

Creating a vision for your department

In the busy day-to-day life of an English department, it can be difficult to see beyond the demands of teaching your classes, dealing with students and colleagues and managing administrative tasks. However, it is essential that you find time to step back and look at the bigger picture. What do you want your department to achieve in the coming year? Where do you want it to be in three or five years' time?

Initial things to consider

It is essential that you have a clear vision of what you want your department to be in the future. To help you to formulate your vision, look at the strategies used by highly successful English departments. Arrange a visit to another school, attend a conference or find publications which can clarify and reinforce your ideas. Once you have a clear picture in your head of where you are going, you need to break this down in order to identify the practical steps that you will need to take:

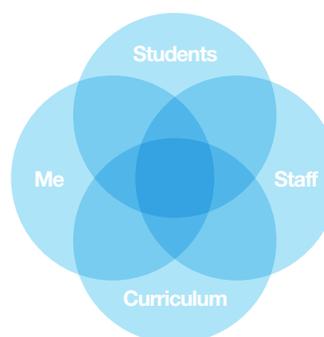
- What needs to be done to make English better for students?
- In what ways will the practices of your staff need to change?
- What will these changes mean for you?

Key factors for success

Before you start, write a description of your department as it is now. Now do the same for your future department, this could be the beginnings of a 'vision statement'. To assist you in this activity, refer to the 'English development guide' section on page 05. Read through the first nine factors for success and reflect on the current position of your department as well as the department you aspire to lead in the future.

Consider the differences between the two descriptions and you will begin to see the changes that you will need to lead the department through. Track the changes you'll need to make in a style that suits you. You could write them between the two descriptors.

Some find it helpful to use a Venn diagram like the one below:



Map out the things you want to see developing or changing, using the areas where ideas overlap. Be creative at this stage – this is your department and the sky's the limit!

Now, using whatever format you prefer, begin to map out when your ideas will be realised. What can be put in place by this time next year? What will take longer – three or maybe five years? For example, if most of your teachers are excellent assessors of learning, but regular moderation at key stage 3 is not in place, then that could be introduced and embedded in year one. However, embedding the use of effective Assessment for Learning (AfL) practice will take longer; three years might be more realistic in this case. Plot your thinking across those time scales, indicating whether it is a development area for students, your team or yourself. Colour coding might help.

Next, leave it alone for a week or so. You might find it helpful to talk it through with someone else, perhaps your line-manager or another head of department. Review the actions that you have identified, what you have prioritised and the timescales that you have mapped out. Resist the temptation to share all of the ideas with your whole department immediately – remember that change can be unsettling, so you want to be clear in your thinking before you start discussing them more widely.

As a first step, using the research you carried out using the ten factors for success, identify ten key actions or areas of development for your department. Share these with your teachers, ask for feedback, and once everyone is happy, use these during department meetings, INSET and line-management meetings.