

foundation stage

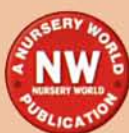
YOUR GUIDE TO DEVELOPING QUALITY PROVISION



PART TWELVE

PLANNING TO MOVE FORWARD

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PLANNING TO MOVE FORWARD

In any good setting, there will be a culture of reflective practice and a constant striving for improvement. Good teamwork and a shared understanding of best practice, along with a genuine commitment from management to achieving quality, are crucial factors in effecting positive change.

For a setting to move forward, staff roles should be seen as complementary, not conflicting, and the diverse strengths within a team celebrated. Managers should promote an ethos of mutual respect, support and co-operation between practitioners and should ensure that effective systems are in place for communicating information and sharing knowledge.

An audit of current staff skills and knowledge is a useful starting point from which to build a balanced team offering a range of expertise and to organise a programme of professional development to support this process.

It is important that management identify priorities for action within the setting. At any one time there may be several areas that need attention, but it is a mistake to attempt too many initiatives at once. Managers, in consultation with practitioners, need to decide what is urgent and how much is manageable. Setting unachievable targets, or overloading individuals, will inevitably lead to a frustrated

and disaffected staff team. Issues that are deemed to be less urgent can still be highlighted on a long-term development plan, but actions will be given a later start date.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Development is a process and can be viewed as an ongoing journey. For a setting to evolve and advance, managers need to plan this journey and identify landmarks en route.

Managers need to use development planning to provide a time scale for addressing such issues as improving the environment, honing the curriculum, establishing and supporting roles (for example, SENCO), staff development and organisation, undertaking a new initiative or piece of research or devising systems, policies and procedures.

Development plans may span several years, but managers should review them regularly to evaluate the progress in the light of any new requirements or other change in circumstances.

These plans are working documents – tools to support the process of change – so management and staff may decide to revise their schedule or take a different course of action in order to achieve their desired outcome.

The plans enable managers to maintain an overview of where the setting is at present and

of where it is going in terms of developments. They also provide a useful visual record of the 'whole picture' and a reference point when teams are looking at the implications of embarking on any additional developments or initiatives.

ACTION PLANS

Managers need to use action plans to clarify and set out in greater detail how they will realise their goals.

If, for example, the goal were 'to improve transitions between rooms and settings', the action plan will break the process down into stages, and the factors needed to achieve the change will be translated into a sequence of actions. The plan will also consider and record the implications of these actions.

Managers may also devise action plans to implement smaller changes that are not identified on the whole setting development plan but are still a part of the process of improvement.

For example, the practitioner responsible for evaluating and developing provision in the construction area would probably find a step-by-step action plan approach useful. Or, a room team looking at specific routines in terms of their appropriateness and effectiveness for children (for example, at snack time) may

CASE STUDY Oakfield Nursery School, Altrincham

Action and self-evaluation plans are the main tools used by management and staff at Oakfield Nursery School in Altrincham, Cheshire, to embrace and implement change.

'We're very open to change and have always been proactive rather than reactive,' says nursery owner Roisin Moriarty.

The nursery's comprehensive action plan, covering everything from staff to administration, premises to policies and procedures, outlines improvements that the nursery wishes to make over the coming year.

The self-evaluation plan, on the other hand, covers changes that need to be made in response to, for example, new guidelines, changes in regulations or an Ofsted inspection.

To help establish areas for improvement within the action plan, the nursery surveys both children and parents. The children's survey forms have faces with different expressions to indicate preferences, while

parents are invited, as part of their forms, to suggest how any aspect of the service deemed less than excellent might be improved.

Such advice is invaluable, believes Ms Moriarty. In response to one parent's comments, the nursery reformatted its planning information displayed for parents. This clarified aspects of learning for junior staff as well as parents.

The action plan is set out as a chart, subdivided into sections and detailing the timescale and each stage of a planned change. All members of staff are allocated responsibilities and parts to play in bringing the action points to fruition. Progress made and any amendments that need to be considered are discussed at the monthly staff meetings. 'Everyone must have some ownership of a project,' says Ms Moriarty.

One area in which the nursery was proactive was in its use of *Birth to Three Matters*. Rather than leave the document lying around until such time as it might

become mandatory, the nursery set about learning from the resource and acting upon its recommendations. 'It was a wonderful tool to work with,' says Ms Moriarty.

The nursery started by discussing the document, then implemented a programme of training, which was cascaded through the nursery, and introduced changes to practice. That process continues, with the children's development profiles currently under review.

'By the time training in Birth to Three became available, our staff already knew about the four components, and three years on, we received an "outstanding" for our under-threes provision in our Ofsted report,' says Ms Moriarty.

'It's important not to shy away from change but to see it as an opportunity for improvement. Being aware of possible changes on the horizon also enables you to keep one step ahead.'

'Every change we've made has always been an improvement, and you can always change the change.'



decide that action planning would enable them to do a more thorough review and help to keep them focused, as a team, on the task.

The extent to which children and parents are involved with changes will vary according to the nature of the development. However, it is always important to consult with concerned groups in an appropriate and genuine way when planning changes to services and provision.

Giving children 'a voice' in decision-making within their world will take many different forms. Observation is a powerful tool in the process of listening to children, as they will often communicate their views and preferences through actions rather than words.

Of course, promoting communication links with parents and carers should always be a top

priority for settings, and in high-quality provision it will be part of the fabric of everyday practice. However, managers may sometimes add forums so that parents give their collective and individual views on a particular issue.

Settings will need to address any weaknesses that have been identified in their Ofsted inspection. The team may have already recognised the problems, but they will still need to draw up a post-inspection action plan stating how management intends to tackle the weaknesses. The plan will probably include short-, medium- and long-term intentions with clear targets and tight timescales.

FORMATS

There are many different formats available to support practitioners in recording their plans.

SERIES GUIDE

- This 12-part series aims to support practitioners in achieving and maintaining high-quality provision in the Foundation Stage.
- The series is underpinned by the principles for early years education as identified in *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* and takes into account the national daycare standards and the 'outcomes' for children as set out in *Every Child Matters* and laid down in the Children Act 2004.
- Each part of the series will focus on a different aspect of practice, highlight key elements of good practice and offer a benchmark for self-evaluation.
- The series encourages practitioners to be reflective in their practice and to see the quest for quality as a developmental process.
- The elements of quality in early years practice are often interdependent and there will be points of cross-referencing between parts of the series.

Most will include the following elements and, as long as these pertinent issues are addressed, the organisation of the material is a matter of preference for the practitioner.

Objectives

Look at the area for development in terms of key objectives and define them as more specific goals on the route to realising the ultimate aim. Once clear objectives are set, practitioners can then agree the steps that should be taken to meet them.

Actions to be taken

- Discuss strategies and agree actions with all involved practitioners and draw up a programme of actions.
- Share the programme with any other associated adults and appropriate members of the management team (if they are not already involved).
- Make statements about tasks clear and specific and make actions practical.
- Organise actions in chronological order, where one action is dependent on the success of the previous one. However, in some

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instances, it may be that some actions can be undertaken simultaneously, probably by different practitioners.

Roles and responsibilities

- Make sure everyone identified in the written action plan is clear about their roles and responsibilities and that these are defined clearly.
- Where several people are involved, ensure each individual states their commitment to undertake their designated tasks and that this is clarified when drawing up the plan.
- Nominate a person to co-ordinate the process and a lead person for each action.
- Decide who will be responsible for monitoring progress and evaluating success. It may be that someone who is not directly involved in the action plan can monitor progress most objectively and effectively, for example, a manager.

Resources

When undertaking to improve quality in a particular area, it is likely that there will be some financial implications, although the extent of these will vary according to the nature of the development.

It is worth being as exact as possible when addressing the costings on the action plan, as failure to do so may result in unexpected

expenditure further down the line which could hinder success. Sometimes teams will need to invest in equipment or materials to achieve their objective and occasionally projects may include expensive building work.

It may be necessary to research suppliers to determine the most reasonable prices, but often the most valuable resource is time; time for teams to plan and evaluate effectively, time for practitioners to work on practical tasks and time for training individuals or groups to equip them with the skills and knowledge to implement their part of the action plan.

Teams may also need to consider cover needed for practitioners released from their usual role to attend planning meetings or work on their part of the project.

Where larger amounts of money are needed, it is a good idea to nominate one person to find out about funding sources and to take responsibility for applying for available funding or grants. This can be a time-consuming task and it is worth contacting development workers or colleagues in other settings who may be able to share useful information.

Timescale

- Agree a realistic timescale. Rigour and a commitment to excellence are marks of a high-quality setting, and enthusiastic practitioners may want to make improvements quickly, but

it is a mistake to set overly ambitious or unachievable time targets.

- Unrealistic targets will put undue pressure on individuals and may result in tasks being rushed or not done at all. There must be a balance between keeping momentum going, and making sure that actions are tackled thoroughly and conscientiously without impeding ongoing practice.
- Always set a start and a finish date, and allow time for reflection and evaluation in the schedules.

Monitoring and evaluating

All plans need to be monitored in order to ensure that actions have taken place within the agreed timescales.

- Agree how to monitor progress – for example, through meetings or through a key person.
- Agree how to evaluate progress and make sure

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10 steps to quality

- 1 Has the management team audited the skills and knowledge within the team and drawn up a plan, in consultation with practitioners, for the professional development of the team as a whole and as individuals?**
- 2 Has the team agreed priority areas for development?**
- 3 Have staff had training on the purposes and process of action planning?**
- 4 Is action planning an integral part of practice within the team?**
- 5 Have all key issues raised on the setting's last Ofsted inspection report been addressed effectively through action planning?**
- 6 How does the team involve children and parents in the process of developing the setting?**
- 7 In any area highlighted for development, do all involved practitioners understand and show commitment to their roles and responsibilities?**
- 8 Are proposed actions practical and achievable within agreed timescales?**
- 9 Have the financial implications of plans been fully explored and, where appropriate, have funding sources been investigated?**
- 10 How have actions taken affected quality for children?**

evaluations relate directly to the key area for development. Who will be responsible for evaluation? When will the evaluations take place? How will they be done? Who will report back on progress?

Criteria for success

- Where possible, set measurable success criteria.
- Link the criteria to the effects of actions – they shouldn't be merely a checklist for actions being carried out.
- In cases where a group of actions are planned to meet one objective, set criteria against which the success of the whole group can be measured.

Review date

- Set review dates at regular intervals along the actions 'time line'.
- Ensure that involved practitioners contribute an update on progress within their areas of responsibility.
- When the action plan has been fully implemented, report back to the whole team on the outcome, and outline the practice that will be necessary if staff are to maintain the quality of provision that has been achieved.

