

Creating supportive environments for NQTs

Self-assessment tool

Foster-Collins & Pearson 2021

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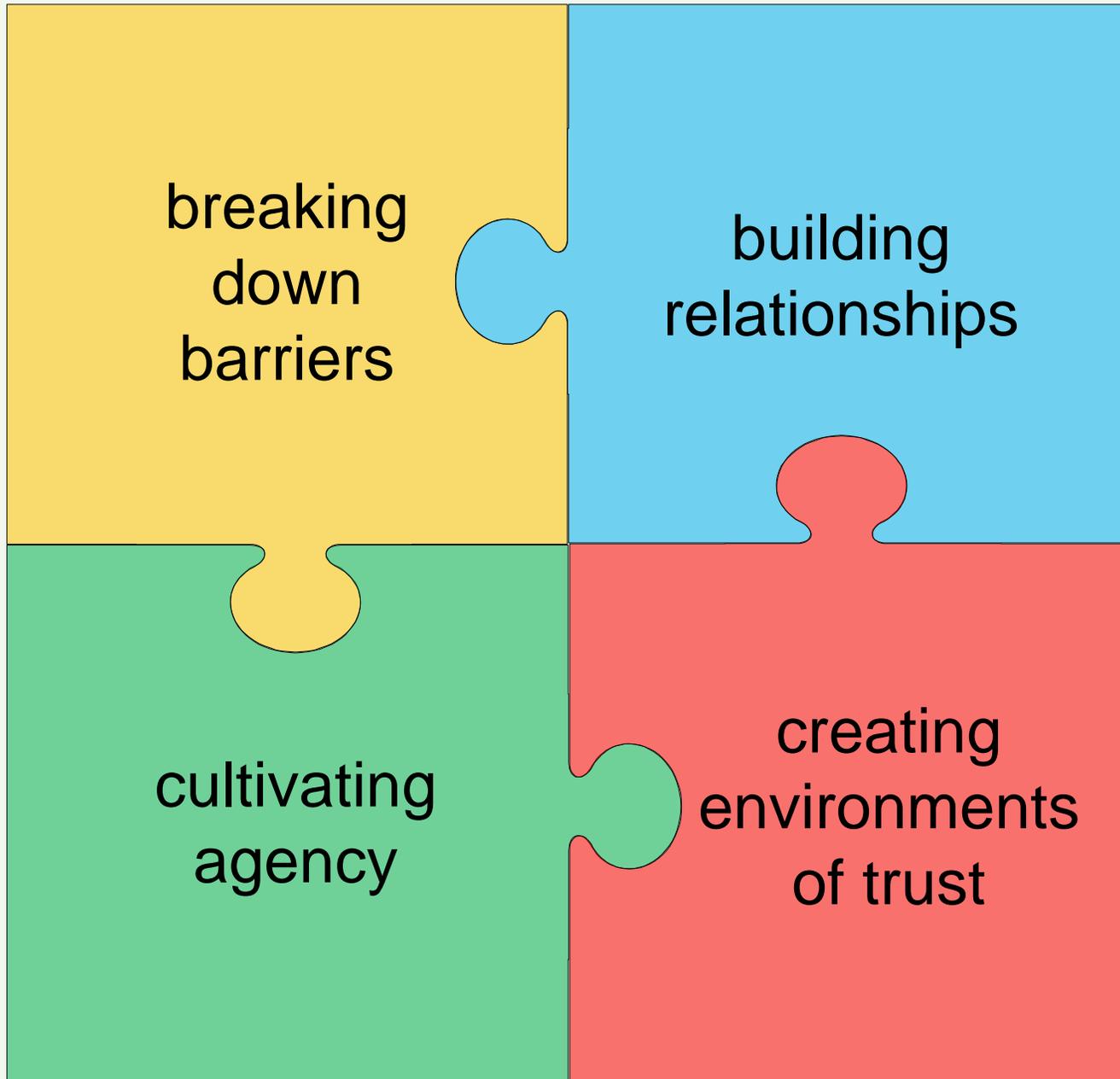


Overview

- This tool has been based on research into new professionals' experiences of the transition between formal training and starting new professional roles, and informed by conversations with teachers in secondary schools in England:
 - new teachers, reflecting on their first year of practice and
 - long-serving teachers, considering what has supported them to sustain their careers.
- It is designed to be used, not just as a checklist, but to
 - generate conversations about the supportivity of your particular school environment
 - produce small practical actions which might help improve this.
- The researchers welcome any feedback on the use of this tool and any proposed changes or additions to it. It will be made available as a free-to-use open access document.

How to use this tool

- It has been noted that when implementing changes to improve school cultures, ‘whole-school’ approaches can be effective, as they can draw upon a diversity of perspectives and knowledge.
- Therefore, this tool might be used to support discussions with small groups of staff who are representative of all the occupational groups working across your school: teachers and school leaders from different departments, at all levels of seniority (including NQTs), learning and behaviour support staff, administrators, catering and playground staff, parent representatives and so on.



The areas for discussion which follow have been broken down into four main areas, but it is acknowledged that small changes in one area inevitably influences other areas, as school cultures and the factors which support new teachers all interrelate.

Not every proposed solution listed in the following tables will be suitable for every school, but might be seen as a starting point from which to generate solutions for your specific workplace context.



breaking
down
barriers

Our findings

Questions to ask

**Actions
resulting (for
your school)**

In our research, NQTs mentioned receiving support from a wide variety of staff

(e.g. senior & middle leaders, peers, admin staff and exam officers, behavioural support teams, lunch assistants, teaching assistants (TAs and HTLAs), keyworkers & pastoral staff, SENCos and SEN teams, student and study support staff, exam officers, mentors & coaches.)

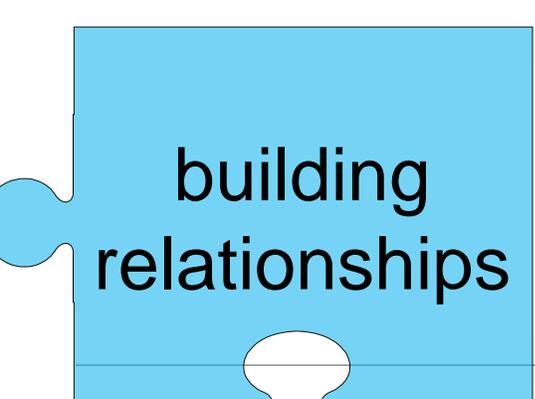
- Who might you identify in your school as potentially able to provide valuable support for new teachers?
- What different skills and types of support could they provide?

Members of Senior Leaderships Teams and Heads of Department / Faculties can play a vital role in influencing local 'cultures of support'; across the school and at the level of departments, through communicating realistic expectations which reflect the non-linear learning journeys NQTs may take.

- How might school leaders 'model' vulnerability? (e.g. talking about how they have learned professionally from past mistakes)
- What are realistic expectations for new teachers, and what might be done to reduce workload? (e.g. sharing previously existing teaching resources)

Initial teacher training programmes (ITT) do not always contain extensive information on SEN topics or the staff who can provide support and knowledge on such issues.

- Could your in-service teacher training include information on SEN topics, delivered by SENCos and allied professionals from outside of school?
- Do inductions include introductions to allied support and behaviour staff so NQTs know who they are and what they can provide?



building relationships

Our findings

Forming networks with other new teachers, both within and beyond their workplace, can be very valuable for NQTs - to gain inspiration and fresh ideas for their teaching practice, and social and emotional support through sharing experiences. This may be particularly important in small or otherwise educationally isolated schools.

Encouraging informal contact between members of staff on both a departmental and whole-school level can encourage future collaboration and support within schools for NQTs. This might be between teachers from different departments and also staff from different occupational groups.

Peers and near-peers (NQTs, NQT+1s and 2s) are a potentially valuable resource, due to their ability to relate to other new teachers' experiences and 'on-the-ground' practical knowledge which may be useful at this stage of their profession.

Questions to ask

- Do NQTs have the opportunity and time to visit teachers in other departments or schools, to observe teaching?
- Are there conferences and/or training programmes NQTs could attend together, to support the development of informal professional networks?
- Does your school provide shared social and training events?
- Are there any shared social spaces such as staff rooms or offices where staff can meet each other? Which staff can access those spaces?
- Are recently trained staff included in NQT inductions?
- Could you run regular 'new teacher' meetings, to network and discuss issues?
- Are informal peer observations and feedback between NQTs encouraged?

Actions resulting (for your school)



cultivating agency

Our findings

Allowing NQTs to take the lead on small projects and activities can allow them to make contributions to their team and school, elicit positive feedback from others, and enhance feelings of belonging.

Informal networks of support can help sustain new teachers through otherwise difficult times.

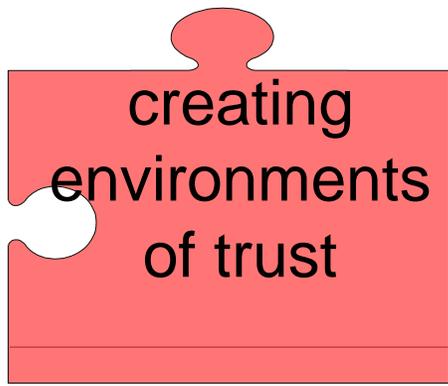
New teachers may benefit from knowing how past NQTs navigated their first years successfully, including how to develop these wider networks of support both in and out of school. They may also benefit from the knowledge of more experienced teachers.

Questions to ask

- Are there any small projects or activities which NQTs might take the lead on, with appropriate scaffolding and support from others? (e.g. fundraising activities, school trips)

- What professional and informal networks are available to NQTs in your school? (These might include peers and experienced teachers, support and admin staff, professional organisations and unions, face-to-face and online communities of practice, such as those available through social media).
- When and where could existing teachers share their own knowledge of these local networks, and 'tips' for managing the teaching role, based on their own experiences? (e.g. managing time and workload, knowing when the 'pinch points' of the school year are).

Actions resulting (for your school)

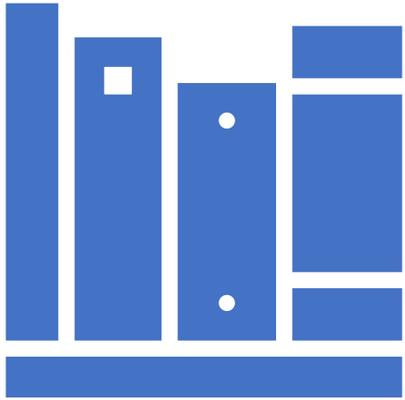


Our findings	Questions to ask	Actions resulting (for your school)
<p>NQTs value having observation and feedback which is separate from assessment of their progress against NQT standards, as this promotes open discussions of ‘what went well’ and ‘what could be improved’, so they can learn from these experiences. For instance, some schools allocate ‘coaches’ who carry out a different role from line managers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who mentors NQTs in your school and is their role separate from assessment?	
<p>Mentors need to be staff who are empathetic and supportive, whilst also being experienced enough to be able to support NQTs with their teaching and skills (including behaviour management).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are mentors chosen?• What steps are taken to ensure they have the teaching and interpersonal skills to best support NQTs?	
<p>To ensure that mentoring is successful, protected time needs to be built in to mentor roles, acknowledgement made of it’s importance, and feedback gained at regular intervals from both parties on what works well and what doesn’t.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do mentors have sufficient time to carry out their roles and do they feel valued for this?• Who supports the mentors? (e.g. to develop their own skills and to support self-reflection)	

Next steps

Once you have identified small actions which can be taken to increase the supportivity of your school, it may be helpful to:

- Allocate each action to a named person/small group of staff who will take responsibility for implementing this change.
- Set a date to 'check-in' with this person/group, to identify any practical barriers preventing implementation and reflect on the degree to which this has been a helpful change.



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