

# Science Teacher SOS

WHEN TEACHING LOSES ITS SPARK :  
SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR SCIENCE TEACHERS



The **Association**  
for **Science Education**

*Promoting Excellence in Science Teaching and Learning*

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# SCIENCE TEACHER SOS

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# Introduction

If you are reading this, it is likely that you are feeling dissatisfied, thinking of making changes to your current job as a secondary science teacher, and may be considering leaving the profession altogether.

The Association for Science Education (ASE) have created this guide to support you in making your decisions. We want you to know that we value you as a science education professional and a champion of the profession. However, we know that although science teaching can be a very rewarding job, at times it can be extremely challenging.

When science teachers are finding school life particularly challenging they may consider leaving teaching for good. This is a non-judgemental and structured guide to help you with your decision making and to help you consider all your options before potentially leaving the profession completely.

This guidance is intended to help you make informed decisions. Avoid being hasty, make sure you have considered everything before making a change.

It is worth remembering the following, although you may not feel it:

- As a science teacher, when you are supported to do your job well, you will be having a positive effect on individual students and classes.
- Science teachers are a precious resource; senior leaders should make reasonable changes to support you in feeling you are able to do your job effectively.

- You are likely to have developed a whole range of valuable transferable skills that are valued and useful in other roles and in other schools.

## How to use this Guide

Part 1 helps you to explore your reasons for considering leaving the profession and takes you through your main options. It includes links to exercises to help you understand the reasons that you are considering leaving so that you can communicate them. It also includes links to additional support and help with making these your decisions. Read through this first.

Part 2 offers additional specific advice depending on your role within the school system, whether you are a new teacher, recently qualified teacher, experienced teacher or a leader of science. This section has been put together by teachers who have been in those roles to support you in making your decision.

## Helping us improve

We would like to evaluate this document and build a series of case studies that may support other teachers facing similar situations. If you have time or feel able, there is a short questionnaire available to help us evaluate and improve this guidance.

Leave feedback on your experience here

[www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ASESOS](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ASESOS)

## How do I get help in a crisis?

If you feel you need urgent help contact one of the following 24 hour services:

- The [Education Support Partnership](#) have a 24/7 free help line 08000 562 561
- The [Samaritans](#) online or by phone 116 123 (freephone)
- Your local hospital Accident and Emergency will have a mental health crisis team

# Why are you feeling this way?

There can be a number of reasons why teachers may consider changing or leaving their job. Use these questions to explore your reasons. The suggestions and activities can guide you to fully understand your reasons for wanting to change or leave.

## Questions to ask yourself

What gives/gave you pleasure in your job? What has changed? What could you do to get that back?

What issues are making you consider leaving?

How is your mental health? Do you feel overly stressed, depressed or anxious?

Are there changes you could make to your own work-life balance?

Are there changes you could make in your work place?

Is it a specific person, your department or school as a whole that is making you consider leaving?

## Suggested Actions

- Write a list of problems, reasons and possible solutions.
- Talk to a trusted colleague.
- Talk to someone in your school about your thoughts. It will be easier to talk if you have identified the issues. If possible talk to your line-manager, but a trusted colleague or peer within your school will also help you to understand the issues and perhaps identify some solutions.
- Try Exercise A to help you write down and evaluate your reasons for wanting to change or leave.
- Alternatively contact ASE and we can put you in touch with someone to talk to confidentially [sos@ase.org.uk](mailto:sos@ase.org.uk).

# How are you?

How you are feeling can be an indicator of your physical and mental health. When you are unhappy or stressed you can develop changes in your physical health, your mood and outlook. Sometimes, physical and medical health issues can cause stress themselves.

## Questions to ask yourself

- Are you looking after yourself properly? Eating, sleeping and exercise?
- Are you getting time to do the things you enjoy? Family, friends, hobbies?
- Are you feeling more impatient or irritable?
- Have you lost your sense of humour?
- Have you seen your doctor recently for a general check-up?

## Suggested Actions

### Making changes to your work-life balance

- Analyse your work-life balance [Exercise B]
- How might you make changes [Exercise C]

## Assessing your mental health

The stress and pressure of teaching, when feeling unsupported, can lead to depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions. These conditions can skew our perceptions of the situation and make it difficult to make rational decisions. Discounting or dealing with these can ensure you are making an informed decision. Consider talking to your GP, Occupational Health advisor, the school nurse or counsellor (if you have one). Occupational Health advisors can often provide counselling which may help you with your decisions.

- Mental Health Resources: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- Education Support Partnership [www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk](http://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk)

# Could you make changes to your current workplace?

Identifying changes that could be made to your current job or workplace. Have you considered working part-time or doing a job share? Some solutions you may be able to change yourself, others would need to be presented to your line manager.

## Questions to ask yourself

Are there changes you could make in your work place?

Is it a particular class or group of students that are making you dissatisfied?

Is it a specific person, your department or school as a whole that is making you consider leaving?

Are the actions of senior leadership making you consider leaving?

## Suggested Actions

### Making changes in your work place

There will come a point where you will need to discuss the issues with your line-manager or someone else more senior than you. Having identified the issues, assessed your own mental well-being and analysed your work-life balance, you will be able to present your issues and proposed solutions to them. You may wish to have another colleague with you to support you in the meeting. If appropriate, you may also consider presenting your issues and proposed solutions in an email.

It is worth making your concerns and intention to leave known to your line manager or senior leadership team, to give them the opportunity and time to make changes. If they cannot, it may be time to consider moving schools.

Ensure your expectations are reasonable by networking and talking to other science teachers in other schools.

# Could you change the school or college where you work?

If you have decided that you no longer wish to work in your current school or college, before leaving the profession, consider working in another school, another phase or another sector.

## Questions to ask yourself

Have you considered working in another school or college?

How do you feel about working in a different type of school? state school, academy, free school, independent school.

How do you feel about working in another sector? primary, secondary, sixth form, further education, technical college

## Suggested Actions

### Moving to another school

Having identified the issues you are facing in your current place of work, find a school or college which can better support you, can build on your strengths and is more aligned to your own philosophy.

### Moving to another sector

There are many types of schools and sectors where science teachers are valued. Perhaps consider changing to primary, secondary, sixth form, further education, higher education, alternative provision or special needs education. Talk to peers in these sectors.

Make contact with ASE for advice from colleagues in different sectors or networking opportunities through ASE's many regional events and committee activities [www.ase.org.uk/events](http://www.ase.org.uk/events).



# Could you change your career pathway?

Sometimes teachers decide that they do not want to teach in schools, but they still want to remain in the education system in another role.

## Questions to ask yourself

What are your reasons for considering leaving classroom teaching?

What might you miss about classroom teaching?

What skills do you have that could be put to other roles within education?

## Suggested Actions

### Be aware of your transferable skills as a teacher [Exercise D]

Other opportunities within science education include:

- working as a science technician
- working as a science advisor
- becoming a monitor or assessor for an examination board
- writing textbooks or resources for educational publishers
- tutoring and mentoring trainee teachers at a local university or school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT)
- undertaking consultancy role in curriculum and assessment development, professional development or internationally.

Make the most of sharing your transferable skills and networking opportunities through your links with ASE members and events in your region [www.ase.org.uk/events](http://www.ase.org.uk/events)

# Teachers new to the profession

As a teacher new to the profession you are entitled to support and mentorship. The first year of teaching can be tough.

## Questions to ask yourself

Are you getting the support you are entitled to?

Is your timetable reasonable? Are you keeping up?

You are still learning and are allowed to make mistakes, but do you need to ask for support?

## Suggested Actions

- Understand your entitlement such as a reduced timetable and mentorship:
  - England - Department for Education [Induction for newly qualified teachers](#)
  - Wales - Education Workforce Council [Induction Guidance](#)
  - Scotland - General Teaching Council IN2TEACHING [Teacher Induction Scheme](#)
  - Northern Ireland - Education Authority [Beginning Teachers Induction](#)
- If you feel able, talk to your mentor, head of department or professional tutor about your feelings or concerns.
- Contact your University Tutor if you had one, or training institution for advice.
- Analyse your work-life balance [Exercise B].

# Teachers in their first few years of teaching

We accept that teachers in their first few years of teaching are still learning their profession and will require continuing mentoring as appropriate to their career. Some of this support will be subject specific from professional associations like the ASE.

## Questions to ask yourself

Are you teaching outside your specialism and comfort zone? How could you increase your confidence in your subject knowledge and your pedagogical content knowledge?

How could you increase your confidence in running or demonstrating practicals?

How could you improve your time management?

How could you gain support with your workload?

How could you improve behaviour management in your classes, particularly in laboratories and practical work sessions, or when undertaking science fieldwork ?

## Suggested Actions

- Seek teaching ideas and practical guidance from other science teachers or your science technicians.
- Attend CPD events run by ASE or other organisations<sup>1</sup>. Teachmeets and social media (#ASEchat) are also a good source of support.
- Develop strategies for managing your time, start to work more effectively and improve your work-life balance by talking to an experienced colleague or try Exercise B Analysing my work-life balance.
- Ask for support and non-judgemental advice to create strategies to reduce your workload from colleagues in school and out of school via conferences, teachmeets and social media. If necessary consult your union.
- The Department for Education (England) is looking at changing policy to help **reduce teacher workload**. Have a read of their reports offering advice on three areas identified as being a burden; marking, planning and data management. Similarly the **Welsh Government** and **Scottish Government** have announced plans to tackle workload issues, and the **Northern Ireland Government** has published a Workload Agreement.
- Approach experienced colleagues, heads of year (pastoral leaders), and your special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) for suggestions on strategies to improve behaviour management. You could also request external CPD.
- Make contact with ASE for networking opportunities [www.ase.org.uk/events](http://www.ase.org.uk/events).
- Alternatively contact ASE and we can put you in touch with someone to talk to confidentially [sos@ase.org.uk](mailto:sos@ase.org.uk).

<sup>1</sup> For example: Royal Society of Chemistry, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Biology, STEM Learning, CLEAPSS (or SSERC if in Scotland)

# Established Teachers

Established teachers can become disillusioned, lose inspiration and feel undervalued. After exploring your reasons for considering leaving [Part 1], some of these suggestions may help to re-direct and energise your focus.

## Questions to ask yourself

Do you feel your expertise and experience is undervalued?

Are you feeling less inspired or that you are giving more than you are getting?

What is it about your current role that is causing you to feel this way?

What do you really enjoy about your role? What could be done to enhance those aspects?

How can you use your experience to improve your role?

How could you gain recognition from beyond your school?

Are you in a position to reduce your workload? Can you change the focus of your job to one in which your experience is better utilised?

Is there some further training or development you could take to reinvigorate you? What would make you feel valued?

## Suggested Actions

- Apply for Chartered Science Teacher status [www.ase.org.uk/join](http://www.ase.org.uk/join).
- Become more involved with other like-minded organisations e.g. Royal Society of Chemistry [www.rsc.org](http://www.rsc.org), Institute of Physics [www.iop.org](http://www.iop.org) and the Royal Society of Biology [www.rsb.org.uk](http://www.rsb.org.uk).
- Make contact with ASE for networking opportunities [www.ase.org.uk/events](http://www.ase.org.uk/events).
- Get more involved with your union.
- Get becoming a monitor or assessor for an examination board.
- Consider approaching a publisher to develop your resources.
- Consider doing a Masters in Education to widen your knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Take up a hobby unrelated to teaching, to readdress your work-life balance.

# Science Leaders

The lead role in a science department, either overall or with specific responsibility, can be challenging; especially with high or unrealistic expectations from senior leadership, staff shortages, staff without expertise or long-term absence.

## Questions to ask yourself

What is making you question your current job? E.g. colleagues, workload, teaching, management, pressure and/or stress?

What is the longer-term outlook for this issue?

What are you in control of?

What can you influence?

Who can you discuss this with within your school or outside? E.g. your local ASE region, fellow Heads of Department, other members of the senior leadership team within school, a union representative?

How can you work better with what you have got?

What options would be open to you, if you left your current role?

## Suggested Actions

### Working better with what you have got

- Develop your team (training, support, CPD, accountability)
- Engage team members
- Delegate specific roles
- Encourage aspiring middle leaders
- Help the senior leadership team realign expectations.

### Considering other options available if you left current role

- Drop a teaching and learning responsibility, stay at current school
- Same role, different school
- Different responsibility, same school
- Change of sector
- Part time or job share
- Attend CPD events run by ASE or other organisations<sup>1</sup>
- Other role in education (training, consultancy, inspection, writer, researcher)
- Leaving education.

<sup>1</sup> For example: Royal Society of Chemistry, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Biology, STEM Learning, CLEAPSS (or SSERC if in Scotland)

## Exercise A - My reasons for wanting to change or leave

Reasons for leaving...	Possible solutions...

Reasons for staying...	How to maintain or do more of this...

# Exercise B - Analysing my work-life balance

Use the codes below to the nearest 30 mins to complete this for a typical week.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
05:00							
06:00							
07:00							
08:00							
09:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
13:00							
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
18:00							
19:00							
20:00							
21:00							
22:00							
23:00							
24:00							
01:00							
02:00							
03:00							
04:00							

**Key** add any significant activities that are missing. Analyse your timesheet using **Exercise C**

Work		Life		Other	
Teaching	T	Sleeping	S		
Planning	P	Cooking & Eating (Food)	F		
Marking	As	Exercise	E		
Meetings	M	Hobby	H		
Admin/Emails	A+E	Personal Time	PT		
Parent Contact	PC	Care of dependents	C		
Travel	Tr	Domestic (Clean & Shops)	D		

## Exercise C - Making changes to my work-life balance

Review your timesheet from Exercise B

Calculate your time on each activity					
Work		Hours	Life		Hours
Teaching	T		Sleeping	S	
Planning	P		Cooking & Eating (Food)	F	
Marking	As		Exercise	E	
Meetings	M		Hobby	H	
Admin/Emails	A+E		Personal Time	PT	
Parent Contact	PC		Care of dependents	C	
Travel	Tr		Domestic (Clean & Shops)	D	
Other			Other		

Which activities dominate your time?

What would you like to do less of? How might you achieve this?

What would you like to do more of? How might you achieve this?

You may need help to readdress your work-life balance, so talk to someone:

- A trusted colleague
- A line-manager
- Someone via your ASE regional committee
- Teacher Support Network



# Exercise D - Transferable Skills

These are just a few of the transferable skills teachers have.

Skills – all teachers	Where evident
Communication	With various stakeholders including pupils, teachers, support staff, school leaders, governors and parents  Written and verbal communication including reports, letters, parents evenings, policies, lesson plans, email, delivery of training  Ability to tailor message to different target audiences (differentiation and teaching across age ranges)
Ability to meet deadlines	Lesson planning Report writing Data entry Exam/assessment marking Book marking
Ability to work under pressure	Lesson delivery Meeting deadlines such as data entry Responding to Senior Leadership Team requests Prioritising workload Exam and assessment marking Book marking
Time management	Lesson planning and delivery Workload management Attending meetings
IT skills	Use of software e.g. word, powerpoint, excel, databases Use of online resources
Creativity	Create and deliver engaging lessons
Leadership Ability to determine a strategy for others to follow	Handbook, Programmes of Study, Schemes of Work, area development plans
Quality Assurance	Learning walks, exam analysis, performance meetings, lesson observations, interviews
Management	Ability to allocate resources Ability to work within a budget