

Preparing for a new academic year

THE ESSENTIAL CHECKLIST

As the new term gets underway, it is well worth making yourself a few “new academic year resolutions” in order to get off to a good start. The following tips will help you prepare to face any challenges feeling calm and confident:



Be prepared for timetable changes

Until learners actually arrive in college, there is always a degree of uncertainty over when, where and even which classes will take place. Try to respond calmly and flexibly to last minute changes, or when you arrive at a room to find it is already occupied. Remember it always takes a few weeks to sort things out. Befriend support staff and administrators as they can often hold the key, quite literally, to resolving any clashes.



Plan for some emergency activities

Your main responsibility is to make sure learners are made to feel welcome and are settled in to college as quickly as possible. In line with this, gather a range of ice-breakers, games and activities which you can use with any group at short notice. Induction sessions can feel very long and dull for many learners, so don't be afraid to set them work in the first session. This will help to give them (and you!) a sense of achievement.



Set simple ground rules

Enrolment forms often include some form of learner agreement, but this is normally in small print and won't necessarily have grabbed learners' attention. Many teachers negotiate “class contracts” with learners, but it's also worth having a few simple, non-negotiable rules of your own, such as punctuality, readiness to learn and respect for all. Think about ways to reward learners for conforming to these. This can prove far more effective than sanctions. Ask yourself if your goals are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. If not, you should think about decluttering your workload. If it isn't necessary, or contributing to your research portfolio, think about offloading some duties; perhaps a colleague would be interesting in taking them on?



Look after yourself

This is all too easy to overlook in the first few weeks of term until a routine has become established. Block out time in your calendar for the time you need to eat, drink, meet a colleague for a chat, relax, exercise or just take a short walk outside. Whatever strategies you use to maintain your wellbeing are essential at this busy time of the year.



Plan your professional development

Inspire yourself by exploring forthcoming courses, revisiting resources and ideas gleaned from previous staff development days and liaising with innovative colleagues in order to challenge yourself. New groups of learners are ideal for testing out that new electronic resource or questioning technique, as well as experimenting with more flexible groupings or pairings, before they get settled into their own routines. than they need to.