

# LEADING CHANGE:

A Guide for New and Existing  
GCSEPod Leaders



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## Webinar Outline

- Introduction to GCSEPod
- Teacher site walkthrough
- Finding and sharing content
- Setting work

# Q&A

WITH GAVIN COWLEY

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Q1

## What are the best communication methods whilst we're working remotely?



As I said during the presentation and you all know, our profession is built on relationships and so are teams. If you can do so safely, observing social distancing guidelines, meet physically. If not, then one of the platforms such as Zoom or MS Teams is a substitute of course. Best to prime those so that the team comes prepared to contribute and each gets their opportunity to do so. This can be difficult without the non-verbal communication cues that being together in the same space offers. Clearly colleagues are using WhatsApp well and I particularly like the use of the voice memos on that platform. You do have to be careful to use that group for agreed reasons so that people are not bombarded with notifications at all hours as I have had reported to me by some. I talk in schools quite often about having almost daily conversations as a team, just for 5 minutes, where the focus of the day is discussed or a piece of work that is being standardised. I think the value of this continues now, is easy to set up and a good way of keeping in touch.

### ANSWERS FROM THE AUDIENCE

My colleague and I send each other WhatsApp voice messages to avoid lengthy emails. We both really like this facility.

We have a weekly departmental where the first ten minutes is just a catch up and the last ten is for any questions. This is backed up via individual meetings or phone calls where people want them.

Our school has an online pub style quiz each week - it has been going now for about 12 weeks - very competitive.

I agree, WhatsApp voice notes have been a hit at our school, as have voice notes attached to class notes for pupils.

I believe in a weekly e-mail blast followed up with a meeting on Teams. It is vital to catch up if only to chew the fat.

Yes, seeing faces is good for wellbeing. It allows staff to ask questions in response to your email and anything else. It allows staff to discuss ideas too (vital for T&L and sharing the load).

Q2

## How could we best motivate our teams virtually?

Regular contact is the key I believe. This can be as simple as a welfare check by text/WhatsApp or perhaps a five-minute phone call just to check that all is OK with them and to make it personal. Think of what those less frequent set piece Zoom/MS Teams meetings are aiming to cover and achieve in advance. Ask colleagues to prepare to arrive in those with ideas to contribute. Make sure each has the "conch" at various times so that they can share. Plan the order in which you will take contributions so that the less vocal can get their say and it has not all already been aired! People can hide behind "my points have all been made" comments otherwise if they so choose. I love the idea of narrated PowerPoints shared below. That would be great for remote standardisation conversations for example but also for the use of GCSEPod in T and L.

As others said - use WhatsApp group call (check in with staff regularly as well). We have Teams and this has been a game changer. Another idea narrates PPTs with key ideas - ask staff to watch and then attend a virtual Q&A. This gives them time and space to think.



Q3

## Any advice for middle leaders who have just joined a new school in this pandemic?

A difficult time for you and for NQTs joining new schools. I would hope that your new school has been in regular contact but if not please reach out to them now and get contact details for your line manager so that they can facilitate access to whatever you need for preparation. You will be getting the traditional induction day certainly, but I would hope that schools are being proactive in preparing those remotely. Don't feel like it has to be one-way traffic and reach out to them. I would be delighted if my new staff were being active in seeking information. I think aiming to have a FaceTime conversation or equivalent individually with each member of your new team to get to know them would produce dividends and when you know more about the landscape you are going in to get them together virtually. Probably best to avoid any radical changes before you can physically be together though! Insist that you are able to have conversations with your line manager.

Reach out to your team by phone. Talk - listen - how can you support them.

A good way to gel with your new team would be to identify a difficulty the team have and solve it.

Q4

## In terms of strategies for effecting the biggest change with students what are your top tips? In particular those gap group students that we all want to improve?

I keep coming back to relationships. Ideally you want the pupils to know that you have their backs and they have confidence in whatever the strategy is that you are putting before them. You have to know them. Learn the names of pupils in your class as quickly as you can. I used to do this as a bit of show in the first 5 minutes that I first met a class. But do this also for those who you don't teach directly but need to be able to influence positively. Explain to them the benefits of whatever it is that you are asking. Always. This again is about building confidence. In the end, it is likely that often you will have more belief in the pupil than they do. I encountered that often. Remember the quote from Steve Jobs about leaders being able to inspire others to achieve things that they didn't think they could. Ultimately, they may not all like you but they will know that you will move heaven and earth to help them achieve. I think all of this is a truism for any pupil, irrespective of whether they are potential Oxbridge candidates or in that rich vein of the middle ground. Take notice of them, catch them "doing it right" and have those one-minute praise conversations. I tried to aim for at least 60 of those per week and helped by placing myself strategically on duty where pupils I needed to reach would be. Often just a comment like "you have watched 10 maths pods over the weekend. That's fantastic. That grade 5 is in your reach" can maintain the momentum. Perhaps no one else has recognised achievement from them ever. Target those conversations most at the group that you most need to shift. Do it relentlessly and diary the time if you can so that it becomes habitual for you. Spread this practice as widely as you can. If 5 of you are doing it that's 300 conversations about achievement per week!

Low stakes quizzes



Q5

How best can you motivate staff as a middle leader when senior leadership does not model what they ask you to do and stifle your efforts?

This is a tough one. Probably the toughest situation of all in fact and it is depressing how often I come across it from middle leaders as a frustration. I feel for you. You are not powerless however. Remember what I said about all revolutions beginning with the thoughts of an individual or small committed group? This is a classic case. All you can do is think about what your values are and use them as your moral compass. Make sure that you are the paragon of virtue that you hoped your leaders would be and lead your area of responsibility by example. Find allies where you can. Within your department or within the middle leadership team. There may even be allies in the senior leadership team that will work with you. Good practice does become infectious (if I can use that term at this time!) and colleagues with professional pride want to be successful. Even if, as I said, you are a team of one, leading a small department, there is no reason at all for settling for second best for the pupils in your class, taking your subject. That is the part that you have the most control over indeed. Remember what I said about "not with these kids" and my school being in the bottom 1% nationally for VA at that point in 2003? Well, when we closed in 2007 (due to falling rolls) we were in the top 90 schools nationally for VA. With the same school community being served but with a different leader and different attitudes about what we could achieve. This was a catchment that served some postcodes in the bottom 2% on the multiple deprivation indices and the cohort was top sliced by 40-60 pupils every year, mostly the more able, going to a nearby C of E school as mine was still perceived to be the secondary modern. If not us, who?

That's very sad to hear. We don't do this in my school. My advice would be to get a core team around you of like minded individuals. If you want to develop and move things along (based on excellence) you will be able to. Ask for more time to work in departments. We will promote this at my school.

Q6

For the first time I will be leading 4 non specialist teachers for my subject. What advice would you give?

This is a challenge certainly, but I find it increasingly in shortage subjects like maths and science. If they are sound practitioners, the non-specialist status is much more easily overcome. Do what you can now to support them in developing their subject expertise. What CPD can you offer them? If you can pair them up with a specialist to plan jointly and observe lessons of the best that you have. If you don't have that luxury then look at which you might take direct, more intensive oversight of, perhaps two of them and meet them often together and pair the remaining (perhaps stronger) two to plan. If they are teaching at GCSE or A level then do plan a robust approach to marking and standardisation as in my experience it is the nuances of this that non-specialists, without the experience you have, lack. The same goes for NQTs of course – they are non-specialists, not of subject, but experience. Treat the non-specialists as you would NQTs to a large extent. Make sure to operate an open door policy with them so that they know they can run something by you whenever they need. Often these colleagues become a strength because of the meticulous planning they have to put in place to have the confidence to stand in front of their class!

Decide on key priorities and share these and give the why.

Regular contact as a group and 1:1 via Teams calls, Zoom or WhatsApp group call.



Q7

**Flipped learning - we have a large majority of students who are not engaged with home learning tasks. What advice would you give?**

I know that this is a problem for many schools. You have to start with an audit of who is engaged and also one would hope that there has been some quality assurance of work that has been set. If not, then that needs to be on your radar. I would hope that school is in regular contact with home for all pupils and so of course a conversation needs to happen with families where there has been little or no engagement. This might require a physical [socially distanced] visit to the home to identify barriers to engagement. These may well be all too real issues around access to devices or data if the lack of engagement is with online work. If this is the case what can be provided offline? This is where the work books that I mentioned that GCSEPod offer for English and Maths come in but there are of course loads of great things out there for all subjects. I would be looking to set pupils short term deadlines for initially small pieces of work and making sure that they know that these are important to you and them. You can signal this by committing to having them marked and fed back to them in a tight time frame and making sure that this is adhered to. I suspect in some cases pupils have felt no urgency to engage with work at home because they knew it wasn't going to be checked. Perhaps prioritise, if you are able, to see those pupils now in Y10 first who fall into this category. Get them involved in the flipped learning approach but with tight timescales and if you have to let them know that you will go and collect the work done offline. Perhaps you could provide them with plastic wallets to put the work in so it is easy to make safe with wipes? Use the certificates and postcards that GCSEPod have created templates for to reinforce good behaviours. Praise endlessly just as you would if they were physically before you. Look at what resources they have failed to engage with and if there are any they have. If GCSEPod is new to the school then that in itself is a good selling point. Device poverty is a problem that you need to work with your SLT to address. I love the idea of ambassadors for GCSEPod. You might also consider "buddying" pupils up now if you haven't done that before and putting them into "virtual support bubbles".

We are engaging with a percentage of our students but by far the most popular resource is GCSEPod (72,000+ pods since we closed)

We've seen great successes with bottom end students and the top end. When we launched last year one of weakest students was given a shout out at an assembly - she was amazed and really proud. Year group were so behind her.

GCSEPod's Check and Challenge is excellent and great for spotting gaps in knowledge and skills.

I have made the top podders ambassadors to encourage other students.

We have been using the blended learning approach since lock down. We have on average 85-90% engagement with students.

Q8

**As a GCSEPod leader, most of us will often be asked to report back to our own line managers on the impact and effectiveness of GCSEPod. What tips can you give?**

The colleague above references 72000 pods being watched in their school. It is worth also looking at the case studies on the GCSEPod site where usage data is correlated with outcomes. This is often split by prior attainment band. Use the assessment aspect of assignments and of course if you teach one of the subjects where Check and Challenge is already available do make use of that too. This could be targeted individually at pre-existing learning gaps identified in tests and/or if you are using [personalised] learning checklists. If you are unfamiliar with these then it is worth thinking about how you can share with pupils what the expected knowledge, skills and understanding for their course is. This gives pupils more independence and responsibility for concentrating on their learning gaps and helps us get away from pupils endlessly rehearsing learning they already have secure because it isn't challenging.



Q9

## How can we ensure teachers and parents are using GCSEPod effectively?

Certainly make use of the launch materials that GCSEPod have already created for you. Use the recognition of success approaches mentioned previously such as postcards and certificates. You can do something similar with staff also as a bit of fun. Remember what I said about the memory curve and using that with staff? We should do the same with parents too! Have regular reminders and use your school system of texting if you have to send nudges home to encourage that they are seeing that pupils complete assignments. Share learning checklists with home by all means. Try to develop the approach I mentioned in my presentation whereby pupils as a matter of course complete 5 questions that someone can ask if I have learned from this work. Make sure parents have that expectation of their child too and this helps overcome the two main barriers to parental engagement identified by the Sutton Trust a couple of years ago. The first of these was that parents said they lacked subject confidence. The second was that they said they lacked the vocabulary to talk about the work to their child. If the child gives them 5 questions to ask them that they know they can answer then these two barriers are removed. It starts the conversation.

We re-launch GCSEPod every year as part of the returning CPD for staff in September and as part of the induction process for new staff. We also launch to parents at our steps to success evenings.

Q10

## How can we ensure the language we use remains positive, in this time of uncertainty?

I am perhaps guilty too of the use of some negative (or realistic) language about the impact of this pandemic on learning and the learning gap. It falls on us to of course arrest and reduce it. If not us, who?! I think the ending point of my presentation is a good way to think of this. From challenge comes opportunity. I genuinely believe that GCSEPod can help us get to a place with blended learning in 5 months that might have taken at least 5 years in some schools without this unfortunate situation arising. We can make better use of the time we have pupils in front of us and we can make better use of the time that they are not in front of us! We know that youngsters will happily wile away hours watching dogs surf boarding and such like! Imagine if we can get some of that time dedicated to learning what they need to? Well, we can. Platforms like GCSEPod can help us get to that place. We have been talking about blending technology and teaching effectively for all of my career and yet, other than a virtual chalk board in the form of smart boards, not that much has changed since I started nearly 30 years ago! Here is our chance, let's take it.

We have stopped calling it the recovery curriculum and instead are going for Bounce Back - this comes with phrases of positivity and avoiding the negative narrowing the gap/interventions/catch up and so on.