

## Setting up for Success with Group Coaching

Most schools are new to group coaching. These guidelines are intended to help you set up a new group coaching programme successfully, to maximise the learning experience for all participants.

### What is group coaching?

Group coaching essentially offers participants an opportunity to be exposed to new leadership development tools and coaching processes and reflect on how you can apply these to your school context.

Participants will be introduced to new content through pre-reading materials ahead of the coaching session. The group coach will then check everyone's understanding, explore concepts in greater depth and lead a live demo of the relevant coaching process. Participants will be encouraged to consider how they will apply their learning to their work and share these reflections with others in the group.

Our aim is that, through engaging in a group coaching experience, participants will share a set of common frameworks, build more trust and initiate a deeper level of conversation, and be willing to explore some new approaches within their work.

### How do I form a coaching group?

We can work with a maximum group size of six people (though smaller groups of four offer more personal attention). The composition of the group is crucial to the success of group coaching. The group needs to form around a common development need that is explicit and shared by all group participants.

Participants in the group all need to feel safe in order to openly share their reflections and disclose their concerns. A single dominant, negative individual in the group can detrimentally affect others' experiences. (We would recommend one-to-one coaching of the individual in this case.)

### What is the commitment for a group coaching participant?

Group coaching participants will need to know what they are signing up for! As you form the coaching group, you will need to brief participants on the group coaching experience:

- Purpose – the common development need within the school context, which forms the key objective for the group coaching programme.
- Attendance: All participants will be expected to attend all group coaching sessions (As the sessions follow a curriculum, it can be disruptive for the rest of the group if a participant misses a session.)
- Prework: Participants will be expected to do an hour's preparation ahead of every coaching session, working through pre-reading materials and reflection exercises.

### **How are group coaching sessions booked?**

The schedule of group coaching sessions is agreed between the school and your group coach at the outset. Sessions typically take place either in the morning before lessons start or after school. Settling on a regular day of the week can help to set a pattern of working.

We recommend that group coaching sessions are spaced 3 weeks apart in order to allow sufficient reflection time between sessions whilst keeping up momentum for the learning. This may need to be flexed to allow for school holidays and to avoid notoriously busy periods such as report writing.

Cancelling and rescheduling a group coaching session is obviously not ideal, as it has a knock on effect on other coaching sessions. If the group finds it necessary to postpone a session, you need to give 48 hours' notice to your group coach.

### **Who needs to be involved?**

Setting up and running a group coaching programme is reliant on an effective partnership between the BTS Spark Programme Manager and your school.

We ask you to nominate the following contact people within your school:

- Group coordinator – one of the participants within the coaching group who will act as a go-between, to finalise arrangements with the group and the programme manager.
- IT liaison – a technical specialist who is able to work with our team in advance of the coaching sessions to ensure the technical set up is functioning correctly.

### **What is the technical interface for group coaching?**

Most of our group coaching for schools is offered through a virtual interface (to avoid the expense of face to face group coaching). The ideal set up for remote group coaching involves:

- Live video link between participants and the group coach
- Live sharing of content (presentation slides) by the coach with the group

Our preferred technology for this is *Zoom* – a free software package which takes a few minutes to download from the internet (providing it doesn't hit problems or get firewalled). You can discuss other options (such as Group Skype or Adobe Connect) with our Programme Manager. Unfortunately, at this stage we are unable to offer video conferencing.

In order to maximise picture and sound quality for the learning experience, it is preferable for the group to be split into buddy pairs (or triads) and each buddy pair to be seated around a different computer terminal. Each computer will need a functioning webcam and a good broadband connection. (If you are using wifi, then please check it has strong signal strength.) As the coaching conversations are confidential, all computer terminals should be in private settings (i.e. not the staff room).

If *Zoom* or a similar visual interface cannot be set up on the school's computers (or fails on the day), then an alternative set up involves teleconferencing. Each participant can dial in separately to a teleconference line in order to join the group coaching session.