**Post-16 poetry: some basic principles for developing responsive approaches**

**Fostering enjoyment, response and understanding**

* Vary activity: don't just do annotation and commentary. Don't always make it about the exam, especially at first.
* Teach the fundamentals of poetry in a creative, active way before asking students to focus on exam-style work or set texts.
* Read and discuss some poems without having to write a commentary on them.
* Make space for enjoyable exploration. Cultivate inquiry, creativity and curiosity.
* Explore ideas about poetry and attitudes to poetry - as well as poems.

**Planning a poetry curriculum**

* Teach the elements of poetic form and language systematically in conjunction with poems that demonstrate their use rather than just leaving them to be revealed by chance
* Teach specific poems in order to teach specific aspects of poetry rather than to teach every aspect of the poem
* Teach form, structure and development. All poems *develop* using a narrative or discursive *structure:* how does this structure relate to the *form?*
* Choose a range of types and genres of poetry deliberately - lyric, narrative, song, traditional, free, half-rhymed, metrical, blank, different forms, different tones, etc.

**Pedagogy**

* Give students choice and agency - e.g. get them to create a class anthology, or bring in a poem of the week
* Use active, creative activities which involve the students in problem-solving and/or group discussion - e.g. sequencing a poem, filling in missing words, predicting the next stanza, deciding which layout is correct, working out the rules of a form or style from examples
* Use creative writing activities to help students feel what it is like to write poetry and use poetic language, and understand the choices poets make
* Read or listen to real poets talk about their work. Foreground the idea of the writer as a person making choices, and the reader responding to those choices.
* Don't give students long lists of obscure rhetorical devices with Greek names to spot - at least until they are ready for it. It's more important that they should learn to be alive to their responses and the impact of the language.
* Focus on macro-reading before micro-reading: grasping the impact, meaning and form of the whole poem before technique-spotting. Don’t focus on the parts at the expense of the whole.

**The commentary / guided analysis**

* Intro: the intro is vital in communicating the students’ grasp of the whole poem – its impact, its theme and meanings, its aesthetic effects, any crucial ambiguities or tensions
* Whole v part: don’t rush into a stanza-by-stanza analysis. Deal properly with the basics of the whole poem first – consider addressing its form and structure in a second paragraph.
* Coherence: any stanza-by-stanza analysis should keep an eye on the development of the poem, not just take each stanza as a separate item.