

Teacher training Real Story

Teach First



Providing Teach First with a powerful facility for tracking and supporting participant progress

Allowing objective discussion, formative dialogue and rapid intervention

About Teach First

Teach First, one of the largest graduate recruiters in the UK, is a charity working for equality of education in England and Wales by developing great teachers to work in low-income areas and working with these schools to increase aspiration and attainment.

Its two-year programme involves the completion of a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) to provide participants, who are all university graduates, with Qualified Teacher Status based on a file of evidence of progress, achievement and reflection. The Teach First programme was developed with the UK's leading teacher training universities and is based on global best practice and research. It covers curriculum knowledge, education theory and practice and classroom management, and includes time in school working with pupils, teachers and members of the local community to develop an understanding of local context.

There are currently some 5,500 BlueSky users throughout the Teach First two year programme.

What were the challenges?

The success of the Teach First training depends on

participants making progress, which in turn relies on Teach First support roles being able to work collaboratively with participants to set objectives and monitor progress through a framework of standards.

Initially the charity operated a paper-based system for progress monitoring, but, given the large numbers of trainees and associated support staff, things had to change.

Helen Gooch, Curriculum Design Project Manager at Teach First and responsible for managing some of the charity's online platforms, including BlueSky, explains: "While some of our participants are career changers, the majority are fresh out of university, so it's also been key that we keep up with the times and offer tools and platforms that are online and easily accessible. It's how this generation of learners like and expect to work."

How is BlueSky helping?

Now all the evidence that the participants need to gather to gain qualified teacher status is hosted on BlueSky.

"One of the main reasons we chose BlueSky was the element of security it offers our participants," said Helen.

“Previously if our QTS participants lost their paperwork all evidence of their development towards QTS was gone, which was a big risk. Now with everything online, this information cannot be lost. We also enjoy better security around the information and reflections that participants share with their support roles, which can be accessed easily, quickly - and remotely which is essential.

“Organisationally, BlueSky is giving us high-quality information so that we know more about the participants at an individual level than we have done in the past. It is fascinating to see this complete picture of progress and identify strengths and areas for development within our programme curriculum.”

Participant’s relationships with school mentors and university tutors are key and BlueSky has provided a simple yet powerful mechanism for objective discussion and formative dialogue, as well as rapid intervention and support. Teachers and support staff, including those working in partner universities and schools, are able to access BlueSky at any time or place, allowing ongoing collaboration and support. This ensures that Teach First’s training and objectives framework and the Teaching Standards are embedded into everyday practice for both participants and those supporting them through their PGDE.

What is the impact?

“BlueSky is allowing us to work as a more forward-thinking organisation. Having moved aspects of our curriculum online, we needed to have accompanying programmes online too,” said Helen.

“Not every meeting can be in person, so it’s great that users can log in anywhere, anytime and have access to a wealth of data with summaries of progress across our framework of standards. The Teach First team can identify trends in terms of the objectives participants are focussing on and where they excel.

“Our Teach First support roles and university tutors have reported feeling more connected now.”

Cost savings look to be significant in the long run. “As a charity, resourcefulness is always at the forefront of

“Overall, BlueSky is a key tool that is helping us to make a real difference to the quality of our programme and ensuring our teachers are the best that they can be for their pupils”

Helen Gooch, Curriculum Design Project Manager at Teach First.

our minds”, said Helen. “We have invested our resources much more wisely in a system like BlueSky as opposed to a paper-based system.

“Overall, BlueSky is making a real difference by helping us ensure that our teachers are the best that they can be for their pupils.”

Mark Gibson, Teach First Participant Development Manager (Yorkshire & The Humber) says that from his perspective the biggest benefit of BlueSky is that PDLs and Tutors feel much more connected to the experience that the participant is having while they are not with them in school. “Journal entries indicating a participant is having a tough time prompt PDLs and Tutors to contact participants and offer additional support. Progress towards objectives can be seen remotely and prompts can be sent if participants are not engaging regularly. I have had a lot of positive feedback from tutors and the university on having this ‘access’ to participants day-to-day”.

What’s next?

“Because BlueSky is a portable career development portfolio participants have the option to continue with their account at the end of their training,” continued Helen Gooch.

“BlueSky will feature in our future thinking. For example we are exploring the potential of NQT mentors having BlueSky access to support our participants’ development in their second year on the programme.”

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