Welcome to the PGCE Partnership Newsletter:

This end of year edition of our newsletter captures the voices and experiences of our 2016-17 trainees from across our different subject areas and training pathways. The theme of our newsletter is “Celebration”. Each trainee has chosen to write about a particular highlight of their Initial Teacher Training year, thereby giving readers a flavour of how our course is a personalised training experience, supporting and challenging trainees as they forge their own professional identities. This year has been another wonderful year for Initial Teacher Training at York and our thanks, as always go to colleagues in schools and other educational settings who have supported trainees on their professional journeys. Despite growing pressures of recruitment and retention in the teaching profession, it is fantastic to see so many dynamic new colleagues, fresh from the York stable, embarking on their careers as NQTs. We wish them good luck and good fortune!

A Challenging & Rewarding Year

I had never had a doubt in my mind that teaching was something I was meant to do.

Throughout my ITT year I have been well supported and given a variety of opportunities to grow as a teacher. This year has been both the most challenging, and yet most rewarding year of my academic life so far.

Teacher training requires a lot of dedication, commitment and resilience due to the nature of the teaching profession. However, the resources you create and the relationships you build with pupils make the job the most rewarding. After completing my ITT training I am so grateful to everyone (especially Paula and Helen) who have supported and encouraged me as it has made me a better teacher. The training sessions both at University and at the placement schools have been very useful in continuing our professional development.

Also, for the History teachers in York the networks that exist have been so welcoming for trainees and that has been an amazing opportunity to get to know other History teachers within the area and share ideas and resources.

I would recommend this course to anyone who is considering their teacher training as the mentors are fantastic and are always only an email away. Thank you again for all the support and encouragement!

Hannah Smith
History

Stronger Together

Before starting teacher training, I found that I was constantly being told what a difficult year I was entering into; those already in the profession were quick to share horror stories and advice.

However, I have had the most engaging and enjoyable year of my life, emerging as (I hope) an enthusiastic, capable young teacher. I put a large amount of this success down to time spent at Wetherspoons in York city centre, specifically table 32.

Let me be clear, I am not endorsing the use of alcohol to solve problems, although it proved useful at times, the point I am making is how crucial it is to keep a work life balance.

From the very start of the year, within the Science cohort, we organised weekly trips to the pub, where we would share stories, laugh at each other, and ourselves, releasing anxieties, worries and tensions. The alcohol had very little to do with it (from what I can remember).

These weekly pub trips were made each week regardless of planning, marking and assignment deadlines. Some weeks there would be 16 of us; sometimes there would be 4, but there would always be someone.

The friendships I have made through the PGCE are stronger than any I have made before. We knew that each Friday, we could meet as a group and get advice, laugh, cry but more importantly learn resilience.

Without even realizing it, as a group we have become the most resilient and positive group of people. If there was an issue or a problem, you could guarantee it wouldn’t be
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on your mind for longer than that week. By sharing and talking to each other, you would find a way to move past it all. You knew that however bad a week you were having, someone would find a way to make light of it. We could share embarrassing moments; laugh them off together; agree that teaching really isn't all that bad and reaffirm that trainees are allowed to have fun!

Resilience is much easier to understand when you don't have to learn it alone.

Anna Quick
Biology

Should I Join a Union?

In the very first week, as we sat in the darkened, deep seated lecture theatre awaiting another talk on what to expect from the course, we were greeted by a previously unknown man in a suit. An atmosphere of excitement and anticipation grew for what was to come - I assure you that it had nothing to do with bags full of goodies which arrived with him...

This was our first introduction to the teaching unions, a critical part of being a teacher, even for the most Conservative of trainees (if it's possible to be a Tory teacher). These unions provide legal support, advice and a range of protections for teaching staff, and the best thing about them is that no matter which union you join, it is free as an ITT student, so join them all!

Having signed up in the session and walked away with the plethora of pens and gifts, I thought no more of the unions for almost half the course. I then made a decision to get more involved, signing up to help the campaign against school cuts (www.schoolcuts.org.uk) and become a more active member of the NUT - soon to be the NEU.

The weekend began with some icebreakers, including dinner and a quiz (which we won by a large margin for UoY under a slightly cynical team name) followed by drinks at the bar and bed.

The following day there were opportunities to use the facilities, indulge in the lovely array of meals and attend many useful sessions ranging from “The Role of the Union” through to “Changing Assessment”. The day concluded with an excellent performance by Banner Theatre about the great Chicago teacher strike, dinner, and of course, drinks at the bar!

This course cost absolutely nothing, travel was refunded and we all gained wonderful insights into the conditions we can expect and demand in our NQT year.

To all future cohorts of trainees reading this, I would highly recommend checking your union emails and grasping every opportunity you get to attend such wonderful CPD opportunities!

Never More of the Same

Looking back over this year, I am particularly proud of my willingness to embrace the full range of opportunities provided by my placement schools.

Specifically, throughout my final weeks of second placement I taught my first subject of History alongside additional subjects of PSHE and Geography (both at GCSE level).

This was a daunting yet enjoyable experience. Visiting and learning brand new subject knowledge gave me a realistic view of what it would be like to be a Humanities teacher. Planning my own lessons for these subjects ensured that I could deliver them with a sense of confidence and that I was not simply “box ticking”. Topics covered in PSHE lessons meant that I needed to focus on activities as well as approach (accuracy and sensitivity) in a way that differs to sensitive topics within the History classroom.

Complacency was never an option. Although refining my History teaching was always my priority, introducing myself to different styles of teaching, determined by these other subjects and topics of discussion, meant that I was being challenged in a different way.

I believe that stepping out of my comfort zone was extremely beneficial to my practice – I am proud that I was able to embrace the extension phase in a way that did not mean teaching more of the same.

http://suebowe.com/tag/stepping-out-of-a-comfort-zone/

Steve Scott
Biology

Stacey Ridley
History
Being an Active Form Tutor as well as a Maths Teacher

Being a trainee teacher isn’t only about delivering high quality, differentiated lessons which ooze with AFL. From day one, you are seen as a fully-fledged member of staff by both pupils and other members of staff. Along with that status, you seem to pick up additional duties in your department and around school.

One of my favourite responsibilities has been my Year 7 form class, which I took over from week 2. As their form tutor I “hassled” them every morning about their uniform, attendance, planners and their equipment for the day. But on top of that we built such a strong relationship as a form. Our proudest moment was the Year 7 Human Rights Day poster completion - every pupil in the year designed posters to promote awareness for human rights’ issues across the world. My class took this task so maturely and seriously, someone was bound to win...

One aspect that I have made huge progress in this year is expanding my subject knowledge. Coming straight out of my History degree into teaching did prepare in some ways for the challenge I was about to take on, but not for the huge breadth of subject knowledge I would need.

I worked hard throughout the year to use Curriculum Area sessions, as well as resources from my placement schools, to help build up this subject knowledge. At first I was completely overwhelmed, however, bit by bit over the year I grew far more confident in my ability to learn as well as teach the subject content. I have even taken on the challenge of teaching some Geography next year!

This year has really rekindled a passion for History in me and has also allowed me to bring my enthusiasm to classroom. For me I am most proud of delivering a scheme of work on the Cuban Missile Crisis. Going into the course I knew very little about the Cold War, and at my second placement school I was required to plan, resource and deliver a sequence of eight lessons on the subject. I am proud of the lessons that I developed as they are engaging, as well as providing a strong foundation for the class’s future GCSE work on the Cold War.

Emma Bevan
History

Subject Knowledge – Minding the Gaps!

http://www.johndclare.net/cold_war16.htm

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The Inspiring Moments

Unquestionably the PGCE course is tough, and there are times when trainees are the staffroom’s latest cynics bemoaning their ill-conceived plan to make five differentiated card sorts. Yet for all its trials, there remained moments on the course which offset the tiring times: moments in which we felt we were having a tangible impact on students’ learning.

I experienced this sense of reward following a number of intervention sessions that I carried out with a Year 9 student. I had been asked to work with her as she had been disengaged in her studies throughout the year and was falling behind on the Of Mice and Men scheme of work. She was initially reticent, however by the end of the sessions I felt we had built up a friendly rapport and she opened up by sharing her lack of confidence in her own ability in the subject.

Following the sessions, she sat an end of unit test, and upon hearing the results of this test she came to find me to report that she had received her highest ever grade. Her smile was worth all those extra hours of work, as in that moment I knew her confidence was growing and with it one more door for her future was opening.

Sarah Reeves
English
Enriching my SEND Knowledge

I spent a week of my Professional Enrichment at a 9-18 school for children with various learning difficulties. I observed and assisted in Maths lessons where pupils were working at a range of levels, from below KS1 to GCSE level.

Prior to starting, I didn’t know what to expect in terms of the levels pupils were working at and how the school differed to the secondary schools I had been to for teaching placements. Some of the main differences I found included pupils being escorted to and from lessons, less responsibility on pupils regarding equipment, and pupils were given free time during almost every lesson I saw.

I loved that every term, the school has a day dedicated to different things; for example while I was there, it was a mock election day. Everyone learnt about different political parties and some of their policies. This was followed by a lesson on the suffragette movement. Then there were lessons about the things most important to us and the children got the chance to come up with some policies they would have if they were prime minister. Then they had the chance to vote in the same way we would at polling stations, followed by a results assembly. I thought it was fantastic that the children were given the opportunity to learn about these important issues that they will experience in later life.

I also experienced a ‘lockdown drill’ where pupils and staff practised what they would do in the event of an intruder in the school. We had to remain silently out of sight until we received the call to say ‘Mr Lockdown has left the building’.

I found the week at this school an eye opener and increased my awareness of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and how I would need to change my teaching to adapt to these needs. The children were amazing and it was an inspiring experience; I would recommend spending some Professional Enrichment time in a special needs school to future cohorts of PGCE York trainees.

Professional Enrichment: Can’t Read, Won’t Read!

During my 2nd teaching placement I had taught a couple of the new GCSE Physics Required Practicals and discovered that the Year 10 pupils were a little ‘reluctant’ to read and follow the Student Notes.

Additionally, following discussion with the lab technicians I realised that not only were the teaching staff and technicians unfamiliar with a number of these new Practicals, but also there were questions regarding possible equipment shortages at my school.

Desiring to do something truly meaningful during my Professional Enrichment, I had a cunning plan (a plan as cunning as a fox who’s just been appointed Professor of Cunning at Oxford University!): for my P.E. I would work through all 100 of the Physics Practicals and produce demonstration videos showing how to set up and carry out each of them.

Additionally, and most importantly of course the ‘reluctant readers’ who are Year

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At my first placement school, I volunteered to coach the Year 7 football squad. I was handed a referee’s whistle before I’d taught my first History lesson, with the words, "Now, you’re a proper teacher". And I soon felt like one!

Without me, Archie, Tom, Calum and the rest wouldn’t have had a weekly practice, had that opportunity to develop their budding friendships or crashed out of the York Schools’ 5-a-side tournament in the first round...

They appreciated it, too. From being the anonymous, new face around school, the "Morning, Mr. Hill"s and "Is the team sheet up yet, sir"s felt great.

http://www.shakespeareandhistory.com/harold-godwinson.php

And when the teaching did start, what a comfort it was to see half a dozen faces in the class you already knew - and what a buzz to be told your centre-half didn’t normally have his hand up and as for the idea of your star striker volunteering to play Harold Godwinson...

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10/11 can follow my video ‘shorts’ and successfully complete their Required Practicals without having to turn a page (well, almost).

Of course, as a teacher, I am not supportive of pupils circumventing reading and I do make contributions to whole school literacy, but as a teacher of Science I have to also be concerned with my pupils making good progress in my lessons so on this occasion I’m afraid I had to leave pupils’ reading development to the English Department (sorry colleagues).

The Biology and Chemistry trainees got on board with my Professional Enrichment idea so now the school has a full set of demonstration videos and we all had an enjoyable and very satisfying final two weeks, further developing and indulging ourselves in Science Subject Knowledge.

Neil Maddison
Physics

Celebrating Languages

One of the highlights of the PGCE course was our MFL visit to Selby High School for their annual Eurofest event.

Pupils prep for weeks and months leading up to the event to win prizes awarded based on their creativity, marketing and selling skills and of course, their linguistic ability.

With language uptake at A-Level in decline nationally it was uplifting to see pupils so excited to speak languages. Mistakes were made, cakes were eaten but most importantly pupils had fun with languages. As part of the event MFL trainees created activities to give pupils a taster of more unusual languages such as; Dutch, Irish, Italian, Polish, Russian, Swiss dialects and even Swahili.

The pupils loved looking around the University and couldn’t believe that you can sleep in the library.

We got asked all sorts of questions including, ‘Do you get detentions if you don’t do your homework?’ and ‘How do you afford to come here?’ Giving students a chance to ask these questions allowed them to see that anyone can go to University.

Although it might seem like choosing what to do after they leave school is miles away for year 7 and 8’s, it helps them to see what they could be working towards.

At the end of the day we asked the students to leave a message about the day and what they wrote was amazing:

“At first I wasn’t sure about coming to Uni but now I want to. I will have lots of choices which is better”

“I would love to come here because it can make your life easier in the future”.

Lisa Thompson
Modern Foreign Languages

Raising Aspirations

Bringing groups of Year 7 and 8 pupils onto a university campus might seem like a crazy idea but the impact it had was definitely something worth celebrating!

During the final weeks of the PGCE course we bought groups of vulnerable and disadvantaged secondary aged students to the University to show them that higher education was always an option for them.

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A Course for Celebrations!

The year is over and, my goodness, it's been a busy one! There may have been tears; there may have been stress; there may have been sleepless nights, but choosing one thing to write about to celebrate is almost impossible.

This year has been full of celebrations: little celebrations, like when one of your Year 7 pupils with dyslexia gets 10 out of 10 on his spelling test; or bigger celebrations, like when that Year 13 student you've been helping out gets 87% in their coursework; or personal celebrations, like when your mentor tells you you've delivered an "outstanding" lesson, especially when you've worked on it so hard.

This course has been one of the hardest things I've ever completed, but without a doubt the most rewarding. And the best thing about it all? The amazing tutors, mentors, colleagues and friends you make along the way.

Katy Risbridger
English

Teaching the Individual

As I write this I am sitting in 'Pip Stop Cafe' at Applefields School (the Secondary Special Needs school in York) exactly one week after completing my PGCE in MFL. A few weeks ago I was here on Professional Enrichment, which is a period of time towards the end of the course where trainees can choose an area that has interested them throughout the year, or an area in which they wish to gain more experience, and spend some focused time on that.

Before starting the PGCE, I worked as a TA and my passion for working with students with SEND only grew during the course. I know it is something I want to specialise in. In fact, my favourite class during the year (although we shouldn't have favourites, sshh!) was a small SEN Year 8 group. One of the joys of the course is that you can experiment with different ways of differentiating material and engaging students, for example we made paper-chains to learn about word order, and practised translation via Jenga, pass the parcel, and a semi-dangerous game which involved throwing balls into a basket on a pupil's head! I was, therefore, delighted to hear that I had been successful in securing a week at Applefields to widen my experience of working with students with SEND.

During my week there, I observed two different classes. One class had students with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, and the other was a Post 16 group. What struck me most was the positive and caring relationships between staff and students, and how teaching and assessment was heavily personalised, based on individual targets.

This is a model that is also used on the University of York PGCE course, where I felt that tutors and mentors get to know you personally and are able to encourage your passions and give you advice and support when you are struggling. Surely that's what every student needs to be successful, whether they are 6, 16, or 26, and whatever ability level?

Claire Morley
Modern Foreign Languages

The Value of Staged Reflection

This PGCE year has been a truly fantastic experience. After coming from a tough experience through my undergraduate degree, I felt welcomed and at home throughout all of this year. The maths Course Leader, Helen Granger, and the rest of the maths cohort made me feel part of a family, and with that a greater sense of purpose.

Although I have had to work extremely hard this year, I feel so rewarded by the fact that you can see the progress you are making right in front of your eyes; over time I went from being nervous about teaching one lesson to being nervous about teaching fourteen in a week.

This course has set me up perfectly for my first post and I feel ready to engage with all the challenges that come with being a modern teacher. I found that having the chance to go back to university at staged intervals throughout this course and discuss how things were going with fellow trainees was invaluable and I will be keeping some of those contacts for a very long time.

I couldn't recommend this course highly enough. Helen, the Maths Tutor, Jill Barnard, and Paula Mountford, the Course Director for ITT, were absolutely fantastic.

Sam Lindley
Mathematics
In my first placement at The Joseph Rowntree School, a Year 9 pupil approached the MFL department asking if anyone knew a Russian teacher, as he would like to learn that language. I quickly jumped at the chance; Russian is my strongest foreign language, but unfortunately there are far too few Russian teaching opportunities available.

So began the Russian club every Thursday lunchtime. It was attended by three very motivated Year 9 boys, usually the least enthusiastic demographic for language learning. The boys showed great interest in the language and culture, mastering the Cyrillic alphabet in a matter of days. By the end of the eight weeks they were able to read and understand short passages and we were able to have short conversations. Motivated by a desire to work in the now Russian-dominated aerospace industry, their enthusiasm was infectious. They inspired me and gave me hope for the future of language learning. Teaching MFL to Year 9s, especially to classes with a majority not carrying it on in KS4, can be very tough, mentally draining and, at times, disheartening, but the passion of these three boys helped keep my desire to teach languages alive and reminded me why I decided to get into teaching in the first place.

Matthew Beaumont
Modern Foreign Languages

There was much to celebrate during my PGCE year, both on an individual basis and as part of such a wonderful cohort. Teaching my first solo lesson and designing my own scheme of work seem now, looking back, small achievements, but (clichéd though this is) they formed important steps on my journey to becoming a teacher. One thing I have learnt during this year of hard work has been to celebrate the positives.

One day filled with positivity was the English cohort’s visit to Shandy Hall in Coxwold, where Laurence Sterne wrote the seminal novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.

We ended the day with Bucks Fizz and homemade brownies to toast our success at completing the PGCE and to celebrate the start of our careers. I very much hope that future cohorts have an opportunity to learn outside the classroom, as, like the York PGCE course itself, our visit to Shandy Hall was an experience to treasure.

Kate Barnard
English

My PGCE year was such a tough but rewarding year, and it all culminated in my Professional Enrichment placement at Danegate PRU in York.

Here, I was able to adapt all of the things that I had learnt in the different Curriculum Area and Whole School Issues sessions, and I was able to build on everything that I had developed during my two school placements.

Life outside of mainstream education is obviously different but I had to experience these differences for myself in order to really appreciate what a wonderful environment it can be, particularly in terms of the relationships that you can develop with the students.
Overall, I spent two weeks at Danesgate, but these weeks taught me more about students, and about working with students as the people and the young adults that they are, than the rest of my time in schools. I learnt so much that I can take into my job as a French teacher in September, and that I can use to develop, over the course of my career, into the teacher that students deserve.

Despite having finished both teaching placements and returned to university, it was such a rewarding and valuable experience to be able to continue applying everything that I had learnt, and to open my eyes to all that I still have to learn. As the final section of such a demanding but enjoyable year, it was a lot of fun, and a great opportunity to reflect on how far I have come since September!

Adam Victor
Modern Foreign Languages

Jam jars and IKEA bags

Visualise, if you will, me rushing from one classroom to another with an IKEA bag full of books hooked on one arm, a half-zipped laptop bag dangling from my shoulder – which was swinging annoyingly to and fro on my hip – with the highlighters and green pens I’d scooped up on my way out of my previous lesson gripped in my other hand. Just another day on my PGCE!

But I guess it wasn’t just any day – for me. It was my last lesson with my beautiful Y8s after four months of teaching them, learning with them, and building bonds with them.

It was a Thursday, in the middle of term, and we hadn’t reached the end of The Tempest scheme and they were only going to continue it with their host teacher after I had left BUT it was my final lesson with them which had me slightly emotional.

After dumping my equipment in the classroom and plugging my laptop in, I whisked out to meet them in their line. I ushered them into the classroom with lots of smiles and ‘How are you?’s but something felt a bit off from the start.

It was the final period of the day – which tended to turn the most angelic students into little werewolves on the best of days – and they were ready with only the slightest of whispers in the air. As I tried to get the register open, a student nervously popped her hand up.

She brought a big handmade card out of her bag and said, “Miss, we wanted to thank you for teaching us so we made you this.”

On it was pictures of Shakespeare, punctuation, and a jam jar which was a class joke. Inside every student had written a message to me. Some were sweet. Some were funny. All of them made me cry.

Cassie Hartley
English

http://www.hobbycraft.co.uk/baking/preserve-and-jam-making

It is safe to say that the next ten minutes of the lesson were hilarious to get through for all of us.

It was beautiful and the first time I’d felt like a real teacher.

The PGCE year has been the hardest of my life. It has also been the best year of my life.

In the last few months I have been constantly reminded why I chose this career. I have not only come away with what I feel is exceptional training, I feel like I have made a difference - even just in a training year. Being a good teacher is not just about walking into a classroom and telling 30 pairs of eyes that the sky is blue (of course, it primarily is). If teaching were just about telling people things and conveying information, It would be easy enough to train a set of graduates to teach, but what this course does is train good teachers.

I wouldn’t be where I am now if it weren’t for the wonderful support from the university tutors and school mentors and tutors. Even if you don’t need to draw on the support as much, you still know it’s there. No matter how badly a lesson goes (they can’t all be perfect... and won’t be) - there is always a smiling face ready to tell you that the world hasn’t ended.

There will be times during the year (spoilers) where you might think ‘Why do I have to do this?’
The short answer is; because it helps to properly prepare you for what is to come.

I realised this quite late into the year. But I suppose what I’m trying to convey is...

*don’t leave the paperwork until the week before it’s due to be handed in.*

Above all else though, enjoy the year!

Nathan Thompson
Chemistry

**One Memorable Moment of Many**

A particularly fulfilling and enjoyable experience of my PGCE year was running a debate with one of my year 9 classes. We were looking at an old and difficult text about ghost sightings, and a modern newspaper article about the existence of ghosts.

To bring these texts to life we did a debate ‘in-role,’ where half of the class played the part of a 20th century character who believed in ghosts and half of the class played a 21st century character who did not believe in ghosts.

Students worked in pairs with given characters (mainly taken from the text) and produced a speech to argue their case. I also took volunteers for judges who ultimately decided on the winner.

Students really enjoyed this activity and wrote some brilliantly imaginative, creative, and humorous speeches. The debate itself played out smoothly, and students were respectful when listening and giving feedback. The students enjoyed the chance to show off their hard-work, not to mention the chance to make relevant jokes where possible. The judges loved the authority of being able to choose the eventual victors, and the fun side of the task lent the classroom a calm and relaxed atmosphere.

Everyone worked sensibly throughout which gave me a chance to get involved with discussions and show a calmer and more humorous side to my teaching style. This was really important for me as it was still a new class, and really helped in future lessons.

Bruce Whitworth
English

**Unlocking Potential in EAL Pupils**

One of my personal highlights and most touching moments from the PGCE this year came from my enrichment placement, where I had the opportunity to work closely, one afternoon, with a young Syrian refugee boy.

I was tasked with working one-to-one with the boy and his translator, to give him some background vocabulary to help him understand *The Woman in Black* – a tall order indeed for someone with so little English.

Nevertheless, using pictures from Google, writing down key words and practising pronunciation, we were able to think about some common gothic principles, and my young pupil took great pleasure from finding the most spooky images he could find to match the vocabulary.

As we worked, he started to tell me things about his country – simple things such as the weather in Syria, for instance, as we looked for images to represent “fog”. Our conversations were stilted and only on a basic level, as he searched for the words to express what he wanted to say, yet I was touched by his happy demeanour and willingness to talk about his country.

We are bombarded with harrowing images every day of people, including children, fleeing from Syria after years of war. Yet this boy, under circumstances we can only guess at whilst he lacks the English to express it, managed to flee to the safety of the UK. Moreover, he seemed content with his life and more than happy to share his experiences.

Of course there are still barriers for him, as he starts his new life: barriers of language, culture and understanding. But, I thought, if I was able to help him, in just one afternoon, to begin to overcome some of these barriers, then what could we achieve in a year? And what could he go on to be and do in the future?

For this reason, I think we should celebrate more of our work with EAL pupils and focus less on the barriers and more of the rewards. After all, if we can help one pupil, such as this, unlock their potential, we will have made a difference as teachers and that, at the end of the day, is all that matters.

Emma Bowler
English
Navigating the Challenges of PGCE

Joining the PGCE course as a mature student of 35, and as someone who had lived abroad for a while I was worried I would be out of touch and the oldest on the course by a long way. It was reassuring to find on day one, that while there is a large proportion of new graduates, people taking the PGCE come from all age groups and all backgrounds.

Being older and joining the course as part of a career change, you are offered a lot of help and support of all kinds: financial, academic and wellbeing.

All you had to do was ask. While some sessions, such as how to be professional, were more geared towards new graduates these were very few and far between.

A particular challenge of mine was not being good at everything right away and so I was particularly happy that this was something my tutor covered with us half way through the course. When you embark upon a PGCE as a career changer, very likely you will have been good at your job and worked your way up the professional ladder, and here I was starting from the bottom again. Having come from an overseas teaching background this was even harder as I had been head of a department and I had trained teachers before, but this was all new, and I had a lot to learn.

Not only is the course physically exhausting, but mentally too. Being advised you are not good enough every day, even in the nicest, most constructive way, can start to bring you down, but knowing I wasn’t the only one who felt this way was reassuring, so I encourage trainees in future years reading this to talk to your course mates as everyone, yes, every single person, finds it tough, and if they say they don’t, they are not being truthful.

Now that I have completed the PGCE I can say that it is one of the most challenging and rewarding things to do. It was a bumpy ride, and there were times I wasn’t sure I would make it.

One of the most difficult times, was Block Two of Placement One. I was getting up in the dark, driving over an hour in the dark, spending time inside all day, leaving school in the dark and driving up to two hours home in the dark. At one point I forgot what daylight looked like! The teaching load was increasing; I was exhausted; I needed to work for at least a couple of hours each night, but all I wanted to do was sleep. However, the University of York tutors were always there to offer support.

Before we left for that second block we were encouraged to record a motivational video leaving a message for our future selves, and send it to our tutor who would send it back to us at a time we may need it. She also reminded us that this part of the placement was just four weeks and we would come out the other side. Of course we did!

One strategy I developed which helped was to look at the year’s plan of the course and break it up into more manageable chunks: 4 weeks on Block 2, half term, 6 weeks on Placement 2 (which was just the refreshment I needed), then Easter, and if you make it to Easter, it’s in the bag!

While you are on placement, I felt like I was in a bit of a bubble. You imagine everyone else getting on fine and begin to believe you are the only one finding it tough. Having talked to my fellow course mates since then, almost everyone had a rough patch, particularly when more separate from the cohort, and thought about quitting at least once. As I said earlier, it really helps to keep communicating with fellow trainees and remembering that your university tutor is only a phone call or email away.

Finishing the PGCE is the most rewarding thing I have ever done. I have learned so much and can’t wait to put it all into practice.

Hazel Le Grande
Mathematics
Thank you to colleagues in schools across and beyond our Partnership for your contributions to another wonderful year of Initial Teacher Training at York; our Grand Tradition continues. Thank you to trainees for your enthusiasm, creativity, professionalism, resilience, good humour and work ethic.

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