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RESEARCH PAPER 1/22

Early Career Framework – school leaders' early experiences of the new model

Format: Report
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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to all 16 school leaders who responded to this quick and general investigation into leaders' experience of the ECF. Such a brief report cries out for more substantial work, such as a 2-4 year longitudinal study, deeper involvement of trainees and their experiences and a longer-term [5 year plus] re-evaluation of teacher supply and demand, rates of attrition and the perception of the profession in the minds of graduates.

Thank you for your help.

Executive Summary

1. Recruitment to English schools is under pressure, and this is set to continue into the mid 2020s.
2. There are a range of factors, but attrition is one of them, often triggered by workload.
3. The need for early-stage support to better help a new teacher develop the tools they need, not only to teach well, but to thrive and remain in the profession for the long-term, is uncontentious.
4. International studies recognise the impact of downward pressure on teacher supply and that attrition is a function of a variety of elements, including context, local and national economy, workload, school management and trainee skills, attributes, and resilience.
5. The ECF provides a significant uplift in investment of time in the trainee on the part of the school in the early career stage, which is broadly welcomed by school leaders in principle, but with significant caveats in practice.
6. The process is seen by a significant number as too time-heavy, inflexible, and not responsive enough to the needs of the (employer) school.
7. For some, the formative experiences on the trainee are, in this system, too focussed on the relationship with the mentor, when the school is itself (better?) able to provide a wide range of formative experiences, if the system allowed for greater flexibility
8. Some early indications point to a difference in quality between various ECF providers, again a matter for 2–4-year longitudinal study. Within this, there is scope to discuss how funding is delivered to best meet the needs of the school and trainee.

1. The Early Careers Framework

1.1 What is it and why was it deemed necessary?

The early career framework (ECF) reforms, launched in 2019 as part of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, were intended to be a step change in support for early career teachers, providing a funded entitlement to a structured 2-year package of high-quality professional development. They are now in operation and we are at the very early stages of being able to sound out impact on the trainee and the host school.

1.2 Teacher recruitment in England

Since 2011 the overall number of teachers has, in general, not kept pace with increasing pupil numbers. This means the ratio of qualified teachers to pupils has increased from 17.8 in 2011 to 18.5 in 2020 (Long, S., Danechi, S., 2021). In addition, the number of teacher vacancies have risen over this period.

More recently there has been an increase in initial teacher trainees, likely due to the wider economic impacts of Covid-19. In 2020-21 overall recruitment of initial teacher trainees was 15% above target (6% above target for secondaries and 30% above for primaries). This was the first time the overall target was achieved since 2011-12 and so is not likely to have reversed shortages which have built up over several years, particularly in certain secondary subjects such as maths and physics which remained below target.

Overall pupil numbers are expected to decrease slightly by 2026, driven by a 7% decrease in nursery and primary pupils which is only expected to be partially offset by a 7% increase in secondaries and increases in other school types. This should alleviate pressure on primary teacher recruitment; however, pressures are likely to continue for secondaries and non-mainstream schools. In addition, other factors such as the ambition for more pupils to take the English Baccalaureate combination of GCSE subjects, and the impact of exiting the EU means that overall pressure on teacher recruitment could continue.

1.3 Teacher workload

Although we are not looking directly at teacher workload in this paper, the impact on attrition, though by no means the sole reason for teachers leaving the profession, is well-documented. TALIS is a five-yearly international, large-scale survey of teachers, school leaders and the learning environment in schools, administered by the OECD. The most recent survey was conducted in 2018, with the results published in June 2019 (Talis, 2019).

TALIS's 2018 survey focused on lower-secondary school teachers (key stage 3) and primary school teachers. It's key findings relating to teacher workload included the following:

- Full-time lower secondary teachers in England reported working, on average, 49.3 hours a week. This was above the OECD average of 41 hours a week. The equivalent figure in England in TALIS 2013 was 48.2 hours a week.
- Full-time primary teachers in England reported working 52.1 hours a week. This was more than in any other participating country except Japan.
- 53% of primary teachers and 57% of lower-secondary school teachers felt that their workload was unmanageable.

Clearly, ensuring the best support for early career teachers will be necessary, though not, I suspect, sufficient, to alleviate the longer-term downturn in supply.

2. The ECF programme

Headteachers or principals must allocate both an induction tutor and an induction mentor to every ECT. The induction tutor will be expected to hold QTS and their main function will be to assess the ECT against the teachers' standards. The induction tutor will be responsible for determining an ECTs progress towards the standards and to ensure that appropriate action is taken where an ECT may be experiencing difficulties. It will be a legal requirement on all employers to ensure that the induction tutor has the time to carry out their duties effectively and to meet the needs of the ECTs for whom they are responsible.

Developed in consultation with schools, academics and experts, the ECF aims to support teaching quality by further developing the core knowledge and professional skills early career teachers need in five core areas of teaching practice: assessment, curriculum, behaviour management, pedagogy, and professional behaviours.

Research indicated that support for early-stage teachers was wide-ranging in quality and quantity. In a context in which local authority support has largely been removed from schools in England, quantitative and qualitative analysis in 2017 (Spencer, P., Harrop, S., Thomas, J., Cain, T., 2019) indicated that the ECTs of the day needed emotional support and help with behaviour management, ideas for teaching and reflective conversations. These needs were being met, though not fully, in the 2019 report, and there was a perception that employing schools could be doing more to develop ECTs as reflective individuals, using a range of long-term, planned and deep approaches to development.

The ECF is the evidence base which underpins this new entitlement for ECTs professional development, setting out what they should learn about during the first two years of their careers. The rationale for extending the induction period is threefold.

First, owing to research from a range of disciplines, we now know a lot more about effective education compared with a few decades ago. As cognitive psychologist Professor Daniel Willingham puts it: "The mind is, at last, yielding its secrets to persistent scientific investigation. We have learned more about how the mind works in the last 25 years than in the previous 2,500." (Willingham, D., 2009). If we want to support teachers in understanding this new knowledge and the opportunities to embed it into their practice in their own unique way, it will take longer than NQTS were typically given. Extending the NQT period to two years gives new teachers the time and space they need to get to grips with the latest research and apply it to the classroom, as well as translating it into their own contexts.

The second reason was the startling reality of poor teacher retention. A recent briefing paper for the House of Commons library revealed that “22 per cent of newly qualified entrants to the sector in 2015 were not recorded as working in the state sector two years later”. Getting these early years right is crucial if we want to retain teachers and give them an experience that is professionally fulfilling while manageable alongside a healthy life outside of school. The current tempestuous educational landscape is well documented: unreasonable workload and the associated wellbeing pressures, leading to recruitment and retention challenges. This is by no means limited to the UK. ¹

Third, to provide a pathway to career development, giving every teacher a broad and secure foundation in all the essential elements of expert teaching, while opening varied pathways for further career development. As it currently stands, the principal method of ‘progressing’ in a teaching career is to become a head of department /element, or year, and then on to senior leadership. It was hoped that the early career framework would naturally segue on to professional qualifications in a diverse range of educational expertise. For some, this may mean mastering assessment theory, or speech and language difficulties, while others may wish to consider curriculum structure or building meaningful links with parents and the wider community. Time will tell as to the development of these various routes.

2.1 Delivery

In ensuring that induction arrangements are consistent with the provisions of the ECF, schools and other settings employing ECTs are able to choose from one of three delivery models:

A funded provider-led programme (also referred to as the ‘full’ induction programme) - Schools are able to access a programme from six DfE-accredited providers which will ‘design and deliver a comprehensive programme of face-to-face and online training’. The training and support for ECTs and mentors delivered through these programmes are fully funded by the DfE. Schools can access the provider-led programme through their teaching school hub or by contacting a preferred provider directly. It is likely to be the case that not all settings will be able to choose from all six providers although the DfE expects that all schools will have access to this option. Further details of ways in which schools identify and select a provider have yet to be finalised although it is expected that the majority of ECTs will be inducted through this route.

Second, schools delivering their own training using DfE materials and resources (also referred to as the ‘core’ induction programme) - In this model, schools make use of materials produced for the DfE to deliver their own programmes of ECT and mentor support. Schools using this model do not have access to an external provider and are subject to fidelity checks by appropriate bodies to ensure that their programmes are consistent with ECF requirements.

Third, schools designing and delivering their own programmes based on the ECF (also referred to as the ‘school-based’ induction programme) - Schools opting for this approach use the Early Career

¹ Australian research years ago shows 30-50% of teachers leaving the profession within the first five years in 2018, though a range of factors seem to be at play (Weldon, P. 2018:1). Canadian scholarship also suggests the need to move from *retaining* to *sustaining* teachers, including supporting their acquisition of a teacher *identity* early on, whereby they see themselves as contributing and having a voice, as well as ‘doing’ (Schaefer, L., Long, J.S., Clandinin, D.J. 2012:117).

Framework to develop and deliver their own programmes without the support of an external provider. This approach is also subject to fidelity checks by appropriate bodies.

3. This small-scale study

3.1 Sample

16 school leaders, across Reading, Berkshire, and Hampshire authorities, participated in this brief small-scale study, including 8 secondary schools. In 75% of the respondent schools there are 0-5 ECT teachers in school, with 25% of respondents having between 5 and 10. This survey is too small to draw definitive conclusions, though large enough to generate themes or indications of interest which will then be tested in longer-term longitudinal study.

3.2 Findings

3.2.1

Is the ECT programme better than its predecessor in terms of what the trainee needs?

[More Details](#)

● Yes	4
● No	5
● Too early to tell	7



In answering this very blunt question about the impact on the **trainee**, the picture is, as expected, mixed, and will need two to three years of longitudinal data to properly evaluate.

3.2.2

Is the ECT programme better than its predecessor from the point of view of what the host school needs?

[More Details](#)

 Insights

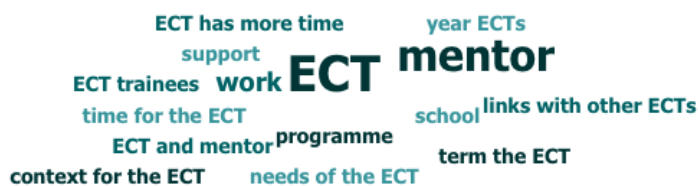
 Yes	2
 No	7
 Too early to tell	7



In answering this very blunt question about the impact on the **school itself**, although the sample size is small, the picture is less persuasive – suggesting school leaders have some caveats as to how the model is working on the ground – again, further analysis will be necessary.

3.2.3

9 respondents (60%) answered **ECT** for this question.



When asked about the strengths of the programme as a whole, there is a recognition that the principal beneficiary is the ECT. Respondents pointed positively to the time spent on a core body of learning to be delivered to the ECT, complementary with the foci of the individual schools. One respondent saw it as ‘far more comprehensive’ than its predecessor model, and several others pointed to the higher status now enjoyed by the mentor.

Another liked the fact that the framework provides consistency in terms of content that is delivered (and when to suit the needs of the ECT) and the flexibility of completing modules at a time that suits the ECT throughout the week. It also links well with content delivered at the ITT stage.

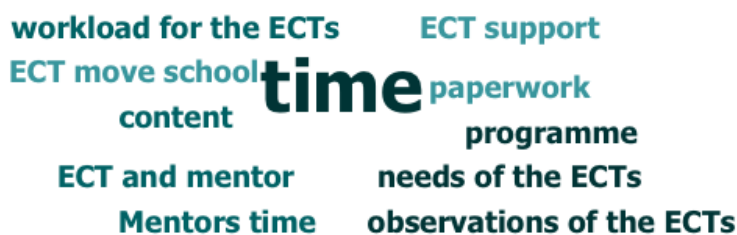
Another commented that schools can be sure that ECT trainees are more likely to have encountered key themes and principles of teaching because their programme is extensive. Longer term the ECT should benefit from better networking with other colleagues as they no longer work in isolation. Also host schools are part of a bigger organisational network. In longer term ECTs will have been better supported including the 5% reduction in teaching in their second year. Less chance of schools and ECTs falling through the net and having a poor experience

Another respondent mentioned that the weekly instructional coaching with the mentor is well received and having positive impact on classroom as evidenced from learning walks and initial ECT Induction Observations. Weekly mentor meetings are now taking place and this respondent’s

school has given 1 extra hour non-contact for mentors to ensure this takes place and removed 1 hour of cover arrangements. This allows 1 hour mentor meeting to take place each week. A weekly 15min learning walk/obs as directed from the provider and conducted by the mentor has proved invaluable for one respondent to inform the mentor discussion each week. One spoke well of the accessibility of resources through their provider linked to their weekly curriculum.

3.2.4 What are the weaknesses of the ECT programme as a whole? Please give as much information as you can.

12 respondents (80%) answered **time** for this question.



The clear issue is time, and a perception that the process is too time-consuming and inflexible.

“Time is a factor. The programme is compulsory, attendance is compulsory and there are requirements that both the ECT and mentor have to fulfil with specific deadlines. Whilst this can be seen as a strength, they can clash with internal deadlines. Whilst not a weakness, schools do have to allow for -5% of teaching in Year 2. A weakness is that funding for the school to support the programme (timetable allowance, professional studies, additional CPD, additional mentor expectations etc) isn't received until the end of the programme and, should an ECT move school the receiving school benefit

Several respondents alluded to the impact on the trainee, and the danger this programme – designed to sustain and support – could carry unintended consequences:

“I feel that a new teacher has enough to do, managing their own class, behaviour management strategies, planning, assessment and generally assuming the role of classroom teacher without this on top. Engaging with the process is ok but then they have questions to answer online to show their understanding of what they have read etc which is deemed to be 'over the top'”

And again, “There is far too much reading and paperwork, it is time consuming and not always relevant to the needs of the ECTs or the focus of the school/teaching.”

Several respondents felt the material too closely repeated PGCE [and similar] courses, and others that the programme was too prescriptive and lacking in flexibility. Others on the impact to school management:

“Timetable/Cover requirements for ECT Termly conferences - we are having to break group into smaller cohorts and allow them to attend conferences of differing days to cover effectively. Lack of subject specialism time on ECF curriculum. Overcoming this with dedicated subject specific mentoring weeks. Multiple paperwork/admin exercises of completing forms asking for same information (mentors, email addresses etc).

Also, the focus on the mentor could be at the expense of the trainee learning elsewhere in the school as “ECTs need training from other qualified colleagues - for example behaviour management techniques or literacy training rather than reading about it.”

3.2.5 Please give up to 3 ways the programme could be improved, if at all



This question adduced responses that can be grouped as follows: reduce time/content; increase flexibility/sensitivity to school’s needs and funding.

Reducing time/content

There was a call by several to reduce workload and increase the professional trust that the school would provide the trainee with a broad and supportive experience. Increasing classroom based activities including time for trainees to network on *what works well in the classroom* was seen as important.

“Allow the teachers to engage with the training without having to spend time answering questions. In the extra time freed by so many sessions online, new teachers would benefit more from observing other more experienced colleagues - currently they have very little time to do this.”

This also went for the mentors, too

“reduce the training modules/weekly requirements for the mentor - although some discretion for experience mentors to support the ECT - programme needs to more quickly get to key aspects of teaching, learning and behaviour management.”

Increase flexibility/sensitivity to the school's needs

There was a general perception that, as the trainee was embedded in a particular school then far more weight should be given to local context. Examples include “Give schools more time within the learning modules to tailor the content to the context of the school.”

“Allow more flexibility within the delivery module so ECT's can dip in and out of the modules/seminars based on the guidance on their mentor and lead tutor. Make the seminars include more discussion of strategies as opposed to delivering more of the theory as the ECT's want/need practical takeaways”

Funding

One colleague called for staged payment of the funding to support the programme. Another said,

“Fund Mentors for their role. This is key for long term involvement in programme. Could this mentoring of ECT be linked into NPQ type qualification? * With 2 year ECT programme it will be difficult to source new Mentors for following academic year for new Year 1 ECTs as there will be the Year 2 ECTs still undergoing their induction * Build in [Local Authority-wide] wide subject hubs for development opportunities and link to subject coordinator role ?”

4. Concluding remarks

This small-scale research has been conducted at an early stage and there is a need for a 2-4 year time horizon to allow for credible longitudinal data. Nevertheless, there is an emerging sense that, and particularly as schools are wrestling with Covid and post-Covid issues, the model is costly in terms of time and resources. That having been said, there is a general sense that the model may offer more to trainees than what they have had in the past. The importance of place – where you are learning your trade as a teacher – must not be forgotten and there is, perhaps, greater scope to trust the institution to provide a rich, local context to the trainee, in addition to that learnt in dialogue with the mentor.

Simon Uttley, January 2022

Notes

- **Long, R. and Danechi, S. [2021]** [‘Teacher recruitment and retention in England’](#) House of Commons Library
- **Spencer, P., Harrop, S., Thomas, J., & Cain, T. (2018)** The professional development needs of early career teachers, and the extent to which they are met: a survey of teachers in England, *Professional Development in Education*, 44:1, 33-46, DOI: [10.1080/19415257.2017.1299028](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2017.1299028)
- **Schaefer, L., Long, J.S., Clandinin, D.J.,** ‘Questioning the Research on Early Career Teacher Attrition and Retention’ *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 58, No. 1, Spring 2012, 106-121
- **TALIS (2019)** <http://www.oecd.org/education/talis-2018-results-volume-i-1d0bc92a-en.htm>
- **Weldon, P. (2018)** ‘Early careers teacher attrition in Australia: evidence, definition, classification and measurement’ *Australian Journal of Education* [Volume: 62 issue: 1](#), page(s): 61-78
- **Willingham, D. (2009)** ‘Why don’t students like school?’ San Francisco: Jossey Bas