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JOINING THE TEAM

**Induction of a new member of boarding
staff**

by

**Tim Holgate
BSA Director of Training**

The Boarding Schools' Association
Grosvenor Gardens House
35-37, Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0BS

Tel : 020 7798 1580 Fax : 020 7798 1581

e-mail : bsa@boarding.org.uk

website: www.boarding.org.uk

This paper aims to explore the principles and practice of effective induction of a new member of the boarding staff team. It assumes that he or she is new to the school, and will be resident in a boarding house. Obviously, most elements of the process will be equally relevant to an existing member of the school's staff taking this step into the boarding environment, and much will be relevant to the induction of a house matron, a non-resident house tutor, and even a new housemaster or housemistress.

We recognise that, just with the arrival of new pupils, induction is a process rather than a single event, and needs to be carefully planned over a clear time scale, with an identified member of staff responsible for its implementation and evaluation. Some of the induction process will obviously be co-ordinated at whole-school level, in order to improve efficiency and consistency and, for a teaching member of staff, much will focus on academic and classroom aspects.

For the purposes of this paper, we shall assume that, for boarding and house-related aspects, it will be co-ordinated by the relevant housemaster or housemistress (HsM). I have designated the new member of staff as a house tutor (HT) although some may be called assistant HsMs. The whole induction process should also provide the HsM with a good opportunity to review and evaluate existing documentation, the effectiveness of house systems and procedures, and the deployment of the whole house team. HsMs will be keen to avoid too much overlap with the induction process carried out across the school for all new members of staff, and will probably wish to explain how whole-school policies are really put into practice, in the context of the particular house involved.

Before the appointment starts

The HsM will probably wish to be involved in the initial appointment process although this may not always be possible. It is obviously important to ensure that the new HT clearly understands what the commitment is, in terms of the demands of the job, and the need for a clear, accurate and up-to-date job description or specification is obviously important. The HsM may meet the candidates during the interview process and show them around the house (and hopefully the resident accommodation). Once appointed, the new HT's induction starts in earnest and, like new pupils, this involves three stages - before arrival, on arrival, and after arrival. The HsM should aim to find out something about the HT's interests and aspirations and, as with existing members of the team, playing to their strengths will be important in terms of team deployment and allocation of duties and responsibilities. The arrival of a new HT can often provide a useful opportunity to re-allocate 'portfolios' among the existing team. This is the appropriate stage to ensure that the HT will not be overloaded, particularly if he/she is a newly qualified teacher. He or she will have two bosses - the HsM and the head of department, and careful liaison by these two managers will be needed in order to appreciate fully both halves of the new HT's demanding job. New staff are often fair game for requests to undertake significant 'voluntary' extra-curricular commitments, and HsMs should be on their guard for this.

Basic needs must be covered first - accommodation, teaching commitments, and probably sorting out the family's needs as well. Hopefully, the HT, once appointed, can spend an acquaintance day in school, in order to clarify many of these early issues.

The new HT will need to prepare for joining the team by assimilating preliminary documentation - but not too much to start with. The boarding house handbook is likely to give the flavour of living and working in that particular environment, and outline the organisation and arrangements in place. The comprehensive boarding staff manual can probably wait until the HT is actually in post.

Will the HT be tutor to a particular group of boarders, or a year group? If so, consider what could be done to help the HT to understand the demands of being tutor to the whole house in some respects, and to a group of particular pupils as well. Are digital photographs of pupils available with a list of their names? What about photos of the other members of the staff team?

In some cases, it might be feasible for the pre-arrival visit to involve an overnight stay, in order to experience life out of school hours (CRB clearance permitting!). This is probably the time for the HsM to start compiling a dossier of short 'pen pictures' of each pupil in the house, ready for the HT's arrival.

On arrival

This will probably occur a few days before the pupils return, and the priority must first be on domestic matters, ensuring that the new HT (and family) are properly settled in to their accommodation. A more detailed 'walk through' of the house, meeting the domestic staff, can be useful. Don't forget the married tutor's spouse - he or she will have an important support role in this demanding new job, and it is helpful for him or her to see what the house is like. Houses often have a start of term house team meeting, and this will provide a good opportunity to meet the other key players in the house.

It is helpful to provide some structure and clear expectations for the return of pupils, thinking about the new HT's role in welcoming back the 'old hands' as well as the new pupils, and meeting parents. Perhaps there may be a social function laid on (for pupils and parents) which will help the new HT to break the ice. The new HT might have a specific role to gather the new pupils together to talk to them while the HsM is busy with parents.

Documentation needs to be looked at in more detail, with the boarding staff manual being gradually talked through and interpreted. Key school policies and guidance documents need to be explained and understood - preventing and dealing with bullying, discipline and behaviour expectations, confidentiality and child protection, and so on.

At some stage, the new HT may need help to recognise the professional boundaries that exist, and in maintaining appropriate relationships, particularly for a young HT who may be quite close in age to the oldest pupils. [This issue is even more important for Gap assistants.]

Early days, and beyond

The HsM will need to check understanding and provide help with a whole range of school processes, and possibly act as a sounding board for professional issues arising out of the HT's teaching role. BSA's Boarding Briefing Paper No 5 provides a list of 20 things to find out relevant to the induction of Gap assistants. Many of these are equally relevant to new HTs, and the list is reproduced at the end of this paper. Some will be picked up below.

The new HT should find it helpful to shadow the HsM and other tutors during their nights on duty, but very soon the HT will need to fly solo. The concept of being on duty is probably second-nature and obvious to more experienced hands, but it is not so obvious to a novice who may need answers to a number of questions.

- Who am I responsible for and to whom?
- How do I supervise pupils? Do I sit in the office, or patrol the corridors? Is a different approach needed during prep, during free time, and at bedtime?
- How much can I rely on senior pupils and prefects to shut the house down at night?
- Do I have to make specific checks? Do I have to provide an end of duty report? Written or verbal?
- How do I hand over responsibility of the house to someone else when I go off duty?
- Am I looking after the house on my own, or is there someone else around as well?
- How do I get back up help and support if there is a crisis (especially if the HsM is out)?

These issues should all be covered in preparation for the HT's first full duty. It is probably wise not to leave the new HT in sole charge until he or she has found their feet.

Support, feedback and evaluation

Perhaps the house will have a large enough boarding team to provide a mentor for the new HT from among the more experienced colleagues. This will provide a second means of support and advice from one of the team rather than 'the boss', and gives an opportunity, if it is needed, to admit to significant concerns and worries.

Whatever appraisal or staff review arrangements might be in place, half term is probably the right moment to provide specific feedback to the HT

about the first few weeks in the house, although there will inevitably be a process of informal dialogue about the house and its pupils almost all the time. It will be a natural inclination for new staff to want to know how they are getting on in the job. By now, the HT will be familiar enough with the routine to be able to indulge in a bit of self-evaluation as well. Part of this process may involve tips and strategies to help the HT to develop his or her own tutoring style.

Very soon, the HsM will be able to harness the strengths and enthusiasms of the new colleague. Would he be a big asset to help with the house play or music competition? Does she seem to identify best with older (or younger) pupils? Does he show a natural empathy for those with learning difficulties, or those from overseas? Has she a particular interest in outdoor pursuits? The HsM will need to consider whether the HT needs support to develop more effective tutoring skills, both formal and informal.

With experience, and guidance from more experienced colleagues, the new HT will develop the confidence to recognise where flexibility, rather than slavish adherence to the rule book, can achieve better pastoral rapport with pupils and a fairer resolution of specific situations. He or she will gradually understand the best way of achieving effective work and learning during prep, more appropriate handling of pupils at weekends, good (and good-natured) discipline at bedtimes, working productively with prefects, communication and relationships with parents, and so on. All these areas need to be gradually discussed with the HsM, who can assist the new HT to develop his or her own tutoring style, while still remaining consistent with, and faithful to, the expectations and ethos of the house. Some of these issues can be developed effectively by meeting and mixing with colleagues in other houses and boarding schools, by taking part in professional training and conferences.

20 THINGS TO FIND OUT

Your role and responsibilities

1. What are my tasks each day, and what exactly am I responsible for doing?
2. Who is my boss - and who do I go to with any queries or problems?
3. Am I to be responsible for any special activities?
4. What exactly should I be doing when I am responsible for supervising pupils?
5. When I am helping to look after pupils, how do I call for 'back up' or help from other staff on duty if I need it?

Policies and guidance

6. Can I give punishments or rewards and, if so, what are they and what should they be given for?
7. What are the times of day and places in the buildings and grounds that are risky for pupils - for accidents, bullying or misdeeds to happen?
8. Which parts of the school buildings and grounds are 'out of bounds' to pupils - and why?
9. What is the pupils' daily routine - both on weekdays and at weekends?
10. What is the school's guidance about being alone with any child, and about any physical contact or touching a child?

Accidents and emergencies

11. How should the boarding house be evacuated in case of fire, and what are my duties to help to evacuate pupils?
12. How do pupils get staff help if they need it at night - and what is my role in this?
13. Am I allowed to give any medicine or first aid to a pupil?
14. What do I do if a pupil has an accident and is injured?

Pupil information and records

15. Are there any special needs of the pupils I am helping to look after that I need to know about?
16. Are there any records I am supposed to read or fill in?
17. Is there anything I need to know about meeting the needs of pupils with special cultural, religious, diet or language needs?

Procedures

18. What are the school's systems for issuing pocket money, for pupils to buy things, and for looking after pupils' property?
19. How do I report things that need repairs or maintenance, or risks or hazards that I may notice?
20. Am I going to be helping to prepare or handle food?