

Time for Learning Plans

The traditional Scheme of Work grid is perhaps well past its sell-by-date for 21st Century learning. Consider instead a Learning Plan to promote independent learning and to underpin the introduction of Flipped or Blended learning as wished.

A Learning Plan is very easy to create and supports all learners across the ability spectrum with clear guidance on what they should know and understand topic by topic. Note that the Learning Plan is a replacement for the Scheme of Work.

Step One: Create a Year Planner

Create on one side of A4 paper a bright, attractive title page for your subject like the example for Human Biology provided as a download. Select an eye-catching photograph or diagram that reflects the curriculum.

Step Two: Create a Calendar page

Create a calendar page on one side of A4 as illustrated in the download example. This is a simple table displaying each week of the academic year and against each week enter the key topic that you intend to teach. If a topic takes two, three weeks or more to teach then repeat the topic heading as many times as required down the page. When you are finished the learners can see at a single glance the balance of the curriculum and the relative importance of each topic i.e. one week for a particular topic but three weeks for another topic etc. They can also see at one glance all of their holiday dates. In the right hand column enter events to look forward to e.g. visiting speakers, trips, parents' nights, assessment dates, concerts, drama events, sports events, quizzes, fundraising events, key faith events like Diwali, Eid, Christmas ,(reflect the cultural backgrounds of your learners although this is also important within monocultures to raise awareness levels.) Black history month, Remembrance Day, Children in Need, Holocaust Memorial day, International Women's day etc. If you can't identify many events to enter down the right-hand column then think again. What is there for your learners to look forward to and what do you do across your course / department to promote wider citizenship, equality and diversity and social cohesion?

Once complete print the title page and the calendar page back to back on stiff A4 paper to create your Year Planner and issue to all learners on the induction course

as their guide to the year ahead. Or present it term by term so as not to overwhelm and to reflect the difficulties of trying to plan for a whole year ahead.

Step Three: Create individual Learning Plans

For each key topic listed on the calendar page you are going to create a Learning Plan and number them Learning Plan 1, Learning Plan 2 etc. The Learning Plan is two sides of A4 printed back to back as presented in the example for download.

Learning Plan title page.

Place your school or college title across the top of the page along with any logos followed by the title of the Learning Plan. On the immediate top left list the number of lessons linked to this topic and enter the individual lesson titles. For greater precision, if wished, you could enter the lesson dates and times. Under this enter a single overarching aim into the 'Big Picture' box. On the right-hand side paste in a bright photograph or diagram to reflect the theme of the topic just to make it more visually appealing. You could also include a QR code, if wished, to go straight to a relevant You Tube video or website. Next, on the lower half of the page, list a series of key questions for the learners to answer. The questions should reflect Bloom's Taxonomy and the more recent Solo model from Biggs and Collis to ensure movement from lower order to higher order questions with an encouragement for all to answer as many as possible. If your course has Pass, Merit and Distinction criteria or Grades E to A try to reflect those levels in your questions so that the differentiation is explicit. All can be encouraged and supported to stretch to answer the higher level answers.

Use to trial Flipped Learning

If you wish to trial Flipped Learning then the Learning Plan is an ideal starting point to help prepare your curriculum and to test the approach before building resources online. In this situation subdivide your list of questions into 'Advance questions' and 'Classroom questions'. The 'Advance questions' should all be lower order questions which involve the learners in basic research and information gathering around what, where and how type questions. The learners' task is to gather-in the basic factual information that underpins the topic so that valuable classtime is not taken up with the transmission of basic factual information. The 'Classroom questions' should largely be higher order questions and evaluative and analytical in approach to test understanding of the advance reading and research. This is best accomplished through regular mixed ability paired and group tasks and learner presentations. If you are not experimenting with Flipped Learning then simply use the key questions to structure your lesson planning and lesson content to explore and deliver the answers during the lesson moving from lower order to higher order responses. Encourage your learners to use the questions as a checklist for their understanding and to self-assess their own progress.

Step Four: Create the Learning Plan resources page.

Listed down the right-hand side of the second page are four types of resources to support learning, classroom, library, online and challenge. Populate these boxes with the relevant resources to support the topic. The classroom is straightforward in terms of the resources you are planning to use within the lessons. Take time to identify resources held by the library in terms of useful books, DVDs, and periodicals. It is important to encourage the learners to use the library outside of lessons and the library staff will probably be happy to assist with this and to source resources to support the topic if none exist. The online box is obvious. List 3-5 key websites that are useful for this topic. You are filtering the web for the learners and directing them to good academic sources of information. Don't forget Apps and ensure you search the Apps store for any useful Apps to recommend to anyone who has a smartphone or a tablet computer. Finally, stretch and challenge is important and so use the final 'challenge box' to set an extended learning or challenge task for the more able or more motivated to have a go at. A small prize might be in order and/or at least recognition on the 'challenge winners' noticeboard in your classroom. Recognition is often a more powerful motivator than prizes.

On the left-hand side is a catch-all column to raise the awareness of your learners to wider considerations i.e. opportunities to practice and develop functional and employability skills linked to this topic. Relevant equality and diversity considerations. Also, as appropriate, highlighting the links between practical workshops / lab lessons and theory lessons so that the learners appreciate theory and application and in vocational programmes the 'line of sight' to the employers' skill requirements. Beyond that consider references to the exam or assessment requirements for this topic and/ or typical exam questions to assist the learners to reflect on their standard of work.

Print the Learning Plan pages back to back on stiff paper and issue to your learners as you approach each topic. This is perhaps better than issuing the whole year up front to avoid overwhelming the learners. Although you might consider issuing a term ahead to facilitate and promote independent learning.

Finally

Please experiment and try out a Learning Plan and judge the reactions of your learners. Does it help them to learn? Hopefully all will gain. The weaker learners will gain clear guidance on what to learn and will appreciate the minimum course standards they have to address. The more able learners can move beyond the minimum standards and test themselves against higher order questions and engage with a series of open-ended challenge tasks. Please adapt or adopt the downloads as you wish but do tweet [Collegebrad](#) or link with me on [Linked-in](#) and let me know how you get on.