Chapter 2 Organising and prioritising your development

Edited by Jo Tait to combine earlier chapters by Graham Gibbs and Carole Baume

Overview

The complexity of my working life increased about tenfold when I moved from being a research assistant to being a lecturer. I couldn’t believe the volume of paper, the number of meetings and the sheer number of different things I’m expected to do. It was quite overwhelming.

My real problem is the department’s filing system. I don’t know where to put things, I don’t know where to find things and so I hang on to things in case I lose them forever. That’s why my office has a piling system.

Balancing the demands is the crucial bit. It is easy for one part of the work, like the administration or the immediate needs of a student group, to take over. You have to stand back and try to see if the overall balance makes sense.

I worked unbelievably hard in my first year but I still didn’t get everything done. I’m learning to be a bit more strategic and to do a ‘just good enough’ job on some things so that other things don’t get neglected altogether.

In my clinical work I was used to people having specialist functions, but as a teacher I found I had to do everything myself: my own photocopying, typing, room bookings, arranging meetings, you name it. It took a while to learn how delegation worked and how I could get these things done more quickly.

This department seems to work in a series of loose teams – it is very friendly and relaxed. Problems get shared and you don’t feel you have to cope on your own.

I’m going deaf and I’m gradually working out ways to manage. The university is actually quite helpful and supportive but I’m still going to have to plan to change the pattern of my work over the next few years.

I wasn’t prepared for the questions in appraisal that asked about the professional development and training I wanted. I just asked for some money to attend my disciplinary conference again this year. There must be a way I can plan my future development better than this!

Just when I thought that I had all my modules planned and that at last I could enjoy a balance of teaching and my research, someone left in the department and so I had to take on two new modules. They were topics I hadn’t taught before – so it felt like back to the drawing board!
Graham Gibbs – a personal perspective

I have not written my contribution to this chapter from a position of strength. While I get through a great deal of work, I am not particularly well organised, I am rather poor at working with others, and my coping strategies might best be described as dysfunctional. This means that most of the advice in this chapter is offered not from the experience of following it, but from the position of someone who needs it. The gap between good intentions and reality is particularly wide for me. Being organised is not something I neglect – I have worked hard at it and introduced all kinds of disciplines and devices into my working life over many years. I get through more work more sensibly, and have fewer disasters, than I used to. But it does not come easily to me, and I find the sheer scale and complexity of my work a struggle.

People differ enormously in the personal style of their organisation. Some people can live with a level of uncertainty which others find intolerable, while some are meticulous and self-disciplined in ways others find abhorrent. You will need to find methods that suit you. I have had to experiment a great deal, and after 25 years I’m still trying new things. I also find some things much harder than others: I am much better at organising projects than organising the people who implement them, for example. I suspect most people find personal organisation difficult and find most guides on how to be more efficient absurdly idealistic. In writing these materials, I have imagined readers to be almost as fallible as I am, which I hope is more realistic than assuming that readers are paragons of virtue.

It can seem that professional work can expand infinitely. Average working weeks of well over 50 hours are commonly reported, and most academics (and others involved in teaching for universities) take work home with them most days. In universities, pressures to undertake high-status research vie with pressures to teach more students better. There has never been a time when it has been more important to be organised in order to manage the demands of work efficiently and without it inducing too much stress. Managing work and managing expectations are associated with many feelings and insecurities; what may seem to be obvious rational or technical solutions seldom solve problems in a straightforward way. This chapter will provide some survival tips and some coping strategies in the hope that you will recognise and adapt those which best fit your needs. Section 2.1 encourages you to do the sensible things first and to leave time for the important big tasks, and Section 2.2 encourages you to reflect on your own ways of coping with stress. Working through these sections, it will be helpful to keep beside you any timetable requirements your job organises for you and a personal or reflective journal in which you can jot down your own insights and coping strategies. Although the focus of these sections is on you and your skills, it is important to remember that your working environment will always affect your ability to change the circumstances and the structures that can make conflicting demands.

The sections that follow this practical advice should help you to identify what your personal and professional priorities are, so that you can keep a constant check on your workload in relation to your goals. Section 2.3 looks at your CV as a statement of where you are now in your profession, with particular emphasis on the teaching side of your professional identity. Section 2.4 suggests that working collaboratively can help to expand your
abilities and experience and to better manage your workload. Section 2.5 encourages you to plan your professional development with an awareness of what your institution expects. In this way, this chapter aims to help you take advantage of new opportunities without being overwhelmed by current pressing demands. As you work through these sections, having your most recent CV and appraisal documentation beside you will be helpful.

2.1 Organising yourself

It can be hard to know, especially as a novice professional, when something has been done ‘just well enough’ in order to stop and move on to the next task. In academic life, for example, we have a tendency to try to be perfect, or as perfect as humanly possible, in everything we do. This may not be realistic. If you are writing some lecture notes, you can probably do 80 per cent of the best possible job in the first 20 per cent of the time. Each additional investment of time will bring decreasing returns until you are almost literally wasting your time polishing your notes any further. Stopping before something is perfect is very difficult. But if you don’t you will certainly be neglecting something else – perhaps your reading – which may have more important long-term consequences. You are always going to be faced with decisions about what is ‘just good enough’ and about balancing short-term against long-term priorities. And it doesn’t get any easier because, it seems, the more successful you become in academic life, the more complex demands come your way. But this chapter may help you to make tough decisions with more confidence and less anguish.

Students experience the consequences of their teachers’ ability or inability to organise and, in research studies, often identify ‘well organised’ as one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of a good teacher. In a traditional university, students expect handouts to be handed out at the right time, room changes to be notified in advance, the books on the reading list to be put in the short-loan collection, assignments to be handed back promptly, and so on. In work placements or professional settings, students expect supervision arrangements and assessment to be arranged with the same level of efficiency. These things may matter more to students than, say, the flair of your lectures, the elegance of your website or the appearance of your handbook and handouts, so it is worth prioritising the practical aspects of your teaching with an eye to making them ‘good enough’.

Timetables and diaries

A timetable of teaching commitments can provide a degree of structure to your working week. Other more or less timetabled activities will also make demands on your life.

If you work in a traditional university context, you might choose to have a wall chart in front of your desk with a ‘normal’ teaching week marked up on it. Whatever your teaching role, you will find that a visual representation of periods of teaching time will help you to see where the pressure points are, what long-term planning you need to be doing, and also where there are likely to be blocks of time you can use for preparation or reflection. Any visual plan of your time will help you to anticipate demands such as: when students may want time out of class; when you
will need quiet time to prepare for lectures or presentations; when you are available and not available for particular activities.

If you work with a traditional institution, you will find your work structured in terms or semesters with, for example, introductory weeks, a schedule of topics, lectures or labs, assignment deadlines when you will need to do marking, reading weeks, revision weeks, examination weeks and exam boards. You will probably find that marking and giving feedback can involve as many hours a term as teaching, and the weeks immediately after assignment deadlines and after exams can be the busiest of your year. Other contexts probably have rhythms and structures driven by different organisational needs.

On top of all this, if you are producing work for accreditation (for example, to gain a Postgraduate Certificate), you will definitely need regular time slots to do this. Block these study times out, and try to avoid agreeing to other commitments at these times.

You will also need to keep some sort of detailed diary in which you record fixed events, such as meetings or seminars, and allocate time for major tasks. There is no ‘best’ way to do this. Some people use an ‘organiser’ – a print-based one, such as a Filofax, or an electronic organiser or software for a PC, such as that provided within Microsoft Outlook. Others use a small pocket diary or a large A4 diary that contains more planning information alongside appointments. However you manage your diary and allocate your time, you will probably find value in some of the wise advice in the following points, based on Graham Gibbs’ experience.

- Block out time in your diary for reading, writing and research. You may have a formally agreed allocation of time to plan at your own convenience (for example, 30 days a year, or the equivalent of about one day a week for 30 weeks). Or you may have to allocate yourself time and be determined to build it in and not let it be squeezed out. Even experienced and productive academics recognise the absolute need to block out writing and thinking time – and to use it for this purpose.

- If you work in a traditional university, control student access to you and your office by allocating regular ‘office hours’ in your diary, outside of which you will not respond without appointment.

- Establish your absence as well as your presence at work, if you can – some workplaces are more flexible than others about this. Most academics get their writing and reading done at home or at least somewhere away from their office and the demands of students and the telephone. If possible, plan to be out on a regular basis and let people expect you to be absent sometimes.

- If you have a few years’ experience in your teaching role, consider whether there are any areas of work you can drop. There may be tasks or functions that are no longer necessary. You may even find you are entitled to sabbatical leave, though this may seem a great luxury to readers who are new to lecturing or who work in other professions.

- Allocate reasonable breaks for lunch or exercise. Without these, you may get tired faster, your health may suffer, and you may end up getting through less work even if you put in more hours. You may also need breaks after demanding teaching sessions, until you are more experienced and relaxed about them. Be gentle with yourself.
• Schedule the ends of meetings as well as their start times. It is easy to find appointments and meetings running on unproductively if you have no expectation of when they will finish.

• Schedule short periods *between* meetings and teaching sessions, if you can. You will need time immediately after a meeting to make a note of actions that involve you, to update your ‘to do’ list or diary, and to file papers. If you rush from one engagement to another, you may end up with piles of unsorted papers with key notes buried among them.

• Say ‘no!’ to low-priority tasks, meetings and appointments. Of course it is important to be seen as reasonably willing, but it is also important to protect yourself from unreasonable demands that you can meet only at the cost of perhaps more important work that is not scheduled in your diary.

• Check what is normal in your workplace by talking with others about what and how much they do. If you have a formal or informal mentor, he or she can be an invaluable source of such knowledge.

• Never say ‘yes’ immediately, in response to an oral request, when you will be under pressure to take on more work or may be tempted by an attractive offer you simply cannot afford to take on. Instead say: ‘I’ll have to check with my timetable/diary/list of commitments to see if it is possible for me to do that. I’ll get back to you.’ Then decide at your leisure when you have time to assess your priorities – and can compose a reasonable case for saying ‘no’.

• Be sufficiently on top of your time planning that you know what is and is not logistically possible for you. If you list your responsibilities and tasks and say ‘I don’t think it is possible for me to add that to my current workload,’ you have a stronger case to argue with your line manager. Ask what the person making such a request is prepared to de-commit you from (or help you with) in order to allow you to take on an additional task.

Organising information

**Graham’s confession I**

I have an in-tray that contains today’s post, anything other than top-priority things from yesterday, and all kinds of things from the day before and the week before which were lower priority and which, as a consequence, I didn’t get to. It builds up until it is embarrassingly large and I find myself sifting through it as a kind of ‘recently arrived’ filing cabinet in order to find things. I then have to put hours aside to work through the lot, from the bottom. I do not recommend this approach. Apart from being inefficient, it is also highly anxiety-provoking as I never know what I am missing.

The following methods might be more effective ways of organising yourself.

• Bin as much as possible immediately – advertising material, anything that an administrator is likely to have filed, and anything where there is a low likelihood of reading or acting on it ‘at some time in the future’.
• Pass as much as possible to someone more appropriate, such as a secretary or a colleague who has primary responsibility for the task – although they then have a new decision to make about its relevance.

• File everything that you do not need yet but will need at some time in the near future, such as papers for future meetings. The better your filing system, the more you can clear off your desk. You may need to make a note in your ‘to do’ list to retrieve these documents on a particular day – for example, to prepare for a meeting. One colleague uses ‘post-its’ to make notes about what to do with papers. Another has a concertina file with each section labelled with a date for the next month (1–31) into which papers required on that date are filed until needed. This is known as a ‘brought forward’ file.

• Place what is left in an ‘action file’. You may need general action files for categories such as ‘correspondence’, ‘imminent meetings’ and ‘to read’, and specific ones for ongoing projects or major tasks. As far as possible, have only action files on your desk rather than piles of unprocessed paper.

• Do not use an in-tray as an action file – it should be for only papers you have not seen at all yet, and nothing should go back into an in-tray.

It isn’t easy to abandon one system and start something else, and it may feel slow and strange at the start. If you put an hour aside, you can probably sort your existing in-tray using the above suggestions, and take it from there.

Electronic in-trays – your e-mails – may need to be processed in the same way to stop a back-log building up. Use computer desktop folders, permanent filing and trashing to clear away e-mails every day. Try to avoid lengthy responses to particular e-mails until today’s arrivals have been sorted, so that you can make sensible decisions about priorities in the full knowledge of what there is to do. When you are away from your office for a long period, temporarily suspend your membership of mailing lists and leave some sort of automatic reply message that lets correspondents know not to expect an immediate reply, with an alternative contact, if possible, for urgent matters.

Many higher education teachers work from home as well as from their offices. In these circumstances, a sophisticated electronic organiser (Personal Digital Assistant – PDA is the current acronym) can be invaluable as a ‘travelling in-tray’ and a system for transferring action folders. If you aren’t attracted by this new technology, you could at least use an ‘in-tray’ floppy disk so that all word-processing documents created at home that you need to add to your office computer are on one disk. Change this disk from time to time and back it up regularly – disks that are carried around tend to corrupt and crash. For your paperwork, you could use one section of your briefcase for action folders to work on and another for folders that have been completed, ready to take back to the office.
Chapter 2  Organising and prioritising your development

Filing

Graham's confession 2

I once discovered an entire in-tray of mine that had been mislaid during an office move five years previously. Nothing in it had been touched, and none of the papers had been filed or acted upon. And, as far as I could tell, nothing had gone seriously wrong as a consequence. This may not be a responsible thing to tell colleagues, and I would not like to risk it again, but it certainly reduced my overall level of anxiety. It took me a long time to realise that the key to coping with all my paperwork was a functional filing system so that I had somewhere to put everything.

To get paper off your desk and to be able to find things when you need them, you need a category system and files set up for every category. An early task should be to establish these categories and set up the files.

- Your department office (and other offices in your workplace) will have large and tolerably well organised filing systems which will contain copies of many of the things you may need to refer to. You may not need to keep copies of everything yourself. Find out what these other filing systems contain and how they are organised.

- You are unlikely to get either the category names or the number of categories right first time. You will start with either too many categories and then have to collapse them down into a simpler system, or too few categories and then have to go through everything and separate it out. The former mistake takes less time to rectify, and the finer-grained your category system, the easier it is to find things.

- Have a look at an experienced (and organised!) colleague’s filing system, and ask about what categories work best and what causes problems.

- New categories will emerge – for example, a file for each of your personal tutees, files for references and articles, files associated with each of the topics you teach about.

- Subdivide large files and set up new files liberally and without hesitation. Keep spare dividers, folders and name tabs to hand to allow you to do this. One of my failings is not setting up new folders quickly enough and then having to wade through huge and undifferentiated files to find things.

- Talk to secretarial colleagues about setting up a filing system. They are professionals in this, and may appreciate their expertise being acknowledged as well as recognise the potential for improving your organisation.

Computer filing needs at least as much attention as paper filing.

- Set up folders and subfolders as early as possible, and structure them so that your computer desktop is not cluttered with masses of folders.

- Set up and use an automatic procedure to label every document in its footer with its file name, file path and date so that when you are looking at a hard copy you can see where to find its file on your computer.
• Match your computer filing system categories to your filing cabinet system as far as possible.
• Establish a system for naming files so that the name tells you what it is and where it is, and include draft numbers or dates in file names when you have saved multiple drafts.
• Put a little time aside from time to time to tidy folders and delete files – it will save effort in the long run.
• Back up regularly.

The most important advice about organising your filing is to start early, before it is really needed and before it gets in a mess. It is almost impossible to keep your in-tray or desk clear without a good system.

Keeping records for teaching purposes

Most of the advice above could refer to any professional, since we are all managing increasing amounts of information. For teaching purposes, you will be expected to keep detailed records of your work for assessment and quality-assurance concerns of various kinds. You need to be able to respond to a vast range of requests for information:

• from the external examiner about whether there were extenuating circumstances about one of your personal tutees to be taken into account in awarding a degree classification;
• from a student appeal board dealing with a case of plagiarism in a dissertation, about whether or not you cautioned your research student;
• from your course leader about the distribution of grades on an assignment you marked which some students had complained was too difficult;
• from a student claiming that they had submitted their project on time when you thought they had not;
• from the work-based supervisor of one of your students asking you about the student’s progress – or you may, indeed be a supervisor, in which case you will need to maintain records for your students;
• from your head of department about student feedback on a module you teach, to see if an issue arising in several other modules also arises in yours;
• from the examinations board about whether an exam question you have set is on a topic which, in the past, students have avoided;
• from a student’s personal tutor asking if the student concerned turns up to your studio sessions or not;
• from the library asking if the books you asked to be placed on the reserve collection for student use are still necessary, or from the book shop asking if you still have a book on a ‘recommended’ list for a module.

To answer any of these questions you will need to either have your own records with accessible reference systems or know where such records are kept. There might be systems in your department to support such matters as assessment marks, student attendance and submission of assignments, but you are likely to need your own system of logging and keeping
documents for everything else, such as records of meetings with students you supervise or course evaluation data.

You will also want to keep your teaching materials organised in some systematic way, and the following activity suggests that you take the opportunity to find out how others manage this – a chance for some collegiality.

**Activity 2.1 Organising teaching materials**

Ask to see a colleague's system for looking after their teaching materials and resources, and ask them what works, what does not and what level of organisation they find helpful. People differ in terms of how disciplined they are prepared to be and how big a gap there is between intentions and reality, so ask to see several colleagues' systems! There may also be shared resources such as handouts or presentation slides that you can borrow and adapt.

### 2.2 Coping strategies

Here we concentrate on just two related aspects of coping with a complex professional life in higher education: managing stress and coping with change. You will notice a change of pace, as we invite you to engage with some structured and reflective activities that will involve you in serious writing and thinking.

Knight (2002) recognises the relationship between an environment of rapid change and experiences of stress, but draws on research and motivation theories to encourage us to think in terms of ‘feeling motivated’ by engaging with colleagues and finding our own ways to work with change. If you are new to teaching in higher education, you may (or may not!) feel encouraged by Knight's claim, based on interviews with many teachers across the sector:

> Emotional unease and stress are to be expected: role conflict, overload and feeling like an impostor are usual among new academics.

Knight, 2002, p. 38

This section provides some practical activities that should help you to appraise your own experience in supportive ways. Look here for strategies to help you to recognise your own competence and your personal working style so that you can maintain enthusiasm for teaching and all the other aspects of your work.

#### Identifying and analysing stress

Those who have worked in universities for some time are clear that higher education feels more stressful than it once was. Courses, particularly in professional and vocational areas, need to change at an increasing rate to reflect accelerating changes in the professions. And as more knowledge is produced, the effort needed to stay up to date increases.

How can you analyse your response to particular sources of stress in your professional life? The Stressor-Response Chain is one useful method. The next activity invites you to identify one particular recent situation or event that caused you stress, and to analyse your responses to it. If you find this useful, you may decide to make it part of your working routine. By
carrying out such analysis, and then considering how you might intervene in the chain to eliminate or reduce the stress, you may develop lasting strategies for dealing with stressful situations. With practice, you could become able to identify potential stressor situations and decide whether you should engage with them or avoid them.

**Activity 2.2 Using the Stressor-Response Chain**

Give your own example of each of the five steps in the Stressor-Response Chain.

This table starts with the cause of the stress. Sometimes, you will become aware of your response to a source of stress without immediately realising what provoked the response, what the stressor was. Without becoming a complete hypochondriac, it's worth noting the emotional and associated physiological symptoms that you experience at or as a result of work, and then identifying as far as you can what caused them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step in Stressor-Response Chain</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Your examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What actually happened?</td>
<td>A pile of exam papers to mark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The stressor – a situation or event)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you ‘see’ it?</td>
<td>‘This is important, and I must do it right’...</td>
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<tr>
<td>(The perceptual response)</td>
<td>‘Who am I to judge?’...</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Is our assessment system clear, valid, usable?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you ‘feel’ about it?</td>
<td>Anxious, reluctant to start</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The emotional response)</td>
<td>Dry mouth, slight sickness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What changes did you notice in your body?</td>
<td>Talking to colleagues who are also assessing; marked the first three papers and compared with a colleague; kept a log of points of difficulty in marking</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(The physiological response)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What action did you take?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The action response – the consequence)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some common emotional responses to stress are anxiety, lost sense of humour, reduced ability to cope with change, or, conversely, a 'high'.

Some typical short-term physiological responses to stress are increased heart rate, better concentration, more alertness, more physical energy, dry mouth, sensitive skin.

Longer-term physiological responses to stress can include tension headaches, bodily aches, disrupted sleeping patterns, digestive disorders, involuntary loss or gain of weight.

There are positive as well as negative consequences of stress; for example, short-term physiological responses such as more alertness and more physical energy. Too little stress and we may achieve very little. Too much stress and we are damaged and ineffective. The optimum level of stress varies greatly between individuals, and for each individual may change over time.

You may become aware of unacceptable levels of stress by noticing certain patterns in your professional life. Here are some of the indicators for Carole Baume that the level of stress in her work is too low (these are all very old examples!), about right and too high.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress level</th>
<th>Too low</th>
<th>About right</th>
<th>Too high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty deciding what to do next</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing small urgent jobs and leaving large important ones</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Watching the clock, which moves very slowly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Productivity is low, but there are still jobs to do in the in-tray</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Completing to-do list for that day each day</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving a good balance between long-term strategic jobs and short-term urgent ones</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to take all my allowed leave</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling able to say 'yes' to a new and interesting challenge</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty deciding what to do next</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing small urgent jobs and leaving large important ones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working evenings and weekends as a norm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being unable to make good decisions about whether or not to take on a newly offered task or role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Excessive sensitivity to criticism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequent minor infections like the cough which won't clear up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Snacking rather than eating proper meals</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Carole Baume makes the following comments:

In drawing up this list, I realised that the same stress symptoms sometimes crop up under both 'too low' and 'too high'. I think I would know for myself whether they were the result of stress levels being too high or too low; however, I am also aware that organisational culture and norms can confuse my own judgement about stress level. Some professional groups have a culture in which high levels of overwork and stress are accepted and even rewarded.
Coping with stress

The first way of coping with unacceptable levels of stress, of course, is to anticipate and prevent the problem that may cause the stress. This strategy is more easily employed the second time around – next year you will be able to anticipate the reprographics backlog in Week 0 and have handouts complete two weeks before the start of the semester.

The second way of coping is to hand over the problem to its rightful owner, who may for example be your head of department, your course or programme leader, or the departmental administrator. Particularly in your first years as a teacher, this may be the most appropriate strategy. For example, probably it is not your responsibility to solve problems to do with classroom allocation, clashing modular timetables or unavailable student IT facilities.

Your sources of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 2.3 Sources of stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the main sources of stress in your working life? The table below suggests a possible classification for these, but use your own headings if those we have identified are not significant for you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of source</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Your examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>The person who teaches with me on the module is on long-term sick leave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>My HoD does not value the university’s policy on access which underpins the course I teach.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>This year’s enrolment in the part-time mode is 50% up on last year – with no extra resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and procedures</td>
<td>The college’s system for offering part-time contracts means I have to arrange part-time teachers’ contributions to the course on a short-term basis, rather than securing their services for the year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource shortage</td>
<td>There just aren’t enough journals in the Library to underpin the project I want to run – so I’ll have to find ways round this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You could build on this activity by ranking the amount of stress caused by each of these sources, identifying which of them can most readily be solved and then sequencing your actions. Maintaining and updating such an action list relating to sources of stress is one strategy for managing the stress.

The third way of coping is to solve the problem that has caused the stress. For example, some students in your module do not have the necessary mathematical abilities to cope with the coursework requirements, and their questions are clogging up the seminars. You could arrange special sessions for these students.

The fourth strategy may be to decide that you can’t do anything about the problem and therefore you will stop worrying about it. For example, you are not expected to sort out who exactly is or is not in your class if the university’s management information system has gone down in Week 1. Teach whoever turns up!

It is clearly beyond the scope of this section to give detailed practical guidance on solving the myriad problems you will encounter in your work as a teacher, but there are practical things you can do to help keep things in perspective. We suggest that you try adopting at least one of the following common-sense strategies as part of your normal routine.

**Take a short break ...**

- If you work mainly sitting in front of a computer screen, make time for some physical activity, even if it’s only a 20-minute walk round the campus after lunch.
- If it feels as though you are always running from class to class, or meeting to meeting, make time for some quiet reading and relaxing time.
- Every hour during long tasks such as drafting course materials, marking assignments or writing course documents, take a 10-minute walk, make a cup of tea, or talk to someone.
- Walk to a colleague’s office rather than e-mailing or telephoning.

**Take a longer break ...**

- Take an evening a week just for you, to laze in the bath, watch a video, play a game of squash or catch up on your motorcycle magazines.
- Make sure you take your full holiday entitlement. Many UK institutions have developed cultures in which it has become the norm for teachers to work many evenings and weekends on top of a normal working week. In many other cultures, this would be seen as a sign of poor time-management and remedied by training courses!
If it is becoming the norm for you to work overtime, then regular holidays become even more important. It may be necessary for you to enter breaks in your diary until they become part of your regular routine.

**Give yourself work-related treats ...**

- Could you make time once a week to take a full hour for lunch with a colleague whose company you really enjoy?
- Could you sit down with the *Times Higher* for 20 minutes over a cup of coffee every Friday morning?

**Cultivate 'stability zones' ...**

You might also wish to think about how you could maintain 'stability zones' to 'provide a mental retreat and give a chance to unwind' in a fast-changing and unpredictable world. The following activity lists six types of stability zones: places, objects, people, organisations, activities, and values and beliefs.

### Activity 2.4

Identify your current stability zones in the table below. Are there gaps you might be able to fill?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability zones</th>
<th>Carole's examples</th>
<th>Your current examples</th>
<th>How could you fill any gaps?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places where you feel at home, you feel you belong or where you have roots</td>
<td>My desk at work, my kitchen table</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects that give you a good feeling, perhaps because they are beautiful or evoke happy memories</td>
<td>Picture of Golden Gate Bridge on my office wall, my personal organiser</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People on whom you can rely</td>
<td>My action learning set, my partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations you belong to</td>
<td>SEDA, my professional association, where I can share the reality of doing my job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Embracing – or fending off – change

Embracing change

Change is one of the few constants in professional life. Whatever your relationship with higher education, the chances are that your unit – department, school or faculty – will have been reorganised during the past two years, or that the modular structure of your undergraduate degree has been revised, or that your internal quality-assurance procedures have been altered – perhaps all three!

Sometimes the changes you make to your courses and your teaching in order to cope with changes such as these can genuinely improve your work, even if you felt you didn’t have time to think them through in enough detail or implement them thoroughly. Sometimes another teacher or member of learning support staff can help you to design and implement changes much more quickly and effectively.

How do you decide how much change is realistic for you? How do you decide how much change to embrace?

- Different people have different capacities to enjoy (or cope with) change. Aim to push yourself only a little way beyond your comfort zone.
- Talk to other colleagues, assess the prevailing climate, try to get a feel for how big potential changes are, and how much impact they are going to have on you.
- Look at your work outside your teaching, and your life outside work. Is your research group being amalgamated with another, or your research lab being extended? Is this the year when two of your children change school, or your mother-in-law comes to live with you? Major changes in one area of your life can make you feel overloaded in another. It may be that you need to postpone some of your plans, so that not too much is changing at once.

How do you decide which particular changes to embrace and which to fend off?
Fending off change

Some changes really do present you with increased opportunities, but others just come too thick and fast for you to deal with. There is almost no end to the possible opportunities for change in teaching in higher education. Sometimes the right response may be to agree your priorities with your line manager (course leader, head of department) and carry out your agreed programme of work without getting involved in too many new schemes. You need to know you are doing a good job in an agreed way in an area that is valued and recognised by colleagues and managers.

- Does the possible change fit with your own career planning?
- Will a change, combined with the other changes to which you are already committed this year, exceed your innovation threshold?
- Do you want to make this change? Will it be a pleasure or just a slog?
- Is there a way in which you could combine this with other changes to which you are already committed?

2.3 Recording and presenting your professional achievements in teaching

The focus of this section is your developing CV in relation to your teaching role. From a starting point based on where you are now, you can build a robust and flexible professional development plan that will help you to attain the CV you would like to be able to present. It's about presenting yourself and your professional development in ways that represent who you are now and how you have reached this position, and planning, from this point, to develop in ways that will be effective for you. Having suggested, in Section 2.1 of this chapter, that you need to protect your time by saying ‘no’ to inappropriate tasks, in this section we help you to identify which opportunities to accept – when to say ‘yes’. Although development of your career will take time, holding in mind a clear direction in which you hope to develop should help you to recognise and make the most of the chances for growth and advancement that come your way.

The world of higher education has changed greatly in the last 40 years and continues to adapt to different agendas. The introduction to Pack 3 in this series maps these changes in terms of learning, teaching and assessment practices. This pack (and this section in particular) helps you to ensure that your professional development is seen to be responsive to such a fast-moving environment.

Working in a university used to provide a very secure and steady career route, with tenure assured for life. The job of a lecturer is now much more precarious and erratic, with progression increasingly becoming as dependent on teaching ‘excellence’ as on a good research profile. Diverse teaching roles in higher education no longer necessarily involve lecturing; teaching could be more connected with a body of professional practice in, for example, health care. Social work, medicine, engineering, music and management schools all recruit experienced professionals as tutors and educators. The expansion of higher education and developments in course design and technologies mean that many more people than lecturers and professionals are involved in course design and production – web designers and learning technologists, librarians and information experts,
curriculum and educational developers who work across disciplines to support these complex teams.

Whatever your role, this section will help add the teaching dimension to your CV and another string to your bow. For those people who enjoy a challenge and who are prepared to make the most of opportunities as they arise, the changing world of higher education provides many career opportunities: for developing new teaching, assessment and course design skills; for working with new colleagues; and for the kinds of achievement that really make the teaching component of your CV stand out from the pile.

Appraisal

A first step in reviewing your current position may come from your institution’s appraisal process. All higher education institutions in the UK and most other professional organisations now have some form of appraisal scheme for staff. These schemes vary enormously in scale, rigour and the extent to which they link to staff development or training programmes. Appraisal works most effectively when you see it as a way to engage your institution, with all its resources, in your development. You can make the links between your appraisal and your professional development, even if your institution’s scheme does not make them explicit.

Activity 2.5 Beginning to think about appraisal

Get hold of a copy of your institution’s appraisal scheme. Work out from the scheme (or ask your appraiser) when your next appraisal cycle should begin.

Highlight (or make a list of) the questions you will be required to answer in your appraisal. Then assemble notes about how and what you may answer, as you work through the rest of this section.

You might also consider what other actions might be taken by the appraiser, other colleagues or the department more generally to help you to achieve your job performance and/or development goals over the coming year or two.

Your current CV

You probably used a CV as part of your application for your current job. You may not have looked at it since then, but you should consider updating your CV every year or so, even if you aren’t intending to apply for a promotion or another job. You should add into it new roles and responsibilities, new publications, new achievements, as discussed below. Preparing for or writing up your appraisal may be a good prompt to do this.

There are several reasons for keeping your CV up to date:

- to prevent you losing or forgetting important information when you do have to prepare a CV for some external reason;
- to be able to respond very quickly to requests for a CV, for example for a research application, course document or departmental report;

Have your current CV alongside you as you work through this section.
to be able to examine your professional self on a few sheets of paper, and see if it's still who you want to be.

What should be in your CV? It should summarise your achievements to date and describe the skills and knowledge you have acquired through your education and working life. Your current CV should be a database, a complete account of your professional self. When you next prepare a CV for a particular purpose, you will be able to draw from the data it contains and edit it, perhaps playing down some elements and expanding others.

Building your teaching CV

Much of what follows applies to the whole of your CV. The emphasis, however, will be on your teaching and course design work, not your research and other activities.

What would you like your CV to look like in five or ten years? The answer will depend in part on the kinds of jobs that you want to be doing, or that you want to be able to apply for, at that time. If you are not sure, spend some time looking through the advertisements in the Times Higher on a Friday, the Guardian on a Tuesday or the Independent on a Thursday. Send for the job descriptions and person specifications for the jobs that appeal to you. Analyse them in terms of the skills, knowledge and experience being sought.

This, however, will give you only part of the picture. What will professionals in your subject be doing in ten years' time? What uses will be being made of communications and information technology? Who will the students be? And how will they be fitting study into the rest of their work and lives? We have to accept that looking at the present employment scene can help you plan only part of your future. Planning also involves prediction and imagination!

This exercise should enable you to list the kinds of experience and achievements you should be seeking out over the next five years in order to make you a credible candidate for such jobs. Do not be too prescriptive at this stage about the kinds of jobs, projects or activities that you will use as development routes – life isn't always that tidy. For example, it is possible to become a head of department without having first been a deputy head of department! There are often many ways to achieve similar skills or knowledge. For example, if one of the jobs that appeals to you is Programme Leader, then the requirements include leadership skills and organisational ability. You could gain and demonstrate such skills by leading a research group or a module or course within a programme, or by being admissions or industrial liaison tutor.

You could also try to find the answer within yourself: you could write the CV that you'd like to have in five or ten years' time, and then work to make it happen.

Presenting your teaching CV

One of the difficulties for recruiters or promotion committees looking at your CV is getting a quick picture of the teaching, student support, and curriculum design skills, knowledge and experience you have, and matching this with what they are looking for. Each institution tends to have its own language and way of describing jobs and structures. In presenting your past work, you will need to go beyond job titles to explain what the job entailed and what you learned and achieved as a result of
that job. Even a traditional lecturer will need to provide some detail of their actual work, since the lecturing role can entail many different activities, as the following example shows.

**Job title: Lecturer in the School of Business**

**Responsibilities**

I am responsible for leading the first-level module (20 credits = one-sixth of the full-time first-year programme) in Introduction to Economics; current enrolment is 250 full-time students and 63 part-time students. I am also responsible for part-time recruitment to the Business Studies degree pathway; current enrolment is 120 new students each year.

**Achievements**

I designed this module to integrate the full-time and part-time students, thus bringing together mature students currently working in local businesses and public-sector workers with school-leavers.

I developed a three-week introductory group project, working with a graduate of the university who is now working locally as a public-sector economist. She contributes to the first session in which we introduce the project design brief and then, with three of her colleagues, contributes to the assessment in week five.

During my three years as recruitment officer, enrolment of part-time students in the programme has risen from 55 to 120. I would attribute this success mainly to my work with local public-sector employers who had not previously realised the full potential of our flexible programme.

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**Activity 2.6 Writing your CV**

Practise writing about your current job, a key area of your CV.

- Under your current job title, write two sentences that describe your major responsibilities, giving their scope and context.
- List three of your major achievements in this job.

When the time comes to present a CV for a particular purpose – a promotion, a job, a grant application – tailor your CV to the situation. Try to see your CV from the point of view of the people who are going to read it, and write it in the language and style with which they are familiar. Explain any ideas, concepts, organisational structures or terminology that are peculiar to your situation. For example, most readers of your CV will know what a module is – it's a part of a programme, a unit of learning. But it may be very relevant to your case to explain how big a part of the programme it is (number of credits, level, duration) and how many students, from what backgrounds, usually take the module.

Some of your experience may be irrelevant to the application you are making. Try to make explicit links between your experience and the experience required for the job. You may need to write a covering letter that takes each of the elements of the person specification and explains how your CV shows that you meet that element.
A teaching portfolio can be closely linked with your CV and, indeed, you may draw on your portfolio to support your CV. Chapter 5 (Section 5.2) in this pack will support you in thinking about how to design and use a teaching portfolio for your own purposes.

2.4 Collaborative work

Why collaborate?

Working alongside colleagues in collaborative ways can be both a professional development strategy and a coping strategy. You will, without doubt, learn from your colleagues – how things are done round here, how things might be done differently, and how you might choose not to do things, having observed someone else’s approach. There is always something you can learn from colleagues: you will inevitably find that you are more and less skilled or successful than some colleagues in different areas – which is a great reminder that ‘good enough’ is a standard that you can aspire to, rather than perfection (see Section 2.1).

The following examples of strategic collaboration are drawn from the perspective of a traditional lecturer. It is easy to see how a librarian or practitioner might take similar initiatives to establish a collaborative relationship with colleagues whose roles are potentially complementary. Ideas of social or situated learning (see Lave and Wenger, 1991) are clear that, particularly for professional development, participation in the work of a department or activity group can be invaluable.

To share scarce resources

If the scarce resource is your own time and that of your teaching colleagues, you could combine your classes for lectures, perhaps giving a lecture on alternate weeks, but each meeting your own student group for the follow-up seminar. Some courses overlap with courses from other departments – for example, Introductory Statistics, which is often needed by a range of vocational courses. You could develop joint generic lectures and use seminars to practise the application of statistical techniques in particular vocational areas.

If the scarce resources are books or journals in the library, you could collaborate with other teachers to stagger the assignments on a course and so level out student demand for the materials.

If the scarce resource is teaching space, you could replace some lectures with jointly-written learning resources.

To share knowledge and skills about your courses and teaching

Your colleagues are a rich resource for your teaching, but often the culture within a department is not one of sharing. Handouts and reference material can be shared quite easily (and almost anonymously) through resource boxes in the departmental office. Observing each other teaching and giving each other feedback may be more difficult to arrange, but it is helpful for both new and more experienced teachers. Many experienced teachers say that they get many new ideas from seeing the approach taken by new colleagues. And teaching innovations are often more easily written up for publication with the help of a colleague who can give perspective to a process in which you are closely involved.
To reduce risk in innovation

Interdisciplinary courses or the introduction of self or peer assessment may look attractive to you in terms of your teaching and learning philosophy, but they might feel quite scary in terms of the potential for disaster. Talking through a proposed innovation with someone and asking them to identify potential danger points may help to reduce the risk of failure and give you the confidence to try out your ideas. An even better idea would be to develop and carry out the innovation with a colleague. Even a short discussion can improve the quality of an innovative idea.

To reflect through discussion

It can be difficult to reflect on your own teaching unaided, and a conversation with a trusted colleague about a class you have run can be very helpful. The colleague can ask you about what you did, why you did it, and whether and why you felt the class was successful or unsuccessful.

With whom could you collaborate?

Other teachers in your institution

- A more experienced colleague may enjoy the approach that you bring to a subject from your research or from your practice.
- A new member of the department may gain support from you in learning ‘how things are done around here’, while helping you to question why some things are done as they are.
- A teacher in a related discipline may bring fresh approaches to your classroom, and their methods may be surprisingly similar or complementary. For example, seminars using student presentations often raise similar issues of support and assessment across several disciplines; interdisciplinary projects can be very important for final-year students; supporting students on placements, learning to use computer-mediated conferencing ... lots of scope here!

Other teachers in your discipline based in other institutions

Learning how teachers in other institutions arrange their courses can help you to rethink your course design, especially if their institutional framework for courses is different from yours. How do they manage to teach the first-year syllabus in three 10-week modules? What can you learn from that to help you to free some time in the year for preparing students for the second-year placement? Search out your disciplinary group(s) or professional association(s) concerned with the teaching of your subject, or your subject group within the Learning and Teaching Support Network (http://www.ltsn.ac.uk).

Other enthusiasts for your particular style of teaching and learning

There are networks, groups and mailbases concerned with a wide range of pedagogic issues such as key skills, problem-based learning, peer learning, project work, teaching online, case studies and learner-managed learning. Search the mailbase lists and the web for contacts.
Staff or educational developers

Your educational development or staff development unit can help you to identify others in your institution with similar educational interests and ideas. Through their information sources and papers, they can help you to find others to collaborate with. If you want to get started in publishing about teaching and learning, they can probably help, by suggesting what the focus of your paper might be, by working with you to shape the article, by suggesting somewhere to place the article, or by offering to jointly author your first paper on teaching.

Administrators

Administrative staff concerned with course approval and quality assurance may be able to help you with issues of course design or redesign. Our experience suggests very strongly that involving administrators in helping you to develop an innovation will help its smooth passage through validation to successful implementation.

Librarians

Subject librarians can help you to plan the use of published and online resources on your course. They can do much more than just find information – they can work with you to ensure that students can access and use the information they need at the right time. They are in the business of client-centred learning. Involve them in developing and implementing innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Practitioners in the profession

 Experienced practitioners in your subject area can enliven courses by giving guest lectures and seminars, helping to find and supervise placements, and assessing practice. They can also be asked to provide material for contemporary case studies and practice-based projects.

And students?

Students are a huge resource. They have time, energy and expertise – which you can harness! For example, individually or in very small groups, students can research particular topics or questions and bring back their results for you and the rest of the class to discuss. Students returning from placement or mature students entering courses from employment can add knowledge and understanding of current practice – ask them to write and talk about it.

2.5 Goals and plans – professional development as a teacher

We suggest that you need to clarify your development needs and goals, and then identify and take up development opportunities, in addition to or as a regular part of your work.

Clarifying your development needs and goals

Teaching in higher education makes many demands on your time. When you start to draw up your professional development plan, analyse the likely demands on you over the next year or so. Then predict the directions you would like to take in the longer term: you should be starting now to develop yourself to meet these challenges.
Chapter 2  Organising and prioritising your development

What new tasks will you need to undertake next year or next semester?

It is sometimes difficult to identify new tasks early enough for you to undertake detailed development. Sometimes you need ‘just in time’ development. Often the best form of development is to talk to the person who is currently doing the task – or a task as similar to this as you can find. Don’t rely on doing this in a 10-minute coffee break. Give the person notice that you would like to have the conversation. Ask them to look out and bring the necessary papers. If possible, prepare a list of questions that you’d like them to answer. Make it a formal meeting! It may also be helpful to talk to the next person up in the hierarchy – for example, if you are going to take responsibility for a course, arrange a meeting with the programme leader and/or subject leader.

You may also be able to use procedural manuals, committee minutes or course review reports to help you to understand the background to, and nature of, the task(s) you are being asked to undertake.

Doing what you do at the moment better, quicker, using less resources, differently …

You may want or need to redesign a course, change the way you teach certain sessions, change your assessment strategy or methods, or change the support system for your students. Triggers for this might include:

- feedback on teaching observation;
- student feedback;
- quality-assurance reports on the course – through your institution’s own quality-assurance mechanisms or a national subject review;
- bright ideas you’ve read about somewhere and want to try.

Some of these changes may just involve planning what you will do, getting the necessary formal approvals, persuading your colleagues to collaborate with you, and doing it. For other changes, you may feel the need for some additional skills, or for some help in thinking through the possible pitfalls. You may need to listen to what others have done in this area of curriculum development of teaching, to read some of the underpinning theory, or to attend a staff development workshop.

Innovating

Maybe your courses and your own teaching get very good ratings from students, quality assessors and your peers, but still you’re getting slightly bored. You’d like to try a new approach to the subjects you currently teach – perhaps a problem-based approach or one involving more practitioner experience. Or maybe you’d like to bring an area of your own research into the undergraduate curriculum in the shape of a new final-year option that would have implications for the earlier years in terms of skill development. ‘Doing something new’ may involve development for you as well as for your students. Other teachers, educational development journals, websites and conferences may be able to provide support for this development.

Development needs identified through appraisal

Most higher education institutions in the UK have some form of regular (often annual) appraisal system. This may help you to identify development needs for your teaching as well as for other parts of your academic life.
Thinking longer term

Some appraisal systems encourage you to think longer term. Where do you hope to be in five, ten or fifteen years? If your appraisal does not include this strand, or if you would rather not share your longer-term thinking with your current institution, you may want to add these development needs to your own plan. There may be skills you want to start acquiring now; there may be pieces of work you want to do now to fit you better for a future direction you want to take.

Beliefs and values

Your beliefs and values about teaching and learning may also have implications for your development needs. For example, you may believe that a primary purpose of an undergraduate degree is to produce graduates who have the abilities and the enthusiasm to continue to learn and study after graduation. If so, you will need to develop your teaching skills and approaches to bring this about, and your monitoring and evaluation skills to assure yourself that you are achieving this. You will also be influenced by other values such as those associated with your professional body, for example those detailed in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.

Other sources

As well as the sources considered above, you may also have identified development needs as you looked at sources of stress for you and at ways of embracing or fending off change in your professional life (in Section 2.2), as you thought about building your CV (in Section 2.3), and as you thought about working with colleagues (in Section 2.4).

Activity 2.7 Clarifying your development needs and setting your development goals

In outline, a development goal may contain the following three elements:

- a particular thing you want to be able to do;
- the skills, knowledge and experience you will need in order to do it;
- the deadline by which you must be able to do it.

Use the following chart to summarise the development needs that arise from each of the sources listed in the left-hand column. I’ve offered one example. You’ll see that I’m not suggesting an exhaustive or detailed analysis of development needs at the moment; simply take an overview.
Chapter 2  Organising and prioritising your development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of development need</th>
<th>Topic/subject/area</th>
<th>What do you want to be able to do?</th>
<th>What skills, knowledge or experience will you need?</th>
<th>By when do you need to be able to do this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undertaking a new task</td>
<td>Third-year module in subject X</td>
<td>Design and get approval to run module next year</td>
<td>Knowledge of course design and approvals procedure Ideas and expertise on how to design a course</td>
<td>February March</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Doing something better
Innovating
Appraisal
Longer-term directions
Beliefs and values

**Other sources**

Building your CV
Collaborative work
Dealing with stress and change

We shall return to this activity later in this section, where we consider how to prioritise this list and assemble a development plan.

**Choosing or making development opportunities**

Choosing or making the right developmental opportunities involves first knowing something about the way you prefer to learn about teaching. Do you prefer to talk with others about teaching methods, to read accounts of other teachers’ experiences, or to work out how you might apply theories about learning? You also need to know what development opportunities exist (or how you can create them) and to be realistic about how much time you want (and can afford) to spend on this activity.

**Off-the-peg development opportunities**

Your own institution probably offers a menu of staff development courses and workshops on many aspects of teaching, learning, assessment and related tasks. If not, there are several national providers of such courses and workshops, such as the Open University, the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) (http://www.iltthe.ac.uk) and the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) (http://www.ltsn.ac.uk) – these are worth exploring on the internet. From Autumn 2004 the HE Academy will be fully operational, this Academy for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching now incorporates ILTHE and LTSN (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk). Many
staff development courses and workshops occupy a day or less. More sustained development is available through open learning, online or via face-to-face qualification courses.

How can you choose the most effective off-the-peg offerings for your particular purposes? You can do this partly by matching what you know of your preferred ways of learning with the descriptions of methods for courses or workshops. If the facilitator of a workshop has published on the subject, then look at their published work to see if you like their approach.

And once you have chosen a course or workshop, how can you make sure that you get the most from it? You should prepare a series of questions that you want the workshop to answer. You could send these questions to the facilitator in advance, or you might feel more comfortable taking them with you – a good workshop facilitator will give participants the opportunity to say what questions they want to work on.

Throughout a workshop you should continue to explore, alone and in conversation with others, how you can apply the ideas being presented in your own setting. You may meet others at the workshop with similar concerns to yours. Keeping in touch with them afterwards can prove a useful source of ongoing support as you implement the ideas from the workshop.

After the event, discuss the ideas you have picked up with colleagues in your department – but do so sensitively: your colleagues may not all share your new-found enthusiasm. Neither may your students; do try out in your teaching new ideas gained through courses and workshops, but remember to explain what you are doing and why.

**Tailored development opportunities**

Conferences on teaching and learning often have parallel sessions as well as plenary events. Sometimes there are labelled strands of parallel sessions, so that the conference is, in effect, tailored for you. These strands may be labelled by topic, for example work-based learning, access, assessment; or by intended audience, for example teachers, educational researchers, learning support staff. Sometimes you will need to do the tailoring yourself. Just as with courses and workshops, you will need to identify what questions you want answered and which sessions and session leaders are most likely to help you to obtain those answers.

Being mentored gives a new member of staff (whether new to the job or new to the institution) access to support, expertise, information and ‘the way we do things around here’. Being mentored can provide a sounding board, someone to talk to about problems and successes, a source of advice and feedback on teaching. If the mentoring relationship has worked well, it may continue beyond its first induction purposes.

Mentoring also benefits the mentor: a reminder of what it is like to be new to the job or the institution; ‘simple questions’ that require the mentor to take a new look at established practice; the chance to observe a new teacher who probably has some new teaching ideas. (You will find detailed advice on finding and using a mentor in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.)

An Action Learning Set (McGill and Beaty, 1992) – a fixed group of about six people who agree to meet on a regular basis – can help you to keep much more control over your development. It also requires you to make a commitment to the development of the others in the group. In an Action Learning Set, the participants negotiate the agenda for each meeting. Often
a facilitator is used for at least the first few sessions, to help participants develop ground rules and constructive ways of working within and between the sessions.

**Do-it-yourself and do-it-with-others development opportunities**

Reading is one of the most popular routes of development for academic staff. There is a rapidly growing literature of theory and practical guidance on most aspects of teaching and learning in higher education. This includes books, pamphlets, reports, journals, magazines and websites. Subject-based teaching and learning journals and books can be found through the websites of the Learning and Teaching Subject Networks.

Discussing your (or their) reading with colleagues can be a natural and easy source of development, as can discussion on the basis of practice. These discussions can take place at an informal lunch-time seminar or even in a course or programme committee meeting.

As your educational practice develops, you may get to the stage of writing and publishing about your work. Many find this and the associated refereeing a developmental activity. Outlets for publication include departmental newsletters, websites and reports, institutional teaching and learning magazines and journals, national pedagogic journals and books.

**Development as part of regular teaching**

Developing isn’t just something that others do for you, or that you do for yourself outside and apart from your teaching. It is something that you can do for yourself as an immediate part of your teaching. But simply teaching doesn’t automatically lead to the development of your teaching abilities.

What converts ‘doing’ to learning? What separates 20 years’ experience from one year’s experience repeated 20 times? The answer is reflection and the associated development, as described in the contribution of Boud *et al.* to Chapter 1 of this pack, an extension of Kolb’s four-stage cycle of learning.

How might you use these ideas in practice? Suppose, for example, that you notice some students had much more trouble than others with a particular concept. You interview a group of them, helping them to overcome their problems and simultaneously trying to understand what was going wrong. This doesn’t get you very far. You then talk to a few students who had no problem with the concept, and realise that those who did ‘get it’ were mature students with much more life experience than those who did not. This leads you to seek ways to use the mature students’ life experiences to help bring the topic to life for the younger students and thus overcome the problem. It also leads you to explore other ways to make use of the diverse experience of the groups of students with whom you work.

**Development through educational innovation**

The example described above started in the classroom. The one below starts with an idea that you might find elsewhere in these resources, or from a piece of learning software developed as part of the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (http://www.ncteam.ac.uk/ltlpt.html), or from a development project in your subject in your own organisation or another university.

Assume that you have found an idea which looks as if it might be applicable to your teaching.
• You get hold of the necessary materials and of accounts of the material in use.
• You go and see it in use, talking to lecturers and students who are using it.
• You evaluate it and work out what would be involved in using it in your course, what changes you would need to make to the material, the educational process and the schedule for the course. If necessary, you get approval from the programme leader and colleagues.
• You talk to the students about what you’re planning to do and why.
• You try it; see how it works; plan whether and how you’ll use it next time.
• You keep a learning diary throughout this process; and eventually you may write a paper on what you have done, for your colleagues in the department or for publication to a wider audience.

Development through committees and working groups

Committees aren’t always the most fun you can have at work, but they do provide development opportunities. Obviously you can develop your committee skills, and several of these skills are relevant to teaching, for example listening carefully, summarising ideas accurately and playing them back, building on other people’s ideas, and writing papers and reports that encapsulate the views of those present and take things forward in a constructive way.

But it’s not just the processes of committees and other working groups that can be developmental for you – so can the content.
• University committees dealing with computer and information technology can show you new ideas that you might use.
• University quality assurance committees reveal the work of colleagues, again a possible source of ideas.
• Working groups to develop new courses, new assessment methods and new approaches to learning resources can all be fine opportunities for your development.

Development through service, civic responsibility, professional work

The American notion of ‘service’ is perhaps unfamiliar in the UK, but undertaking voluntary work – for example, being the university’s representative on a school governing body or working with a local business development association – provides contacts, access to ideas, and a chance to develop new projects, and with them new skills and knowledge. And committees and working groups of your academic or professional society provide similar opportunities to work with and learn from colleagues across the country or the world.

Development through job shadowing and exchange

Teaching in higher education tends to be a rather secretive business, and watching someone else teach can be a revelation. Sitting with the course or programme leader for a couple of hours as he or she deals with letters and e-mails, telephone calls, agendas and minutes, papers and questions, and decisions, can tell you a great deal about the realities of course leadership. It can also give you an overview of the course and how it works which is
better than any number of briefing papers. Outside your own workplace, even a single day working with or exchanging roles with another professional in your field can yield new ideas, techniques, insights and examples.

Drawing up and reviewing your development plan

This section pulls together the outcomes of activities set earlier in this chapter to help you to compose a development plan. Here we describe a rational, step-by-step approach to planning. However, you should remember that creating a development plan is also about your personal and professional values; it involves making choices about how you will live your life.

Setting goals

Your development goals will come from a variety of sources: appraisal, the demands of next year, the next job you want to be able to apply for, and so on. If you have worked through this chapter, you will already have outlined your development goals as part of Activity 2.7, and reflected on the outcomes of appraisal (Activity 2.5) and your current CV (Activity 2.6).

These activities, together with your general reading and thinking, may have resulted in a ragbag of possible development goals that vary in terms of the timescale over which they can be achieved, their scale and the difficulty of achieving them, the size of the contribution they can make to your future performance, and how much they appeal to you. Before you can plan to achieve them, you must prioritise them.

Five or so development goals at a time are probably enough. So how do you decide which five? Ask yourself the following questions.

- If you did not meet a particular goal, would this lead to disaster? If so, that goal should be one of the five.
- Is one of the goals particularly attractive to you? If so, include it!
- Is at least one of your development goals about your long-term future aspirations, not just about surviving next year?
- Is at least one of the goals rapidly and readily attainable?

You are not abandoning the rest of the goals that you identified; you are just choosing five or so to work on first. As these are achieved, you can return to the rest of your list. But as you do so, check that those goals are still important to you.

Choosing methods

For each goal you identified, return to the list of development methods and make notes about the possible ways you could achieve the goal. Which method is likely to be most efficient? Which method will best fit into the rest of your life? Which method best suits the way you prefer to learn? Which method sounds most attractive?

Setting milestones and timeframes

For your larger development goals, it will usually help to define some milestones. For example, if the goal is to introduce self- and peer-assessment into your teaching, then the milestones might be:
• selecting from the literature several possible approaches – three months hence;
• finding a critical friend for the project – three months hence;
• discussing your ideas with colleagues, course leader and students, and identifying an approach to try – five months hence;
• getting the necessary approvals to introduce the change – eight months hence;
• developing the detailed materials and procedures – ten months hence (start of term).

Reviewing progress

However good your initial plan, it will be necessary to review your progress. One approach is to have a private quarterly review of progress towards each goal. Another is to look at the natural rhythm of each development strand and enter several review points in your diary. This may sound bureaucratic, but a ‘review’ can be as simple as a one-minute check on whether you are still on track. (Some people find that this kind of review is better done with a colleague.)

Clearly the more specific the goals, the easier it is to monitor progress towards them!

One reason for failing to make progress towards a goal may be that the goal has become irrelevant or less important in the light of changed circumstances. So, as well as reviewing progress towards a goal, review the goal itself.

If the goal you are failing to achieve is still important, you may need to change the development method you are using. For example, if you’ve read the books but aren’t finding ways to implement the ideas, go to a workshop on the subject, or find and join an online discussion group.

Example: one strand of a development plan

The table below may provide a model structure for your development plan. The first five rows of the table draw on material from Activity 2.7. Rows 6, 7 and 8 build on the account of development methods in this section.

You will see that this describes doing the job and developing your skills at the same time, and uses a combination of off-the-peg development opportunities (two workshops) and do-it-yourself activities (reading and talking to colleagues) in support of development through educational innovation (designing a new module).

A well-balanced development plan would combine strands of various types. There might be one strand concerned with a piece of educational development, another that responds to a development need identified in appraisal, another to solve a teaching or assessment problem you identified during the year, and another that begins to address your next role or job.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Topic/subject/area</th>
<th>Third-year module in subject X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Source of development need</td>
<td>Undertaking this task for the first time!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What do you want to be able to do?</td>
<td>Design and get approval to run module next year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4 | What skills, knowledge or experience will you need? | (a) Knowledge of course design and approvals procedures  
(b) Ideas and expertise in how to design a course |
| 5 | By when do you need to be able to do this? | (a) February  
(b) March |
| 6 | Development method(s) | Read QA Handbook, talk to Course Approvals Secretary in Registry.  
attend workshop on course design offered by Educational Development Unit.  
Talk to colleagues who designed new modules last year. |
| 7 | Milestones | Development and approval schedule confirmed by end February.  
Outline approved by Subject Area Board by end March.  
Course Handbook completed by end June. |
| 8 | Review notes | End Feb: Schedule completed – no problems!  
End March: Subject Area Board wants elements of peer assessment to reflect new university policy. Hunt for sources on this. Book place on external workshop in April.  
End June: Handbook complete – needs to go on web – more to learn! |

**Celebration**

Planning and reviewing progress are made more agreeable by the celebration of successes. Celebration can simply include talking with a critical friend or mentor about what you have done and what you have learned from it; it may extend to a departmental seminar or to a publication. Celebration provides closure, and encourages you to revisit your list of development goals and bring another item onto the active list, to keep your professional development alive.
Further reading


This collection of writings by practising academics in Australian universities contains some insights into how they see their work and development as teachers in higher education.


Most books on time and task management are aimed at managers who can delegate, rather than lecturers who have little power or support. While written in the language of corporations, this book starts from the perspective of someone who is not in charge.


Written by three lecturers and researchers from Warwick University in the UK, this handbook is designed for those entering traditional academic roles and for experienced academics wanting to develop or change direction in their careers. It contains general advice on writing CVs.


This is a lively and thoughtful approach to reflection in learning by two UK academics.


Stephen Covey outlines how to set personal goals and then break these down into tasks; an ‘international best-seller’ used by members of the course team who wrote these materials!


This is a very personal account of the use of reflection to improve and enhance teaching.


Johnson draws on his experience in Brunel and Kent universities in the UK in this 86-page practical guide. He covers basic self-organisation, setting priorities, decision making, action planning, writing, working with others, and maintaining motivation.

Reis, R.M. (1997) Tomorrow's Professor: preparing for academic careers in science and engineering, New York, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Following a general introduction to the world of science and engineering in American higher education, this 416-page volume covers preparing for an academic career, finding and getting the best possible academic position, and advice from experienced academics on the first years in the job.

Developed by an academic from Griffith University, Australia, much of this book is written in the form of letters or memoranda to hypothetical early-career academics. It covers managing your academic life, applying for jobs and promotions, teaching, publishing and PhD studies.
References


