

# THE PERFECT LESSON

further  
education

links directly to the Common Inspection  
Framework (CIF) 2012 criteria for  
further education and skills providers

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Jackie Rossa Edited by Jackie Beere

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For Geoff, who made everything possible,  
and Nanny, for always believing.

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# Introduction

The further education and skills sector has considerably less status and fewer resources than schools and universities (Nash et al. 2008), and was memorably described as the ‘neglected “middle child”’ of the British education system by Sir Andrew Foster (2005: 48). As such, the demands placed on teachers working in this sector are huge, complex and constantly changing.

In recent years, we have seen the introduction of the new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework for Further Education and Skills, study programmes, traineeships, changes to funding, the reform of vocational training and the raising of the participation age, to name but a few. All of this has happened in a climate of economic instability where jobs are hard to get and increasing numbers of young people are classed as NEETs (not in employment, education or training). In addition, the speed of technological, global, social and economic advancement means that the only thing we can be certain of is that things *will* change, and that, first and foremost, we need to equip our learners to thrive in such a world. Learners who now need to stay in education and training until they are 18!

## The Perfect Further Education Lesson

The need for great teaching has never been more challenging or more essential. Teaching and learning are central to the 2012 Common Inspection Framework, and rightly so. It is only teachers who can ensure that learners achieve and succeed, and, if teaching and learning are working well, then everything else (including success rates) will fall into place. This book is designed to go some way towards helping teachers maintain their focus on what really matters, so that they can continue to make that important difference to the lives of so many learners.

Note: This book does not cover the full range of contexts, such as on-the-job training, one-to-one reviews and tutorials. This does not mean that they are not important; it simply means that I could not do them justice here.

The term 'teacher' is used to describe all teaching roles (e.g. trainers, assessors, tutors) and the terms 'learner' and 'student' are used interchangeably.

I have seen every single one of the teaching and learning ideas in this book used to great effect by teachers, trainers and assessors, but that does not necessarily mean that they will work for you. So, take the ones you like and make them your own by changing, mixing, matching or layering - whatever it takes.

Above all, have fun and enjoy your teaching.

## Chapter 1

# Planning a Brilliant FE Lesson

Brilliant learning rarely happens by accident. It is usually the result of careful planning based on a thorough understanding of your learners. Lesson planning should be an exciting, creative and enjoyable process which ensures that you are well prepared, organised and confident. Good planning also means your learners develop the knowledge and skills that will effectively equip them for life and work.

Before you plan your lesson, however, you need to know exactly what it is that makes learning outstanding in your setting. What are the magic ingredients that will make your lesson brilliant for your learners (and, incidentally, outstanding in the eyes of an observer)? In the same way that you would not expect your learners to successfully complete a task or assignment without knowing what success looks like, you need to know exactly what an outstanding lesson looks like.

The most significant feature of outstanding learning is the progress that learners make. Some of the other essential

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ingredients that will make your FE lesson outstanding include:

- Learners developing their skills and understanding exceptionally well.
- Demonstrating consistently high expectations for all learners.
- Generating high levels of enthusiasm for participation in and commitment to learning.
- Actively involving and engaging learners in a wide range of activities.
- Fostering resilient, confident and independent learners.
- Learners developing the critical skills needed to achieve qualifications.
- Demonstrating excellent subject and/or industry experience and using this to motivate and engage learners.
- Using assessment as an integral part of the learning process.
- Challenging all learners to exceed their expectations.
- Closely matching support and intervention to individual needs.
- Differentiating tasks and activities for various groups of learners.
- Using collaborative peer learning and assessment.
- Utilising technology to contribute to learner progress and success.



- Making strong links between learning and the world of work.

Teaching outstanding lessons is not easy and every teacher will do it slightly differently. However, the only way you can make sure that you are able to demonstrate the features listed above is to constantly experiment and practice, to take risks and do things differently. To achieve consistently great learning, you need to regularly adapt and tweak your practice. This means that you will probably make mistakes and things will go wrong. But that is the joy of learning, and learning from your mistakes and your achievements will help you to improve.

This may feel difficult at first but, over time, you and your learners will develop the habits of outstanding learning. This means that when the inspector does arrive, they will just see you doing what you usually do – teaching a highly effective lesson.

One factor to bear in mind: planning a brilliant lesson does not mean writing a long, detailed lesson plan. Lesson plans are useful in that they set out what you want your learners to learn and how you intend to achieve this. You need to set clear objectives and assess whether these have been achieved, but keep it smart and simple. Remember also that the lesson needs to deliver progress for all – and that takes planning. As all teachers know, very few lesson plans survive the reality of the learners, so you should regard your plan as a flexible framework for learning, rather than something to be slavishly followed. When it comes to observations, inspectors are

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looking for well-planned lessons rather than extensive lesson plans – they will make judgements on what they observe rather than what they read.

The rest of this chapter will give you information on how to effectively plan your outstanding lesson, and the remaining chapters will provide you with more detail to explore when you need it.

It is essential to bear in mind that there is no set formula for any lesson or learning. The only thing that really matters is the learning that is taking place and the progress each individual learner is making.

### Planning for success

So where do you start when planning your lesson? Many teachers say that they begin with the curriculum content that needs to be covered and the requirements of the awarding body. Whilst this is important, it is all too easy for teachers to get bogged down in it, leading to what Ofsted describes as:

‘Lessons [that] do not focus sufficiently on developing learners’ skills for employment.’

Ofsted (2012b): 7

## Chapter 1

Our learners need to develop the skills and knowledge that will enable them to be successful in their future jobs and lives, in addition to those they need to pass the course. Ofsted identifies the broader skills necessary for learner success and career progression as:

‘Communication, teamwork, leadership, taking responsibility, reflective thinking, problem solving, independent enquiry and employability.’

Ofsted (2014): 45

The best lessons develop these important skills as well as subject knowledge. Planning your brilliant lessons will become much more straightforward when you focus on what your learners need to do to learn, rather than what you need to do to teach.

### Case study

Paul is teaching his group how to prepare a door for painting. Before he starts the lesson, he asks them to identify what a good paint job looks like. He uses the feedback to establish the success criteria for the lesson. Learners are then asked to identify what skills they need to use to successfully paint their door. Paul then asks them which of the skills and processes they feel confident

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in and where they might need additional help. He uses this as his basis for pairing learners and providing additional demonstrations. At the end of the lesson, the learners review their progress against the success criteria for the finished door and the skills that they have used and developed during the lesson.

It is also important to develop learners' core skills in maths and English:

'Good and outstanding teaching makes the best use of opportunities to create confidence in and correct use of, both English and mathematics, recognising that these core skills are essential to employers.'

Ofsted (2012b): 28

Although this may seem challenging in an already jam-packed curriculum, you should take every possible opportunity to practise, reinforce and develop your learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Using and applying maths and English in a vocational context improves the quality of that learning, making it more relevant and meaningful.

### Case study

Lawrie is teaching his class about disease immunity. He gives learners a text on the subject. Each pair skims the text to get an overview and then scans it to identify important information. They then share their findings with another pair and work together to summarise and create questions to ask about the topic. At the end of the activity, they discuss and evaluate not only what they have learned about disease immunity, but also the effectiveness of the strategies that they used to extract information from text.

### Top tip

- Include literacy and/or numeracy opportunities in your planning every lesson.

## Planning to develop great learning habits

Good learning habits are important employability and life skills that become habits simply because they are used so frequently that they become second nature. This means that great learning becomes a routine part of your lessons and learners are able to demonstrate these skills without thinking, and talk about their learning in ways that show you have

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been a very effective teacher, enabling you to consistently demonstrate outstanding learning.

Great learning habits include:

- Arriving on time, being organised and expecting to start work straight away.
- Treating each other and staff with consideration and respect.
- Working hard and expecting tasks to be difficult and challenging.
- Taking responsibility for their own and each others' learning.
- Working independently.
- Seeking feedback on their work.
- Asking good questions.
- Making mistakes and learning from these.
- Evaluating and improving the quality of their work.

‘Good and outstanding teaching ... results in young people who not only know the value of being on time, meeting deadlines and managing their career, but also who can deliver the quality of work that employers expect. For young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, these skills can be an escape route from deprivation, and, in some cases, crime and anti-social behaviour.’

Ofsted (2012b): 28

# THE PERFECT *further education* LESSON

removes the mystery surrounding outstanding learning and enables you to make the great escape, by setting you free to do what really matters for your learners. It identifies key factors that make learning outstanding and provides practical advice and strategies to help you to achieve this.

*“A new and fresh one-stop set of recipes including ideas from a variety of sectors and providers, so whether in construction or arts, in care or maths, foundation learning or horticulture, teachers can relate to them easily.”*

Dr Barbara Van der Eecken, Associate Director for Quality,  
Birmingham Metropolitan College

*“If you need some inspiration to support your teaching and learning practice, use this book.”*

Deborah McVey, Education Consultant, Inspector,  
Trainer and Head of Improve, Protocol

*“Jackie Rossa has brilliantly crafted a book that succinctly and eloquently addresses the perennial question of what constitutes a grade one lesson and includes a wide range of practical examples drawn from the breadth of the FE curriculum.”*

Elaine Martin, Director of Quality and Performance,  
Vision West Nottinghamshire College

*“Jackie Rossa writes with a sound understanding of the challenges and opportunities that staff work with on a daily basis in the FE sector.”*

Jane Lord, Learning and Quality Manager, Blackpool and The Fylde College

*“A great and very refreshing book, written in plain English with workable strategies to tackle issues that teachers find difficult.”*

Karen Green, Director of Quality Improvement, Chesterfield College

**Jackie Rossa** has worked as a teacher, an educator and a manager within the learning and skills sector and now works as an educational consultant and additional inspector. She has conducted research into transforming learning and has worked with many providers to successfully implement initiatives designed to advance excellence in teaching and learning.

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