can be tricky with all the online resources out there, so try not to get too bogged down.

How often do you use artificial intelligence? It really can reduce planning time. But be mindful of how you use AI – it can reduce authenticity too. Elsewhere, do you use list-making or scheduling apps to help plan your daily tasks?

Build relationships, stay connected

The pace of life in any school can sometimes make us forget the importance of staying connected with others. While this might go against the grain of leaving work at school – helping with extra-curricular shows, performances or sports fixtures, allows you to see your students in a positive light (even ones you may have found challenging).

It can also help you connect with colleagues in another way. If you feel comfortable doing so, join



in with after-school staff social events – a Friday get-together or end-of-term social, for example.

Get to the staffroom whenever you can. This can sometimes seem a daunting place at a new school, but as well as enabling you to make friends, staffrooms are a hotbed of hints and tips to make your day that little bit easier.

Try to leave work on a high – make a positive phone call or email home the last thing you do on a Friday. This will be the last thing you remember about the week – no matter how stressful it has been.

Emails

While making communication faster, emails increasingly take up more and more of our working day. We can all feel pressurised into instant responses, so here is a list of advice to cultivate a healthy inbox:

- You should turn off email notifications on your phone. Only access them when you choose to open the app, as something may pop into your

Remember too that some lessons just won't hit the mark for whatever reason. That's okay, you're only human. Reflect on what could be done differently next time. Tomorrow is another day

inbox that worries or upsets you and it can ruin your weekend or personal time.

- Don't respond to everything – no-one will be offended if you don't always reply with a polite thank you. If you really must reply, the “thumbs up” emoji often suffices!

- Think about when you send emails – can it be delayed and sent in the morning rather than later in the afternoon or evening? This helps to set a clear boundary.

Check-out Education Support's free resources and webinar on how teachers can set boundaries around technology (see further information).

Final thoughts

While undeniably rewarding, teaching is an extremely demanding profession. By setting boundaries, seeking support, and finding joy in the everyday, you will be thriving in your career and making a lasting impact on those you teach.

Education Support has a wealth of free mental health and wellbeing resources including guides, tools and videos online. It also runs a 24/7 emotional support helpline offering access to qualified counsellors, where you can have a confidential conversation and find support tailored to your circumstances and challenges (see right).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Education Support Helpline

► Education Support runs a free 24/7 emotional support helpline on **08000 562 561** for teachers and education staff. When you call, you'll talk to a qualified counsellor. The helpline will offer you immediate, confidential emotional support: www.educationsupport.org.uk

Education Support Resources

- *Setting boundaries: A guide for staff in schools:* <https://buff.ly/1LgLHjq>
- *How to re-charge in 3 minutes or less:* <https://buff.ly/7ZijUp9>
- *Technology and teaching: Tips for boundary setting:* <https://buff.ly/nG55y00>
- *Webinar: Technology tips for education staff who want a life outside of work:* <https://buff.ly/B30Ny0g>

SecEd

THE SECED PODCAST



Protecting staff wellbeing in schools: This recent episode offers practical advice and examples for how we can protect the wellbeing and mental health of teaching staff, with some great ideas for teachers and guidance for school leaders. Listen via <https://buff.ly/3ZnhhBf>

Contents

Navigating your first years as an ECT

Pages 2-3

Designed-in wellbeing for ECTs

Page 4

ITT-ECF: Meeting Standard 4

Pages 6-8

Getting lesson pace right

Page 9

Learning/lesson objectives & success criteria

Pages 10-11

Dealing with challenging classes

Pages 12-13

Behaviour: Connection before correction

Page 14

Twelve time-saving tips

Page 15

Working with the seven types of parents

Pages 16-17

Safeguarding advice for ECTs

Page 18-19

Retention: How to make it to year five

Page 20

CPD & collaboration

Page 21

Designed-in wellbeing for sustainable practice

You cannot expect wellbeing to just happen – you need to design it into your working life in school from day one. This framework will help you to do just that

Early in my school life, I watched an assembly I have never forgotten. The teacher filled a vase first with large stones (the essentials), then pebbles (the everyday tasks), and finally sand (the extras). Her point was simple: if you focus on the smaller, less important things first, there is no room for what really matters.

In teaching, it can become tempting to let the “sand” – such as ineffective but time-consuming assessment, over-analysing of slide design, or meandering email chains – crowd-out more impactful practice.

Teachers must develop sustainable habits to avoid burn-out and prioritise wellbeing. As an ECT, you are probably no stranger to reading about teacher wellbeing, but it is often hard to see where this fits in with the day-to-day requirements of being a teacher.

The truth is it doesn't – it must be designed in.

Designed-in wellbeing is not about squeezing self-care into an already packed schedule. It is about building sustainable habits, routines, and mindsets into the foundation of how you work so that looking after yourself is part of the plan, not an afterthought.

Systems, not sacrifice

A key mindset to avoid as an ECT is that teaching well means working endlessly. While the role will always have workload pressures, effective and sustainable teachers do not constantly work beyond their hours to the point of burn-out, instead they utilise clear systems to reduce workload.

● **Planning:** Use the resources that are available to you and adapt to the needs of your students. Do not focus on reinventing the wheel every time, but improving it.

- **Marking:** Work within your school's assessment and feedback policy. Prioritise feedback that impacts learning. Consider how whole-class feedback, live marking, and peer/self-assessment can support you. The Department for Education Workload Reduction Toolkit or the Education Endowment Foundation's *Teacher feedback to improve pupil learning* resources are useful here (see further information).
- **Emails:** Set clear boundaries. If you can, allocate specific times during the day to check and respond to emails rather than reacting as they arrive. Use folders, flags or labels to prioritise your responses. Protect your time, as emails should fit around your teaching, not dominate it.

Turn feedback into progress, not pressure

As an ECT, you will receive a lot of feedback. Some of it will be constructive, some transformative, and some will feel challenging. Designed-in wellbeing means viewing feedback as a tool for growth not as a personal judgement.

- **Seek feedback intentionally:** Make proactive use of the expert colleagues within your department to identify feedback that will make a key difference to your practice. Ask specific questions like: “How can I improve transitions between activities?”
- **Timeline:** If you have received a range of feedback, think about how you will action this by creating a timeline for development.
- **Avoid perfectionism at all costs:** Improvement is the goal. You do not need to be a flawless teacher.

Shanti Chahal

...has worked in teaching at both secondary and primary level, including as an English subject lead and a curriculum developer. She is now an English subject lead and lead mentor for wellbeing at e-Qualitas. Find her previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/shanti-chahal

Professional boundaries

One of the most powerful forms of self-care is learning how and when to say no. It can feel challenging, especially when you are early in your career, but boundary-setting is a sign of professionalism, not selfishness. Think ahead rather than working around unfeasible responsibilities.

- If asked to take on a new responsibility, be honest with yourself about your capacity.
- Protect your non-teaching time, including evenings, weekends and breaks. You cannot pour from an empty cup.
- If workload is spiralling, speak-up. Your mentor and induction tutor are there to help you manage workload.

A support network

No one thrives in isolation. One of the best things you can do for your wellbeing is to build a supportive network. That might include other ECTs in your school/trust, your mentor or other expert colleagues. It could be a subject-specific community, e.g. subject associations or teacher networks.

Your network is where you can discuss challenges, share successes, exchange strategies, and continue growing together. A strong community can be a vital in preventing burn-out. Equally, your union rep will also be able to provide advice and support.

Celebrate your wins

It can be easy to fixate on what is

going wrong, but designing in wellbeing also means designing in gratitude and reflection.

- Keep records of one thing each day/week that goes well, no matter how small.
- Celebrate progress and regularly reflect on what you know now that you didn't a month ago.
- Revisit positive feedback (perhaps feedback you have received via emails, student conversations, or expert feedback) and remember the impact you have had. Keep it handy for days you need a boost.

Final thoughts

Wellbeing isn't a luxury for when the marking is done. It is a foundation that supports your effectiveness, resilience, and teacher persona. The choices you make now can shape the kind of career you build. Designed-in wellbeing doesn't mean never feeling tired or challenged, it means you have chosen to build a professional life where you can thrive, not just survive.

SecEd



FURTHER INFORMATION

- DfE: *Workload Reduction Toolkit*: <https://buff.ly/e738b7M>
- EEF: *Teacher feedback to improve pupil learning*: <https://buff.ly/Jq9KMCC>

A Charter for Early Career Teachers

Early Career Teachers (ECTs) are the future of the profession and deserve excellent training. The Early Careers Framework sets out the minimum expectations for induction, but settings should offer more than the minimum.



All ECTs should have:

Expert tutoring and training resources

CPD should be in-person wherever possible and relevant to the context of the school. Resources shouldn't simply repeat what was learned during ITT.

Meaningful mentoring: regular catchups and reflective discussions

Time for this must be protected. The 10 per cent allocation should be maintained in year 2, when challenges for ECTs are different but no less demanding.

Stable employment

Contracts for ECTs should last for at least the length of induction. A commitment to their professional development shows them that they are valued.

Find more information and advice for ECTs at neu.org.uk/new-teachers

Clear expectations, clear information

ECTs should know what to expect. They should know who their appropriate body is, how to contact their training provider or induction mentor, and who to ask for advice about school or MAT policies. They should not expect to be subjected to 'support plans', which are not appropriate for managing their progress.

Respect

ECTs must be respected and valued. They should be encouraged to participate in the wider life of school, to join peer networks and see a variety of teaching approaches. They should feel confident in asking for support and guidance.

If you're an ECT and you're not already a member of the NEU, join today for just £1 at neu.org.uk/join or by scanning the QR code*.



Standard 4: Plan and teach well-structured lessons

The Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework comes into effect in September with eight core standards. In this article we delve into how teachers can meet criterion for Standard 4, which relates to planning and delivering well-structured lessons



The Department for Education has published a new framework to support trainee teachers and ECTs which comes into effect in September 2025 (DfE, 2024).

The Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITT-ECF) combines what was the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (CCF) and the Early Career Framework (ECF) with the intention of ensuring that all new teachers receive three or more years of training underpinned by the best available evidence.

The original frameworks were designed to help trainee teachers and ECTs succeed at the start of their teaching careers. The DfE hopes that combining them will give teachers a more “joined up development journey beyond initial training into the early years of their career”.

The ITT-ECF has also been updated to ensure it is based on the latest evidence, including new and updated content on how teachers should support students

Matt Bromley

...is an education journalist, author, and advisor with 25 years' experience in teaching and leadership including as a secondary school headteacher. He remains a practising teacher. Find his previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/matt-bromley

with SEND, high-quality oral language, cognitive development, and mental health.

In combining the frameworks, the DfE stated that: “We know that a teacher’s understanding and confidence with the elements of teaching develops as they grow in experience, and that they require less expert support over time. But ... this is not a linear process and ECTs should purposefully revisit the components of great teaching throughout their training to strengthen and deepen their expertise.”

As such, the DfE says that ECF programmes going forward will be consciously designed to build on prior learning, with delivery tailored to what each ECT needs in

order to develop their expertise. Indeed, the DfE says it is vital that ECTs are able to “relate their training directly to their own specific contexts and needs”.

The ITT-ECF is also to provide more support with regards teaching students with SEND. The combined framework includes significantly more content related to adaptive teaching and supporting students with SEND, some of which has been adapted from the new National Professional Qualification for SENCOs to be relevant for trainees and ECTs.

Structure of the ITT-ECF

The ITT-ECF sets out two types of content:

- “Learn that...” statements are informed by the best available educational research. This evidence includes practice guides, rigorous individual studies, high-quality reviews and syntheses, including meta-analyses.

- “Learn how to...” statements are drawn from the wider evidence-base, including both academic research and guidance from expert practitioners.

Standards in the ITT-ECF for which there are “Learn that” and “Learn how to” statements are:

1. Set high expectations
2. Promote good progress
3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge
4. Plan and teach well-structured lessons
5. Adapt teaching
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
7. Manage behaviour effectively
8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

The ITT-ECF is a minimum entitlement to training and not a full curriculum. The DfE says it remains for accredited ITT providers and ECF lead providers to integrate additional research and expert practice as appropriate.

Plan and teach well-structured lessons

In the remainder of this article I will delve into Standard 4 and five of its core “learn that” criterion...

Criterion 1

Effective teaching can transform pupils’ knowledge, capabilities and beliefs about learning

In terms of transforming students’ knowledge about their capabilities, we need to make them comfortable with the

discomfort of hard work because students must be challenged if they are to make progress.

So, how can we create a learning environment that is conducive to hard work and that convinces students they have the capability to willingly learn from mistakes, take risks, and know and do more? To my mind there are six core elements for such a learning environment. Students must:

1. Feel welcomed
2. Feel valued
3. Be enthusiastic about learning
4. Be engaged in learning
5. Be eager to experiment
6. Feel rewarded for hard work

Behind all these characteristics is a simple, albeit oxymoronic, aim: to ensure learners are comfortable with discomfort.

In other words, we want our learners to know that the work they will be asked to do in our classrooms will be tough, that they will be challenged with hard work, and made to think. We want our learners to know that there will be no hiding place in our classrooms – they must ask and answer questions and attempt everything we ask of them.

However, in so doing, we want them to feel safe and protected, to be eager for challenge, and to willingly attempt hard work because they know that we have strung a safety net beneath them – yes, they might falter but we will catch them if they fall.

We also want our learners to know that taking risks and making mistakes is not just accepted in our classrooms but is positively and proactively welcomed as an essential part of learning.

Our learners are not at the point of automaticity and so must make mistakes if they are to get better in our subject. If they don’t make mistakes, they cannot receive feedback and if they don’t receive feedback, they will not know how to improve.

There are many ways of achieving an effective learning environment in which learners are comfortable with discomfort: some are simple common sense; some are more complex. Let’s take each of the six hallmarks I listed earlier and discuss some tangible ways of achieving them.

1, Feel welcomed: The best – and simplest – way of achieving this is

to physically welcome students into our classrooms. We could establish a habit of greeting learners at the classroom door at the start of every lesson and do so with a smile and by greeting some learners by name. For some learners in some contexts, that might be the first time someone – an adult, at least – has acknowledged their existence. If we can’t show our learners that we are pleased to see them and eager to teach them, then can we really expect them to be pleased to be in our lesson?

2, Feel valued: We achieve this by creating a culture whereby everyone’s contributions are welcomed and given the time and attention they deserve. This might involve explicitly teaching and repeatedly reinforcing, not to mention modelling, debating skills such as active listening. Valuing each learner’s contribution is not the same as agreeing with everything they say. Indeed, if an answer is wrong then a learner needs to know why. But a learner’s response doesn’t have to be right for it to be useful.

3, Enthusiastic about learning:

This is, in part, achieved by developing learners’ intrinsic motivation, but this isn’t always possible and is rarely easy. So, another tangible, teacher-led strategy for enthusing learners is to model that enthusiasm by constantly articulating – with our words and actions – our joy at teaching our learners and at teaching our subject. In this regard, sometimes a little over-acting goes a long way. It is better to be considered the kooky, eccentric teacher who’s madly in love with science, than the boring one who never cracks a smile.

4, Engaged in their learning:

What is “engagement” and why does it matter? Fun is never our

goal as teachers; we don’t need learners to enjoy our lessons to learn. We need them to think about the right things. If they happen to enjoy what they do, then that’s a bonus. But “fun activities” are not our guiding star – rather, thinking hard but efficiently about curriculum content is.

5, Eager to experiment: Taking risks and making mistakes is an essential part of the learning process and must be positively and proactively welcomed in our classrooms. We therefore want to instil in learners the importance of practice, of drafting and redrafting work until it is the best it can be.

6, Feel rewarded for hard work:

Rewarding hard work and effort not only creates a level playing field on which every learner has equal chance of scoring a goal (because everyone can try hard), it also makes explicit the progress each learner is making from their individual starting points. Not every learner can achieve a Grade 9, but every learner can improve.

Criterion 2

Effective teachers introduce new material in steps, explicitly linking new ideas to what has been previously studied and learned

Here I would like to focus on the need to articulate what learners are expected to learn and why, which brings me to the importance of sharing learning objectives and success criteria.

If you want to give learners a fighting chance of success, we need to explain what they are expected to learn, why that is important, and how that learning will be used later – including how it will be assessed. And the best learning objectives and success criteria do just that.

Learning objectives are not lists of tasks. They do not articulate

THE SECED PODCAST



Teacher training & induction: Navigating the ITT-ECF:

This podcast discusses teacher training and induction, offering practical advice for trainee and ECTs and their mentors, including around the new ITT-ECF. Listen via <https://buff.ly/NYf51dH>

what learners will do in the lesson; instead, they articulate what learners will know by the end of the lesson – what they will take away with them.

Success criteria, meanwhile, set out what a good one looks like. They are measurable statements used to determine whether – or to what extent – learners have achieved the learning objectives.

Learning objectives and success criteria are central to helping learners establish where they are in their learning, where they are going, and how they will get there.

When writing objectives, start at the end and ask: What do I want learners to know and do at the end of this lesson? What do I need learners to think about in the lesson in order for them to acquire that knowledge? (For more on effective learning objectives and success criteria, see pages 10-11).

Criterion 3

Modelling helps pupils understand new processes and ideas; good models make abstract ideas concrete and accessible

Once learning objectives have been written and shared, the most effective, expedient way for learners to acquire the information we have set out for them to acquire is for the teacher – that educated, experienced, expert at the front of the classroom – to tell them, then show them, what they need to know. This is the *I Do–We Do–You Do* approach.

At the start of a new teaching sequence, we should make effective use of direct instruction – which is another way of saying ➤

“Model that enthusiasm by constantly articulating – with our words and actions – our joy at teaching our learners and at teaching our subject. In this regard, sometimes a little over-acting goes a long way”

teacher explanations and modelling. Here are four features of effective explanations:

1. Reduce the difficulty of a task during initial teaching: Present new material to learners in small “chunks”.
2. Provide scaffolds and support: Model a new procedure by thinking aloud, guiding learners’ initial practice, and providing learners with cues.
3. Give supportive feedback: Provide systematic corrections and feedback, as well as expert models of the completed task.
4. Offer opportunities for extensive independent practice: Give learners plenty of opportunities to try-out new knowledge and skills.

Criterion 4

Guides, scaffolds and worked examples can help pupils apply new ideas, but should be gradually removed as pupil expertise increases

Scaffolding is a feature of adaptive teaching. The idea is this: we teach the same curriculum to all and have high expectations of all. We give learners the same activities to do in class and assess them with the same rigour. This ensures every learner, regardless of background, starting point, and additional need, is afforded an equal opportunity to succeed; they are given access to the same ambitious content. But to make sure they can access it, we sometimes need to scaffold the task initially.

Task scaffolding is a temporary support structure which enables learners to access more challenging content. The scaffolding should be taken down as soon as possible so that learners become independent.

Scaffolds might be live, “in the moment” tweaks made in response to formative assessment and/or learner observation, or they might be planned – regular additional support given to those learners with known needs.

Scaffolds might be visual – such as giving a learner a task planner, a list of small steps to take, worked examples, images that support vocabulary, etc.

Scaffolds can also be verbal – such as explaining a task in more explicit terms and in smaller steps, repeating an instruction,

“When writing objectives, I suggest we start at the end and ask: What do I want learners to know and do at the end of this lesson?”

reteaching a difficult concept, using questioning to address misconceptions, etc.

Scaffolds can also be written – such as a word bank, a writing frame, sentence starters, and so on.

Visual, verbal and written task scaffolds are forms of additional or different types of support we can offer learners to help them get started with the same task as their peers. But we can also vary the size and style of a learner’s finished product to ensure equity.

Criterion 5

Explicitly teaching pupils metacognitive strategies linked to subject knowledge, including how to plan, monitor and evaluate, supports independence and academic success

Metacognition describes the processes involved when learners plan, monitor, evaluate and make changes to their own learning behaviours. Metacognition involves metacognitive knowledge and self-regulation.

Metacognitive knowledge refers to what learners know about learning. This includes:

- Knowledge of their own cognitive abilities (e.g. I have trouble remembering key dates in this period of history).
- Knowledge of particular tasks (e.g. the politics in this period of history are complex).
- Knowledge of different strategies and when they are appropriate to the task (e.g. if I create a timeline first it will help me to understand this period of history).

Self-regulation, meanwhile, refers to what learners do about learning. It describes how learners monitor and control their cognitive processes. For example, a learner might realise that a particular strategy is not yielding

the results they expected so they decide to try a different strategy.

Put another way, self-regulated learners are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and can motivate themselves to engage in, and improve, their learning. In practice, metacognition and self-regulation might take the following form:

The planning stage: Learners think about the learning goal the teacher has set and consider how they will approach the task and which strategies they will use. Learners ask themselves: What am I being asked to do, which strategies will I use, are there strategies I have used before that might be useful?

The monitoring stage: Learners implement their plan and monitor the progress they are making towards their learning goal. Learners might decide to make changes to the strategies they are using if these are not working. Learners ask themselves: Is the strategy I am using working or do I need to try something different?

The evaluation stage: Learners determine how successful the strategy has been in terms of helping them to achieve their learning goal. Learners ask themselves: How well did I do, what didn’t go well, what did go well, what could I do differently next time?

The reflection stage: Reflection is an integral part of the whole process. Encouraging learners to self-question throughout the process is therefore crucial.

Study skills

Allow me to finish this article with a plea for you to prioritise the teaching of study skills. Break-down broad tasks into their constituent parts, modelling each process, then providing opportunities for learners to practise and refine them.

For example, if an assignment requires learners to research information for an essay, you must explicitly teach them how to use multiple sources, how to skim and scan for key facts, and how to distinguish between fact and opinion and detect bias.

You must then teach them how

to use evidence to support an argument, including how to embed quotations, and how to write a bibliography citing their sources. Before learners write their essays, we must teach them how to craft a logical argument.

Likewise, if we expect learners to engage in classroom debates, we must teach them active listening skills and turn-taking, as well as how to agree or disagree with someone else’s contributions.

Other study skills we might teach to our students include:

- **Note-making:** Learners’ notes should provide a thoughtful summarisation of the key points rather than be verbatim transcriptions of what the teacher has said. I favour the Cornell model of note-making because it promotes active processing and retrieval practice. It’s easy to teach too.
- **Self-explanation:** When studying a topic, if a learner were using self-explanation, they would try to explain how new information is related to what they already know. Learners can also self-explain when solving problems and deciding how to proceed. **SecEd**

FURTHER READING FROM SECED

- ▶ *High expectations in the classroom:* <https://buff.ly/25ctB7h>
- ▶ *Inclusive teaching, planning, and assessment:* <https://buff.ly/XSnWZVP>
- ▶ *Nine principles for effective teaching:* <https://buff.ly/FlgSo7g>
- ▶ *Ten characteristics of expert teaching:* <https://buff.ly/N5CPG82>
- ▶ *Ten habits to embed in your classroom:* <https://buff.ly/FrOmujF>
- ▶ *Adaptive teaching:* <https://buff.ly/4tiOCHj>
- ▶ *4Ps of high quality teaching:* <https://buff.ly/jimrxpa>

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ *DfE: Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework, 2024:* <https://buff.ly/Mepvloj>



With support from



With support from

Using lesson time efficiently and effectively

Using every possible moment of time with your students in the classroom is important, but not always easy. How can we maximise learning and minimise ‘dead time’?

Tom Fisher

...is in his 12th year of teaching and works as a teacher of PE at Orchard School in Bristol. He is ECT induction tutor and ITT managing mentor. Find Tom’s previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/tom-fisher

Research suggests that up to a third of lesson time can be wasted because of distractions – largely due to behavioural interruptions, including low-level off-task behaviours or students arriving late to lessons (see Mccrea, 2024).

However, distractions might also include students not understanding content and switching off, or even displays around the room can be at fault.

So here follows some advice on how to optimise precious learning time and minimise distractions.

Keep it pacey

With most single-period lessons being around 50 to 60 minutes, we

must aim to streamline our teaching to ensure each moment counts. Our actions must be routinely deliberate, following a similar pattern each lesson so students are acutely aware of our “when-then” expectations – starting from when they enter the classroom.

To do this our teaching must be pacey, without being rushed. Controlled, without being slow. Exciting and inspiring curiosity, while following a clear plan and being effective in developing understanding and progress.

These elements can be tricky to balance and it is something I work with as a priority with the ECTs and trainee teachers I mentor. Think about your transitions between activities, from entering the room and starting a Do Now activity, to your modelling and teaching new content, and finally to independent practice and proving they understand the material.

How do you want these transitions to be carried out to ensure off-task time is minimised and we don’t provide a window for opting out and distractions?

Do the students know exactly what you expect of them, for every little detail in your lesson? These are important aspects to consider when you plan your lessons and create your own teaching style and classroom routines.

In my lessons as a PE teacher, I

ensure all my students know exactly what to do at every transition, no matter what topic we are practising and performing in, with these transitions being planned to ensure minimal physical movement or group changes. These quickly become routines as long as I meticulously stick to my own “when-then” expectations for each lesson part.

No opting out

Students can, and do, look for opportunities to “opt out”, particularly if their aspirations are low. How can we ensure that opting out is not option, or even change their attitude to make them want to opt-in?

First, remove the option to opt-out. Haven’t got a pen? Here’s a spare. Don’t have a Do Now sheet? It’s also on the board. Can’t remember the question? Here’s the question again (I will come back to you in one minute and will expect an answer).

Be fair, but firm. Keep expectations high. Students are there to learn and we are there to teach them. If we are allowing them to opt-out, we are permitting them to fall behind. Constant, diligent reminders of the expectations, keeping it snappy and removing any “dead time” will avoid us inadvertently giving students permission to “drift”.

Second, make it interesting. Young people love novel, fun learning and we want our students to love our subject. Keep it as fun as possible, even if it is a dry topic. Showcase your subject and your own passion for it and this will rub off on your students.

Accessible by default

If our students don’t understand the content, precious time can be wasted. We are required to adapt our teaching to consider all our students and their needs, ensuring, as Peps Mccrae described (2025), that “accessible design isn’t a checkbox – it’s a mindset”.

He writes: “Accessible design means making lessons as usable as possible from the outset, as often as possible, for as wide a range of students as possible. Then, only adapting further when necessary – and in the lightest-touch way.

“When teaching isn’t accessible,

students with SEN often expend huge effort just to keep up, often leading to frustration, disengagement, and a widening achievement gap. Accessible lessons are perceivable, understandable, and doable by all.”

To do this, we must adapt our lessons to be, as my school says, “harmful for none, helpful for some”. So, what does this mean in practice?

Well, for example, the University of Warwick (2025) found that a solid pastel coloured background on slides is the best option for avoiding glare and is less offensive than bolder colours or patterns, particularly for some SEND students (University of Warwick, 2025).

Does this harm the students without SEND? Of course not. But it will ensure all students can access the learning a little more and so will ensure learning time is marginally maximised.

Another example is “Now and Next” boards in a small section of the whiteboard screen to aid and reassure students with SEND what the current activity is and what is coming up next. This may even be complemented by a visual timer. This won’t harm the learning of any student; in fact, it will help maintain the pace and ensure that all students are aware of the expectations, while minimising any excuse to opt-out because students do not know the current task

Font, size, colour, and image selection and arrangement on slides are all further examples of how teaching can be adapted to ensure learning is made accessible for all students without hindering the learning of others. **SecEd**

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ *Mccrae: The cost of distraction, Evidence Snacks, 2024:* <https://buff.ly/Zti3mk0>
- ▶ *Mccrae: Accessible by default: Designing inclusive lessons, Evidence Snacks, 2025:* <https://buff.ly/DH2Hm8b>
- ▶ *University of Warwick: Creating inclusive PowerPoint presentations (accessed 2025):* <https://buff.ly/SSVXuVw>

Learning objectives, lesson objectives and success criteria

What are the differences between lesson objectives, learning objectives and success criteria and how can we sharpen our lesson planning and pedagogical choices?

One issue I notice many trainees and ECTs have when planning lessons is muddled or unclear lesson and learning objectives and success criteria.

While some lessons I have observed in my roles as a mentor or induction tutor have had a lovely variety of activities to engage students on content related to the lesson focus, it is not always clear what precisely students are supposed to know or know how to do by the end of the lesson.

In addition, during the post-observation reflection and feedback session, if I asked a trainee/ECT how well they thought students had met the success criteria for the lesson objectives (and as a follow-up: how did you know?), it was not unusual to be met with a puzzled expression.

As such, this article aims to clarify the difference between lesson objectives, learning objectives, and success criteria and provide some practical pointers to sharpen up your lesson planning and pedagogical choices.

Learning objectives

Lesson objectives and learning objectives are similar terms that are often used interchangeably.

However, learning objectives tend to have broader aims that encapsulate the longer-term learning outcomes that a course or scheme of work seeks to achieve and as such will inform and guide curriculum-planning.

Learning objectives would usually align closely to national and school-specific curriculums and, where appropriate, the examination specifications that students are being taught.

Specifically, learning objectives help teachers to organise their lessons by pinpointing the

Helen Webb
...is an accredited executive coach based in Leicester. She has more than 20 years' experience in education as a science teacher, lead practitioner, PGCE and ECT mentor, ECF Lead and ECT induction tutor. Find her previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/helen-webb

essential knowledge and skills students are required to learn. This focused planning enhances both teaching efficiency and learning outcomes as it enables teachers (and students) to “cut the fluff” and focus on what is important.

As learning objectives are specific and measurable, they also guide summative assessment planning, such as for topic tests, mocks or final exams.

Lesson objectives

A lesson objective is a clearly defined statement that outlines what students are expected to know, understand, or be able to do by the end of a lesson.

Lesson objectives, although informed by the learning objectives, are more precise and guide the day-to-day teaching and learning. They will inform the flow of the lesson, your choice of activities, strategies and what materials to use in the lesson. Lesson objectives will usually be assessed with in-class formative assessment strategies and quick checks for understanding.

Command words

Both learning objectives and lesson objectives are written in clear, concise terms, often using command words (action verbs) such as “analyse”, “describe”, “compare”, or “evaluate” to define measurable skills or knowledge areas.

Command words indicate the specific learning outcome or action a student should be able to

do to demonstrate understanding of the lesson content. For example, instead of introducing your lesson by saying “Today, we are learning about fractions”, you might instead say something more precise: “Today we are learning to define what a fraction is, identify the numerator and denominator in a fraction, and understand the difference between a proper and an improper fraction.”

To share or not to share...

Some teachers list their lesson objectives on an introductory slide early in their lesson presentation to support their planning process or so students know “at a glance” what the lesson is about.

This can be useful, especially if you are preparing resources to share with other staff or if you intend to re-use it yourself.

However, I have observed varying practices over the years when it comes to how, when or even if lesson objectives are shared with students.

But I don't see the value in students wasting valuable learning time copying down lesson objectives. Teachers may instead introduce their lesson with an informative title or a big question to capture attention. Verbally explaining precisely what they are going to be learning can also be a powerful way to start the lesson.

When students are aware of the learning and/or lesson objectives, they better understand the purpose behind each lesson. I have seen some schools elaborate by

introducing each lesson with a “What, Why, How” we are learning today. This transparency can support student engagement.

Lesson planning

Early in my career, the following practices helped me to keep my lesson planning focused.

Limit the number of lesson objectives to three or four per one-hour lesson, which prevents overwhelm but also encourages you to consider how learning could be scaffolded, linked and developed within a lesson so that all students are able to learn and be challenged.

Take the carbon cycle as an example – by the end of the lesson, you will be able to:

- Explain the importance of carbon in the carbon cycle to living organisms.
- Describe and explain the key processes involved in the carbon cycle, including photosynthesis, respiration, decomposition, combustion.
- Create a diagram of the carbon cycle that clearly labels the main carbon reservoirs and the processes that transfer carbon between them.
- Explain the role of micro-organisms in cycling materials through an ecosystem.

In addition, when planning and writing lesson presentations, include a single lesson objective in the header of each slide. This enables you to ensure that each item of new knowledge and each activity aligns directly with the knowledge and skills you want students to learn. It also stops you from going off (too much) on tangents while you are still developing your practice.

For key stage 5, to ensure I taught every learning objective in a content heavy specification, I would also insert separate learning

objective slides, which would each include a single learning objective statement taken directly from the specification.

This practice ensured I was being thorough in my delivery of the content as I would cross-check that all specification points from the exam board had been included in a sequence of learning or scheme of work. It also stopped me from avoiding or skating over tricky or dull aspects (which at times I was tempted to do). It also signposted to students what they were supposed to be learning.

Success criteria

While learning objectives state what students are expected to learn (the end goals of the lesson or unit), success criteria specify how to know if those objectives have been met.

Clear success criteria enable both teachers and students to have a transparent understanding of the targets for learning, reducing ambiguity and setting clear expectations.

Specifically, success criteria translate the often-abstract learning aims into tangible outcomes that are measurable and observable, making them easy to assess. As such, success criteria provide clear markers against which student performance can be evaluated during formative assessment.

For example, an art project may have the lesson objective: “Create an original piece of pop art that reflects the dynamic style of Roy Lichtenstein, incorporating key elements of pop culture and the artist's distinctive techniques.” The success criteria for this might be:

- **Originality:** The artwork must be completely original, with no copied or traced elements.
- **Pop culture:** The image should reference or incorporate elements of pop culture or consumerism (you might offer examples).



- **Colour:** The piece should feature bold, vibrant colours rather than pastels or greyscale tones. Use solid blocks of colour, avoiding gradients to maintain the pop art aesthetic.
- **Lichtenstein's techniques:** Incorporate Ben-Day dots effectively in a manner reminiscent of Lichtenstein's work; apply other relevant stylistic techniques (again you might offer examples).
- **Inclusion of dramatic text:** Integrate a striking word/phrase that enhances the impact of the composition and adds narrative or humour.

Assessment and feedback

Both teachers and students can use success criteria to assess whether the desired learning outcomes have been achieved. By knowing precisely what is expected, students can monitor their own progress and take active steps to address areas where they may be falling behind.

Success criteria also provide a concrete basis for offering targeted teacher feedback during or after the lesson. They help pinpoint specific areas where students are excelling or may need support.

The following formative assessment strategies can be

useful to check students' understanding and help to ensure students are meeting success criteria within a lesson:

- Cold-calling to check the understanding of a sample of students.
- Mini-whiteboards for hinge questions and to check knowledge/skills of the class.
- Retrieval quizzes to check understanding of knowledge.
- Circulating in a lesson, monitoring, observing and/or live-marking a sample of work against success criteria.
- Students' self or peer assess work against criteria, respond to feedback and make improvements.

Effective success criteria

When crafting success criteria, consider the following steps.

First, align with learning objectives. Ensure that each piece of success criteria is directly connected to a corresponding learning objective. This helps maintain focus and coherence.

Second, be specific and measurable. Use clear action verbs (command words) and specific terms so that it is obvious what constitutes success. Instead of stating something vague such as “understand”, a more measurable criterion might be “explain (the concept) using (specific key terms) and refer to a real-life example in your explanation”.

Third, focus on observable actions. Determine what the student should do to demonstrate their learning. This might include activities such as explaining, comparing, creating, or solving problems. For example, a learning


objective for an English lesson might be for students to “develop skills in persuasive writing”. The related success criteria might be:

- Clearly state your opinion in the introduction.
- Support your arguments with at least three relevant examples/pieces of evidence.
- Use persuasive language techniques (such as rhetorical questions, emotive language) appropriately throughout.
- Revise and edit your work to improve clarity and coherence based on peer feedback.

Final thoughts

Having well-defined learning objectives, lesson objectives, and success criteria allows teachers to plan focused and coherent lessons where students know exactly what they need to achieve and how to get there. By continually referring to these clear aims and criteria, you can ensure purposeful teaching, encourage student engagement, and accurately assess progress.

SecEd

**FURTHER READING FROM SECED**

- Effective lesson-planning tips for new teachers: <https://buff.ly/3iVmg3C>
- Getting feedback right in your classroom: <https://buff.ly/aCJMxxf>
- The learning objective: Dos and don'ts: <https://buff.ly/mX3gC0i>
- Learning objectives and success criteria: <https://buff.ly/MFJrNir>

Your first time with a challenging class

Many ECTs worry about taking on their first ‘challenging class’, but with proper preparation and a number of classroom strategies it doesn’t need to be daunting

The bell has gone off, your laptop is set up, and you are just about to teach your first ever lesson with “that” group. The group of students who you have been told are “unteachable”, the group who for the rest of the year are all yours. Now what?

Lesson planning will be critical in determining how your lessons go with the group, but you are going to make things a lot easier for yourself if you have done the groundwork in advance.

Before the lesson

Know the process: Every school has different systems and processes for behaviour management. Make sure you have read your school’s behaviour

management policy and know the processes for dealing with behaviour, including how you call for extra support. I would suggest having a word with your line-manger, mentor or another more experienced member of staff to ask them if they could drop by your lesson to check-in. If you are lucky enough to have a dedicated behaviour support team in place, ask for both guidance and support.

Read up on the students: There is a wealth of research that shows how teaching is built on the teacher’s ability to build and maintain relationships with young people (Ansari et al, 2020; Rhodes & Long, 2019; Harris & Garwood, 2023). Positive relationships between staff and students are

critical to an effective learning environment, so much so that they are referred to in Department for Education behaviour guidance (DfE, 2022), with an emphasis on relational approaches to behaviour over punitive ones.

The best way of building a relationship with a class is to get to know the students in that class. This takes time and effort on your part, but it will make all the difference in your classroom.

They may go under slightly different names, but somewhere on your school’s management information system you will find SEND and or behaviour passports/profiles/summaries. These will give you a starting point in terms of strategies for specific students and things to avoid.

I have lost track of the number of conversations I have had with parents who contact me because a teacher has not followed their child’s education plan. These are powerful documents created in collaboration with the student and their parents/carers.

Often these documents will also include the student’s likes and dislikes. Asking them a question about how they are doing in their specific sport or activity shows that you have invested time in getting to know them and this will pay dividends.

Ask those with experience: Even if you are the only one in the school teaching your subject, you will be part of a wider faculty and there will be people of vast experience who you can talk with. Speak with as many staff as you can, even if from other departments, to get as much information as you can. The best sources of information are the teaching assistants who work with the same students all day every day. Ask them:

- Who should I not allow to sit together and who would work well together?
- Who is likely to cause an issue first?
- Is there any specific approach

Gerry Mallaghan
...is an experienced teacher of more than 20 years, currently working at Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School in Coventry. Find his previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/gerry-mallaghan

that works well with specific students in the class?

- Who has parents/carers at home who are supportive/unsupportive?

Make your seating plan: Armed the above information, you want to get your seating plan in place. Seating plans can make or break your lesson. Changing seating plans will change the entire dynamic of your classroom. I have written about this in a previous article (Mallaghan, 2017), but pointers include:

- Keep the students who will need regular monitoring in an easy to access location.
- If you know a student has a history of arriving late – give them a space close to the door so they cause the least disruption to your lesson.
- Make sure any students with specific needs are seated correctly, e.g. those with vision and or hearing needs may need a specific location.
- Make sure you keep any specific pairings apart or together as appropriate.
- If your seating plan is not working for specific students, move them during the lesson to help them refocus.

During the lesson

Set out your stall: Schools all have policies outlining your role, the expectations of your lessons, as well as the expectations they have of students. You will have no choice but to work within these. However, you need to be clear on what you expect from your students while in your lesson, and what you will do in response.

Ensure you focus on the positive actions you will take when the students get it right – it will have a bigger impact (see Dowley & Lovell, 2020).

However, don’t forget to make it clear what happens when they get it wrong and the actions you will take when their behaviour is not at

the standard expected. Research tells us that giving students a predictable learning environment supports a higher quality of learning (Argyropulo-Palmer, 2022). When I set my stall out, I always ask the question: “What is rule number one in my classroom?”

I always get the usual behaviour-focused suggestions, which I follow up with: “If you don’t understand something in my lesson and my classroom, who’s fault is it?”

Eventually somebody is brave enough to say, “the teacher’s?” and I will wait for the collective gasp as I say “correct, it’s mine”.

Of course I ensure I relay to students their responsibilities, in that if they don’t show up on time, do not actively participate/stay on task, and do not tell me when they do not understand, then it is not the teacher’s fault.

By shifting the responsibility for a lack of understanding, even if only in part, from the students to me as their teacher it creates a more supportive atmosphere in which students are more likely to ask for help (Harris & Garwood, 2023).

Routine, routine, routine: The best classrooms are those in which there are fixed routines, and everyone is clear on the process (Argyropulo-Palmer, 2022). Having the student books and or equipment in a clearly labelled box in the same location every lesson allows students to start work immediately, reducing the amount of chaos that can occur as students arrive.

You will need to align with the

specifics of your school’s processes and policies, but you should also have a lesson title, date and starter activity ready for students to work on as they arrive. As the students fall into this routine it allows you time at the start of your lesson to greet them, spot any signs that they are not okay (safeguarding), ensure they have the equipment they need for the lesson, and address any issues with uniform and or behaviour. If students know what they should be doing, they are much less likely to be doing something you don’t want them to be (Shotton Hall, 2021).

Clear consequences: At some point in your lesson, you will have to address unwanted behaviours. By setting out your expectation and the actions you will take in response, you should have made this part easier for yourself. Use the school’s policy and systems, be consistent on how you deal with these behaviours, and ensure you follow up after the lesson (see Rogers, 2015). Report what happened using your school system, set an appropriate sanction, and contact home the same day, if necessary.

Students will respond better to the certainty of consequences rather than the severity of consequences (Dowley & Lovell, 2020), but actions must be taken to discourage negative behaviours and promote positive actions.

After the lesson

Reflection: No matter how long you have been teaching and how much you plan, things will not always be perfect in your classroom. You are working with young people who will think in a very different way to an adult. For those working with older students, you can throw a bunch of hormones into the mix. There is no way to predict how students will react, but taking a calm and respectful approach to any issue will always serve you well in the

moment. When the moment passes, you then need to reflect on what happened and use the opportunity to develop. Ask simply what could you have done differently, and would it have led to a different outcome? Don’t be afraid to ask others for advice about how they would have acted in the same situation. Of course, this guidance will help you with any class and, as with any job, nothing beats experience, so don’t torture yourself too much when (not if) it goes wrong.

SecEd

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Ansari, Hofkens & Pianta: *Teacher-student relationships across the first seven years of education and adolescent outcomes*, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* (71), 2020.
- ▶ Argyropulo-Palmer: *The role of routines in creating an effective learning environment*, *Impact, Chartered College of Teaching*, 2022: <https://buff.ly/HNDPq1h>
- ▶ Department for Education: *Behaviour in schools: Advice for headteachers and school staff*, 2022: <https://buff.ly/sOvwmL2>
- ▶ Dowley & Lovell: *The Classroom Management Handbook: A practical blueprint for engagement and behaviour in your classroom and beyond*, *John Catt Educational*, 2020.
- ▶ Harris & Garwood: *Reclaim Your Challenging Classroom*, *Corwin*, 2023.
- ▶ Mallaghan: *Get your seating plans right*, *SecEd*, 2017: <https://buff.ly/25zPGMW>
- ▶ National Education Union: *Positive behaviour management 2024*: <https://buff.ly/29UhUbh>
- ▶ Rhodes & Long: *Improving behaviour in schools*, *Education Endowment Foundation*, 2019: <https://buff.ly/M2QxosN>
- ▶ Rogers: *Classroom Behaviour: A practical guide to effective teaching, behaviour management and colleague support*, *SAGE*, 2015.
- ▶ Shotton Hall Research School: *The role of routines in behaviour for learning*, 2021: <https://buff.ly/gvCOWCt>

“ I have lost track of the number of conversations I have had with parents who contact me because a teacher has not followed their child’s education plan ”

Connection before correction

When managing behaviour in our classrooms, we must balance our non-negotiables with empathetic responses as we try to connect with all of our students...

Every member of school staff has a role to play in how behaviour is managed and as an ECT it is important to be clear about your expectations. By assessing a student's behaviour, you gain insight into how they respond in different situations and are then able to challenge behaviour using empathetic language. This is not about being soft on poor behaviour, but about addressing it through curiosity, questioning, discussion, and role-modelling.

Non-negotiables

A key message that every teacher should consistently reinforce is your set of non-negotiables. These are the expectations where marginal gains are made, whether it is ensuring a student's uniform is correct when greeting them at the door or when dismissing them at the end of a lesson, using SLANT (sit-up, listen to the speaker, ask and answer questions, nod, track the speaker), or equipment expectations.

Your non-negotiable values communicate to students and families the high standards you uphold. These expectations are built upon every year.

Having clear non-negotiables provides structure. This consistency across lessons and transitions reinforces the student-teacher relationship from the outset. Leading with your non-negotiables sets the tone and standard you want from your students.

A safe space

Teaching and learning, SEND, inclusion, and pastoral care go hand-in-hand. Great teachers make it clear that while the classroom has high expectations and non-negotiables, it is also a safe space to make mistakes, whether answering questions or indeed in other areas.

However, Gabor Maté (1999) reminds us that we must give a

Adam Brett-Aguirre

...is senior pastoral operations lead in a secondary school in Wilnecote. He has 20 years of experience in schools, is a trauma-informed practitioner, and volunteers for the Step Up Network

student the attention they need, not the attention that they ask for. Students will look to use diversionary tactics (from putting their head on the desk and not engaging to distracting and openly disrupting learning). So we need strategies for when students disrupt learning. One widely used approach is WIN(E): Wonder. Imagine. Notice. Empathetic (delivery).

For example: "Jimmy, I noticed you haven't started your work yet. I imagine you might not have caught what I said. Can you start on question one for me? I'll come back and we can go over questions two and three together."

This type of response avoids interrogation or humiliation and instead opens a connection through behaviour management.

Another example: "I wonder what you two are talking about, I notice the work hasn't started. Let's write the date and title and begin question one. If I come back and you haven't started, that'll be a warning."

Again, this approach is clear, calm, sets expectations while offering support – connecting before correcting – and gives time for the students to comply.

It helps to create intelligent accountability. Students learn that failure to respond may lead to consequences, but the adult remains calm and empathetic, aiming for the best outcome.

To understand WIN(E) further, Dan Hughes' (2012) PACE model is useful: Playfulness. Acceptance. Curiosity. Empathy. Although if I run behaviour management training, I often replace "playfulness" with "teaching".

We should explicitly teach

students what we want them to learn while accepting they will make mistakes.

Curiosity about why a behaviour occurred helps shape empathetic responses, even when it is frustrating. It is okay to feel frustration – it is how we respond that matters. I rarely display anger or annoyance. Instead, I do my best to role-model a calm and positive emotional response.

If you are familiar with Porges' (1994) Polyvagal Theory, you will understand how students may enter a "flight", "fight", or "freeze" state when behaviour is challenged. Recognising and intervening early can prevent escalation.

For example: "Jimmy, you look frustrated. Why don't you take a minute to calm down? I'll come back to check on you."

A teacher or teaching assistant can set the tone by balancing non-negotiables alongside assessing developed behavioural responses with empathy – connecting before correcting.

You may have sent Jimmy out because he was verbally abusive to another student – and you will need to challenge that. However, by giving Jimmy an opportunity to calm down and exploring it briefly with him you will support him and help him manage the situation.

WIN(E) will help you de-escalate difficult situations, deepen your understanding of behaviour, and build stronger relationships.

Here is one final reflection: consider Panksepp's Emotional Systems, which can help identify how different students may emotionally respond to school life. These responses include panic, grief, rage, fear, seeking, care, and

play (Panksepp, 2005). Reflect on which of your students exhibit underactive, balanced, or overactive responses in these "systems". The same student might fall into different categories for different emotions. Be curious about how you might respond using WIN(E). Understanding emotional responses will help you differentiate your behaviour management while still aligning with your school's policy.

Final thoughts

Remember, whether it is addressing untucked shirts or shouting across a room, your tone can make a difference:

- "Jimmy, I noticed your shirt isn't tucked in, how come it isn't tucked in? I want to avoid reminding you to do this otherwise I will have to follow up with a sanction."
- "Jimmy, help me understand why you shouted at Adam. I noticed you aren't listening to anyone. That could get you into more trouble – let's sort it out together."

Even when consequences are necessary, you've still connected with the student. Empathy can defuse conflict and reinforce standards. It is how we work with students, not just how we manage them.

SecEd



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Hughes: PACE: 2012: <https://buff.ly/wmKk6G2>
- ▶ Maté: Scattered: How attention deficit disorder originates and what you can do about it, Dutton, 1999.
- ▶ Panksepp: Affective consciousness: Core emotional feelings in animals and humans, Consciousness and Cognition (14), 2005.
- ▶ Porges: Polyvagal Theory, 1994: <https://buff.ly/jDk5uYd>

Twelve time-saving tips for your ECT year

From getting prepared for September, to using technology, to looking after yourself, here are 12 quick tips for ECTs everywhere...

One of the biggest joys of teaching is that work is never boring. Days go fast and terms fly past. However, it is going to help you if you can become an expert at time management pretty quickly! Here are some handy hacks and tips that might just help you look cool, calm and collected at the start of your ECT year.

Get ahead

I often compare the start of term to hopping onto a treadmill that is going at full speed. Turn some of July or August into useful preparation time – you will be thinking about the job anyway, so harness that energy and get ahead.

Tip 1: Read key school policies before term starts. Focus on the school-specific policies (even if you have secured a job at the school where you have undertaken your training, there will be things you need to know). If you prioritise any, read the staff code of conduct and the student behaviour policies. Among common sense procedural information, you will be able to learn of any professional pitfalls to avoid as well as being able to show students from the start that you know the school rewards and sanctions systems.

Tip 2: If you are lucky enough to have your own classroom, set it up. Think about how you want the flow of your room to work and have a place for everything so your students can become increasingly autonomous. Where will the A4 paper be, where can students collect textbooks or mini-whiteboards? Check whether there are expectations regarding what is displayed on

David Beckham has a rail on which he hangs his outfits for the week in advance, accessories included! I know plenty of teachers who do the same

walls: keep what is relevant and declutter the rest. Clear out cupboards, clean your desk and stock up and lock away that valuable currency – board pens!

Let tech take the strain

Using technology in the educational workspace will be another area of knowledge to skill-up on. And that takes time, but why not:

Tip 3: Familiarise yourself with your school management information system (MIS). This will take a lot of the strain for you every day. From safeguarding incident reporting to register-taking, it will be good to learn your way around quickly. For example, the 'Loudspeaker' tool in Bromcom is great for cold-calling and there are quick ways to create, save or print seating plans.

Tip 4: Get yourself organised with a personal password keeper. You will acquire a growing list of system and software log-ins and won't want to be resetting passwords during precious PPA time or – even worse – during a lesson with 30 pairs of eyes on you. I would recommend Bitwarden – a "freemium" open-source password manager.

Tip 5: Learn about how Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom is used in your school. There may be some tasks you can set up in advance like adding students to your class groups, but lots might be already done for you. Best to check with your induction tutor. Set up your mark books/assessment record files or ask where to access any online ones that you will be expected to add to.

Tip 6: Enter your timetable and meeting schedule into your Outlook, which will most probably be linked to your school emails, and connect to the school's live electronic calendar too. This way you will quickly be able to spot any clashes and keep track of after-school meetings and in-school events. You'll save yourself time preparing for lessons that might just be postponed in favour of a PSHE day, for example.

Tip 7: Decide on your file-saving and folder-naming protocol for your personal area of the school network. Make sure it is going to be one you can grow. Check what is already stored in whole school shared folder areas – no need to duplicate files.

Don't be hard to help!

Tip 8: You could spend unnecessary time puzzling out a procedure, location or expectation that someone else could quickly help you with. Don't be afraid to ask. If your school doesn't already provide a staff "buddy" officially, ask for one. We often pair up ECTs with second year teachers who are close to remembering what it was like to start at the school. Unlike a line manager, a buddy is a great person to ask the "stupid" questions of.

Josephine Smith

...is headteacher of Kesteven and Sleaford High School in Lincolnshire and part of the Robert Carré Trust. Find her previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/josephine-smith

Look after yourself

Tip 9: Apparently, David Beckham has a rail on which he hangs his outfits for the week in advance, accessories included! I know plenty of teachers who do the same. It is one less thing to think about early in the morning.

Tip 10: Likewise at the end of the working day you'll probably not be feeling like the most creative cook and yet you will feel so much better if you eat properly. Batch-cook and freeze meals at the weekend. Even if you only do this every so often, you will really appreciate your own time-saving efforts.

Tip 11: You will probably have seen ECT survival packs on your social media scroll. Chocolate, tea bags, pain-killers, and sticky notes seem to be common ingredients, but you will think of other personal items that you wouldn't want to go without and might just need to get you through a busy day. Stick them in a desk drawer just in case.

Tip 12: Invest in the key ECT accessory – a water bottle. Make it part of your morning routine to go via the water cooler. There's a lot of talking to be done and you need to hydrate regularly.

SecEd

Meet the (7 types of) parents: A survival guide for ECTs

Interactions with parents will form a core part of your life as a teacher, but there is no manual – until now! Here's your guide to the seven types of parents and how to handle them



Your first year in teaching can be tough. By the time you have wrestled with a class of 30 sugar-rushed year 8s, deciphered numerous interpretations of what constitutes “completed homework”, and learned the uncanny ability to drink coffee cold, you may think you're ready for anything. And then you meet the parents.

Don't get me wrong, the vast majority of parents are not to be feared. I would estimate that well over 80% of the parents I deal with are lovely, lovely people – generally supportive and grateful for all that teachers do. Moreover, parental engagement can be effective in raising student outcomes (EEF, 2018; 2025).

However, about 20% can be a tad trickier and some of those, probably half, can be a bit of a pain and somewhat at odds with accepting that – shock! – schools have rules and that we all need to play our part in getting the youth of today to do the right thing.

As students come in all flavours

Andrew Jones

...is assistant headteacher at The Reach Free School in Hertfordshire. He has been a teacher for 22 years. Find his previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/andrew-jones

of chaos, so too do their grown-ups: from the empathetic “How do you put up with them?” to the full-blown “I want to meet the head because someone threw a snowball at my daughter”.

This unscientific guide, blending practical advice, a bit of research, and mild sarcasm, will I hope help you to navigate the often-bizarre, sometimes-brilliant world of parent-teacher interactions.

Types of parent

While researchers like Baumrind (1971) have categorised parenting into authoritative, authoritarian and permissive, those of us in the field might suggest more nuance. My list is not quite as rigorous as Epstein's (1987) Framework of Six Types of Parent Involvement, but it

panels/forums and let them know how much they are appreciated. They remind us why home-school partnerships matter.

2, The fellow educator

Behaviour: This parent has friends who work in education or was once a school governor. Begins every sentence with: “Well, I have friends who work in schools...” Offers unsolicited lesson advice. Uses 1980s teaching lingo. Says “chalk and talk” a lot.

Strategy: Nod respectfully while internally screaming. Then gently pivot to modern methods – cite the Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit or Rosenshine's 2012 Principles of Instruction. Use phrases like “research-informed practice” as a polite forcefield.

3, The ghost

Behaviour: Has a child. Probably. Unconfirmed. May appear on year 11 results day.

Strategy: While often impossible to contact, keep trying but do not take avoidance personally. These parents may be dealing with significant external pressures, such as work, language barriers or even chronic forgetfulness (see Lefebvre, 2025). Use multiple channels: text, email, phone. This is often the saddest situation. If you are genuinely concerned, raise with middle/senior leaders, safeguarding or pastoral staff. But never give up on these parents.

4, The helicopter

Behaviour: Knows the timetable better than you. Sends three emails before lunch. Refers to “our homework”, “our English exam”, and says things like: “What are we going to do about it?”

Strategy: These parents mean

well and are generally supportive but may get difficult if grades do not reflect their idealistic view of their child, or if not enough homework is set. More problematic is their involvement in doing their child's homework. In meetings, cite research on independent learning – according to Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000), autonomy supports motivation. Tell them you are fostering that – it sounds impressively academic.

5, The keyboard warrior

Behaviour: Lives in the class WhatsApp group. Reacts emotionally to school communications, often without reading them properly. As such, misinformation spreads fast.

Strategy: Assume all emails are being screenshot and shared. Be clear, factual, and calm – even if the topic is “URGENT: Lost Waterbottle”. If conflict brews, request a face-to-face meeting. They are often far more reasonable in person. And breathe – most of them mean well(ish).

6, The lawyer

Behaviour: Always ready with a counterpoint. Their child is never wrong. Has memorised every school policy.

Strategy: Stay calm. Document everything. Refer to policies like holy scripture. Say “As per school policy” instead of “Because I said so”. Do not engage in lengthy email battles. If the situation escalates, refer upwards – middle and senior leaders are your friends.

7, The rose-tinted defender

Behaviour: Loves their child fiercely, but also believes their child has never lied, never been rude, and definitely did not kick that boy. Responses often include: “That's very out of character”, “Another child told them to do it”, or “Are you sure it was them?”.

Strategy: This type of parent has been studied by actual academics (Leiden University, 2021). Acknowledge the love. Then gently steer the conversation toward growth and boundaries. Use inclusive language like “we” over “you” and “I”. In most cases, their protectiveness softens by year 9 as

Stay calm.
Document everything.
Refer to policies like
holy scripture. Say ‘As
per school policy’
instead of ‘Because I
said so.’ If the situation
escalates, refer
upwards ”

the child slowly grinds them down at home.

Communication

It is important, where possible, to keep all of these types of parents happy and informed of their child's progress and behaviour at school.

While some children need more calls and emails home than others and, inevitability, some parents need more support or reassurance than others, communication is key to establishing solid parent-teacher relations.

First, email or call home with positives where possible. I ask my House Team (form tutors) to try and call all parents at some point throughout the year with a positive call, starting – in year 8 – with the most difficult students (or parents).

A study by Kraft and Rogers (2015) found that positive communication with parents increased student engagement and achievement. You don't need to write essays – just keep them in the loop.

When it comes to those 20% of tricky, potentially difficult, parents, there is a golden rule: document everything. That conversation you had on the phone about Tyler's being “bullied”, which seemed a little tit-for-tat because Tyler is not always pleasant himself? Log it.

If it is not written down, it didn't happen. If it's not followed up, the next time Tyler needs to serve detention after school or be isolated, it will be raised. If you have ended a call acknowledging that Mischa might have an underlying learning need, email the SENCO before you forget.

Meetings

Meetings are often needed. They

can explore problems faced by students, explain incidents that have only been partially recounted at home, and reassure parents that you care. In most cases, parents appreciate your time, and leave with good will towards you and the school.

However, when preparing for a meeting with an infamously challenging parent, treat it like you're about to appear on Dragons' Den:

- Bring relevant evidence (mark books, homework logs, screenshots if necessary).
- If behaviour-related, get statistics for the number and severity of incidents that have occurred.
- If related to another member of staff, speak to them first. Do not be afraid to delay meetings until you have the facts.
- Do not go it alone. Always invite a colleague or senior leader. There is strength in numbers and also witnesses. And, I know this is obvious, but be polite and diplomatic even if they are somewhat frosty or become emotional. If things get heated, don't be afraid to end the meeting. If they are abusive or overly disparaging about colleagues or the school, I would end it regardless.

Protecting your sanity

Parents will sometimes criticise your methods, your tone, your qualifications or even your hairstyle and dress sense (yes, this has happened twice in my career), and the fact that their child failed a test despite having revised “for hours and hours” so it must be your fault! Remember:

- It is not always about you.
 - You are not the only one.
 - You are the professional.
 - The other parents rate you.
 - If I am to be mildly ungenerous: They may have too much time on their hands (I am always amazed that the most critical parents do not seem to have jobs).
 - They lack any real power, so they are having a go at you.
 - The problem is probably a result of poor parenting.
- So do not take it home with you and do not question your own abilities. Take a walk, drink some tea, scream into a pillow, etc.

Teaching is emotional labour and boundaries are vital.

Final thoughts

As my colleague Anthony Smith has told me, parents are not the enemy. They just come from a different perspective – one where their child is the main character. Your job is to partner with them (or, in some cases, manage them diplomatically) to support student growth. Remember, you came into this profession to give young people life chances. That's your mission. Sometimes parents get in the way of this, but it is just part of our job to overcome that. Again, remember that most parents are supportive and have the utmost respect for what you do – as do I, so thank you.

SecEd

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Baumrind: *Current patterns of parental authority, Developmental Psychology* (4,1), 1971.
- ▶ Education Endowment Foundation (EEF): *Working with parents to support children's learning*, 2018: <https://buff.ly/u1Xwxpf>
- ▶ Education Endowment Foundation (EEF): *Parental engagement*, 2025: <https://buff.ly/iL7raol>
- ▶ Epstein: *Toward a theory of family-school connections. In Social Intervention: Potential and constraints*, Hurrelman et al (eds), DeGruyter, 1987.
- ▶ Kraft and Rogers: *The underutilized potential of teacher-to-parent communication, Economics of Education Review* 47, 2015: <https://buff.ly/PW4oMAh>
- ▶ Lefebvre: “Ghost parents”: *Who they are and why teachers need to get them on board, Bored Teachers*, accessed 2025: <https://buff.ly/aSRgXT>
- ▶ Leiden University: *How do parents' brains react to feedback about their child? 2021*: <https://buff.ly/lh1Cdxxo>
- ▶ Ryan & Deci: *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and wellbeing, American Psychologist* (55,1), 2000: <https://buff.ly/oQXzLuK>

How can ECTs fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities?

As soon as you step into your new role and your new school you must meet your safeguarding responsibilities. Are you ready?

From the moment you apply for a job in a school you are part of and subject to the school's safeguarding and child protection arrangements.

Safeguarding is woven through every aspect of school life, from the recruitment process to working with children, from governance and leadership to working with others to keep children safe.

As an ECT it can be a daunting prospect to be tasked with identifying and reporting safeguarding issues or child protection concerns, but it is essential that you understand why it is important to fulfil these responsibilities, the difference you can make to children and, of course, how to do this.

This article will explore some of your key safeguarding responsibilities and offer practical tips on how to safeguard children in your role.

Understanding the issues

Before you start working with children, you should have undertaken safeguarding induction training. This should help you to understand some of the main safeguarding issues, signs and symptoms of abuse, procedures in your school for raising concerns, how to keep yourself and children safe, and how to fulfil your duties.

To get the most out of training – induction and the on-going safeguarding training you will receive – you should:

- **Understand that 'it can happen here':** Although case studies or examples given in training may seem

hypothetical, they will be based on real cases or things that may have happened in your school, and we know that sadly 1 in 14 children suffer physical abuse and 1 in 20 suffer sexual abuse (NSPCC 2024; 2025). Children who you work with may be suffering harm or abuse, it can happen anywhere and it is real.

- **Know that safeguarding training is not a tick-box activity:** Fully participating with discussions and sharing your views is essential to help to develop your skills. Don't be afraid to say the wrong thing – discussing and addressing misconceptions helps everyone to be better "safeguarders".

- **Internalise the belief that you can make a difference:** The content covered in safeguarding training can be difficult but the purpose of it is to make sure that everyone can take action to prevent or stop children from being harmed. You might be the only person that notices something, or a child might disclose to you and if you have fully engaged with training you will be in a better position to make a real difference to that child's life. It is also important to look after yourself in safeguarding training. If you are affected by things that are

discussed, you should talk to your designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or another suitable member of staff for support.

Knowing your responsibilities

Your safeguarding responsibilities are outlined in detail in Part 1 of the key statutory document *Keeping children safe in education* (DfE, 2024), which is updated every September.

This document should have been given to you as part of your induction and you should have read this section as well as Annex B, which outlines important information about some of the forms of harm children may suffer. Some of the most important things to remember include:

- **Knowing who the DSL is:** You need to know the identity of the DSL and deputy DSL and know the correct procedures for reporting any concerns to them.
- **Understanding your school safeguarding policy:** Make sure you have read the safeguarding policy and the code of conduct and if there is anything that you are unsure of, ask the DSL.
- **Familiarising yourself with other relevant policies:** You need to read and understand other policies that also contribute to the culture of

With support from



safeguarding in your school. Your behaviour policy and procedures for children missing education are essential reading, as outlined in *Keeping children safe in education*.

Fulfilling your responsibilities

While it may be easier to attend training and read documents than to identify and report concerns in practice, it is vital to recognise that raising safeguarding concerns is part of your role. It can be difficult to take a disclosure, or to suspect that a child you know is being harmed. However, you must report any concerns to the DSL immediately, in line with your school's procedures.

Sometimes, you may not immediately recognise that something a child has said or done is a safeguarding concern and you might feel that you can support the child yourself. A child may also ask you to keep a disclosure confidential. This is never acceptable and could lead to further harm to a child.

You must always seek advice and share information with the safeguarding lead so that the child can receive the appropriate support, rather than attempting to handle the situation on your own.

Safer working practice

The final point above leads us to the final key area. "Safer working practice" is essentially a set of principles designed to ensure that all of those working in schools – including staff – are kept safe and everyone behaves appropriately to uphold professional standards.

- Safer working practices are outlined in your school code of conduct and the document *Guidance for safer working practice* (Safer Recruitment Consortium, 2022). Ensure you are confident in:
- Knowing where the boundaries are in terms of topics to discuss with students, particularly during PSHE or tutor times.
 - The expectations of how to conduct yourself in lessons, around school, outside of school, and online.
 - What to do in the event of challenging behaviour and how to seek support.
 - What the rules are for contact



“We know that sadly 1 in 14 children suffer physical abuse and 1 in 20 suffer sexual abuse. Children who you work with may be suffering harm or abuse, it can happen anywhere and it is real”

with students outside of lessons (including after school revision sessions, break time conversations, and one-to-one support).

Something that can be particularly challenging for ECTs is reporting concerns about other members of staff, especially senior staff. However, if you see something that breaks the code of conduct, makes you feel uncomfortable, or alarms you in any way about the behaviour of another member of staff you must report this in line with your school policy.

Everyone has a role to play in keeping children safe and you should be listened to and supported by relevant senior staff or governors if you have a concern.

Final thoughts

All members of staff, from the least to the most experienced, play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children. Safeguarding is a deeply ingrained responsibility that requires vigilance, understanding, and proactive engagement.

By fully participating in safeguarding training, familiarising

yourself with school policies, and knowing how to report concerns, ECTs can significantly contribute to the protection of students.

It is important to recognise that safeguarding is not always straightforward – concerns may not always be immediately obvious, and it can be difficult to think that children may be suffering abuse.

However, teachers must trust in their training and know that raising concerns is vital. Building a strong knowledge of safeguarding policies, knowing when and how to report concerns, and understanding the boundaries of professional conduct in and out of school will help you to navigate these challenges effectively.

Ultimately, ECTs should remember that their actions can have a profound impact on a child's life. By understanding and fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities, they not only uphold the standards of the school

but also create an environment where students can thrive, knowing that their wellbeing is being actively prioritised and that help will be provided if needed.

SecEd



FURTHER INFORMATION

- DfE: *Keeping children safe in education 2024: Part one*, September 2024: <https://buff.ly/1MOHaOv>
- NSPCC: *Statistics briefing: Physical abuse*, April 2024: <https://buff.ly/kCztEWF>
- NSPCC: *Statistics briefing: Child sexual abuse*, January 2025: <https://buff.ly/rXHdZgK>
- Safer Recruitment Consortium: *Guidance for safer working practice for those working with children and young people in education settings*, 2022: <https://buff.ly/Q3STwLO>

Five years and beyond: How to thrive as an ECT

It might seem odd talking about your fifth year of teaching as you begin your first – but how do you plan to make sure that you avoid burning-out and dropping out?

Much of the narrative around teachers is about why so many leave. The retention crisis reverberates across the profession, creating a loud noise that silences a much more positive story.

And that is the story about the many teachers who stay. Might we shift our attention away from explaining why 37,413 teachers leave a year, but why a spectacular 468,258 stay? (DfE, 2025)

That line of thinking took me to Emily, Sam, and Hannah. Three teachers, five years into the profession, who seem set on staying. Five years in seems to be a key point given that the DfE's data shows a third of teachers (32.4%) currently quit after five years.

So, what can we learn from them that might help teachers in their early years? Emily, Sam, and Hannah have surpassed the five-year mark and provide insights into how they maintain their passion and purpose.

Protected personal time

In the early years, teachers grapple with finding their footing amid the challenges of managing classrooms, building professional relationships, planning lesson plans, and adapting to all the demands of working in a school.

For Sam, one of the keys to staying in teaching for more than five years has been the careful balance he has learned to strike between his professional life and personal wellbeing.

Initially, like many ECTs, Sam found himself caught in the cycle of late nights, excessive planning, and worry about student outcomes.

The pivotal moment came when he and his wife, Emily – also a teacher – began discussing how they could protect their time outside of work.

Planning ahead became crucial as did a conscious effort to create boundaries, ensuring that their personal time was not compromised by their work. This might involve working late at times, but then setting clear personal time so that they fully reset, using travel and personal interests to recharge. Sam approaches this balance with purpose and thought.

Staying motivated

Picture Hannah, a talented geography teacher, similarly five years in, now an assistant director of sixth form, having already been a programme leader for geography.

For some teachers, CPD and leadership opportunities can be the key to staying. Early in her career, Hannah completed an NPQ in middle leadership and this gave her a sense of direction, practical tools, and the confidence to grow.

When the opportunity came to lead the geography department, she stepped up. Hannah invested in her own development and felt that school was investing in her. Her advice? Say yes to development, even if it feels premature. For Hannah, professional challenge and a sense of progression have been essential to job satisfaction.

The power of relationships

For Emily, relationships are at the core of her ability to stay in teaching. Both in the classroom and beyond, her connections with colleagues and the broader school community provide her with the emotional support needed to thrive. She explained: "It's not just about the students – it's about the people you work with."

For Emily, the camaraderie she shares with her colleagues is vital. Teaching can be an isolating job, especially when the demands are high. But having colleagues who understand the pressures and joys

Neil Renton
...is headteacher of Harrogate Grammar School, a large comprehensive school of 2,100 students in North Yorkshire, part of the Red Kite Learning Trust. Find Neil's previous contributions to SecEd via www.sec-ed.co.uk/authors/neil-renton

of the profession, makes a huge difference. Emily stresses that forming supportive relationships with colleagues is a key strategy for avoiding burn-out. Simply put: "When you have a network of people who get it, it helps you cope with the challenges and feel more connected to the profession."

Sense of purpose

Balancing work and life, staying motivated through growth, and the importance of relationships with colleagues help to explain why Sam, Hannah and Emily stay.

One ingredient that unites them all, however, is something that gives me a great deal of hope for the future and a much more positive narrative than all the crises that we are constantly reminded of.

They talk of the relationships that they form with students that "fuels their drive". They take great pride in watching students thrive, and this connection provides a sense of purpose and fulfilment, motivating them to continue in the profession.

Some practical advice

The stories of Sam, Emily, and Hannah offer practical takeaways for new teachers:

Prioritise balance: While the demands of teaching are high, it is essential to protect personal time, whether that is through setting boundaries on weekends or ensuring holidays are truly a time to recharge. Prioritising your own health will ultimately make you a better teacher.

Seek professional development:

As Hannah's journey highlights, professional growth is key to staying motivated. Engaging in leadership opportunities or pursuing additional training can reignite your passion for teaching and provide new challenges that keep your work fresh.

Build relationships: The emotional toll of teaching can be hard to manage alone. Emily's experience underscores the importance of building relationships with colleagues. Having a supportive team to lean on, whether it is fellow teachers or a mentor, can provide emotional stability and offer solutions during tough times.

Final thoughts

Sam, Hannah and Emily might just provide strategies that avoid the negative narrative of burn-out and a drumming thud of a retention crisis.

While teaching can be incredibly demanding, the key to staying in the profession for them lies in finding balance, building supportive relationships, and engaging in development. They have shifted the narrative themselves; they have worked out how to stay, not why to go. **SecEd**



FURTHER INFORMATION

► DfE: School workforce in England: June 2025: <https://buff.ly/H83F3ak>

Learning from your peers

Seeking help and learning from your colleagues in school should become a career-long habit. Here are five tips for effective teacher collaboration and learning

As an ECT, you will have a whole raft of professional development and support opportunities available to you. As part of the ECT entitlement, you will have a mentor and a structured training programme designed to give you the best possible start to your career. And this kind of learning is vital. However, equally important, will be how you can learn from, and in turn support, your colleagues, through more informal forms of collaboration. Below, I suggest five ways in which you can make sure you make the most of these kinds of learning opportunities.

1, Culture of collaboration

It will likely come as no surprise that you can benefit hugely from the expertise of the colleagues in your school, but quite how important a culture of collaboration is to the development and effectiveness of teachers – particularly those new to the profession – is often under-recognised.

Ronfeldt et al (2015) looked at teacher collaboration happening in 300 schools across the US and found that the quality of collaboration that teachers engaged in around teaching and learning was linked to improved student outcomes, as well as greater rates of improvement to teacher effectiveness.

As you apply for jobs, ask questions about the opportunities to work and learn with colleagues, alongside a wider culture of development and learning – all of which will contribute to your job satisfaction and development as a professional (Gu et al, 2023).

Dr Cat Scutt

...is deputy CEO of the Chartered College of Teaching.

2, It makes you better

As a new teacher (whether new to the profession or new to a school) it can sometimes feel hard to ask for advice – you may worry about seeming to need help and wanting to look independent.

However, research has found something very interesting when looking at advice-seeking behaviour in schools (Spillane et al, 2018).

They expected to see that the most effective teachers in the school would be sought out by others for advice. In fact, the opposite was true. The study states: "Results demonstrate that higher performing teachers are not more likely to be sought out for advice; instead, higher performing teachers are more likely to seek advice."

So if you want to be the best teacher you can be, actively seeking advice from your colleagues will set you on that path.

3, Seize opportunities

Approaches to CPD that involve collaborating with others can also be particularly powerful, helping

to provide support and motivation for changing practices, which are key mechanisms in effective professional development (Collin & Smith, 2021).

Your ECT training will involve connecting with other ECTs, whether face-to-face or online, and there will be a whole raft of other opportunities for collaborative CPD in your school, locally, and through professional associations – including the Chartered College of Teaching.

This might be as simple as conferences or webinars that provide opportunities for roundtable discussions, or, ideally, something more structured like a "journal club" approach (see further information), where you engage with an article before planning how to implement some of the ideas in practice, and reflecting on and sharing the impact in the next meeting.

4, Share your expertise

Collaboration as an ECT absolutely isn't all about you learning from expert colleagues. You will bring your own expertise, knowledge and skills, including from your teacher training, as well as your own passions and interests, perhaps from a previous career. Multiple pieces of research (Bond, 2023) have shown the value that mentors get from taking on a mentoring role – so your mentor will be learning from you, too – and it is also worth taking opportunities to mentor other new teachers as you progress in your career. Research also shows the benefits lesson observers get from observing the lessons of others, as well as the benefits for those being observed (Burgess et al, 2021) – a great reason for you to get involved in peer observation. Go and watch other teachers' lessons, and invite them to yours, in a spirit of openness and shared learning.

5, Remember why

One of the things I have always found most amazing about



FURTHER INFORMATION

- Bond: *Mentoring and coaching of teachers: What can research tell us?* 2023.
- Burgess, Rawal & Taylor: *Teacher peer observation and student test scores*, *Journal of Labor Economics* (39,4), 2021.
- Chartered College of Teaching: *Facilitating effective journal clubs*: <https://buff.ly/tNrXHhk>
- Collin & Smith: *Effective professional development: Guidance report*, *Education Endowment Foundation*, 2021: <https://buff.ly/GoDdkGN>
- Goddard, Hoy & Hoy: *Collective teacher efficacy*, *American Educational Research Journal* (37,2), 2000: <https://buff.ly/vWsvPEn>
- Gu, Eleftheriadou & Baines: *The Impact of the Early Career Framework programme on the work engagement, wellbeing and retention of teachers*, 2021-2026, *UCL Centre for Educational Leadership*, 2023.
- Ronfeldt et al: *Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement*, *American Educational Research Journal* (52,3), 2015.
- Spillane, Shirrell & Adhikari: *Constructing "experts" among peers: Educational infrastructure, test data, and teachers' interactions about teaching*, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (40,4), 2018.

teachers is that despite how busy they are, how many pressures and demands they face, they are always keen to help. One of the main reasons people choose to become teachers is a desire to make a difference for our students – and that doesn't only happen through your work directly with children.

By taking the time to develop yourself through collaboration and CPD, and to help others to develop too, you are playing a part in developing the effectiveness of teaching across your school – what is known as "collective teacher efficacy" (Goddard et al, 2000) – as well as the profession more widely.

SecEd