

The RED System: Transforming teaching

Research into Education, and Development

Lesson observation reinvented

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Overall premise

The whole of pedagogy can be précised in just two words: 'stuff' and 'difference' – the *stuff* we plan and do and the *difference* this makes to learning. Outstanding learning is only ever an evaluation of the *difference* we make. This means we can be creative with the *stuff* we do.

Tony Davis, Director CCQI

Why design an observation system that doesn't work?

- Every system has an impact. Do you know the impact your system is having? Is it the one you want?

This fundamental question can have a profound effect on education and training providers. What is the impact you want from your observation system? Is it delivering?

For many education leaders, the rhetoric is that they want their observation system to demonstrably improve learning outcomes. Leaders like to feel that this is driven by the moral imperative to do the very best they can for their learners, but the reality is often quite different. More often than not, the real motivator behind the design of a lesson observation system has its roots firmly in Ofsted's older inspection frameworks and their requirement that providers should have 'robust performance management' (Ofsted, 2015). It should be noted, however, that in 2019, this changed to: 'The extent to which leaders consider the workload and well-being of their staff, while also developing and strengthening the quality of the workforce'.

In most instances, the old framework phrase ('robust performance management') lead leaders to design an *accountability* system, but to call it (and even believe it to be) a *learning* system. The only test of whether a system is about **either** accountability **or** learning, however, is to thoroughly understand the views of those being observed. If teachers believe it to be an accountability system, then it matters not what the architects think; and it is impossible for a system to be truly both.

We welcome Ofsted's change, as it now so clearly states that inspectors are not testing out whether or not a provider's system is robust, only that it is effective. In other words, you can have the most 'robust performance system' imaginable, but if it doesn't lead to sustained and sustainable improvements in the teaching and learning, then it will quite rightly be judged a weakness.

A second motivator for designing an accountability system, is the burden of proof – to yourselves, governors and Ofsted – that improvements are being made. The misconception here is that a lesson observation grade is a piece of reliable and useful data with which to evaluate the system. It isn't. Here's one of many simple tests:

- if a profile of lesson observation grades goes down, does this prove that the impact of teaching on learning has gone down?

Here's another:

- does an observation grade, often based on no more than 30 minute of a lesson, once a year, give a clear indication of the impact a teaching is having on learning?

Or:

- are observers grading pedagogy (the *stuff* teachers do) or *difference made* to learning? If the former, then every grade is meaningless.

But real as this argument is, it effectively deflects us from the main issue with accountability-based observation systems – that they produce an 'us' and 'them'. Whether graded or not, if the system results in some teachers having to do something, or having something done to them as a result of an observation, then it's really a pass/fail accountability system and there's a strong chance that those who 'have something done to them' will simply go into denial.

For instance, if a teacher is given a grade lower than they expected (whether that be grade 4, 3 or 2 in the Ofsted grading system), they may well go into denial. Typical responses from a teacher that illustrate this are:

- "What do they know about teaching my subject?"
- "They only stayed for the first half an hour, so they missed all of the impact on learning."
- "They said I didn't cover equality and diversity. We did that just before they came in."
- "The buses were all running late, so my lesson didn't start on time or as I'd planned."

And many, many more. The key issue with this, of course, is that these teachers are potentially the very ones the system aims, and needs, to improve; the very ones who, because of the system, won't.

So what should a lesson observation system look like if it is to achieve what leaders, governors and Ofsted all want? That's the challenge *The RED System* is designed to meet.

The intended impact of The RED System

- To inspire teachers to invest in the development of their pedagogy, so that all learners achieve aspirational outcomes.

As a result of the RED system, teachers will:

- define and easily identify positive, negative, missing and/or unintended impact on learning
- set out the outstanding level of impact they intend to have on learners; in individual lessons, between lessons, and throughout their scheme of work
- plan lessons covering all aspects of the 'rubric for an outstanding lesson plan' in a format that allows them to be creative in designing outstanding learning experiences
- ensure all learners exceed expectations by differentiating the support needed to enable all learners to achieve high grades rather than differentiating, and so lowering, expectations

- be education researchers, exploring and experimenting with a range of teaching strategies
- judge the success of their experiments by evaluating the actual learning impact against the intended.
- use supportive observations to help them reflect on how to improve the impact of their teaching strategies
- be proactive in observing others to develop their reflective and coaching skills.

As a result of these impacts on teachers, every learner should:

- find all learning experiences unmissable
- progress from their individual starting points (A) to appropriately individual and challenging end points (B) in every lesson
- become expert/independent learners
- be inspired to study and explore their subject between sessions
- be curious and engaged throughout every learning experience
- be part of a sustainable, high-performing social community
- treat 'mistakes' as a valuable learning experiences
- create strong visual, audio and physical anchors to sustain their learning and aid recall
- become effective reflective practitioners
- look forward to their on-going challenges.

Part of the RED preparation process is for providers' staff to produce a full list of impacts on learning in their Quality Standard for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA).

Components of the RED system

- Preparation:
 - Establishing the need for change – Training for teachers and observers
 - Quality Standard for TLA
- Phase 1: Creative Learning Teams
 - The Creative Learning Team day
 - The follow-on research lesson
 - The RED LISD
- Phase 2: Focused learning projects
- Phase 3: Celebration of new teaching strategies and learning impact
- The RED System review

As every element of The RED System is about reflective practice, it is important that learning impact (positive, negative, missing and/or unintended) is recorded and fully evaluated by the teacher, assisted, where necessary by others. These reflections also act as base-line assessments from which teachers measure the success of any new initiatives, and managers evaluate the effectiveness of this learning-based observation system. Individual RED Development Plans are also built throughout the research phase to help with reflection and to identify, as a team, the most effective strategies for improvement.

It is recommended that The RED System should initially be piloted for one year. Any extension beyond the experimentation year should depend on its success in engaging all staff positively, and on the improvements it makes to teaching, learning and assessment. It is, of course, hoped that it becomes an invaluable and permanent part of the quality cycle.

The RED System process

Preparation

Establishing the need for change – Training for teachers and observers

Teachers and observers receive training on The RED System, enabling them to:

- identify positive, negative, missing and/or unintended impact on learning – in their own work and in others'
- understand aspirational differentiation, and use this to inform and develop curriculum design
- use their understanding of outstanding learning impact to design unmissable learning experiences.

Teachers and observers consider the benefits and implications of moving from an accountability observation system to a gradeless, though data-rich system centred on learning. In The RED System, teachers become researchers into teaching and assessment strategies; looking for those approaches that produce the biggest impacts on learning.

The Quality Standard for Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Using an efficient, structured process, all staff contribute to the development of a Quality Standard for Teaching, Learning & Assessment (TLA). This standard sets out the aspirational impacts all staff want to have on learning – the 'difference' they want to make. Crucially, the standard does not include any details about how the impacts will be achieved – the 'stuff' they will do. The importance of this distinction cannot be overstated as it focuses all parties, including the quality system as a whole, on the evaluation of impact. This, then, frees staff to think creatively about how they wish to teach, in full knowledge that they are working towards the aspirational statements of impact. In turn, this produces both ownership and the culture of risk-taking needed to move pedagogy practices forward.

In practice, a representative group of staff is drawn from across the provider, with significant representation from front-line teachers and assessors. In a typical college, this could be 25 to 30 staff. In a small private training provider it may be the majority of staff. This writing group develops the first draft of the Quality Standard. This first draft is edited into one voice and sent back to the members of the group to discuss with their colleagues. This ensures all staff then have the opportunity to reflect on and improve the draft impact statements. Results of this consultation are then used to produce draft 2.

This aspirational standard then becomes the direction of travel for the whole organisation, and also the vocabulary with which to discuss TLA – a must when talking to inspectors.

Phase 1: Creative Learning Teams

The Creative Learning Team Day

Groups of four teachers spend a day watching each other teach, supported by a trained observer/coach (the Creative Learning Team (CLT) Leader. Each member of the CLT completes a [Lesson reflection form \(E5\)](#)¹ for each lesson observed. Following each observation, the observee reflects independently on the impact they had on learning, while the CLT Leader coaches the three teacher-observers to discuss the impact on learning they perceived. The three teacher-observers are then joined by the observee to fully understand and evaluate the lesson's impact on learning. This is supported, as appropriate, by the CLT Leader.

It is important that all parties understand that this is a 'no feedback' system. While all observers make their own judgements about the level of impact their peers have had on learning, this is for two purposes only. Firstly, it is to present scenarios the teacher may not have seen so that they can make a judgement of impact, or to ask questions to promote discussion. Secondly, it is so that observers can use the experience of observing to make judgements about their own practice and its impact on learning. The only 'public' evaluation of impact on learning is by the teacher.

At the end of the CLT day, all teachers complete the Creative Learning Teams section of [The RED System: Teacher's research notes \(T1\)](#). This is used to identify at least two elements of their own practice from which they would like more impact and two examples of their colleagues' impact they would like to steal. These intended impacts form the base-line data from which any improvements are measured.

The RED LISD

Following a CLT day, the CLT Leader completes the [Data Collection Form \(L7\)](#), identifying the areas of impact teachers have identified, the positive impact they would like to steal from colleagues, and any cameos of good practice that should be shared. Where possible, these cameos of good practice should be added to the provider's *RED LISD*. This *Learning Issues & Solutions Database (LISD)* is a collection of:

- the common issues teachers would most like to resolve, and
- cameos of good practice that might be used to resolve them.

The aim of the *RED LISD* is to give teachers an easy and efficient starting point for the research phase of this system. While the intention is to support staff with the design of their research lesson, it should become a go-to resource throughout the year for anyone wishing to resolve a learning challenge and make all lives easier.

¹ See appendix for full list of resources

The follow-on research lesson

As a result of the CLT, teachers should now be clear about any new or additional impact they want to have on their learners. The follow-on task is to search for the most effective, new and/or innovative teaching strategies needed to achieve this change. Examples might include identifying the strategies needed to:

- make learners so curious, they are driven to invest time between lessons to explore the subject for themselves
- proactively develop learners' use of vocational terminology and evaluative language to help them form coherent, evidence-based opinions
- build the social infrastructure of their groups so that peer working and learning can work effectively both in and in-between lessons as a tool for study and assessment.
- etc.

Whatever the challenge, this search for new ideas is the heart of The RED System. It culminates in the production of a plan for a research lesson centred on, or incorporating, the new ideas that have been explored. Ideally, the lesson plan will be in the teacher's preferred lesson-plan format. The [Draft rubric for outstanding lesson planning](#) resource (T6.1) – might prove useful for teams to debate the ideal content of a plan that produces unmissable learning.

Lesson plan review

The lesson plan review is the opportunity to gain further insight and clarity of expectations by explaining the new ideas and their intended impact to a third party. Teachers can choose whomever they wish to complete this review, though there are benefits if this conversation is with the observer who will ultimately be the resource to help evaluate the session's effectiveness. These benefits include: the opportunity for the *observer* to collect good practice to facilitate conversations between peers where there are similarities or crossovers between experiments; and for the promotion of good ideas to the whole organisation through *The RED LISD*.

Observation request

Following the lesson plan review (ideally no more than a few days), the teacher asks their observer to support them by watching the session. As before, at the end of the observation, the teacher evaluates the impact the lesson had on learning using the [Lesson reflection form](#) (E5). The observer's role is simply to be an audience for the review and to present scenarios for consideration and/or to ask questions. The observer also completes a [Lesson reflection form](#) (E5) which is also used to help capture the teacher's own evaluation of impact during the evaluative conversation. The teacher's LRF and/or annotated session plan contributes to their on-going Action Research Evidence base*, and valuable learning is collected in the [CLT Leader review notes](#) (L1) for sharing with the whole team. There may, again, be contributions to *The RED LISD* at this stage. The teacher's evaluation is captured and entered into the data system, so providing essential information on improvements.

* *There is no specified format for this evidence base.*

Phase 2: Focused learning projects

As the research progresses through the year, curriculum teams negotiate areas of development they would like to work on as a team. These may be in response to changes in external accountability systems, such as:

- embedding English, maths and/or equality and diversity, or
- the effectiveness of study programmes.

Or they may be about specific elements of pedagogy, such as:

- lesson openings, to fully engage all learners
- lesson endings, to promote curiosity and learning between lessons
- the development of expert-learner skills
- the use of ILT to facilitate independent learning, or
- the use of learner-centred formative assessment strategies.

The curriculum leader, or an appropriate member of the team, uses a combination of learning walks and discussions to collect strategies and impact evidence on the agreed theme, recording these on a [Lesson reflection form](#) (E5). The reviewer then produces a short report that forms the basis of a quality circle aimed at agreeing strategies for improving the element under consideration. Individual and/or team [Development ideas](#) forms (T1.2) may need to be completed to capture the research and quality improvement journey. The only aim of this work is to support the team in overcoming challenges that are costing everyone time and energy.

Phase 3: Celebration of new teaching strategies and learning impact

This is a cross-provider event to share the results of teachers' research and experimentation. This good practice should be captured by the RED Team Leader and CLT leaders and shared widely. As before, this may include further contributions to *The RED LISD*.

The RED System review and its data outputs

Once all teachers in the curriculum area have completed the research and development phases, the system is fully evaluated. An appropriate week is identified to carry out a full programme of observations. These observations again centre on an evaluative conversation about the impact of the lesson on learning, taking note of any developments identified by the teacher in phase 1. This provides a third set of data. As before, the teacher is the primary reviewer of learning impact, assisted if needed by the observer.

These observations are also used to evaluate the extent to which the system has helped to improve the overall impact of teaching and assessment strategies on learning. Teachers and observers jointly complete a [Summary evaluation form](#) (L1.1).

When all observations have been carried out, the RED Team Leader completes the overall evaluation of the system, which includes both qualitative and quantitative data.

- Which of the issues identified at the start of the project have now been resolved?
- What percentage of the issues identified at the start of the project have now been resolved?
- Which strategies were most effective in helping to improve learning impact?
- What, and how many, new elements of innovative practice have been generated by The RED System research?
- What good practice should now be shared across the whole provision?
- How will this good practice be shared, if not using *The RED LISD* approach?
- Is the good practice making a difference to others?
- Is the evidence of impact of the system sufficient to recommend continuing with the approach?

The data generated from these types of questions not only enables leaders and managers to evaluate the extent to which the system has improved learning experiences, but also assures both governors and any external inspectorate of the organisation's capacity for improvement.

Examples of data generated by The RED System

Teacher-level report		
Research phase	Evaluation phase	
Summary of impacts to be addressed Identified at the beginning of the research phase	Issue resolved/ new impact achieved?	New innovations
Learners should be able to solve problems and/or develop their understanding for themselves, and so be more independent. I'm too quick to give developmental feedback.	Y	
My less-confident learners aren't practising and refining their ability to vocalise their ideas sufficiently. I need to reflect on my Q&A techniques to ensure everyone processes the answers to important questions, not just the most vocal.	Y	
I want to really capture my learners' imagination and/or rev them up for learning at the start of the session to ensure I engage them fully.	Y	
Over-contributing learners have a tendency to dominate plenaries, so causing a drop in learning momentum for others. I need to develop strategies that harness their enthusiasm, but don't steal opportunities for contributions from others.	N	
Number of issues resolved	3/4 (75%)	
New innovations*		
Excellent use of wikis to ensure all learners hand their written work in on time.		1
Excellent use of curiosity at the end of lessons to promote personal study between lessons.		1
Number of new elements of practice		2

Provider-level report: Resolution of issues			
Research phase		RED System evaluation phase	
Summary of issues identified at the beginning of the research phase	No. of lessons in which issue present/total lessons observed x / z (%)	No. of lessons in which issue still present/total lessons observed y / z (%)	Percentage change $x - y / z$ (%)
The coaching of learners to solve problems for themselves and/or develop their understanding. Teacher is too quick to give developmental feedback.	105/120 (87.5%)	30/120 (25%)	+ 62.5% improvement
The effectiveness of lesson openings to really capture learners' imagination and/or rev them up for learning.	100/120 (83%)	20/120 (17%)	+ 67% improvement
Improving the contributions from less-confident learners so that they can practise and refine their ability to vocalise their ideas.	90/120 (75%)	5/120 (4%)	+ 71% improvement
To avoid drops in learning momentum due to insufficient strategies to deal with over-contributing learners.	110/120 (92%)	90/120 (75%)	+17% improvement
Overall evaluation	<i>Total x</i>	<i>Total y</i>	$(y / x) - 1 \times 100$
	405	145	64% reduction of issues

Provider-level report: New innovations		
a	New elements of practice	No. of lessons in which this was observed/total lessons observed x / z (%)
1	Excellent use of wikis to ensure all learners hand their written work in on time.	10/120 (8%)
2	Excellent use of smart phone apps to prepare learners effectively for GCSE numeracy.	15/120 (12.5%)
3	Excellent use of curiosity at the end of lessons to promote personal study between lessons.	30/120 (25%)
Overall evaluation		$(Total\ x / total\ a) / z \times 100$ $(55 / 3) / 120 \times 100$
3	New areas of practice observed in	15% of lessons

Overall evaluation of The RED System

- Example overall evaluation of Teaching, learning and assessment:

Good

- Example overall evaluation of management of improvement of teaching, learning and assessment:

Outstanding

- Significant improvement in the quality of learning experiences with 64% of teaching, learning and assessment issues now resolved.
- Good level of impact of new teaching, learning and assessment strategies with new innovative and impactful strategies observed in 15% of lessons.

Main area for development (example)

- The number of teachers benefiting from the positive outcomes of their peers' research lessons

Actions for improvement (example)

- Increase the celebration of effective practice.
- Survey teachers about the issues they'd most value being resolved.
- Ensure *The RED LISD* is rich in solution-focused case studies and used regularly.

The link to capability procedures

This is one of the most important sections of this document. Many providers underestimate the subtleties of the link between a poor observation outcome and the capability procedure. In graded systems, several grade 4s may be an obvious trigger, but what might it be in a system that does not use grades? Providers that have removed grades want their process to be seen as a learning rather than accountability system, but it is only the trigger for capability that really achieves this aim. For instance, if you 'support your staff with coaching and mentoring if they have more issues than positives' then this is likely to be seen as a grade 3 or 4 by the teacher, a slippery slope to capability, and a disincentive to engage in an objective evaluative conversation. Any part of the system that produces an 'us' and 'them' will be interpreted as a 'pass' or 'fail', so making it about accountability.

To maintain the 'learning' ethos, then, consider the impact of following capability trigger:

All teachers should wholeheartedly embrace the objective evaluation of the impact of their teaching and assessment strategies on learning. An unwillingness or inability to do so is the trigger for the capability procedure.

Lessons can and do go wrong. This is only a problem if nothing is learned from the experience.

Indicative timescale

	Provider role	CCQI role	CCQI days
Preparation: The need for change: training for teachers and observers			
Baseline assessment – Staff survey	Set up and run survey with all staff	Supply questions	0.25
	Collate and send responses to CCQI	Analyse responses for use in training	
Transformational lesson observation session	Decide on audience and organise date	Deliver training session	1
The writing of the <i>Quality Standard for TLA</i>	Recruit a representative group of teachers (e.g. ~ 25 teachers in a GFE)	Run the QS writing workshop Edit the draft QS Run second workshop if required.	Up to 2.5
Phase 1: Creative Learning Teams (CLT)			
CCQI to take observers through the CLT process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce process to four teacher/observers Run the CLT day <i>A provider may wish CCQI to train all observers directly, or to train a core group of CLT Leaders who then cascade the training to their CLT groups. Only one report is needed to illustrate the process, however, a report can be produced for each tranche of observers if required. (For instance, if two CLT days are run concurrently, one report could cover all eight observers. If there is a gap of more than a week between CLTs, separate reports would be preferred to avoid losing momentum.)</i>	Decide on audience and organise the CLT day/s Observers' participation in the CLT day/s	Deliver session	1 (Or as required)
	Write short report		0.5 (Or as required)
Further CLT days, facilitated by either provider staff or CCQI.	1 day per group of four teachers.	1 day per group of four teachers.	(1)
Planning the research lesson			
Teachers research individually, and as part of a team, into strategies that will increase the impact of their work on learning. Teachers then produce one 'model' lesson plan for review.		<i>External training is available if required.</i>	<i>Optional</i>

Lesson plan review			
CLT Leaders (preferably) review their colleagues' lesson plans.	~30 minutes per teacher?		
Observation request			
CLT Leaders observe one lesson given by each teacher they are supporting, and help them to evaluate their lesson's impact on learning.	Approximately 2 observer hours per teacher		
Phase 2: Focused learning project (optional)			
Research time, quality circles and learning walks. <i>CCQI can assist initially with these quality circles and learning walks if required.</i>			<i>Optional</i>
Phase 3: Celebration of new teaching strategies and learning impact (optional)			
Teachers present the results of the research to their peers.	Organise the event		
The RED System review (optional)			
Observers observe one lesson given by each teacher, and help them to evaluate their lesson's impact on learning.	Approximately 2 observer hours per teacher		<i>Optional</i>
Observers to use the summary evaluation forms, jointly completed with the teacher, to evaluate the effectiveness of The RED System. <i>CCQI can assist with this review process if required.</i>	1 day		<i>Optional</i>

Appendix: The RED System Resources

For everyone

- E1 The RED System overview – in brief
- E2 The RED System overview – in full – *Transforming teaching*
- E5 Lesson Reflection Form (Teacher & peer observer)
- E6 Using the Lesson Reflection Form

For the RED System coordinator

- C1 Preparation for The RED System training day
- C2 Pre-RED survey questions for teachers

For the CLT leader

- L1 The RED System: CLT Leader review notes
- L2 Example CLT-day preparation letter
- L3 CLT day session plan, including:
 - L3.1 CLT self-evaluation form
 - L3.2 CLT session PowerPoint presentation
 - L3.3 Functional Skills numeracy video
- L4 Example Lesson reflection form - Functional Skills numeracy
- L5.1 Lesson Reflection Form (CLT leader)
- L5.2 Lesson Reflection Form (CLT leader electronic)
- L5.3 Lesson Reflection Form (CLT leader) Research Lesson
- L5.4 Lesson Reflection Form (CLT leader) Research Lesson (Example)
- L6 CLT day evaluation form
- L7 Data Collection Form
- L8 Example CLT follow-up letter

For the teacher

- T1 The RED System: Teacher's research notes
 - T1.1 Extra 'New teaching strategies' form
 - T1.2 Extra 'Development ideas' form
- T2 How to use the Quality Standard for: TLA – Stage 1
 - Task 2.1 Learning objective review – part 2 completed

Teacher support resources

- T4.1 Draft rubric for outstanding lesson planning
- T4.2 Example lesson plan – blank
- T4.3 Example lesson plan – illustrated