

Transforming teacher professional development

A case study from England

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Foreword

I am delighted to endorse this report which provides an account of recent policy in England towards the professional development of teachers. This story has some distinctive features that I am sure will be of interest to education policymakers in other countries.

The need to improve the quality of learning outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students, is the greatest challenge facing education policymakers around the world. That was the situation before the global pandemic of Covid-19 and the learning losses resulting from the pandemic have further increased the scale of the challenge. The world is facing a learning crisis. Too many students fail to achieve good learning outcomes. The world's response to the crisis must involve investment in teaching quality. Better learning will necessarily require better teaching. We will not achieve our collective aspiration to 'build back better' in the context of school education without skilful and dedicated teachers.

This report describes the practical steps that have been taken in England to improve teacher professionalism. Although the focus here is on developments in just one country, the insights will have a resonance and a relevance in many other countries where policymakers are considering how to nurture a high-performing and highly motivated education workforce.

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Introduction

Education policy in the United Kingdom is a devolved responsibility and there are separate, independent ministries for education within each of the national jurisdictions: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This report is concerned exclusively with policy in England. The Department for Education (DfE) is the ministry with ultimate responsibility for all government schools in England.

In recent years, the DfE has pursued a distinctive policy of support for the teacher workforce. Support for teachers is based on the principle that **teachers need high-quality support throughout their careers**. A career-long programme of evidence-based professional development has been established, structured around four key phases of the professional journey:

- Initial Teacher Training
- Early Career Support
- Specialist Development
- Leadership Development.

Professional expectations for roles in each key phase are set out in authoritative documents known as 'Frameworks'. These Frameworks provide an evidence-based view of the professional knowledge and occupational skills needed by teachers depending on career stage and role.

While there is a lively public and professional debate in England about school education, the Framework documents have been largely welcomed, and seen as objective, because the expectations and the underpinning evidence base was determined not by the government but by panels of experts, including practitioners, and verified by an independent research institute known as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

The model of support is consistent with the idea that teachers, in common with members of other important professions, are particularly in need of support in the early stages of their careers. The intention is to ensure a seamless transition from pre-service training to effective early career classroom practice. New teachers have access to a funded two-year support programme that involves time off timetable for professional development and mentoring.

Beyond the early career phase, there is a recognition that teachers may wish to undertake important specialist roles in schools, while some will wish ultimately to undertake leadership roles. Those undertaking or aspiring to specialist and leadership roles have opportunities, funded by the government, to undertake accredited training over one or two years leading to the award of a type of certification known as a National Professional Qualification.

The 'delivery system' for training teachers is built upon a belief that professional learning is best achieved in the context of professional practice (on the job), using expert practitioners to train others. This approach was heavily influenced by medical practice, where it is well established that the best hospitals and best clinicians should lead on the training and professional development of others. A network of 'Teaching School Hubs' has been established so that teachers can access high quality pre-service and in-service training delivered by effective current practitioners working in excellent schools.

Teaching School Hubs are based in government schools with a reputation for quality, verified by school inspection. They are supported as training centres by larger, national organisations with expertise in professional development, logistics and project management, known as Lead Providers.

Figure 1: The Teacher Development Model for England, 2021



Policy towards teacher development in England has evolved over the last decade. At the same time, some principles have remained constant:

- **A recognition of the pivotal role of teaching quality.** In recent years, senior policymakers in England have assumed that the school system cannot be highly effective without a workforce of highly effective teachers.
- **A commitment to evidence-informed professionalism.** The government has sought to promote insights from robust research about 'what works' in teaching and learning.

In this report, the evolution and functioning of the teacher development model in England is described. The latest iteration of the model is very new and it is too early to judge how successful it will be in terms of improved outcomes for students. While recognising that it is 'work in progress', we believe that it constitutes a significant case study in education reform that will be of interest to policymakers in other countries.

Methodology

This report describes aspects of recent policy towards teacher development in England, drawing on insights from a desk review of key policy documents, analysis of public statements made by government ministers and officials and semi-structured interviews with expert witnesses. A total of 20 witnesses were interviewed. They represented different stakeholder perspectives: government ministers, policy advisers, headteachers, university academics and others.



Our findings

A consensus about the importance of teaching and professional learning

Over the last decade, the government has consistently emphasised the need to focus on teaching quality in any discussion of policy relating to school effectiveness and school reform in England. Following the General Election of 2010, the first policy paper in which the new administration set out its education reform plans was called, significantly, **The Importance of Teaching**. While much has changed since then, the belief in the power of good teaching has endured. Our expert witnesses spoke repeatedly about this issue and considered it axiomatic that education policy should make support for teaching quality a top priority.

'We have to prize teacher education and improving the quality of teaching above pretty much everything else.' – Government adviser

These beliefs are now embedded within the policy discourse in England. Few dispute that teaching quality can make a big difference and that the professional development of teachers should therefore be taken very seriously. The origin of these ideas can be traced back to the school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness research that began in the 1970s. Why did some schools serving similar communities get very different academic results? Often, the research indicated, the key variable was teacher quality. In addition to teacher effectiveness research, government policy has been influenced by research into the characteristics of high-performing education systems worldwide. The work of Sir Michael Barber, when working as a consultant for McKinsey and Partners, was influential. Based on a study of high-performing education systems, Barber and his McKinsey colleague, Mona Mourshed, had famously stated in 2007 that:

'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.'

Barber's insight has since become an established principle. The statement has an almost proverbial quality now. It was echoed, for example, by one of our expert witnesses, who said:

'Schools can only perform as well as the teachers and the leaders that work in them.'
– Senior executive, Multi-Academy Schools Trust

Recognition of the importance of teaching quality leads logically to an interest in recruitment, professional development and retention. There was a fundamental optimism among several of our witnesses about the power of systematic professional development to make teachers – and schools – better. One witness contrasted the 'quick fix' improvements available when teachers are moved from school to school with the sustainable, system-wide improvements that occur when policy on teacher recruitment and teacher development is sound.

'You can only gain so much by moving the best people to the worst schools. If you want to improve the system as a whole, you have to raise the quality of teaching and leadership across the whole system and therefore I think that's made policymakers more interested in issues around teacher quality, teacher recruitment and continuing professional development.' – Former minister

A theme that emerged in several interviews was the connection between systematic professional learning, based on evidence, and the status of teaching. One of our expert witnesses considered that taking the

professional development of teachers seriously was an essential part of the process of increasing the status of the education workforce. The systematic acquisition of evidence-based knowledge and skills was essential if teaching was to be seen as a profession equivalent in standing to other top professions.

‘... a proper profession is one that systematically passes on core knowledge, behaviour and skills to the next generation of that profession. That is why accountants have exams. That is why when you want to be a lawyer, you have to study the seven areas of law ... [by contrast] in teaching, we turn people into the classroom and go “good luck”’.

– Government policy adviser

The emergence of a policy of ‘supported autonomy’

Action intended to assist teacher professional development in England needs to be seen in a wider policy context going back many years. For decades, successive ministers of education have promoted the idea of high autonomy combined with high accountability as the key ingredients needed for an improving and healthy education system. The mantra of ‘high autonomy and high accountability’ first emerged, as one of our expert witnesses pointed out, as long ago as the 1980s under the prime ministership of Margaret Thatcher, who gave schools a high level of local decision-making power and passed legislation known as the Education Reform Act in 1988, which set out plans for increased accountability via tests for all students at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16.

‘For me, the story is one of continuity since 1988 and the Education Reform Act.¹ That’s really to me where the whole reform journey starts. From then on, successive governments in education have accepted a set of fundamental principles. One is that we should have a very high accountability system ... combined within the high accountability system, the flip side of that is a high autonomy system. So actually it’s a high accountability, high autonomy system’. – Former policy adviser

Thatcher’s successor as prime minister, John Major, further increased the level of accountability by establishing a tough inspection system for schools in 1992 through the creation of an agency known as Ofsted: the Office for Standard in Education. Thatcher and Major were both members of the Conservative Party. The next two prime ministers – Tony Blair and Gordon Brown – belonged to the Labour Party. Although from a different party, Blair and Brown did not fundamentally challenge the policy commitment to accountability and, in international terms, high degrees of autonomy with regard to school-level decision-making.

Some of our witnesses considered that, in retrospect, a third element was missing from policy during these years. Teachers may benefit from a judicious mix of accountability and autonomy but, like all professionals, they also need support for professional development and capacity development. During the Blair-Brown Labour years (1997–2010) some support was available, but it took the form of a relatively top-down set of directives to teachers about how they should teach, delivered by so-called National Strategies.

Following a change of government in 2010, the new administration abandoned the top-down National Strategies approach to professional development, while at the same time radically increasing autonomy by encouraging schools to break away from district-level supervision and become autonomous government-funded ‘academies’.² The new government put its faith in decentralised decision-making combined with an emphasis on ‘standards’ – focusing on reforms to the national curriculum and assessment system which raised the level of expectation for what children should be able to know and do at different stages of their education. Centrally coordinated professional development was not a priority. Since 2016, policy has shifted, with a growing realisation that standards, autonomy and accountability are highly desirable but not enough. Schools also need systematic support for professional learning.

¹ The Education Reform Act of 1988 set out plans for increased accountability via tests for all students at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16.

² The first academies were established by the Labour government of Tony Blair but the programme was massively expanded by the Conservative-led Coalition government of prime minister David Cameron.

Several witnesses described the rationale behind this shift from 2016 onwards. In order to make smart decisions, autonomous professionals should be accountable but also need access to evidence-based guidance. The medical analogy was again a powerful point of reference. Physicians in general practice make professional judgements for themselves – they are autonomous. When they make mistakes, there are accountability consequences. While working in a context of autonomy and accountability, they also have access to support in the form of mediated access to the latest research-based findings about the efficacy of different forms of treatment.

One of our expert witnesses talked about how, in about 2016, there was a heightened recognition in government of the significance of professional expertise or ‘capacity’. Reforms that addressed structures and governance arrangements had been implemented but ultimately, senior officials concluded, policy needs also to strengthen the skill of the professionals in the system. An education workforce that lacks expertise will not make good use of the freedoms provided by autonomy and cannot be incentivised to perform well through the power of scrutiny and accountability. So, in addition to autonomy and accountability, another essential characteristic of an improving education system is that policymakers understand the need to invest in the ‘capital’ or expertise of the workforce:

‘There is a sense in which there is a missing independent variable which is capacity. So you can have free, autonomous schools and you can hold them accountable but if they don’t have expertise being autonomous is just another version of being lost. So capacity is the key thing that can make a more autonomous system work.’

– Former government adviser

Another witness used the phrase ‘supported autonomy’ to describe the new approach from 2016. Policy continued to respect the judgement of practitioners but recognised also the need to provide the same practitioners with high-quality training and access to reliable evidence.

‘From 2016-17 onwards, you’ve seen a much more deliberate move through teacher training towards a sort of supported autonomy ... We are not going back to advice from people in their ivory towers but we share the evidence through organisations like the EEF about what works in education. Teachers need the right sources. We needed to create a better structure to disseminate that best practice properly across the whole system.’

– Government adviser

The key components of the teacher support infrastructure

Between 2016 and 2021, a national system of support for teacher professionalism emerged in England, based on a series of foundational documents that set out priority areas for professional learning. These documents were known as ‘Frameworks’. They were intended to be evidence-based and the content was quality assured by an independent agency responsible for the synthesis of findings from robust educational research: the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). Training related to the content defined in the Frameworks used a delivery mechanism that gave a central role to high-performing schools. The best schools provided training in line with Framework expectations through a national network of teaching School Hubs. These schools were supported by large national organisations – known as Lead Providers – able to provide project management and logistical expertise. Delivery was subject to quality assurance by Ofsted, the national agency for the inspection of the school education system.

The rest of this report is devoted to a more detailed consideration of the evolution and nature of each of these components.

Evidence-based Frameworks for professional development

One of the most important elements of the approach used in England is the series of Framework documents which codify the characteristics of high-performing professionals operating in different roles and stages within the school system. Each Framework document

is intended to be evidence-based and consistent with the findings from robust relevant research. The Frameworks were designed in a way that highlighted two facets of each role:

1. What professionals need to 'learn about'
2. What professionals must 'learn how to do'.

Eight role-related evidence-based Frameworks have now been published relating to each of the following contexts:

- Trainee teachers
- Teachers in the early years of their careers
- Teachers who lead teaching in a subject or phase
- Teachers responsible for behaviour and student wellbeing in their school
- Teachers who lead the professional development of other teachers in their school
- Senior school leaders with major cross-school responsibilities
- Headteachers
- Executive headteachers with responsibility for more than one school.

One of our witnesses was involved in the process of producing the Framework documents. These were drafted by largely independent teams of experts. This had been a difficult process due to disagreements between the experts on the best ways to proceed, but a large degree of consensus was ultimately built.

'And then we started to have difficult conversations about sort of the exact phrasing of those documents. But I think it's a credit to the profession, to the people who've put in loads of work ... there are countless people who have put in huge amounts of work to get these documents to where they are. And the fact that they have all landed well with the sector. It's not as though there's not lots of things to argue about in education but the goodwill, and the desire to see this change happen amongst those in education is the reason it has landed well.'

– Government adviser

The word 'Framework' was chosen carefully. These documents are not intended to provide a comprehensive, exhaustive curriculum for training. Instead, they offer a looser 'framework' within which there is scope for tailoring, expansion and customisation. One of our expert witnesses was keen to emphasise this point:

'It's a 'framework' around which Initial Teacher Training providers are supposed to build their curricula. It's not a full curriculum. It's deliberately called a 'framework'. That's the point of it.'

– University teacher educator

Those responsible for the design of the Frameworks wanted to provide a basis for professional development that went beyond questions of personal preference. Too often, pedagogical issues have been addressed through the lens of personal bias rather than objective consideration of evidence. One government adviser spoke with approval, for example, of the way the Framework for teachers in the early career phase encouraged teachers to consider the best approaches across a repertory of pedagogical methods. The Framework was comprehensive and forced teachers to consider techniques that they might otherwise disregard.

'If you don't like group work, I'm not a big group work person, tough it's in there. If you want to agree, it will tell you how to do it really, really well. If you're not big fan of teacher time in front of the classroom, tough, it's in there and we'll tell you how to do it really, really well. If you if you don't like talking about pupil motivation, you just want to talk about sanctions or awards, tough. And if you're the other way around, I'm afraid sanction and rewards is in there as well because there's good evidence that all these things are important and important tools and in a teacher's toolbox.'

– Government adviser

Independent verification of the evidence underpinning the Frameworks

In each of the Framework documents, there is transparency about the evidence that justifies the stated expectations. The rubric consistently explains that 'Learn that... statements are informed by the best available educational research', while 'Learn how to... statements are drawn from the wider evidence base including both academic research and additional guidance from expert practitioners'. Each Framework includes an extensive bibliography, highlighting the academic evidence that has been used to determine the content. The bibliographical references are annotated with recommendations for further reading.

Our expert witnesses described how important it was that an independent agency – the EEF – was assigned the task of verifying the research base of the content of the Frameworks. The intention was to reassure teachers that there was an objective basis for the professional expectations set out in the Frameworks. For one witness, the independent role of the EEF was absolutely pivotal in ensuring that teachers accepted the key messages in the Frameworks:

'Teaching is an essentially contested topic, right? But you want teachers trained in your best bets of what you think the evidence actually shows works in the classroom. The thing that would have killed this at birth in this country would be if the government was seen as trying to push a specific particular take on the evidence. If it had been the government signing off the evidence you would have got organ rejection. The thing that made it work was having a very visible independent arbitrator of the evidence that was not the government.' – Former government adviser

The golden thread

The intention behind the Framework approach was to provide seamless support as teachers move from initial training via the early years of classroom practice towards more specialist roles, and finally, in some

cases, receive the training needed to undertake different types of leadership roles. The 'specialist' roles for which training is available relate to responsibilities such as coordination of subject teaching or pastoral care across the school. Leadership training has been segmented so that distinct training is on offer which is relevant to senior leaders who are not headteachers, as well as headteachers and those providing 'executive leadership' for a group of schools.

'There is now a very, very clear pathway from pre-service training, through to in-service training through the Early Career Framework, through to a series of middle leadership roles, senior leadership, executive head leadership ... There is now an architecture and funding and an expectation that every new teacher will be supported throughout their career within a supportive framework delivered by schools ... It's about the most consistent architecture we've had since 2010. And I like it instinctively a lot.' – Former policy adviser

The government ambition was to create a systematic approach to teacher development that was based in the idea of planned progression as teachers moved through their careers. Systematic professional development would constitute a 'golden thread' connecting professional growth at different stages of a teacher's career.

'We are creating a world-class teacher development system, building from Initial Teacher Training, through to early career support, specialisation and on to school leadership. At each phase, teachers will have access to high-quality training and professional development underpinned by the best available evidence. This will create a golden thread of support that teachers can draw on at every stage of their careers.' – Government minister

Figure 2 illustrates the idea of the 'golden thread', using the topic of student behaviour management – an example of a topic which is important in teacher professionalism whether one is a trainee or an experienced leader. As shown in the figure, the

Figure 2: The golden thread

EXAMPLE 1		EXAMPLE 2	
Extract from Core Content Framework for Initial Teacher Training, setting out behaviour management expectations for new trainee teachers		Extract from Core Content Framework for Executive Leadership, setting out behaviour management expectations for those with management responsibility for a group of schools	
Learn that...		Learn that...	
1	Establishing and reinforcing routines, including through positive reinforcement, can help create an effective learning environment.	While classroom-level strategies have a big impact on pupil behaviour, consistency and coherence at a whole school level are paramount.	1
2	A predictable and secure environment benefits all pupils, but is particularly valuable for pupils with special educational needs.	Whole school changes usually take longer to embed than individually tailored or single-classroom approaches however, behaviour programmes are more likely to have an impact on attainment outcomes if implemented at a whole school level.	2
3	The ability to self-regulate one's emotions affects pupils' ability to learn, success in school and future lives.	Teacher and pupil behaviours become ingrained and can be difficult to change, so most whole school behaviour policy or practice will likely take more than a school term to demonstrate impact.	3
4	Teachers can influence pupils' resilience and beliefs about their ability to succeed, by ensuring all pupils have the opportunity to experience meaningful success.	Some teachers will benefit from intensive support to improve their classroom management.	4
5	Building effective relationships is easier when pupils believe that their feelings will be considered and understood.	Despite consistent systems being beneficial for all pupils, universal behaviour systems are unlikely to meet the needs of all pupils all of the time. If pupils need more intensive support with their behaviour, the approach may need to be adapted to individual needs.	5
6	Pupils are motivated by intrinsic factors (related to their identity and values) and extrinsic factors (related to reward).	SENCOs, pastoral leaders and other specialist colleagues also have valuable expertise and can ensure that appropriate support is in place for pupils.	6

Framework documents for Initial Teacher Training explain the knowledge and action needed for an inexperienced trainee to ensure a good classroom learning environment. Meanwhile, the Framework document for Executive Leaders addresses the same theme in the context of those highly experienced school leaders who are responsible for behaviour and learning across several schools and many classrooms. The documents use the same format across each stage of the professional journey, setting out required knowledge through 'learn that' statements and required behaviours and skills through 'learn how to' statements. All of the Frameworks emphasise the respective roles that different post-holders should play in promoting high-quality teaching.

The importance of the early years of teaching

Recent policy in England has put a marked emphasis on support for teachers in the first two years of teaching. Senior policymakers were concerned about the need to keep new teachers in the profession. They were also keen that teachers who were new to the classroom should be given systematic support comparable to that provided in other top professions.

'There is no more important area for us to get right than the support that we give to new teachers ... Just as in other professions, such as medicine and law, teachers in the early stages of their career need structured support to begin the journey to building expertise ... A key aspect of the most effective teacher induction around the world is mentoring.'
– Government minister

For many years, newly qualified teachers in England have been entitled to a locally designed programme of professional development support in their first year of employment. From September 2021, an expanded two-year programme of support was introduced, linked to the key content areas of the Early Career Framework: behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours. New teachers now have a guarantee of ten percent non-teaching time during their first year and five percent

non-teaching time in their second to focus on such professional development activities, and every new teacher is also assigned a mentor whose core role is to support their professional development.

Our witnesses agreed that investing in professional support was an important way of tackling the problem of retention. As we have seen, the English school system has a high level of accountability, and without a matching level of support, it is possible for some teachers to become demoralised. One witness commented on how important it was to make professionals feel valued:

'Teacher development for me is all linked to teacher retention. If people are feeling developed, they feel valued, they feel invested in. Then they tend to feel more comfortable, more happy with their job, and therefore they tend to stay.' – School-based teacher training expert

The risk of failing to retain teachers has been reduced by the emphasis on greater coherence between pre-service training and post-qualification support. The goal is that new teachers will access a seamless programme of at least three years of aligned training (one year as a trainee teacher and two years as an early career teacher). In order to harmonise the provision for these two groups, a Core Content Framework for Initial Teacher Training was developed in 2019, carefully matched to the expectations set out in the Early Career Framework. The alignment of the expectations for initial training and early career support was an important moment in the development of the overall teacher support approach. One expert witness explained how the two documents were drafted in a way that sought to maximise consistency and progression:

'The Core Content for Initial Teacher Training covers a lot of the same ground, but just at a slightly lower level because obviously, we're talking about trainees as opposed to early career teachers. And the idea being that the two things join up to create this seamless career training and development pathway.' – University educator

The concept of the specialist roles

One of the distinctive features of the Frameworks – and the aligned training – is the emphasis on different professional pathways for teachers. In a recent report considering the future of the education workforce from a global perspective, the Education Commission advocated the idea of the school as a professional team, with a range of specialist roles. In effect, this concept can be seen in the new teacher support system for England. There has long been a recognition in the UK of the importance of ‘middle leadership’ in government schools. From 2021, accredited training based on the relevant Framework has been made available in England for three specialist roles:

- **Leading Teacher Development:** for teachers with responsibilities for leading the professional development of other teachers in their school
- **Leading Teaching:** for teachers with responsibilities for leading teaching in a subject, year group or phase
- **Leading Behaviour and Culture:** for teachers with responsibilities for leading behaviour management and/or supporting pupil wellbeing in their school.

One of our witnesses was particularly pleased by this development, which recognised the need to invest in the professional development of most staff who would not ultimately become headteachers.

‘And [we should] not necessarily just think about teachers becoming headteachers because we all know that good schools don’t just rely on a quality headteacher at the top of the tree if you like, but there’s all sorts of middle leader and senior leader roles within that organisation that are really, really important. And historically, that training, that professional development, just hasn’t been there for them consistently.’ – Headteacher

Providing accreditation for flagship training courses

The National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) – a suite of accredited courses for the education workforce – have been in existence since 1997 and have evolved during this time. The most recent 2021 reforms created alignment with other Frameworks and brought with them government funding for all participants.

Six accredited courses are now provided. Three new NPQs, introduced in the 2021 reforms, relate to the three ‘specialist’ middle management roles described above. These are in addition to the following school leadership NPQs:

- **Senior Leadership** – for school leaders who are, or are aspiring to be, a senior leader with cross-school responsibilities
- **Headship** – for school leaders who are, or are aspiring to be, a headteacher or head of school, with responsibility for leading a school
- **Executive Leadership** – for school leaders who are, or are aspiring to be, an executive headteacher or CEO of a multi-school trust, with responsibility for leading several schools.

The NPQ courses each take between one and two years to complete. They are fully funded so that participating teachers do not have to pay for the qualifications. The courses are predicated on the relevant Framework documents and are therefore based themselves on current research and international best practice. The training is provided via a mix of face-to-face sessions, webinars, and self-directed study. Final accreditation depends upon successful performance in a summative assessment exercise in a scenario-based, case study online examination.

The evolution of the Teaching School model

From September 2021 onwards, much of the support and training offered to early career teachers and those studying for the government accredited NPQs is provided by a national network of 87 ‘centres of excellence for teacher training and development’,

known as Teaching School Hubs. The Teaching School Hubs are also heavily involved in the provision of school-based Initial Teacher Training. The rationale for the role of the Teaching School Hubs as training centres is that expert practitioners (associated with some of the best schools in the country) are the people best placed to take the lead in the professional development of others.

In effect, 2021 marked a relaunch of the Teaching School concept. Teaching Schools had been originally introduced in England in 2011, with Teaching School Alliances set up all over England in the years that followed. To be approved, Teaching Schools needed to be rated as outstanding by inspectors. They were expected to organise not only training but also to support school improvement support for local schools within an alliance that they led. 100 Teaching Schools began operating in September 2011, and by 2015, there were about 600 Teaching Schools across England. By 2020, there were 750.

With the benefit of hindsight, the consensus among our witnesses was that the original Teaching Schools were given too many responsibilities and too little financial support. At a time when policy emphasised the transformative power of decentralisation, Teaching Schools were largely trusted to get on with implementation without much external direction, support or oversight. Over time, some concerns grew about the variability of the different forms of training and support offered in this highly autonomous and decentralised environment. An evaluation report published in 2015 was complimentary about much Teaching School practice, but also described provision nationally as somewhat inconsistent, varying substantially from place to place. There was a growing consensus that, while the principle of the Teaching Schools was good, they were being asked to do too much without always having sufficient support and quality assurance.

One of our expert witnesses had been the headteacher of one of the first Teaching Schools. Looking back, he could now see that the first Teaching Schools would have benefited from a structured set of Terms of Reference. Instead, he was given what he described as

‘a blank piece of paper’. It was only with hindsight that he could see that this was naïve:

‘Back then, the minister gave the first 100 teaching schools a blank piece of paper literally and said go out and do what you need to do. You are the 100 best schools ... I remember the time, because we were one of them. The feeling was great’.

– Headteacher

Another witness, who was a former government adviser, made the same point. He talked about how the first-generation Teaching Schools were not given ‘enough clarity on what they were doing’. It was not enough to say: ‘your school is great, help other schools to excel’. Teaching Schools also needed support and accountability through good internal governance and external scrutiny. This did not undermine the fundamental principle that high-performing schools should be centres of excellence in teacher development.

By 2021, high-performing schools remained at the heart of the teacher development model, but a refreshed approach was adopted that set out to give these schools a clearer focus for activities and an infrastructure of support.

At this point, a radically simplified structure of Teaching School Hubs was introduced. In place of about 750 Teaching Schools Alliances nationwide, 87 Teaching School Hubs were established. Each of the new Hubs supported a clearly defined geographical area. One of the main differences between the new Teaching School Hubs and the first generation of Teaching Schools was that the Hubs were given an exclusive focus on professional development and no longer expected to also advise on organisational improvement for under-performing schools. The government has made clear that it expects other agencies to fulfil the school improvement role so that Teaching School Hubs can major on end-to-end professional development support.

With this increased focus also comes clearer role specificity for Teaching School Hubs than first-generation Teaching School Alliances. Teaching Schools Hubs are expected to play a significant role in each of the four key areas of the new teacher development model:

- School-based Initial Teacher Training
- Support for early career teachers
- Delivery of new specialist National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for experienced specialist teachers
- Training for those seeking accreditation in the new suite of Leadership NPQs.

One lesson from the experience of the first generation of Teaching Schools was that even high-performing schools need some support when designing and organising large-scale training programmes. In light of this, the government has rationalised the teaching school system and created the category of lead providers, larger organisations with the capacity to work with Teaching School Hubs, which act as the delivery partners. Training is now provided by the lead providers and the delivery partners working together. The design of the new model reflects a belief that the practicalities of the delivery of training can make a huge difference to its success.

'This new world-class teacher development system requires world-class delivery. That is why we are creating a new national teacher development infrastructure made up of lead providers and delivery partners, responsible for designing and delivering training to schools. Delivery partners will work with lead providers to deliver training. The backbone of these delivery partners will be Teaching School Hubs, who will be essential to the success of these reforms.' – Government minister

Another learning point from the experience of the first generation of Teaching Schools was that high-performing schools need both support and challenge if they are to act as centres for professional learning. As a result, the government is now placing a greater emphasis on both delivery support and objective quality assurance. The entirety of the new teacher

development system will be evaluated – from end to end – by Ofsted, the national school inspection agency for England. Ofsted have for some time had a mandate for the inspection of Initial Teacher Training, but this remit has been expanded so that the government inspectors will also be able to assess the quality of in-service training offered by the lead providers for early career teachers, specialist teachers and school leaders.

Recognising the importance of funding

One notable development since 2016 has been a more generous allocation of funding to teacher professional development in England. Critics of the first network of Teaching Schools had argued that they were not sufficiently funded. The re-launched Teaching School Hubs are, by contrast, much better funded. Meanwhile, the creation of a new two-year programme of support for early career teachers has involved substantial investment in the costs that schools must incur to release new teachers for professional development activities and to fund new mentoring arrangements. Participation in the reformed programme of accredited NPQs is fully funded so that teachers and school leaders do not need to use either school funds or their personal resources to pay for the training.

While there are some mechanisms in the funding model to incentivise providers to work with educators in schools serving disadvantaged communities and to promote teacher recruitment in specific subjects, the level of funding under the current settlement effectively provides universal support for all teachers from Initial Teacher Training through to the most senior leadership roles.

The delivery system and the division of labour between different actors

The latest policy reforms in England have focused on developing the capacity and capabilities of the teaching workforce at each career stage. Building on the evidence-informed competency Frameworks created by the DfE and sector experts, and validated by

the EEF, funded training is provided through a delivery network of schools and other organisations. The goal of these reforms is to increase both the recruitment and retention of teachers and subsequently increase

the quality of teaching in every classroom. These reforms have led to a new infrastructure with a clear division of responsibility between the key actors (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The division of labour between key actors

Department for Education

- **Government department responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England.**
- Works with experts (academics and practitioners) to create and publish high-level competency frameworks.
- Procures, funds and manages **Lead Providers**, overseeing their performance against contract objectives and issuing annual call-off contracts to provide targets and funding.
- Commissions the **Education Endowment Foundation**.

Education Endowment Foundation

- **An independent charity set up to improve educational attainment by conducting and commissioning research and communicating this to schools.**
- Reviews frameworks against the evidence, validating each one before publication.
- Provides guidance and challenge to **Lead Providers** developing their curricula and training materials.

Lead Providers

- **Charities and commercial organisations with track record of large-scale design and delivery of professional development.**
- Develop curricula and accompanying materials (online self-study, training and guidance for mentors) for each qualification, exemplifying the knowledge and skills defined in the framework.
- Form contractual partnerships with and manage performance of school **Delivery Partners** (principally Teaching School Hubs) to deliver the training offer at a local level.
- Pass funding through from the **Department of Education** to **Delivery Partners**.
- Deliver outcomes specified in contract with **Department for Education** (e.g. meeting recruitment targets, participant satisfaction).

Delivery Partners

- **Schools working to deliver training to other schools. The most significant of these are 86 Teaching School Hubs commissioned by the Department for Education to deliver training to all schools in a given geographic area.**
- Form a partnership with one or more **Lead Providers** to deliver their training.
- Lead delivery locally, recruiting and managing participants, managing relationships with other schools, delivering face-to-face training and conducting initial quality assurance of trainer quality.
- Report to both their **Lead Provider** and **Teaching School Hubs Council**.

Ofsted

- **The national inspection service, inspecting and regulating all education providers in England.**
- Inspects **Lead Providers** and their **Delivery Partners** in order to ascertain quality of delivery.
- Publishes reports in order to drive up quality.

Teacher development and the work of the Education Endowment Foundation

We have seen how one important component of England's 'infrastructure' of support for the professional learning of teachers is the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). One of the first acts of the new Coalition government in 2010 was to announce plans for the establishment of the EEF: an independent charity with a focus on supporting schools to access research-based evidence about effective practice. The charity was formally established in 2011. The government provided a founding grant of £125 million and gave the charity permission to raise additional funds from philanthropic sources.

From its inception, EEF placed a particular emphasis on the need to mobilise robust knowledge in order to improve learning outcomes for disadvantaged students and thereby to close 'the attainment gap' that often existed between students from more or less disadvantaged backgrounds. The EEF began with a commitment to the idea that effective pedagogy could

be transformational in securing much better outcomes for students from deprived backgrounds. It set out to show that there was no inevitable connection between background and success at school. The challenge was to ensure that teachers in schools that served disadvantaged communities had access to evidence-based guidance on methods that would help them to close 'the attainment gap'.

The establishment of the EEF represented a commitment to a vision of teaching as an evidence-based profession. As Sir Kevan Collins, the first CEO of the EEF, said in 2012, the challenge was to 'build a knowledge base on which an evidence-based teaching profession can stand'.

One of our expert witnesses worked for an influential think tank during the Coalition government. Looking back to the period 2010-2011, he recalled how policymakers at the time were interested in the particular power of a certain type of evidence. Ministers and senior advisers believed in the potential of findings generated by quantitative research that used large-scale randomised controlled trials (RCTs).





'... really importantly, it was quantitative research only. It was randomised controlled trials. ... It was really clear, we're going to trial this intervention, we're going to measure it during an RCT. If it works, boy, are we going to do it. If it doesn't work, fine, we've learned something.... So it was a very specific type of research institute and one of the things that has been absolutely fundamental to the centrality the EEF in discourse, since its set-up is that it only does randomised controlled trial, quantitative research'. – Former senior think tank expert

This expert explained that senior policymakers and ministers in 2010 were sceptical about the nature and quality of some forms of evidence. The EEF model (quantitative research only) constituted an implicit challenge to and criticism of some other forms of research, including much qualitative research.

The commitment to prioritise evidence based on RCT research manifested itself in two core activities of the EEF that have continued from inception in 2011 until today:

- 1. Synthesising the robust research undertaken by other bodies through a so-called 'Teaching and Learning Toolkit'.** The Toolkit took the form of a public website and was developed by academics from the University of Durham. The website summarised findings from robust quantitative research, explaining to headteachers and teachers what was known about the educational impact and cost of different approaches.
- 2. Creating new knowledge through the rigorous testing and evaluation of innovative initiatives with the potential to improve pupil attainment for the most disadvantaged pupils across England.** An RCT approach was used as standard and the findings were published with an element of advocacy for promising approaches.

The EEF approach invited education professionals to bear in mind the quality of evidence for the claims of different approaches. Where 'evidence strength' was limited, there was need for great caution. Findings where 'evidence strength' was considerable deserved to be taken particularly seriously by school professionals. Taking into consideration evidence quality, the EEF organised analysis in terms of impact on cognitive learning outcomes and cost.

Figure 4 demonstrates how the EEF approach generated, in the context of the Toolkit, headline findings. In this highly abbreviated way, teachers and headteachers could see, for example, that effective classroom feedback and the use of peer tutoring constituted promising areas for professional consideration.

Since 2017, the EEF has broadened its range of core activities through a new emphasis on the development of a series of Guidance Reports on key topics. The EEF described these reports as a mechanism for providing 'clear and actionable guidance for teachers on high-priority issues'. The emphasis in these reports is on the mediation and communication of use evidence-based insights likely to be of use to teachers and school leaders. They are intended, in effect, as a resource for professional learning that is grounded in evidence. The emphasis is on action – practical steps that

teachers can take in line with evidence-based insights. The reports review the best available evidence on a particular aspect of teaching and learning, and make actionable recommendations for improving teaching practice.

Several of our expert witnesses emphasised the importance of the EEF as part of the new teacher development infrastructure. The EEF, as an independent and impartial body, was able to 'de-politicise' some of the debate about educational

methods. Witnesses suggested that while some teachers might be sceptical about directives from politicians, the EEF was seen differently – as a source of objective guidance based on the best evidence. One government policy adviser described the EEF as 'the guardian of evidence in this country' and explained his view that the use of evidence objectively synthesised by the EEF was a means of avoiding 'violent fluctuations' in policy which can happen when new ministers arrive intent on a change in direction.

Figure 4: Extracts from the first edition of the EEF Toolkit

Feedback			Performance Pay		
Av. Impact	Av. Cost	Evidence Strength	Av. Impact	Av. Cost	Evidence Strength
+ 9 months	££	★ ★ ★	0 months	££	★
Peer Tutoring			School Uniforms		
Av. Impact	Av. Cost	Evidence Strength	Av. Impact	Av. Cost	Evidence Strength
+ 6 months	££	★ ★ ★ ★	+ 1 months	££	★

Conclusion

The approach to the professional development of teachers in England presents an interesting and promising case study in education reform. Context is important and it is of course always unwise to try to replicate precisely policies designed for one particular country. Policy must be adapted to context and the unique circumstances of place. It is necessary to bear this caveat in mind. At the same time, there are principles and practices underpinning the English model that we consider to be relevant more widely:

- The need to provide end-to-end professional development that supports teachers as they move through their career journeys
- The benefits of authoritative evidence-based documents setting out professional expectations for different stages and roles within the teaching profession
- Ensuring that advice on pedagogical practice is determined objectively and independently by a body that teachers trust and respect
- The use of a supported network of excellent schools as training venues for pre-service and in-service teacher training
- Opportunities to undertake accredited courses linked to specific roles within the education system.

It can be argued that teachers worldwide would benefit from support based on similar principles and practices. Such an approach has the potential to bring about a step change both in teacher professionalism and student learning outcomes.

Education Development Trust's large-scale delivery is underpinned by evidence and research. As a registered charity, we reinvest a percentage of our surplus into a publicly available programme of educational research. We also invest in an ongoing Research and Development cycle to rigorously review the impact of our own programmes, generate new evidence on what works, and share insights to support broader debate and policy.

The evidence and insights shared in this report are part of this ongoing commitment to Research and Development.

To find out more about our work and research, please visit our website (www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com) or contact us at: enquiries@educationdevelopmenttrust.com



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