



# **HEAD OF DEPARTMENT'S** Pocketbook

*3rd edition*

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Cartoons:  
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# Getting the best for your department



There will be occasions when you need to get the **best** for your department in the face of pressure. Balancing whole school and departmental needs can be tricky when you are confronted with an issue that requires immediate action.

Consider the following guidelines:

- Be clear about what you want to **achieve** from the discussion
- Know the **facts**: what is being requested? What are the costs/benefits?
- Emphasise what you can **agree to**
- Explain clearly the **consequences** of the action which is being proposed
- **Separate** the person from the issue - stay calm
- Ask for **time** if you need more information or thinking space
- Seek **alternative** solutions with the person making the request/demand
- Look for a **win/win** situation, but be prepared to stand up for your beliefs
- Finally, accept that a decision-making **hierarchy** exists in your school and you are **not** yet at the top of it!

Sometimes our emotions well up when requests are made. The first step in dealing with requests is to Listen, then to Question, then to Analyse and finally, to Decide.



# Lesson observation



Regular **lesson observation** should be a feature of every department. It is important because it:

- Allows you to monitor the **quality** of teaching and learning in your subject area
- Can determine specific **training needs** for individual teachers
- Reveals **good practice** that can be shared with other members of the department
- Gets colleagues **used to** being observed, reducing anxiety when inspectors observe them

Encourage all the teachers in your department to observe each other as part of a rolling cycle and make sure **you are observed** too. Lesson observation is an extremely effective mechanism for improving departmental practice. It is now firmly established in schools as part of performance management.

**Remember:** few of us improve without feedback, and lesson observation is an excellent way to gain useful feedback about your teaching.

# Lesson observation



The most effective approaches to lesson observation come from shared ownership of the process. 'Joint Evidencing' (JE), empowers both observer and observed.

## **Before the observation:**

- Agree a specific focus
- Develop the criteria for success (or use those already available in school)
- Plan the timings for the observation and feedback

## **During the observation:**

- The observer focuses on the criteria that are pre-agreed
- Evidence and timing of events which supports these criteria are noted down throughout

## **After the observation:**

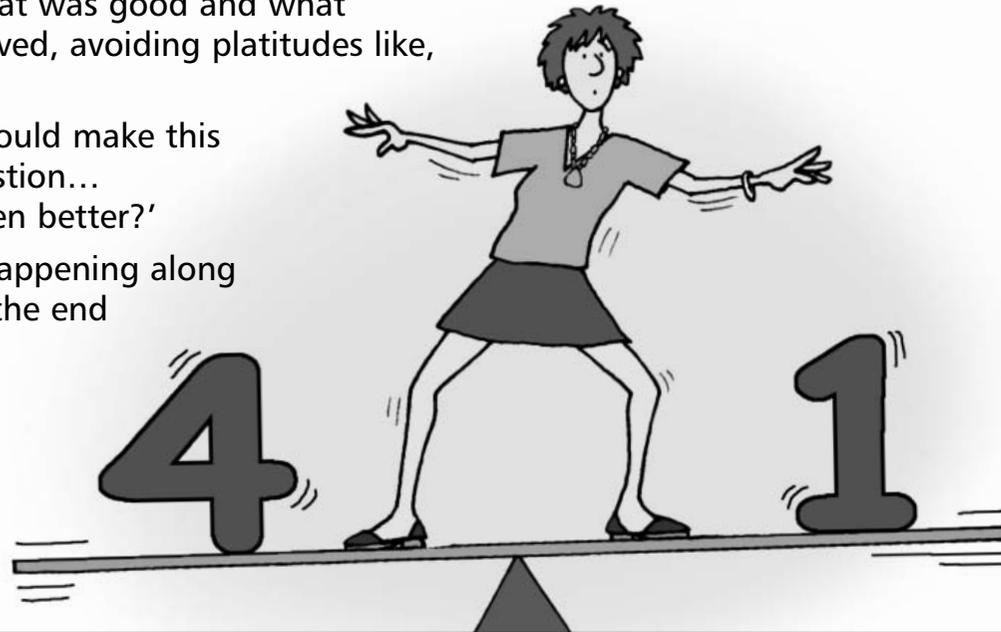
- Find quality time to review the observation very soon afterwards
- Conduct the review meeting on the basis of evidence that you and the person being observed saw, eg *'I saw evidence of this, but not this; did I miss something? What did you notice? What was your intention at this point?'*
- Keep the focus on evidence and away from judgments and points of view
- Agree action points and timescales for following up any areas for development

# Giving feedback



**Feedback** is a vital tool for helping people to learn. Where it cannot be joint-evidence-based the following guidance can be helpful. Keep it:

- **Balanced** – with a ratio of four strengths to one developmental point
- **Specific** – state exactly what was good and what specifically could be improved, avoiding platitudes like, 'that was great'
- **Solution-focused** – 'You could make this even better by...' or a question... 'What would make this even better?'
- **Often and immediate** – happening along the way rather than all at the end
- **Genuine** – it needs to be delivered with congruence in word, tone of voice and body language: you have to mean it!



# Managing meetings



All too frequently meetings are used as ways of passing information on and for administration rather than for furthering the **vision** and **success** of the department.

For effective meetings:

- Use other ways of communicating **information** – briefing sheets, memos
- Circulate an **agenda** in good time – give timings to each item
- **Start** the meeting on time and **end it** on time – don't be afraid to challenge lateness or people who overrun on their item
- Make the **first item** a fixed discussion, eg 'update of best practice in the subject'
- Limit time on **administration** to say 20% of meeting time – it expands to exceed the time you give it!
- Make meetings **productive** in terms of attention and outcome by exploring ideas with your team – encourage discussion
- Plan key items for discussion in **advance** throughout the year – and communicate these early
- Encourage **others** to lead items, freeing you to manage the meeting

# Performance management



It is your role to support the development of your team towards excellence and one of the key tools to enable you to do this is the performance management framework (PM).

Schools and colleges have their own approaches to performance management and ways of linking it to performance-related pay. There are some basic principles which can help:

- Find out how PM is structured in **your** institution – follow this to the letter
- Be **transparent** throughout the process
- Avoid making judgements until all **evidence** is gathered and **discussion** is taking place
- Nurture the principle that you want all of your staff to be **successful** and **communicate** this
- **Enjoy** the process of helping colleagues to move themselves to the next level of professional performance

P M M

## About the authors



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