

# 101 things to consider as a Director of Studies

by Helen Mattacott

Perhaps the most difficult job to hold within an ELT organisation is that of the Director of Studies. ELT centres differ widely in terms of their size and types of courses but one thing that tends to be common to all DOSs is the frustration of being in the firing line both from the teachers and from the Director. In addition, there is the feeling of being the general 'dogsboddy' with no cohesive job description and at the same time, feeling that the job is an impossible task. The British Council Inspection Scheme examines private sector language schools in Britain with a view to conferring 'Recognition' on those establishments that have reached certain standards. The Scheme assesses seven categories and academic management forms one of those categories. What I intend to do is to take that category and break it down into six separate sections in which I will look at the 101 things the Director of Studies has to do. Much of the following is common sense, much is what a good Director of Studies would do anyway but it is always worth stepping back and thinking through something that you do every day to see how it could be improved.

## MANAGEMENT OF THE TEACHING TEAM

### Teacher Induction

What methods of teacher induction are used?

Is the teacher sent a teacher's manual in advance? If so, what does it contain? e.g. a description of courses offered, details of who's who in the school; a clear outline of the teacher's duties; syllabuses; guidance on course design; suggested materials for each course/level; description of first and last day procedures; testing information for placement, progress and proficiency; details of what to do in case of problems (with students, equipment, colleagues) details of training opportunities; etc:

Is the teacher given an induction session such as a tour of the building, introduction to the other teachers, training in use of the equipment e.g. video, language lab, a guide to resources, computer room, self access centre.

Is the induction done on a group or one to one basis, regularly on fixed dates, as the need arises or is it only done with a new group of summer intake teachers?

Are there any formal settling-in procedures such as the new teacher observing before teaching, mechanisms for guiding the teacher in the first few weeks, the new teacher being 'fostered' by a long standing teacher etc.

### Monitoring of teachers and maintenance of teaching standards

Does the school have an observation policy stating how frequently observation is carried out? (A guideline is once or twice in the teacher's first week, once a week for the first month and then three times a year thereafter) Who does the observations and what do the observations cover? e.g. lesson planning and preparation, classroom management, teaching performance, linguistic sensitivity, achievement of learning etc. What about opportunities for peer observation?

Is there a post-observation chat with a written record of it signed by the teacher and the DOS? Is there evidence of these observations on file?

What about annual appraisals? Which topics are covered? e.g. a review of achievements this year, areas which need further work, areas of concern, teacher training attended/given, objective setting for the next year. Again, give a copy to the teacher to sign before putting it on file to avoid the suspicion that negative comments are being kept on his/her file.

### Support for teachers

Is there a clear schedule of in-service training sessions? How are the topics selected? Are the sessions all geared to teaching or are personal development themes also examined e.g. stress management, time management etc.

Are teachers given an opportunity to attend sessions/courses/conferences outside the school?

Is career advice given?

How do the DOS and teachers keep up to date with developments in ELT?

Does the organisation subscribe to any ELT publications?

Does the organisation belong to any local or national or international organisations connected with TEFL or related professional associations e.g. ARELS, IATEFL, Besig etc. or local teachers'/DOS groups.

### Communication channels

Do staff meetings take place regularly? Are minutes kept as evidence?

Is there a staff rep?

Are there clear channels of communication between teachers and the DOS and senior management?

Are teachers' responsibilities specified? Do they have job descriptions?

Is the line management made clear?

How far is the DOS given authority to implement policies/innovations?

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101 things to consider as a Director of Studies - *continued***Special Provisions**

What special provision is there for the training of minimally qualified staff?

e.g. enrolment on the ARELS INSET training

What special provision is there for the selection, training and monitoring of vacation course staff? e.g. selection of the teacher on the grounds of qualifications, personality, flexibility and how they will integrate into the existing team. Appraisals at the end of their contract, monitoring by the DOS etc.

**COURSE DESIGN AND USE OF MATERIALS****Appropriate objectives**

Do the courses have clear objectives?

**Appropriate syllabus objectives**

Is there a syllabus or course checklist? What is the syllabus based on? What is the rationale behind it? Is it regularly reviewed? Does the syllabus need refreshing/updating?

Are students involved in course design through needs analysis? If so, how is the analysis carried out? Does the syllabus reflect the students' needs?

How does the DOS know if the needs of the students change? What happens if this occurs?

Is there a weekly course plan? Is it given to the students or is it put up on the classroom wall? Does the DOS check it?

**Appropriate materials**

Is there a course book? Which criteria were used in its selection?

How are materials evaluated and selected? Is there a system for updating old materials and ordering new ones?

Do teachers create materials themselves? Is there a typewriter/ word processor for them? What other support is given to teachers? Is the teacher allocated time for materials development?

Are teachers made aware of copyright law? Do photocopied materials state source and publisher?

Do the materials look professional? How could their appearance be improved?

Have you thought through how students organise their work for ease of learning? Are students given files for their work? Are dividers provided/advised for ease of identification of language areas/skills? Are they given vocab. sheets on which they can write all their vocabulary, or sheets for phrasal verbs so that they are all kept together?

**Appropriate methodology**

Is a certain methodology used at the school or is it an eclectic one? What are the reasons for this? e.g. appropriacy to the students needs, recent language learning theories such as using the student as a resource, more of a movement

towards the concept of customer care and meeting the needs of students through needs analysis even though the students may be in open groups.

**Course Development**

Is there regular course evaluation and a process of course development in place? Does it take into account student course evaluation? Which other factors are considered?

**STUDENTS' PROGRESS AND RECORDS****First day procedures**

Are first day procedures student and teacher 'friendly'? Are students who have finished early just kept 'hanging around' or do you give them something to do such as watching a video etc.?

How could the service be improved? Are students given adequate information about their course in advance and on arrival?

**Student placement**

How are students placed in classes?

Is the testing system regularly reviewed to ensure that it is still effective? Which skills/language areas are covered by the test? Are some skills given more weight than others? Why is that so?

How does the DOS know that correct placement has been effected? Do the teachers attend a level liaison meeting?

How are class moves engineered? Is the student kept fully informed about changes of lesson times, classroom, teachers, etc.?

**Continuous enrolment**

What are the implications of continuous enrolment? How is the disruption to the class minimised? What special attention is required for this type of course?

**Needs analysis**

What role does needs analysis play in placement? How are records of work kept?

**Record keeping**

How do teachers on a course liaise? Are records of work kept up-to-date and regularly checked by the DOS? What systems are in place so that students returning in later years do not repeat the course materials?

**Progress monitoring and learner feedback**

How is progress monitored? Is there a weekly/mid-course review?

Are students given individual feedback by the teacher on

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their learning performance?

Is there an exit test? What is the test based on? Is the test a 'set' test, a published one or made up each time by the teachers?

Are students given recommendations for keeping up their English/further study in verbal/written form?

Is there a leaving certificate/pack?

#### Problem diagnosis

How are students' problems diagnosed? Are students given clear instructions on what to do if they have a problem with their studies? Do they know who to speak to? How are they given guidance and support?

### TEACHING STANDARDS

#### Monitoring of teaching and classes

Does the DOS sit in on classes to get an overview of the standard of teaching, the class levels, student groupings etc.?

#### Appropriate resources and practical support for teachers

What about day-to-day support? Does the DOS make him/herself available at certain times to help with lesson planning, advice on materials, general listening to problems. Are lesson plans/course plans monitored at all?

### RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

#### Systems for access

Are materials clearly classified/catalogued?

Are teachers allowed to take materials home? If so, is there a booking out system?

How do teachers book equipment?

#### Maintenance systems

Who is responsible for maintenance of the resources centre?

Is there a balance between teacher training texts and learning texts?

Are new materials regularly purchased? How is teachers' attention drawn to interesting new materials?

#### Review and development policy

Is there a system for review and development of resources?

#### Exam course vs. exam training

Are there specific exam courses or additional exam training to mainstream courses?

#### Systems for guidance on exam selection

How are the exams offered selected? Do they best reflect the needs and interests of the students?

How are students guided in which exams to take?

Are there entry tests for exams or 'mock' exams?

#### Exam course staffing

Is special training given to teachers? How are 'exam course' teachers selected?

#### Exam course resources

Are the exam texts/resources sufficient?

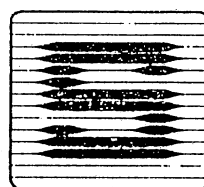
#### Review and development

How does the DOS keep up-to-date on exam developments?

#### Records of exam results

How are exam records and results kept?

*Helen Mattacott is the Education Officer for ARELS (the Association of Recognised English Language Services) and a member of the IATEFL ELT Management Group Committee. This article is the written version of a paper given at the IATEFL 1995 International Conference in York.*



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EFL SERVICES LTD,  
Elsworth, Cambridge, CB3 8HY, UK  
Tel: INT +44 1954 267661 Fax: INT +44 1954 267683  
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