ITT MFL   support for teacher trainers
Working with your Trainees
Course Development
Models of Provision
e-module
Recently qualified teachers' contributions to your taught programme

Monitoring pupil progress

During my PGCE course at the University of Sheffield 2004-2005 we were given the opportunity to think at some length about the issue of recording pupil progress and were given ideas for alternative approaches that we might like to try for ourselves, one of which was to use a computer-based markbook instead of the usual paper-based system. Conforming to the typical male stereotype, I found the use of ICT to be a motivating factor for my learning and was only too eager to trial it during my second period of school experience. I found this to be a successful system that I developed during that year, and have continued to do so during my induction year last year and further this academic year. This fact did not go unnoticed by my PGCE tutors, both during and after my course, and it was with great pleasure that I took up their kind invitation to return to Sheffield and share my experiences with the new cohorts in 2005-06 and 2006-07.

The main advantages which I found to be gained from using a computer spreadsheet to keep pupil records were flexibility and time-saving; the former of particular use to me as a new teacher, and the latter of use to any busy professional, teacher or not. As a new teacher my rate of learning is necessarily faster than my more experienced colleagues who have developed systems of recording during their careers, and know how they want to use the columns and pages in their markbooks (not that they should not be re-evaluating this themselves every once in a while!).

I find the ability in *Excel* to insert, delete, copy and paste columns invaluable in being able to customise the look of my markbooks. At this stage I am continually re-evaluating how I organise the data, deleting or hiding superfluous information and using new functionality in *Excel* as I learn how to exploit the programme further. A good example of this would be that I often use *Excel* to calculate total marks for a test by inputting the mark for each question, from which I use the spreadsheet to calculate NC levels, but I only need to see the levels and not the individual marks, therefore I can hide the marks to make the sheet more workable, whilst still maintaining the original data for reference.

Using electronic markbooks is not without problems however. As I stressed to the trainee teachers in my session, data integrity must be

at the forefront of one's mind when placing sole reliance on an electronic system. It is advisable to check that the system where the data is stored is backed-up regularly (if using a network) or to keep your own personal back-up if using a stand-alone system on either a laptop or a PDA. I experienced loss of data first-hand during my induction year whilst transferring data between school and home using a USB flash drive. I found that files sometimes corrupted if worked on directly from the USB drive and that it was advisable to save them onto the computer's hard disk first, and then copy back onto the USB device once the file was saved and closed. Luckily I was able to retrieve most of my data from the back-up on the network, but inevitably some was lost (and the students had lost their test papers which had been handed back to them!). I am fortunate to have worked and still be working in schools with outstanding records on network availability and data integrity; therefore I can have every confidence that my data is as safe, if not safer, than using a paper-based markbook (after all, who always keeps a regular back-up of their paper markbook?).

I found the experience of returning to Sheffield to share my knowledge and experiences with the trainees to be a little nerve-racking the first time I gave the session in January 2006, as I was only 6 months out of finishing the course myself, and did not consider myself to be able to speak with authority on the issue. On the other hand, as a PGCE student I found some of the best and most memorable individual learning experiences within the course were given by visiting tutors who were still practising teachers, and who brought a certain freshness of approach to their style of communication. For this reason I tried to make my sessions relaxed and interactive, combining both theory and practical application into the day. I also had to work with the fact that many people had never used *Excel* before and that some people on the course would not be comfortable with using formulas and performing statistical calculations on paper, let alone on a fear-inducing computer. Many people still prefer to run for the safety of the trees (paper!) when confronted with an electronic alternative.

When planning how to deliver my session in January 2007 I started by considering my billing which was "Monitoring pupil progress: using ICT as a management tool." I first considered what progress was and why one should monitor it, referring to assessment for learning. We need to keep pupils informed of, and encouraged by, their progress and the steps that they need to take to make further progress. I recall that when I was on school experience during my PGCE, particularly in the post-Christmas depression before starting the second school experience, that one can become quite disillusioned, and feel like you have not taught your pupils anything. I stressed therefore the importance of encouraging yourself by clear monitoring of progress, so that you can see for yourself that you are doing your job properly,

and that despite what it might feel like in the classroom sometimes, learning IS taking place!

We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of recording information about pupils, along with the students' own experiences of recording data whilst on school experience. I then outlined my own experience of using electronic markbooks, from small beginnings on the PGCE course, through my induction year and my current developments, as well as future aspirations, such as recording and archiving of students' oral development. I felt it important to stress that just because I had been asked to come and deliver the session did not mean that I was a shining example of good practice the whole time, but that I was prepared to think outside of the box and to try new ways of doing things in order to develop professionally, and ultimately to offer my pupils a better learning experience.

Once we had dealt with the theory, we moved onto a practical session in the ICT suite. I demonstrated on *Excel* how to perform the most commonly used operations and how to use the most useful formulae for markbooks. It was then time for the students to get their hands dirty and work on a small set of data which I had prepared and made available to everyone. Using a simple set of instructions, the students manipulated the data, sorting, performing simple calculations and awarding grades based on a raw mark. I think that they were surprised at how easy it was to get to grips with *Excel*, and how a limited range of functions can be used to great effect. Some commented that if you were using *Excel* regularly to keep records, then it would quickly become a lot easier to use.

Jonathan Calow, June 2007