Quality Assurance Department

What kind of Planning by the Teacher and Learning Support Assistant will the External Review be looking for?

1. What kind of planning is expected from the teachers by the External Reviewers?

The external review team will be looking for evidence of effective “lesson planning”. This planning can take various forms depending on the school context, teachers’ personality and experience.

Normally teachers develop exhaustive lesson plans when they are mastering new content, new books, syllabi etc, not only at the beginning of their career but also when they change years, subjects, duties, schools, texts. As experience grows, teachers usually resort to shorter planning to orient their work according to the particular class characteristics.

Some schemes of work reserve enough space to allow teachers to include four or five lines that refer to the relevant content, the learning activity to be used, and how to adapt the activity for a particular child or group of learners in the classroom. Other teachers prefer to have a compact Scheme of Work and have their planning somewhere else – indeed class planners for teachers commonly exist that are based on this idea.

In the final analysis the planning of the lesson is only the minor aspect of the teacher’s work – the actual teaching and learning are more important. But there cannot be consistently effective teaching without some kind of planning.

2. I am an experienced teacher and I feel that I do not need written down planning notes. Do External Reviewers expect to see written down planning notes?

The formalization of short planning notes is considered important since:
- Writing imposes a sequence, which itself helps clarifies intentions;
- Written notes can be referred to, especially in keeping the record of work;
- Written notes can be re-examined and adapted at the end of the year;
- The reviewer, who will only be seeing the teacher once or twice during the external review process, needs to have a quick understanding of the teacher’s intentions and the relation of this to what is actually being observed. The written notes are indispensable for this understanding.
3. Does the teacher have to stick rigidly to his/her planning notes during the lesson?

The ability to be flexible and adapt previous planning to the day-to-day occurrences and learning opportunities in the classroom is the hallmark of an effective teacher. Lesson planning should not be too restrictive to stiffen immediacy and should not serve as a straight jacket impeding effective learning.

At the same time the maintaining of an accurate and updated record of work is considered to be critical. Effective record of work allows the teacher to make the necessary changes from the planned lesson; the teacher then records what actually happened and adapts future planning accordingly. Reliance on soft copies of Schemes of Work or one planned in pencil is also considered acceptable, since one expects that some changes need to be made as the term progresses. The Scheme of Work, planning notes and the record of work are to be considered as a tool to achieve effective learning and teaching.

It is important to note that the Quality Assurance Department [QAD]’s aim in publishing these parameters is to help teachers, Learning Support Assistant [LSA]s and Supply Learning Support Assistant [SLSA]s in the schools internal review and in preparation for the external review, and should be considered as minimum requirements. But these are not meant in any way to overrule instructions by the school authorities over and above these guidelines. Instructions in this sense issued by the school authorities remain binding.

4. How can I indicate adaptations I made to plan for differentiation and inclusion?

Experience has shown that the major issue with teachers’ planning is not the level of detail, but the extent to which they are planning for differentiation and inclusion particularly when a statemented child is present. Consequently no exhaustive explicit planning is expected, but there needs to be some indication, that some differentiation/inclusion or learner-centeredness in the activity and/or in the assessment has been taken into account and planned for. It is also critical that the lesson focuses on the learning of the child rather than the teaching of the teacher and the planning should reflect this concept. The QAD recognises that the reform towards differentiated and learner-centred teaching is still in its infancy and the external review will help schools by giving advice and helping it focus in this direction.

5. Will teachers be provided with a template of Schemes of Work or Lesson Plans?

The QAD strongly believes in teachers' professionalism, and autonomy of their work. It recognises that teachers face a myriad of “realities” and that a top down approach to documentation will not be effective. Consequently the QAD will not give out templates of Schemes of Work or lesson plans as it believes that standardization runs counter to the current reforms in education. Teachers are faced with unique situations and should be free to come up with their own solutions to ensure effective learning in their own particular context. The QAD is interested in seeing teaching that is alive, interactive, motivating and leading to learning.
6. I am a class teacher and I work in collaboration with LSA/LSAs in the classroom. What is expected from us?

A key component of the external review is the observation of teaching and learning. All stakeholders in the classroom will be observed, including LSAs.

In the case of a class with an LSA, we would expect to see evidence of joint planning between the LSA and the teacher. As before, the planning could be part and parcel of the short planning notes mentioned previously.

Although the class teacher has full responsibility for ensuring differentiated teaching in the classroom, the LSA is expected to do the necessary adaptations for statemented learners who need more individual adaptations. Such adaptations are to be done under the guidance of the teacher.

During the external review, the reviewers will need to look at the LSA’s Preparation File or equivalent. In the case of State and Church schools this file needs to have:

- Record of observations done prior to formulation of IEP;
- Student’s Profile (including Individualised Educational Programme [IEP] and Making Action Plans sessions [MAPs]);
- Teacher’s scheme of work and forecasts;
- LSA’s daily schedules (These should indicate the LSA’s planning in advance and in full consultation with the teacher. The daily schedule should reflect the teacher’s Scheme of Work [SoW].
- Any adapted handouts (all adapted handouts are to be endorsed by the teacher);
- Communication Book or comparable communication mode;
- Other relevant documentation (e.g. reports, self evaluations etc.).

In the case of Independent schools LSAs are strongly encouraged to follow this model or an equivalent one that allows for effective planning and recording.

The QAD would like to point out that this may not be an exhaustive list and all LSAs and SLSAs need to follow instructions as given from time to time by their officials and school authorities.

7. From where can I get further information on what happens before, during and after an external review?

The external review is intended primarily to support schools in their internal review process. For more information please visit the document entitled 'Parameters of the external review' available at http://www.education.gov.mt/edu/qad/Parameters_External_Review.pdf.

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