



AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE EARLY CAREER FRAMEWORK



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1. Introduction and Context

The introduction of the Early Career Framework (ECF) in 2019 marked a milestone in comprehensive professional development for new teachers in England. Developed as part of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, the ECF aims to provide vital support to stem high dropout rates among early career teachers.

The initial rollout has seen encouraging success, with thousands of teachers completing the ECF thanks to dedicated work from providers, schools, mentors and other stakeholders. However, as a new programme, opportunities for optimisation have emerged to further enhance its flexibility, subject and phase specificity, and sustainability.

To explore these opportunities, the Gatsby Charitable Foundation commissioned an initial mapping and scoping exercise, led by Professor Sam Twiselton and the Teacher Development Trust (TDT).

Through literature analysis, interviews and focus groups, the study explored areas including:

- Expanding subject specialisation
- Tailoring prescribed elements
- Facilitating ongoing development
- Strengthening mentor support

While the ECF touches on a wide range of issues impacting early career teacher development, this exploratory study focused specifically on opportunities to enhance subject specificity, flexibility, and sustainable support structures. Some areas out of scope for this initial exploratory study but warranting future investigation include:

- Coherence with wider policy initiatives
- Funding and governance mechanisms
- Implications for pupil experiences

We have intentionally narrowed the focus to key themes around content, delivery models and capacity building where TDT expertise and steering group input is strongest at this stage.

Additionally, as an initial 6-month exploratory study, the limitations of timescale and data collection warrant caution against over-stating findings around efficacy and impact. Longer-term, expanded evaluations will be hugely valuable as the ECF programme evolves.

The report acknowledges the highly effective work already underway by participants across the sector in delivering the ECF under challenging conditions. Recommendations aim to highlight opportunities to better support this work through funding, resources, trust in professional expertise, and long-term strategic vision. This will contribute to the wider goal of securing high-quality development across the profession, so that teachers thrive and pupils succeed.

As such, this report links to TDT's recommendations to government on a CPD entitlement, [*A Professional Expectation: Improving Access to CPD for Teachers and School Leaders*](#) in its attempts to distinguish between the *requirements* placed on early career teachers and the *entitlement* they have to effectively support.

1.1 Glossary of Key Terms

- Early Career Framework (ECF): The framework document outlining core content areas and research evidence underpinning the ECF professional development programme.
- ECF Implementation Model: The overall infrastructure, curriculum, platforms and processes put in place nationally for delivery of ECF content to early career teachers.
- ECF Programme: The full support package experienced by early career teachers, encompassing ECF content, mentoring, and assessment procedures.
- Stakeholders: Encompasses national policymakers, government bodies, delivery partners, lead providers, school leaders, teachers and mentor participants engaged in the ECF programme.
- Sector: In this report refers to the education sector as whole, including all groups involved in early years, primary, secondary and further education.

2. Executive Summary

As an organisation primarily concerned with the development and maintenance of cultures and conditions for school improvement and the development of teacher expertise, underpinning TDT's findings and recommendations are the following principles:

- Professionalism, Agency and Trust: There should be a recognition that ECTs are developing professionals and that mentors are their examples in this, who together can be trusted to make informed decisions and adapt approaches based on their contexts and individual needs. Recommendations aim to foster a culture of professionalism, curiosity, and trust, empowering ECTs and mentors to exercise agency and professional judgement. Importantly it needs to be recognised that protected and funded time is needed to do this ([see, COI 2021](#))
- Autonomy and Job Satisfaction: Providing mentors and ECTs together with more choice, flexibility, and opportunities to shape their own development could enhance their sense of ownership, intrinsic motivation, and long-term commitment to the profession. Recommendations should consider how to promote greater autonomy and professional agency for ECTs, as these factors are closely linked to job satisfaction and retention in the teaching profession ([see, NFER 2020](#))
- Wellbeing and Workload: The wellbeing and manageable workload of ECTs and mentors should be central considerations in any longer term improvements. Recommendations strive to strike a balance between providing comprehensive support and avoiding excessive burdens that could negatively impact the wellbeing and sustainability of the ECF ([see, TWES 2021](#)). Funded, protected time is central to this.

2.1 Findings

This exploratory study identified five key themes:

1. Mentoring is invaluable but constrained by limited capacity. Protected funded time, career recognition, and strategic support structures are needed to unlock the full value of mentoring relationships.
2. The ECF programme design parameters could allow for more tailoring of content sequencing to avoid repetition, deepen understanding and application in new

contexts, and help mentors meet ECTs at point of need.

3. Subject specificity should be strengthened through pedagogical content, expert access, communities of practice and phase-specific focus.
4. Senior leadership strongly enables ECF efficacy, but compressed capacity and rigid processes pose risks, increasing the need for funded, protected time.
5. If the Teachers' Standards were reviewed to better align with the developments to the golden thread (including ECF and NPQ), opportunities may be clearer for policymakers and programme designers to better enable trust in the profession which is felt on the ground.

2.2 Recommendations

The study offers nine key recommendations to policy makers:

1. Ensure sustained funding for mentoring through a Teachers' Professional Development Fund.
2. Allocate resources for mentor support as part of fully funding the 'Golden Thread'.
3. Recognise mentoring with formal career pathways and recognition.
4. Support flexible Early Career Framework (ECF) delivery to reduce administrative burdens.
5. Include ECF understanding in leadership training for effective support.
6. Update Teachers' Standards to align with the ECF.
7. Clarify subject leader responsibilities in ECT development.
8. Enable subject-specific networking, possibly aligning national subject hub networks with ECF entitlements.
9. Develop phase-specific content tailored to early years and primary education.

Enabling best practice requires provision of sufficient time, funding and professional autonomy for participants navigating heavy workloads. But done judiciously, these measures can enhance ownership, trust, wellbeing and sustainability for the ECF programme and teaching profession.

3. Methodology and Approach

This collaborative study incorporated multiple research activities:

1. Literature Review

An initial rapid literature review examined existing evidence published on the ECF programme and early career teacher development. Over 500 documents mentioned the ECF, but empirical evaluative studies were limited. The review revealed opportunities for longer-term, holistic impact evaluations.

2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 experts across roles including:

- National policymakers
- Lead Providers
- Teacher development consultants
- Senior school leaders
- Subject association and trade union representatives

Interviews elicited in-depth perspectives on enablers and challenges for the ECF programme.

3. Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with practitioners engaged with the ECF to understand on-the-ground implementation experiences. Representing diverse settings, and split by role type, the team held 10 small focus groups, yielding granular insights into variations in programme delivery.

The triangulation of documentation analysis, interviews, and focus groups enabled the team to test assumptions and critically arrive at the above findings. However, limitations of the exploratory study warrant acknowledgment. As a rapid 6-month exercise, time constraints limited sample sizes and the ability to quantitatively track impacts over time. Additionally, the voluntary nature of participation may bias findings towards particular perspectives.

Longer-term, rigorous mixed methods evaluations assessing indicators like job satisfaction, attrition, and pupil outcomes are vital to fully gauge ECF efficacy. This will be enriched by regularly updating the supporting literature review as new empirical studies emerge.

4. Detailed Findings

4.1 Literature

This report builds on a review of existing literature and research related to early career teacher development and support. Searches of peer-reviewed literature and grey literature sources revealed a limited number of empirical studies focused specifically on evaluating or understanding the ECF itself. This is perhaps not surprising as the ECF is a relatively new initiative, although it might be expected that studies of policy implementation or long term impact would have begun.

While over 500 papers mentioned the ECF, the majority used it simply as background context rather than the main subject of investigation. A handful of journal articles and evaluations, such as work by the Department for Education, UCL, and Ofsted, did contain data collection and analysis centred on the ECF programme. However, their focus tended to be quite broad, examining aspects like process, participant experiences, and barriers/enablers rather than assessing the framework's impact.

Beyond this empirical work, a number of guides, opinion pieces, and policy analyses touching on the ECF were identified, often published by subject associations, multi-academy trusts, and other educational organisations. While providing practitioner perspectives, these did not constitute rigorous research evaluating the efficacy of the ECF model.

The limited empirical studies published so far presented findings that were generally positive about early career teachers' experiences of the ECF, though these experiences did vary. A common theme was the centrality of mentoring - examining styles of mentoring, mentor-mentee relationships, and obstacles to effective mentoring. There appeared to be little specific focus in the published literature on evaluating the ECF's subject-specific content and support, and a lack of data on the long term and wider impact of the ECF, particularly on pupil and student experience and improvements to learning outcomes.

Looking ahead, several promising lines of inquiry emerged as opportunities for further research into the ECF's efficacy:

- Deeper examination of mentoring experiences, such as effective matching of mentors and mentees across contexts, the array of mentoring approaches utilised, and how mentoring is flexibly adapted in small schools or for shortage subjects.

- Exploring how mentors, providers, and schools individualise and contextualise the ECF content, including what opportunities and approaches exist for building in subject and context specificity.

4.2 Theme 1: Mentoring

All stakeholders were clear and positive about the high value an effective mentoring experience adds to the early career phase when appropriate time and recognition is given to it. Many considered it to be the 'make or break' element contributing to an ECT's sense of being valued and supported. Similarly mentors also felt the value of the role for their own professional development and recognition. A number of stakeholders discussed the helpful alignment of a whole school mentoring policy with the school development plan and highlighted this as a key school improvement tool. Protected funding would be a catalyst to this. It would be useful if strategic mentoring policy became embedded in school leadership development (e.g. NPQs) and accountability.

'It's about making mentors feel important ...able to engage in the system and see their role in it.' Trust Leader

4.2.1 Time

The most resounding finding was that protected time is fundamental for impactful mentoring. This was the strongest and most consistent theme across all our interviews and focus groups. To fulfil the mentoring role, protected time for both mentor and mentee must be effectively funded. This is needed not just for the high quality conversations that are central to the role but also for adequate preparation and training. To fund and ensure adequate time is available for mentors as well as mentees going forward would be a potential game changer for both mentees and mentors. This is particularly important in the first year.

"Where our mentors do have a reduced timetable it is such a massive step forward. It improves their ability to do the role but also the prestige of doing it." Lead Provider

"They need to be released because they're supporting someone through their first part of their career; we're looking at Teacher retention if they're not trained and supported properly and the mentors aren't trained and supported properly in relation to that, then we're not going to have the retention of teachers at all." School Leader

"[Example Mentor] doesn't actually have any extra time allocated for being a mentor to more ECTs, so that's just an extra responsibility that she has on top of being a curriculum lead." Induction Tutor

Where a long term strategic approach is taken to the allocation of time and resources to mentoring it appears much more likely to achieve an effective mentoring experience for both mentee and mentor. Funding for protected time would support this.

4.2.2 Subject Expertise

A significant number of stakeholders expressed a need to strengthen the specialist subject expertise available to ECTs. For the secondary phase it was felt that this can be a particular problem for ECTs who have subject specific needs but whose mentor does not have the appropriate subject background. It would also support ECTs to regularly and enthusiastically feel part of a subject community that gave them opportunities to revisit their passion for the subject and their desire to pass this on to pupils. Many people expressed the need for key points in programme design where subject specific support and input was guaranteed. A number of people suggested that alternative subject expertise should be available for schools that could not provide this in-house.

"There are lots of things in science where I'd need more tailoring to my subject or specific things in school." ECT

For the primary phase it was recognised that ECTs are likely to have a more diverse set of subject specific needs and that facilitating access to this at school or trust level was something effective mentors saw as part of their role.

4.2.3 ITT and ECF Mentoring Alignment

As mentioned many times - mentoring was viewed by many as the most important element of the ECF. However many also raised its equal importance for ITT (where more than two thirds of the programme is in school). There is a concern that the capacity for schools to offer ITT placements and the effective, dedicated mentoring that is needed to do this (an enhanced requirement from Sept 24 following the implementation of the ITT Market Review) is threatened. While mentoring is invaluable, scaling existing good practices requires significant resource prioritisation. Many suggested that protected funding for mentoring time to cover both ITT and ECF would be a huge benefit.

"This could be a gamechanger." Trust Leader

4.2.4 Support for Mentors

There was a strong consensus that mentoring is such a crucial element of ECT support and development that more attention needed to be given to the support and development of this crucial group. This is about the ongoing conduct of the role and where support, QA and professional value can be found. In schools and trusts where the approach to mentoring is strategic this was often built into the professional development structure. Others also mentioned the 'lead mentor' role being introduced in ITT and suggested this was a potentially useful source of support and oversight for ECF where the role was held within a school or trust.

"The Leading Teacher Development NPQ is not focused enough on mentoring. We also need a more national model for mentoring - [the existing] mentor framework is out of date." Mentor and Facilitator

"You need that time to go and train. You need to be released and you need it because you're supporting someone through their first part of their career." Mentor

Many stakeholders highlighted the importance of the Induction Tutor and suggested this role needed more consideration in the future development of the ECF. The need to keep it separate from but complementary to the mentor was considered important if the risk of 'judge-mentoring' where support and assessment might come into conflict was to be avoided.

"Investment has to be in mentors as well as the ECTs. I am lucky because I get to pick them, but in some schools it is who is free. Need to prioritise the right people to be mentors." Induction Tutor

"I think it's really important to have an independent person whether it's someone from another school or an outside agency, someone just to say how's it going?" Mentor

Similarly it was often raised that the role of the mentor in relation to other sources of support and expertise available within the school or trust was important. Where mentors saw themselves as a conduit to other experts, ECTs feel supported by a 'wrap around' approach to their needs.

"I think that role is critical because ...this is probably the area where we could make this have even more impact on how it plays out in schools." Lead Provider

"Mentorship is crucial for easing workload and enabling professional growth."
Induction Tutor

4.2.5 Career Pathways

Effective mentoring is also enabled through formal career progression pathways and strengthening continuous development support structures.

As mentioned above a number of stakeholders highlighted the importance of mentoring being recognised as an important feature of school and staff development. Where this is recognised at school or trust level it can help the most effective mentors to focus their professional development and feel this is a highly regarded and well utilised area of specialist expertise from which many staff can benefit. A number of stakeholders commented that school, trust and system level formal recognition of this as a career pathway was or could be beneficial.

"An issue has always been the skin in the game for the teacher who's been teaching for 4 or 5 years who wants to progress into leadership, who wants to progress their career. Doing this and then being recognised for it is important ... and should be seen as important for people's CVs." Lead Provider

4.3 Theme 2: Programme Design

Much thought and care has gone into the programme design by both government and lead providers. Any changes therefore need to be made with caution. However, as the ECF programme matures there is scope to further enhance responsiveness to context and point of need. Technological platforms additionally constrain effective content delivery in some contexts.

4.3.1 Framework Evidence Base

While the majority of stakeholders expressed support for the EEF's role in ensuring there was a robust evidence base underpinning the ECF, many suggested it was a partial 'snapshot' of what is understood that will evolve and need continual review. It was felt to be important that the evidence base at any given time is not used as a fixed and uncontestable set of understandings. A

number also raised the lack of robust evidence on professional development and mentoring and the need for this to be commissioned.

“Gatekeeping is actually really, really important and I do see the need to have it. Except that we are also going to need to work out how we broaden it, particularly if we are going to do something in the Early Years space”. Lead Provider

4.3.2 Sequencing and Repetition

As discussed in section 6.2, there is some frustration that mentors do not feel trusted to know best how to meet ECTs at point of need. ECTs also express the negative impact of repeating content that they have experienced in ITT. The recently published ITTECF review goes some way to address this but it was felt that more could be done to maximise the benefit of the programme through a more flexible approach, possibly allowing carefully considered variation to the sequence. This would build on the recently announced flexibility for mentors to focus on the aspects of self-study most needed to support their ECT’s development in a more tailored way and allow more freedom over the sequence as well as depth.

“I found the [in person] meetings that we have are very repetitive. A lot of the content was covered on my PGCE.” ECT

“The lack of flexibility in the role of mentors in delivering the programme gives a clear message that we don't really trust that [they] can do this properly. I had that fed back innumerable times. And it has impacted on mentor engagement.” Lead Provider

The ability to flex the ECF programme to context and needs has improved significantly as it has matured and the revised framework and implementation will support this further. However, many expressed the need for more flexibility over the ordering of learning blocks to help balance customisation to context and needs with curriculum coherence.

“The chunks have to be big enough so you've got coherence and progression ...What I'm not so sure about anymore is that you need it to be from course start to course end.” Lead Provider

It is important to note that any variation to sequence might present risks to curriculum coherence and there would therefore need to be carefully designed parameters within which this could happen.

As also acknowledged in the recently published ITTECF review, the frustrating sense of repetition needs to be addressed by a clearer framing of revisiting and deepening, rather than encountering for the first time. It is worth noting here though that there is an anomaly for ECTs who have entered the profession through assessment only as they will be encountering the knowledge statements for the first time in the ECF.

"I'm really, really keen on making sure that we don't go for a free for all - that we have coverage that makes sense. But if you we're looking at having broader chunks, potentially three, three chunks that might meet them better at point of need" Lead Provider

The burden on workload that lack of flexibility creates should not be overlooked.

"Sometimes they say they might not be able to give you your time this week because such and such is off ...and I think sometimes they just think '[ECT name] always manages to get everything done'" ECT

4.3.3 Choice and Coherence

While it was agreed by most that it is important for the ECF to have a common core, there are concerns that programme delivery design is too rigid and inflexible, and does not offer individual professional agency or choice. Some additional flexibility across some modules could provide space to contextualise around phase, subject or school.

"I think there needs to be more context, more subject specific, to be more relevant to what they're actually doing. I think they have to watch a lot of webinars that might not actually motivate them [at that time]." Mentor

Practitioners praised the flexibility available in the second year from some providers, where they are able to choose to focus on particular aspects of teaching, within specified parameters. If the ECF is to encourage autonomy, there does need to be some thought given to how that is developed during and beyond the second year of teaching.

"Empowering people to know there is flexibility within the programme requires minimums. We've been surprised by the amount of difference between providers." Induction Tutor

To support sustained and meaningful engagement, practitioners and school leaders felt asynchronous online learning needs to be reviewed. Content needs to be carefully framed and designed to facilitate the all-important revisiting of components of great teaching in new contexts and greater depth but accessed in a way that is more responsive to points of need (as identified and negotiated with the mentor).

"As much as I thought well we could just bring them on a bit more and study more about behaviour because it's a good opportunity ...they were still concentrating on how to plan a lesson" Mentor

Similarly consideration needs to be given to the use of synchronous learning opportunities to:

- Create subject and phase communities
- Intentionally facilitate cross subject and phase learning
- Develop peer support

"It was good from the point of view that, where I am the only ECT in my academy, it was good to meet as ECTs and other subjects and as schools generally." ECT

4.3.4 Delivery Process and Platforms

Stakeholders raised several issues related to the complexities of the platforms used for delivering the ECF.

A common concern was that the multiple layers of the model (lead provider, delivery partner, school, IT systems, mentor) made it challenging to discern and develop lines of accountability and responsibility which are both conducive to robust quality control of the programme nationally as well as demonstrating and exercising trust in the profession.

Some stakeholders felt that the technological platforms themselves were difficult to navigate and use effectively, which has been considered in the DfE's own review. There were also concerns about the compatibility and integration of different platforms and systems.

There was general widespread consensus that a two year model for delivery should remain, supported by practitioners in these stages of their career.

"I enjoy that it is over 2 years, the lowering of contact time in year 2 means I feel prepared for year 3 which helps my confidence. I don't think I would be ready this year." ECT

"It needs to be spread over the 2 years because there's so many changes that are happening that you need to be kept abreast of." ECT

4.3.5 The Teachers' Standards

There was some tension between the focus on assessing ECTs against the Teachers' Standards and developing a deep understanding of the principles and evidence underpinning the ECF itself.

The professional accountability of mentors in supporting ECTs to successfully complete the ECF programme was a point of discussion. While mentors should feel a sense of responsibility for nurturing their mentees' development, there were concerns that an over-emphasis on "completing the programme content" could additionally undermine meaningful engagement and the development of professional agency and curiosity.

"It's a bit like a tickbox, you are at the sessions because you need to be and you have to cover certain things." ECT

For this to be possible, Teachers' Standards updates to align with the golden thread should be considered.

4.4 Theme 3: Subject and Phase Specificity

Opportunities exist to strengthen subject-specific pedagogies and guarantee access to subject matter networks. Many of those we spoke to noted a strong need for subject specificity in the ECF, particularly focused on the practical aspects of subject pedagogy.

Tailoring content and mentoring to Early Years and primary contexts additionally emerged as an area needing focus. Many also pointed to the need for some specific focus on the phase in which an ECT is working, and on subjects as they are taught within particular phases. It is also important for ECTs to cross subject and phase boundaries, in order to have a broader understanding of the fundamentals of teaching and learning.

Schools and providers work hard to make sure that materials are contextualised, but access to subject and phase support is not consistent across the country or across

subjects. Solutions to providing access to context specific support should be supported by the programme design and by policy on funding and aligning national initiatives, e.g. subject hub networks.

4.4.1 Case Studies

Almost all stakeholders, across all roles, felt that high quality subject specific materials and case studies were a priority and that flexibility over when and how to access them would be important to maximise their effectiveness. These materials could exemplify the sorts of things that a teacher should know and should be thinking about as they develop their subject knowledge, and would be helpful to both ECT and mentor. Concerns were expressed about how these materials might be produced and by whom, reflecting unease about potential bias or inflexibility.

*"Subject materials should be pitched as **a** way of teaching this subject, rather than as **the** way' Subject Association*

*"Secondary case studies could be more balanced and framed within their context."
Mentor*

4.4.2 Subject Specific Expertise

Subject specific mentoring was identified as key to supporting the ECT's subject knowledge and pedagogy. It is helpful for this to be within school, so that support is readily available, and the mentor understands the context of the school curriculum and practice. It was acknowledged that this is not always possible, particularly for smaller subjects and in small schools. It can also be more difficult to provide subject mentoring in smaller departments where accountability responsibilities may blur mentor relationships. In these cases it is important that the mentor can signpost the ECT to subject support within the Trust, or local authority or local partnerships, and to highlight resources from the Delivery Partner.

"Most ECTs I speak with feel that for in-person days the enquiry tasks are too broad. The resources, like powerpoints, lack points for meaningful engagement." Mentor

Subject leaders within a school or Trust can also be a good source of support for ECTs to develop their subject knowledge and practice.

Subject specific mentoring can be important for the mentor as well, offering opportunities to share subject expertise, to learn from the ECT and to develop shared understanding of the curriculum.

While it is currently difficult to ensure all ECTs have subject specific mentors, discussion confirmed there is no doubt that it is too important to leave to chance. For those subjects, schools or local areas where it is difficult to provide a subject mentor, it is still important that ECTs have access to subject expertise, and that the school-based mentor can signpost to well-qualified practitioners.

Consideration could be given to making subject specific mentoring a guaranteed local or national entitlement, to ensure parity of support. This could be through developing national or local pools of subject experts, including phase-specific subject expertise, who can work with the ECT on particular issues.

"I'm very fearful that we'll end up with 30 different iterations of the early career framework, and then you'll have teachers at the very beginning of their profession, unsuited and unfitted to move between phases. So I'd be very disturbed if the ECF moved too far away from a core programme.

Early years, SEND, primary, secondary - there are clear differences and those need to be accommodated for. I can see a way forward with subjects in that, like modules that could be used for different subjects, and national or regional access to expertise." Lead Provider

4.4.3 Networks and Communities

Peer networks outside school (in subject or phase) are useful for professional development, confidence and support. Subject hubs could offer expertise to ECTs and mentors, however they are unevenly distributed across the country, and not available in every subject, and it would be difficult at this moment to build them into a national entitlement. Policy-makers should consider how to align the subject hub programme with the ECF programme. Curriculum hubs could be developed across a range of subjects in order to provide more subject-specific support and networks, which could benefit teachers at every stage of their careers, not just in the Early Career phase.

There may also be a role for subject associations, in offering both resources and networks. For secondary ECTs in particular, it is often a love of their subject that draws them into teaching, and it is vital for retention and wellbeing that this is

nurtured through their early careers. It was suggested that, often conversations around the Framework are focused more on data or behaviour than on subject teaching. For ECTs, being part of a professional community with shared values and passions could support both wellbeing and retention, and could be nurtured through a subject community.

“People love their subject first and foremost, love teaching their subject. Having an expectation that everybody can enter with the same confidence and passion across all three sciences is a challenge and children know if you’re not passionate or confident. It can be nurtured through the subject community as well as the subject teaching community - definitely beyond school - possibly even with subject organisations facilitating.” Subject Association

This is equally true, particularly in primary and early years, of phase communities. ECTs should be encouraged to engage with professional associations that offer support, networking and community within their phase as well.

While opportunities to join a subject or phase community, and to attend conferences and events that nurture this sense of belonging to a community, are often available, discussions with stakeholders and the study’s steering group suggest that this should form part of the entitlement for all ECTs.

4.4.4 Early Years

Some stakeholders were concerned that the ECF does not seem as well-designed for teaching in the early years, including both foundation stage and key stage 1. The lack of evidence around child development, and from key early years theorists such as Vygotsky and Piaget, has made it feel very secondary-focused. Subject focus in early years, and in primary more generally, is very different from secondary, and it is not possible over the two years of the ECF to consider all subjects in depth, without adding considerably to teacher workload. But it is also not desirable to focus only on English and maths.

“We need to think about how the ECF can address subject specific gaps for primary and early years. We can’t cover all the subjects in 2 years of the framework, not in any depth anyway. Could we offer core and optional ‘credits’ over a career? Or perhaps have a national entitlement to additional subject content beyond the ECF.” Union Leader

Consideration could be given to developing a national entitlement to subject resources within phase, extending into the years after the ECF in order to address subject specific gaps.

4.5 Theme 4: School Capacity

School leadership capacity and strategic vision were repeatedly highlighted as crucial enablers for ECF efficacy. However, compressed timescales pose mentor resourcing issues. Addressing these resourcing and structural barriers will be key to sustainable models enabling the ECF to achieve its aims.

School leaders, including senior leadership teams and induction tutors, should be provided with support to reflect on and share their experiences of ECF delivery so that future developments to the ECF can be shaped in the interests of all participants across all providers. Formally, this might, for example, take the shape of including content on the ECF in all leadership NPQs, as well as policy-makers recruiting to a national steering committee of school leaders to oversee future developments.

Recommendations here link to the aforementioned TDT recommendations on entitlement, *A Professional Expectation: Increasing Access to CPD*.

4.5.1 Time and Resource

Effective timetabling and allocation of time was highlighted as a crucial factor in enabling successful mentoring and ECT support at the school level.

"Balancing the ECF and teaching workload is challenging, especially observations. There is a lack of appreciation of how much work it entails." Mentor

In-school leaders noted the challenges of finding sufficient time and resources within existing staff structures to accommodate mentoring, training, and other ECF activities when there is little flexibility around, e.g. order of delivery, and funding for releasing staff. Strategic, long-term planning expertise to ensure that ECTs and their mentors have sufficient dedicated time built into their schedules for observations, feedback conversations, and training, is a significant enabler. While this is being catered to locally, through the efforts of leaders in schools, Trusts and Teaching School Hubs, and despite overall buy-in for the ECF being high, there was a sense of frustration communicated that the lack of ownership for operational delivery can hinder progress.

*"Workload, SEN responsibilities, and safeguarding concerns impact job satisfaction."
School Leader*

Overall school capacity was identified as a major enabler or barrier, with issues related to school capacity and staffing levels being frequently raised. For this to be possible, appropriate funding from the government toward the release of mentors is crucial.

4.5.2 Trust and Autonomy

There was consensus on needing sufficient consistency and fidelity to the ECF framework and evidence base to create national "entitlement." However, more deliberate processes for ensuring professional trust and autonomy in how the programmes are delivered many felt would enable them to better impact at a local level.

Specifically, the need to work through the learning blocks (in both the independent learning and the mentoring) in a particular way and order was often cited as a source of frustration and a barrier to meeting ECTs at the point of need. Many mentors had adopted a twin track approach where they focused mentoring on the areas they considered important for the ECT in addition to separately working through the programme in the specified order. This raises questions about the best use of time and the approaches most likely to foster a positive attitude to the ECF locally and nationally. It also risks the crucial sense of professionalism needed for mentors and ECTs to feel valued and trusted.

"The programme does not allow flexibility that is needed means it takes [mentor] skill to get buy-in." Induction Tutor

A 2020 report by the NFER showed that autonomy is a crucial aspect of teacher satisfaction and that this particularly applies to professional development. It is associated with a nine-percentage-point increase in intention to stay in teaching.

"I don't think any mentor who wants to put in the time with someone and actually help them develop genuinely does it simply for recognition." Mentor

"From my personal experience, being able to offer what I feel I didn't have is enough for me." Mentor

It is important, however, to balance the rewards of increased flexibility against the risk to curriculum coherence and the need for building knowledge over time.

“It's about the leverage isn't it? And about that sense of agency, that sense that you're a professional and you can make things happen and you've got the trust [of your colleagues].” Lead Provider

“Refining this would be to extend greater trust to the profession. The over rigidity of the mentor training has discouraged a number of mentors within the system.” Lead Provider

4.6 Summary of Focus Groups Discussions and Findings

4.6.1 Mentors, Induction Tutors, School and Delivery Leaders

Collated February 2024, some key emerging findings and examples regarding mentor, induction tutor and school leader perspectives on the Early Career Framework (ECF) include:

Common emerging themes:

- Value of formal ECF structure but needs more flexibility
- Importance of customised support and protected time
- Tailoring to subject-specific contexts is vital
- Effective matching of mentors with ECT skill levels and teaching contexts
- Workload balancing and wider understanding of ECF demands needed
- Ongoing investment and training for mentors is essential

Commonalities in experience:

- Appreciation for formal recognition and developmental arc ECF provides
- Intrinsic motivation to mentor for professional growth of self and ECTs
- Administrative assistance would aid delivery of quality mentoring

Differences highlighted:

- Quality and approaches vary among ECF providers
- Support needs and optimal mentoring models differ across teaching contexts (e.g. secondary vs. early years)

- More experienced mentors want recognition, less structured training

In summary, while perspectives differed based on factors like experience and teaching context, there were strong common themes around the formal and developmental value of ECF, need for flexibility, customisation and support for mentors, and motivating relationships. Targeted investments in areas like administrative aid, protected time and tailored training emerge as priorities to improve mentor entitlements and strengthen ECF implementation.

Sample group evidence (see appendix 9.4) highlights the investments needed in tailored training, administrative support, protected time, and workload balancing for effective mentoring. While valuing the formal structure, mentors and leaders emphasise the importance of flexibility, subject-specific alignment, understanding school contexts, and intrinsically motivated relationships. Continued enhancements to the quality, customisation and context-responsiveness of ECF mentoring emerge as priorities from these discussions.

4.6.2 Early Career Teachers

Collated February 2024, some key findings and examples regarding ECT perspectives on the Early Career Framework (ECF) include:

1. Repetitiveness of content: All groups noted the ECF content can be repetitive from their initial teacher training, lacking tailored subject-specific focus and practical application. Specific examples cited include safety procedures, analysing school data.
2. Mentoring is invaluable but needs support: The crucial role of mentors for support is consistently highlighted, though mentors are often overstretched. Suggestions include better workload scheduling for mentors, incentives, and departmental matching.
3. Need for flexibility and customisation: Groups emphasise increased flexibility in ECF implementation to suit teachers' individual needs and integration with school contexts. This could involve tailoring programs, pacing of workload, and options to revisit learning.
4. Disconnect with motivation: The mandated ECF program risks being viewed as a "tick box" exercise. Motivation tends to come

more from seeing student progress rather than the program content itself.

5. Concerns on workload: Uneven spread of ECF workload exacerbates existing challenges around high teacher workloads. This contributes to retention issues alongside wider system concerns.
6. Appreciation for two-year supported timeframe: The gradual reduction in ECF contact time over two years, compared to the intensive first year of teaching, receives positive feedback.

In summary, while valuing elements like mentoring and the two-year structure, the ECTs met with provide consistent critiques regarding the repetitive content, inflexibility, and misalignment of ECF with in-school teaching realities and motivations. Tailoring, integration and addressing workload issues emerge as priorities. Participant views highlight important considerations for both enhancing and evaluating ECF implementation to support teacher retention and effectiveness.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Several promising opportunities emerge from these and interview findings, including the need for enhancing subject-specific content and support which offers a strong lever for improving engagement and efficacy. As teachers' motivation often stems from passion for their subject, strengthening these connections throughout early development nurtures talent retention and effectiveness.

While consistency and curriculum coherence matter, judicious flexibility empowering participants fosters ownership and trusts professional judgement. The principles guiding this study emphasise building agency and autonomy. Allowing careful sequencing modifications aligned to needs would balance structure with customisation.

Positioning mentoring as a strategic priority warrants consideration. Dedicated funding and capacity building elevate its status as a specialised body of knowledge vital for succession planning. This includes consolidation of development support for mentors themselves.

Implications extend to the wider CPD landscape too. The infrastructure enabling the ECF could form the foundations for a broader entitlement to professional learning. But sustaining this requires long-term resource prioritisation by government.

Ultimately, quantitative data on impact is needed to reinforce qualitative insights around enhancing flexibility. But indicators on engagement, wellbeing and perseverance with the profession provide encouraging signs.

Realising the ECF's full promise rests on the agency and expertise of participants. While prudent standardisation and evidence alignment matter, so too does professional autonomy. The vision forward encompasses a policy ecosystem fostering judicious innovation within structured parameters.

6. Recommendations for Policymakers

The resulting nine recommendations of this study link to TDT's [*A Professional Expectation: Improving Access to CPD for Teachers and School Leaders*](#). For context, the CPD entitlement report recommends that government:

- Commission an independent review of Teachers' Standards for Professional Development to reflect current understanding and expectations.
- Fully fund the 'Golden Thread,' including ECF and NPQs, ensuring accessibility and reviewing leadership NPQ content.
- Establish a Teachers' Professional Development Fund to seed CPD development in areas of need, with an initial £3m per year.
- Allocate remaining entitlement funds to schools based on their judgement, without ring-fencing, but with evaluation for effectiveness.
- Define entitlement in terms of a professional expectation, not specific hours, to avoid box-ticking culture.
- Focus entitlement-funded CPD on individual teacher or leader needs, excluding operational or policy training.
- Commission and fund the Chartered College of Teaching to create a Professional Development Portal for all educators.
- Provide guidance on career pathways and CPD options without linking to promotion or pay, embracing a co-production approach.

6.1 Recommendations on Resource Allocation and Recognition

1. Plan for long-term strategic mentoring, considering staffing and funding for sustained support. This aligns with the need to create a Teachers' Professional Development Fund, ensuring sustained investment in mentoring.
2. Allocate funding for protected time and resources for mentors to ensure effective support. This echoes the importance of fully funding the 'Golden Thread', including resources for mentors to carry out their roles successfully.
3. Recognise mentoring as vital for teacher development, exploring formal recognition and career pathways. This relates to the importance of providing guidance on career pathways and CPD options without linking to promotion or pay, emphasising the importance of mentor recognition.
4. Support flexibility in Early Career Framework (ECF) delivery to reduce administrative burdens on schools and allow variation in content sequence,

easing cognitive load for participants. This corresponds to the focus on individual teacher needs in CPD funded by the entitlement, avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens.

6.2 Recommendations on Professional Development and Training

5. Ensure leadership training incorporates understanding of the ECF to effectively support Early Career Teachers (ECTs) and mentors. This ties with the need to review leadership NPQs to ensure they support CPD conversations effectively, including understanding the ECF.
6. Update Teachers' Standards to align with the ECF, reflecting contemporary understanding and expectations. This corresponds to the call for an independent review of Teachers' Standards for Professional Development to reflect current understanding and expectations.
7. Clarify responsibilities for subject leaders in ECT development at both local and national levels, ensuring that where subject-specific support is not available through mentoring it is available through other routes and channels locally. This ties with the need for evaluation to inform understanding of how schools utilise funding, ensuring effective support structures like subject-specific development.
8. Enable subject-specific networking, possibly aligning national subject hub networks with ECF entitlements. This relates to the call for creating a Teachers' Professional Development Fund to seed CPD development in areas of need, such as subject-specific CPD.
9. Commission the development of phase-specific content tailored to early years and primary education to meet specific needs effectively. This again aligns with the call for seeding CPD development in areas of need.

7. Conclusion & Next Steps

In conclusion, this exploratory study revealed crucial ingredients for building on the successes of the ECF roll out by focusing continual improvement efforts on enhancements to subject specificity, sustainable resourcing, and balanced customisation.

Longer-term quantitative studies assessing impact are vital next steps for validating findings from this initial qualitative study. Exploring alignments with wider CPD entitlement proposals additionally offers opportunities for infrastructure building. Successfully translating these insights will require collaboration between policy, research, and practice.

With care and commitment, continuous improvements promise a reinforcing cycle of increased system capacity, trust in the profession and retention of passionate talent.

7.1 Call to Action

It is clear that those involved in the early career framework are passionate about supporting the next generation of teachers, and committed to making the system work in the best way possible. While some of our recommendations are for policy-makers, particularly in government, to take forward, the sector owns its collective responsibility to build a strong profession. There are opportunities for different partners in the system to:

- Share effective practices
- Develop evaluations of impact
- Strengthen the evidence base for mentoring practices and professional development
- Build understanding of the ECF within leadership development programmes
- Nurture networks and subject and phase communities for ECTs and mentors.

7.2 Recommendations for Further Research

While this report covers a wide range of issues related to early career teacher development, the intention of this paper is to make recommendations to the medium and long term continual improvements to the provision grounded in TDT's understanding of effective culture and conditions for retention and teacher development. As such, there are some areas that fall outside our scope but that our findings suggest additional investigation is needed in. These include:

- Identifying any missing, under-emphasised, or outdated content within the ECF, like decolonising the curriculum, preparing for climate action, or addressing post-COVID challenges for teachers.
- Understanding the pupil experience, including how aware students are of their teachers engaging with the ECF, trialling activities, and developing as reflective practitioners through the framework.
- Exploring how routes into teaching, such as ITT or assessment only, impact the experience of teachers engaging with the ECF.

As the ECF model matures, continued research along these lines could provide valuable insights into its strengths, areas for improvement, means of tailoring delivery, and opportunities for enhancing outcomes for early career teachers and their students. A multi-faceted programme evaluation incorporating these aspects would yield a richer, more holistic understanding of the ECF's efficacy.

8. Thanks

We are grateful to the Gatsby Foundation for funding this work and supporting the study and publication of its report.

Steering Group:

This exploratory study was further supported by an expert steering group overseeing the research, including Catherine Boulton (Royal Society), Jenni French (Gatsby Foundation), and other critical friends of TDT.

Researchers:

We were fortunate to gain insights from an expert research team at Sheffield Hallam University, led by Emily Perry and Jo Booth.

Stakeholder Contributions:

Contributions to the study have been gratefully received and this report is offered to sector stakeholders and government in the spirit of collaboration to continue to improve conditions for teachers in England.

We extend particular thanks to colleagues and representatives from the below organisations for contributing to and shaping our thinking and recommendations - without their generosity this report could not have been possible:

Ambition Institute, Burnham-on-Crouch School, BDAT Academies, Capita, Chartered College of Teaching, Chiltern Learning TSH, Confederation of School Trusts, Department for Education, Education Development Trust, Education Endowment Foundation, Gatsby Foundation, Institute of Physics, Iris Connect, Lead TSH, Liverpool Hope University, NAHT, NASUWT, NCETM, NEU, Ofsted, Royal Society, Royal Society of Biology, Sheffield Hallam University, Teach First, Teaching School Hub Council

Publication Note:

At this moment, we believe the report best reflects the praise and concerns of the practitioners we met with. The team at the Teacher Development Trust are grateful to those who supported us to arrange and host a series of focus groups with teachers and leaders. An online call for participation was also made available for anybody who wished to share ideas and views.

We met with representatives from four of the Lead Provider organisations for the ECF programmes. All of these organisations were invited to interview and provided an explanation as to the intent, themes of inquiry, and methodology of this study. We received no objections to the study premise or development of the report. We also met with representatives from the DfE and EEF.

Finally, TDT recognises that the Department for Education has recently published an evaluation of the Early Career Framework induction programmes. While there are some positive findings around confidence-building and extending ITT learnings, the review also highlights areas for improvement like workload and lack of tailoring. DfE is already enacting changes to address this feedback, with more flexibility introduced and further enhancements to personalisation and streamlining coming in 2025.

Our independent analysis was conducted over the same timeframe as DfE's review. We believe the recommendations we put forward stand on their own merits. The planned reforms noted above appear promising for strengthening ECF delivery moving forward. However, our suggestions could further improve outcomes in areas like mentor entitlement and the development of professional agency. We look forward to a continuing dialogue around medium- and long-term improvements to the ECF programmes so the sector may best serve early-career teachers together.

9. Appendices

9.1 Information shared with contributors, interviewees, and focus group participants in advance

About the review

The Early Career Framework (ECF) is a pivotal initiative in teacher support and training, responding to the pressing challenges of teacher recruitment and retention. However, concerns have surfaced regarding its restrictiveness and the possible need for more subject-specific focus.

This research project, led by Professor Sam Twiselton OBE in collaboration with TDT, aims to delve into these concerns and explore the possibility of a more flexible, nuanced approach to the ECF. By examining gaps in the current framework, exploring subject specificity, and envisioning ongoing learning opportunities, the project, funded by the Gatsby Foundation, seeks to shape recommendations for a more adaptive and responsive support system for early career teachers.

The research focuses on key lines of enquiry:

- 1. Subject Specificity: There are challenges and opportunities surrounding subject specificity for early career teachers. Your expertise will help us explore how we can strike a balance between developing both subject and teaching expertise and the benefits of this. Your thoughts on developing subject-specific materials generated by subject associations will play a vital role in shaping this vision and its practical applications in the classroom.*
- 2. Application of Knowledge in the Classroom: Beyond theoretical knowledge, we are interested in understanding how subjects can be practically applied in diverse classroom settings, especially considering factors such as behaviour. Your experiences and observations will provide valuable context to this discussion.*
- 3. Strengthening the Role of Mentors: The quality of mentoring is of course vital to the development of professional agency and expertise in early career teachers. Your insights into how the mentor programme can align with*

recommendations, better supporting the growth and satisfaction of early career teachers are highly anticipated.

4. Realistic Implementation of ECF: Working within parameters is often necessary, we are envisioning realistic and flexible recommendations for the implementation of the Early Career Framework (ECF) and want to ensure we avoid recommendations which will cause undue disruption to schools. We are interested in exploring ways to make these more flexible and subject-specific where there is evidence this will promote greater job satisfaction and retention. Your innovative ideas in this regard will greatly inform our research.

Your role in interviews/focus groups:

- *Scoping and Testing Understanding: Your input in scoping and testing our understanding with a wider group is essential.*
- *Assessment of Current ECF Version: We seek your critical analysis of what is working and not working in the current version of ECF.*
- *Thoughts on Proposed Changes: Your thoughts on proposed changes and any additional recommendations will shape the direction of our research.*

Your participation in this research interview will help shape a comprehensive review report that makes recommendations to the improvement of this framework.

Please note:

It is important to TDT and the organisations supporting this work that all views and experiences are fairly and accurately represented, and for this to happen we are committed to protecting focus group participant's anonymity. While we will offer thanks in our review publication to all participating organisations, no school, school leader, or participant of a focus group will be named nor identifying details shared.

The insights of this work will be public and available to inform any organisation's decision to bid for the ECF. We would like to make explicit that while TDT is able to run this project with impartiality given we are not a current lead provider of the ECF, we acknowledge that the insights gained will influence our decisions to bid for the contract when tender is published this spring. The project itself is not intended as a promotional activity for TDT's ability to succeed in a bid to be a lead provider. Engagement with stakeholders across the sector, through multiple providers and

made anonymous where necessary, will ensure the recommendations of this review reflect and are responsive to the sector.

In the interest of working together with our colleagues in the sector for the continued improvement and success of national programmes for teachers, we will not publish any quotes or evidence which we feel unfairly represents any provider or encourages competition. Lead providers contributing to this review will be sent an advance embargoed copy of the report prior to final edit, giving opportunity to query any representations that may have been unintentionally made.

Contributing Voices

Practitioner voices are essential when advocating for the future of teacher support and training. Each group's contribution will help create a more responsive and effective support system for early career teachers, which can ultimately lead to improved outcomes for both educators and students alike.

Early Career Teachers:

Your insights as early career teachers are invaluable in shaping the direction of the ECF. Your firsthand experiences provide crucial perspective on the effectiveness of current support systems and areas where improvements are needed. Your contribution will directly impact the quality of support provided to future generations of teachers, ensuring a more nurturing and conducive environment for professional growth.

Mentors:

As mentors, you play a pivotal role in guiding and supporting ECTs through their professional journey. Your understanding of the challenges faced by mentees, as well as your expertise in providing effective support and guidance, are instrumental in refining the ECF. Your contribution will encourage long term changes to the framework to better align with the needs and expectations of mentors and mentees alike, fostering a more enriching mentoring experience.

School Leaders and Induction Tutors:

School leaders and induction tutors serve as key decision-makers and influencers within educational institutions. Your strategic insights and operational experience are crucial in identifying systemic challenges and opportunities for improvement within the ECF. By actively participating in this focus group, you can help make recommendations for policies and practices that not only support ECTs but also contribute to the overall success and sustainability of your schools.

Delivery Partners and Facilitators:

As delivery partners and facilitators, you are at the forefront of implementing and delivering the ECF. Your deep understanding of the framework's intricacies, as well as your expertise in facilitating professional development sessions, offer valuable perspectives on its strengths and limitations. Your input will inform recommendations for enhancing the delivery and effectiveness of ECF programmes, ensuring that they remain relevant and impactful in addressing the evolving needs of early career teachers.

9.2 Interview questions

Opening Questions:

Scoping and Testing Understanding:

- *How do we make the ECF the best it can be so it has a permanent place in the education landscape?*
- *What is working well and how can it be further improved within realistic parameters?*
- *How far do you think the proposed changes will meet these improvements? Is there more that can be done?*
- *What would you definitely not want to see changed?*
- *What insights can you provide to help test and refine our interpretation of gaps in the framework or development of ECTs in general?*

Assessment of Current ECF Version:

- *What critical analysis can you offer regarding what is currently working well in the ECF, especially in terms of subject specificity, and what areas need improvement?*
- *For unions, if we assume that the ECF is here to stay (and most people want it to stay), what are the key things you think should change in order to address the key issues your members raise? What would you do first?*

Thoughts on Proposed Changes:

- *What are your thoughts on ways in which guaranteed access to subject expertise could be facilitated (pools of mentors, online seminars, national subject specific resources etc)*

Questions by Stakeholder:

Subject Associations:

Motivations, Professional Identity and Subject Specificity in Teaching:

- *What insights can you provide into the motivations of educators within your subject area for entering the teaching profession?*
- *How do these motivations influence the work and engagement within your association?*
- *What role do you think your association can play in supporting teachers in expressing themselves as subject specialists?*
- *In what ways can subject associations contribute to ensuring that educators feel sufficiently supported and passionate about their subject matter?*
- *Do you observe variations in the importance of subject specificity based on the diverse routes educators take into teaching?*
- *How can subject associations tailor their support to address the unique challenges and needs of educators in different educational phases?*
- *Are there concerns or worries within your association regarding the availability or effectiveness of subject-specific mentors?*

- *In your opinion/experience, are there subject-specific approaches that could enhance job satisfaction and retention while working within the parameters of the ECF?*

Thoughts on Proposed Changes:

- *As we contemplate changes to the ECF, how do you think these changes may address concerns raised by ECTs?*
- *Are there specific considerations related to subject-specific mentoring that should be prioritised?*
- *What recommendations do you have for improving the ECF to better support the development of ECTs?*
- *As a Subject Association Lead, how do you perceive the potential impact of such initiatives on subject-specific mentoring within your association?*
- *What recommendations do you have for aligning mentor programmes with ECF recommendations to enhance the growth and satisfaction of early career teachers?*
- *From a subject association perspective, how can the implementation of the ECF be made more realistic and flexible without causing undue disruption to schools?*

Teaching Unions:

Subject Specificity:

- *Does your union advocate for maintaining subject and phase specialism within the ECF?*
- *What challenges do you perceive in achieving a balance between subject specificity and broader phase requirements?*

Application of Knowledge in the Classroom:

- *In your view, how does the practical application of subject knowledge, especially in handling diverse classroom situations, factor into the ECF, and what improvements can be made?*

Strengthening the Role of Mentors:

- *What role would enhancing the quality of mentoring for early career teachers play in a more robust and adaptable ECF programme?*

Realistic Implementation of ECF:

- *What are the barriers to realistic implementation of the ECF? How might unions contribute to making the implementation of the ECF more flexible and realistic, particularly in subject-specific contexts?*

MAT Leads, Lead Providers, and Delivery Partner Leads:

Subject Specificity:

- *How does your organisation address the challenges of subject specificity and phase specialism within the ECF?*
- *What strategies or programmes does your organisation have in place to support subject-specific training, within and outside of the ECF, especially in smaller departments or for practical subjects?*

Application of Knowledge in the Classroom:

- *How does your organisation incorporate the practical application of subject knowledge, especially in handling diverse classroom scenarios, into ECF programs?*

Strengthening the Role of Mentors:

- *What initiatives or practices does your organisation employ to ensure high-quality mentoring for early career teachers, and how might the learning from these contribute to ECF recommendations?*

Realistic Implementation of ECF:

- *From your organisational perspective, how can the ECF be implemented more realistically and flexibly without causing disruption to schools?*

Other Sector Experts:

Subject Specificity:

- *How do you perceive the role of subject specificity and phase specialism within the ECF?*
- *What are your recommendations for achieving a balance between subject specificity and broader phase requirements?*

Application of Knowledge in the Classroom:

- *How might the ECF better address the practical application of subject knowledge, especially in diverse classroom settings, and*

across different phases, based on your expertise?

Strengthening the Role of Mentors:

- *In your opinion, what role do mentors play in the development of professional agency and expertise for early career teachers?*
- *Do you have any recommendations for improvements in mentor support within the ECF programmes?*

Realistic Implementation of ECF:

- *How can changes to the ECF be implemented in a more realistic and flexible manner, considering subject-specific contexts?*

Responses Template:

<p>Interviewee: Organisation and Role:</p> <p>Interviewer: Date:</p> <p>Recording (link to be added by TDT after meeting for records and review):</p>	
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Intentions described and permissions for recording, etc. sought</p>	
Questions	Notes
<p>Can you describe your role and relationship to/understanding of the ECF and proposed changes?</p> <p><i>Option to provide more information if required</i></p>	
<p>What critical analysis can you offer regarding what is currently working well in the ECF, especially in terms of subject specificity, and what areas need improvement?</p>	

What are your thoughts on proposed changes to the ECF, and do you have any additional recommendations that could shape the direction of our research?	
What insights can you provide to help test and refine our understanding of the proposed changes in practice?	
What insights can you provide to help test and refine our interpretation of gaps in the framework or development of ECTs in general?	
<i>Add rows/questions as required</i>	

9.3 Focus group questions

Early Career Teachers (ECTs):

Motivations and Routes into Teaching:

- *What motivated you to enter the teaching profession, and how have those motivations evolved over time?*
- *Are there specific factors or experiences that influenced your decision to become a teacher?*
- *What was your route into teaching?*
- *Are you currently teaching in an area where you have an academic background?*
- *If not, can you provide examples of how your academic background in a specific subject has been beneficial in your current teaching role?*
- *Do you believe the importance of subject specificity varies for individuals depending on their route into teaching (e.g. traditional teacher training, alternative certification programmes)?*

Phase Distinctions:

- *Reflecting on your experience in primary education, how would you compare the emphasis on children versus the emphasis on your subject matter?*
- *In your current role, how do you balance the focus on students with your subject-specific responsibilities?*

Subject Specificity and Application in Classrooms:

- *Regarding the passion for your subject, do you feel that it is sufficiently nurtured in your current role?*
- *How has your experience with the ECF been influenced by subject-specific mentoring (or not)?*
- *How do you believe having subject-specific mentors has influenced your practical application of subjects in the classroom?*
- *In your opinion, how crucial is it for ECTs to have mentors who are specifically aligned with their subject area?*
- *Are there specific concerns or worries you have regarding the availability or effectiveness of subject-specific mentors in supporting your passion for your subject?*
- *How would you say your route into teaching influenced your views on the significance of subject specificity in mentoring?*
- *Can you provide examples of how your subject-specific mentor has helped you practically apply your subject knowledge in various classroom scenarios?*
- *How has mentoring influenced your understanding of diverse classroom environments and the practical challenges associated with teaching your subject?*

Realistic Changes and Implementation:

- *In what ways do you think a more flexible, subject-specific version of ECF could better support your development as an ECT?*
- *Reflecting on your current role, do you feel that certain parameters impede flexibility, especially concerning subject-specific aspects?*
- *How could these be addressed?*
- *Are there specific areas where you would appreciate more flexibility in your role, particularly related to your subject area?*

- *Would this impact your overall job satisfaction and retention?*

The Role of Mentors:

- *Could you share your experiences with mentors, especially focusing on any subject-specific mentoring you've received?*
- *How has your mentor contributed to your teacher identity and passion for your subject?*
- *In your opinion, what strategies or changes could strengthen the mentoring programme to better support the growth and satisfaction of ECTs like yourself?*

Mentors/Leaders:

Current ECF Programme and Motivations:

- *From your perspective as a mentor, how do ECTs generally perceive the current version of the ECF?*
- *Can you share examples of what is working well in the current version and areas that may need improvement, particularly with a focus on subject-specific mentoring?*
- *In what ways do leaders and mentors contribute to or influence teacher identity?*
- *What motivated you to become a mentor, and how have those motivations evolved over time?*
- *Are there subject-specialist/specific factors or experiences relevant to share in relation to this?*
- *How are you enabled to contribute to the development of teacher identity (and/or passion for subjects) in your ECTs?*

Subject Specificity (including Routes into Teaching and Phase of Education):

- *Do you believe the importance of subject specificity varies for individuals depending on their route into teaching (e.g. traditional teacher training, alternative certification programmes)*
- *From your perspective, does the importance of subject specificity in mentoring vary across different phases of education (e.g., primary, secondary)?*
- *How might the phase of education impact the role and effectiveness of subject-specific mentors?*
- *Regarding the passion for your subject, do you feel that it is sufficiently nurtured in your current role as a mentor?*

- *Do you believe having subject-specific mentors influences your ECTs practical application of subjects in the classroom?*
- *In your opinion, how crucial is it for ECTs to have mentors who are specifically aligned with their subject area?*
- *How has mentoring influenced your understanding of the practical challenges associated with teaching a subject?*

Thoughts on Proposed Changes:

- *As we contemplate changes to the ECF, how do you think these changes may address concerns raised by ECTs?*
- *Are there specific considerations related to subject-specific mentoring that should be prioritised?*
- *What recommendations do you have for improving the ECF to better support the development of ECTs?*
- *In what ways do you think a more flexible, subject-specific version of ECF could better support the development of ECTs?*
- *Reflecting on your current role, do you feel that certain parameters impede flexibility, especially concerning subject-specific aspects?*
- *How could these be addressed?*
- *Are there specific areas where you would appreciate more flexibility in your role, particularly related to your subject area?*
- *Would this impact your overall job satisfaction and retention?*
- *What are the limitations that should be considered?*

9.4 Headlines from Group Discussions (Mentors and Leaders Sample)

Sample Mentors/Leaders Group 1

- Value formal recognition and experience building through ECF
- Essential to have protected time for reflection
- Separation of induction tutor and mentor roles beneficial
- Need for investment and support for mentors
- Importance of peer networks and ongoing mentor training
- Tailor training and support to mentors' needs and experience
- Concerns about workload, funding and time constraints

Sample Mentors/Leaders Group 2

- Desire for more dynamic, collaborative mentor models

- Interest in flexible, context-specific professional development
- Differences in quality across ECF providers
- Emphasise empowering mentors to adapt to ECTs' needs
- Highlight value of subject-specific mentoring
- Mentor understanding of school context is crucial

Sample Mentors/Leaders Group 3

- Comprehensive support materials needed for ECTs
- Guidance should be customised based on backgrounds
- Community engagement valuable for ECT peer support
- Subject-specific preparation and ongoing learning key
- Structured mentoring programs and administrative assistance would help
- Intrinsic motivation for mentoring roles

Sample Mentors/Leaders Group 4

- Appreciate structured ECF for developing ECTs and mentors
- Suggest increased flexibility similar to Year 2 inquiry model
- Matching mentors to ECTs enables tailored support
- Workload balance challenging, lack wider understanding of demands
- Independent check-ins could help address mentor-ECT issues

9.5 Headlines from Group Discussions (ECTs Sample)

Sample ECTs Group 1

- Find group meetings valuable but inquiry tasks too broad, resources unengaging
- Call for more balanced, contextualised case studies
- View ECF as a "tick box" exercise, lacking in motivation
- Importance of tailored ECT support; varying mentoring experiences
- Workload, SEN responsibilities challenge retention and satisfaction
- See student progress as a key fulfilment
- Appreciate two-year extended timeframe

Sample ECTs Group 2

- Express a mix of teaching passion and concerns about school environment

- Varying ECF implementation and support levels in schools
- Need for greater ECF awareness, aligned expectations in schools
- Recommend gradual, flexible ECF approach with consolidation of learning
- School climate and ECF experience affects retention considerations

Sample ECTs Group 3

- Content often repetitive from initial teacher training
- Reduce repetition, enhance subject-specificity
- Spread ECF workload more evenly across years
- Ensure sufficient mentor time and matching
- Tailor ECF to individual teacher needs
- Motivation stems more from student needs than ECF itself

10. Funder

Gatsby is a foundation set up by David Sainsbury to realise his charitable objectives. This includes a commitment to strengthening the country's science and engineering skills by developing innovative programmes and informing national policy on technical education, skills and good careers guidance. To achieve our ambition to increase the quality and supply of STEM skills to the UK workforce, we work to ensure that young people are taught by well-qualified and motivated specialists.

To find out more visit: www.gatsby.org.uk/education

“Continuing professional development plays a critical role in the retention of teachers, and it is crucial that their early experiences are the best they possibly can be. This is why Gatsby, building on existing good practice and the changes and improvements to the Early Career Framework recently made by government, is committed to finding out what else can be done.

“We can't rely on recruitment alone to address the critical shortage of teachers which is particularly acute in physics, maths, and computer science. We must do everything in our power to retain those already teaching our children in the classroom. With a greater emphasis on flexibility and subject-specific support the Early Career Framework has the potential to boost retention and ensure more young people benefit from being taught by specialist teachers.”

Jenni French, Head of STEM in Schools, Gatsby Foundation

11. Lead Organisation

Teacher Development Trust (TDT) is the smart, heart, humble charity for effective professional development in schools. Founded in 2012 by teachers and school leaders, our mission is to support extraordinary leaders to empower staff and build expert schools. We want to see powerful professional development in every school and college so that teachers thrive and children succeed.

To find out more visit: <https://tdtrust.org/work-and-evidence/>

“As a charity, the Teacher Development Trust is focused on supporting the most effective professional development for teachers and school leaders and there is no doubt that the introduction of the Early Career framework is the biggest government initiative to develop new teachers of recent times, perhaps since the creation of teaching as a graduate profession over 40 years ago. On principle, we believe that every new teacher into the profession deserves a robust and supportive induction experience and the introduction of the structured, two-year ECF is clearly a boon for the system. It provides the opportunity for greater consistency across schools, with replicable and evidence-based content, that has at a stroke eradicated the previous discrepancies of induction experience that made choosing a school feel like a lottery for new teachers, and has gone from idea to delivery at remarkable pace. Everybody involved should be proud of their work, especially those teachers, mentors, and CPD leaders who have put in the hard graft in schools.

It would, of course, be implausible that such a significant reform, introduced at such pace, would be perfect. One of our organisational values is humility: we want to be honest about what is going well and what could improve. We think that now is a time to take a humble approach to considering the initial impact of the ECF - being clear that it is a positive idea and that there have been considerable strengths to its delivery, but also understanding what can be changed and improved. We are particularly interested in the experience of ECTs, CPD leads, Induction Tutors and mentors - those who are making the ECF work everyday - to understand how we can build on the progress made so far and improve for the future. We are committed to the ECF being a success - we already think it has gone a long way to demonstrate that. We are also committed to genuine, considered improvement. This report is a chance to explore what the delivery of the ECF feels like on the ground and make suggestions - largely to policy makers - about areas for potential reform in the future.”

Gareth Conyard, Co-CEO, Teacher Development Trust



About Us



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Founded in 2012 by teachers and school leaders, our mission is to support extraordinary leaders to empower staff and build expert schools.

We want to see powerful professional development in every school and college so that teachers thrive and children succeed.

With support from globally leading partners, researchers and advisors, we curate and disseminate the most rigorous evidence and support school leaders around the country to network, and to improve their staff development approaches.

Our work is underpinned by the key principles of effective teacher professional development and learning. Using a strong international evidence base of what constitutes successful teacher professional development, we are working with the entire education sector to promote the principles of good CPD.

