



# GUIDANCE ON TEACHER GOAL-SETTING

Balancing autonomy and coherence



Produced by Teacher Development Trust in partnership  
with National Foundation for Educational Research



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According to new research conducted by NFER in partnership with TDT, teachers' perceived autonomy over their professional development goals has a strong association with retention and overall improved job satisfaction. This resource, developed by TDT in response to the research, lays out some guidance for schools on how to improve school systems in this area. Download the NFER research report at <https://nfer.ac.uk/publications>

## Professional Development Goals

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Teacher development goals are typically chosen from different priority sources:

1. **School development goals** – key areas of the organisation development plan to which the teacher can contribute through learning and developing professionally;
2. **Team development goals** – priorities for a year group, phase, subject or house, set by the team in which the teacher mainly works, led by the middle leader's development plan for that area and team, helping the teacher see how their learning helps their colleagues;
3. **Personal performance goals** – areas of learning that are directed to improve the performance of a key task, typically around class teaching or a leadership responsibility; and
4. **Personal development goals** – areas of learning that are related to career development, including academic study or taking on recent or future responsibilities.

## Giving Autonomy, Maintaining Coherence

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Two possible approaches to increasing autonomy over CPD goals:

### Using Middle Leaders

Middle leaders select a key development area which relates to their team development plan. Team members are given some CPD time across the year to focus on a chosen element of this, both individually and as a team, with time to discuss and share and, finally, bring it together into a short learning log for the whole team.

### Choice of strands with opt-out

Senior leaders set up two or three key CPD strands across the year, related to whole school goals. Staff generally choose their option - some are guided to select a specific one. There are a handful of 'off piste' spaces to which teachers can apply and compete for if they want to do their own thing, explaining how they'll make it rigorous and why it's important.

In both cases, it is helpful for line managers (or coaches) to discuss how these choices will relate to the four key goal sources (above). This should also link to performance management goals.

## Performance Management

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Performance Management (PM) is a key tool to support the development of staff and demonstrate the link between performance and professional learning. The problem most schools have is that Performance Management tries to meet too many different needs and satisfy too many stakeholders. It often performs a variety of different functions and loses sight of its true purpose.

Often Performance Management practices are used to determine how well an individual is performing and make an assessment on whether they can progress up the payscale/ career ladder, or whether they need additional support and mentoring.

### It isn't clear that these common Performance Management practices are useful in raising performance.

But research suggests we can make performance management work better.



What does appear to be an important practice of Performance Management systems is **goal setting**. Teachers need to be involved in setting and committing to goals that link to the larger mission/purpose of the school. Allowing greater input increases opportunities to employ autonomy and can have many benefits when applied to this process.

We've worked with hundreds of schools to improve the links between development and performance management. Here's a summary of key results seen through reforming Performance Management:

- increased motivation and buy-in from teachers
- teachers see the relevance of PD to their individual goals and needs and, importantly, how their efforts contribute to wider organisational goals
- achieving a harmonious balance of autonomy and coherent alignment, maximising the benefits of both without reducing buy-in and avoiding incoherent efforts

## Case Study

Notre Dame High School, Norwich, a Teacher Development Trust Network member and regional hub, have successfully changed from a top-down performance management system to a more co-created 'performance development' system. Developmental conversations around goal-setting and identifying future needs are separated from light-touch accountability conversations, assessing teachers for continued performance against the Teacher Standards.

Appraisers and line managers are carefully trained to use coaching conversations. Senior leaders share a common agenda for performance development meetings, focussed on co-constructed targets and asking helpful questions. This gives teachers a greater sense of agency in setting their own developmental goals.

The school has moved away from a "what went wrong" mentality – staff agree that the aim of meeting should be to inspire future development, so the focus is on discussion on strengths and ensuring that there is an opportunity to check-in afterwards so that the individual being evaluated has had a healthy amount of time to reflect upon and process feedback.

Research suggests that the benefits seen from involving teachers in choosing goals but not giving them total control allows leaders to harness teacher autonomy to benefit pupils and staff. Understandably, this can be quite challenging when leaders are responsible for pupil outcomes and whole school improvement. But the long-term benefits of allowing teachers to feed into their development goals in a structured way can create a dynamic and motivated team of teachers.





# Impact from the Teacher Development Trust

## Insight, Impact, Embedding

### TDT CPD Audit

A rigorous, diagnostic review that gives **in-depth insight into your school's strengths and barriers** to effective teacher and staff development. Includes leader self-reflection triangulated against staff surveys, staff interviews from our experts, and examination of policies and records.

### Leadership Coaching

Gain buy-in from managers, colleagues and employees and achieve effective change with regular **coaching** support from TDT experts alongside our extensive toolkits and resource libraries.

### Network Support

Connect with the most ambitious leaders of teaching and development through case studies, events and training.

### Further reading

Blog: [Performance Management in Schools](#)

## Develop expertise, build capacity

### TDT Associate Qualification in CPD Leadership

Our flagship qualification for current and aspiring leaders of teaching and CPD, with taught input from national experts, in-depth research engagement, highly practical in-school impact projects, and preparation to be a CPD champion in the region.

### Pedagogical Coaching

Clusters of lead practitioners trained in cutting-edge coaching techniques simultaneously improve teacher quality and morale through quick, effective and engaging cycles of observation, feedback and reflection.

### Lesson Enquiry

Teams of teachers trained by our experts carry out local pedagogical research projects in collaborative teams, creating an impact and insight report to share across your school(s).

Contact us to find out more:

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