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# Chapter 11

## Taking Things Forward

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### INTRODUCTION

This chapter rounds out the preceding chapters by encouraging you to review where you are in your teaching, and then to assess which areas you wish to focus on in further developing your skills. Once you have reviewed your priorities, a realistic way forward may be to work on one or two key areas rather than trying to do everything at once.

The directions in which you will be thinking of developing your teaching expertise will vary. Some tutors and demonstrators may have mastered the 'basics' and feel ready to try out some new strategies, others may just be beginning and need to make sure they get a firm grasp of basic skills.

It is worth bearing in mind that the first-hand experiences you are gaining as a teacher and the skills you are developing, should be useful to your future career path whether or not you choose an academic career. All of the following are valued by employers in many fields:

- group and teamwork skills;
- oral communication skills;
- leadership skills;
- explaining, listening and questioning skills;
- evaluating others;
- reflection on practice.

### TAKING STOCK

Before looking at how you can take things forward, it may be helpful to spend a few minutes reviewing where you are now. Whether you are new to tutoring or demonstrating, or already have some experience, this will be an opportunity to take stock of your professional needs, in relation to your teaching responsibilities over the coming year.

If you are just beginning as a part-time teacher, you may want to think about the issues covered in this handbook and pinpoint those which are of most concern to you personally. If you have some experience, you might like to look back and reflect on what skills you have already mastered and what you still need to learn. In either case, why not take a moment or two to review the following?

- What will your teaching responsibilities be over the coming term?
- What will your teaching responsibilities be over the coming year?
- What information will you need to carry out these responsibilities effectively?
- What skills will your responsibilities call for?
- How familiar are you with these skills?
- How can you best ensure that you develop these skills appropriately over the coming weeks?

### MOVING FORWARD

To help you make good progress developing these skills as quickly and as effectively as possible, here are some things you may like to try:

- Using this handbook as your key resource. As with all such handbooks, it is likely that you will need to work through it more than once to gain the full benefit.
- Checking that you really do have all the relevant documentation and materials produced by your department and course team. If you have not, then why not make a list of what you do have and check it out, say, with the course leader or your mentor if you have one?

- Familiarising yourself with the main library provision and IT facilities, the departmental library and the administration and secretarial arrangements in your department.
- Finding out about and taking part in training courses and seminars offered to part-time teachers in your institution.
- Thinking about how you can make the most of your mentor and your head of department by raising with them some of your concerns or queries. Their expertise within the department can be particularly valuable to you (see chapter 9, *Working with Others*).
- Finding out about the framework of student support services that exists within the University and how these are linked with the personal tutor system (see chapter 7, *Supporting and Advising Students*).
- Sharing your experiences, ideas, and concerns with other tutors or demonstrators. Those within your department are the obvious ones to work with, but it may also be of benefit to talk to colleagues from other departments (see chapter 9, *Working with Others*). Examples of things you may like to share are:
  - reviewing feedback gathered on your teaching especially using methods like previewing and reviewing (see chapter 10, *Feedback on Tutoring and Demonstrating*)
  - talking about ways you have found for dealing with, for example, silent or over-talkative students
  - looking jointly at some of the written work that has been marked and clarifying ideas about applying assessment criteria (see chapter 6, *Marking and Commenting on Essays* and chapter 4, *Problem-Solving Classes*).
- Keeping records of your work:
  - files of your own materials associated with the course
  - student records of attendance, assignments and formal assessments (it is useful to keep a record of your comments as well as the marks).
- Thinking about what feedback you would find the most helpful, how you are going to collect this feedback and what you are going to do with the information. Chapter 10, *Feedback on Tutoring and Demonstrating*, has lots of ideas for simple and effective ways you can do this. It is not necessarily something you need to do on your own: you could form a group with others on the course.
- Looking at the possibility of keeping a record of your development as a tutor or demonstrator: for example, by keeping a diary or a log, in which you record your thoughts every now and again, on your experiences of leading tutorial or practical groups, or, say, on the kinds of feedback you are giving and how effective you think it is. This is useful as a stocktaking exercise, for recording good ideas and for keeping a record of the skills you are developing.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

How much time you will want to and be able to spend on some of these possibilities will depend on a number of factors, one of which will be how you see your own future career development. If, for example, you feel strongly committed to pursuing an academic career, then your part-time teaching will be an important opportunity to acquire some of the basic skills of a university teacher. You may also want to put special effort into developing your expertise, into getting feedback, and into actively exploring sources and resources from chapter 12, *Sources and Resources*.

On the other hand, your long-term career interests may lie elsewhere and an academic career is not going to be your chosen path. You will nevertheless be developing transferable skills that are valued by employers and, like any teacher, you will have the satisfaction of a job well done.