The Early Career Framework

A Guide for Mentors and Early Career Teachers

Introduction

This guide has been developed from findings from the Early Career Teacher Support pilot evaluation *(Hardman et al., 2020),* funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). It is one of three guides intended to summarise the key messages from the evaluation and provide strategic and practical suggestions that can inform planning to support the development of Early Career Teachers (ECTs) in schools. The guidance is applicable to all school contexts and is not specific to particular programmes of support.

Who should read this guide?

This guidance is aimed at mentors and ECTs (Mentees) in primary and secondary schools. It is recommended that both mentor and Mentee read and discuss the guidance provided to help inform planning for ECT support.
It is recommended that senior school leaders become familiar with this guidance in order to support the mentoring of ECTs and the conditions within schools that enable effective mentoring.
All those involved in supporting ECTs in schools - Heads of Department, phase/subject colleagues, SENCOs and Teaching Assistants - can use this guidance to maximise the role that is played by members of the school community to enhance the impacts of mentoring for ECTs.
For further guidance please see also:

- **The Early Career Framework – A Guide for School Leaders and Induction Leads**
- **The Early Career Framework – A Guide for Implementation**

Key Definitions

ECF   **Early Career Framework: published by the DfE listing what new teachers should know and know how to do.**

ECT   **Early Career Teacher: teacher in their first two years after qualifying to teach.**

The Early Career Framework & Our Research

The Early Career Framework (ECF) has been introduced in some parts of England from September 2020 and will be rolled out nationally in September 2021 along with guidance to support participating Early Career Teachers and mentors. Stemming from the Recruitment and Retention Strategy (*DfE, 2019*) the ECF seeks to ensure that all teachers in England receive high quality support in the first two years of their career. During 2019-20 the Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research at UCL Institute of Education undertook an evaluation of three pilot programmes which were designed to test different ways of supporting Early Career Teachers and their mentors. We worked with the Chartered College of Teaching, Ambition Institute and The Education Endowment Foundation as well as 98 schools (both primary and secondary) to evaluate the impact of these pilot programmes.

Following the pilot which we evaluated, the DfE selected four suppliers to develop freely available resources for schools to use. This included a separate team from UCL Institute of Education. We shared our initial findings with these suppliers to inform their materials. From 2021 there will be six suppliers, including UCL Institute of Education, offering programmes based on one of these four initial programmes. Schools now have three options around how they implement the ECF. The guidance in this document is relevant to all three options.

As detailed at https://www.early-career-framework.education.gov.uk schools have three options around how they implement the Early Career Framework:

- **Full induction programme**
  A funded provider-led programme offering high-quality training for early career teachers and their mentors alongside the professional development materials.

- **Core induction programme**
  Schools can draw on the content of the high-quality core induction programmes to deliver their own early career teacher and mentor training.

- **School-based programme**
  Schools design and deliver their own ECF-based induction programme.

Key recommendations

This guide suggests how six key areas of mentoring ECTs can be supported, drawing on the evaluation findings and referring to further international research:

1. Mentoring within the school's learning community.

2. Support for mentoring.

3. Establishing a formalised mentoring routine.

4. Establishing productive mentoring conversations.

5. Getting the balance right - managing priorities for professional learning.

6. Managing workload and well-being.

Recommendations in each area are illustrated with examples of mentors' and Mentees' experiences and perspectives as well as from senior leaders responsible for induction and mentoring arrangements in the pilot schools.

1. Mentoring within the school's learning community.

1.1 Schools currently provide a varying range of support for ECTs, often as part of professional development that is organised within wider networks and alliances. Plans to provide mentoring for ECTs from September 2021 should examine the strengths and gaps within existing mentoring practices. This is to ensure that strong sources of support within schools are recognised and built upon, while considering the benefits of receiving input from expert external sources. This increases the opportunities for mentoring to benefit from the wider expertise available within the school and beyond. The school as a whole can directly benefit from careful choices about programmes of support for ECTs and Mentors.

"Although the alliance provides a light touch NQT support programme, it is more [about] reporting on progress. [The ECF pilot programme] is therefore the main source of NQT training and support and overall the school is very positive about how the pilot programme fits with school systems and priorities." (Mentor)

1.2 Although Mentor-Mentee collaboration is key to supporting ECTs, there are many reasons to avoid mentoring being an exclusively 'privatised' practice (Milton *et al.,* 2020) which takes place between Mentor and Mentee. Apart from losing opportunities to learn from the wider school community, new teachers can feel overwhelmed by overly intense relationships with a Mentor as the sole source of support and guidance *(O'Grady et al., 2018).* In the pilot programmes, support for ECTs was enhanced where there was frequent dialogue between senior leaders, Mentors and Mentees. Senior leaders also explicitly fostered dialogue within the wider community about being an ECT, so that ECTs benefitted from multiple networks within schools.

> *"There's an entire support network in school and [ECTs] know that my door is always open for question and answer and anything they want to run by me. They can contact me at any time they want, and we can discuss protocols for things, the policies that exist or they may just want to talk about anything, any concern that comes their way, I'm here for them. We have a buddy network, where our [Recently Qualified Teachers (RQTs)]...come occasionally to our meetings and check in. We paired them together at the beginning of the year". (Induction Lead)*

> *"There's always somebody who's been an NQT or they were an NQT the year before, or they're an RQT. So you can always go and speak to people about it." (NQT)*

2. Support for mentoring.

2.1 The Mentor role is vital to the support of ECTs. Mentors in turn require professional learning opportunities with a deliberate focus on deepening knowledge of mentoring skills and approaches. Extensive research calls for Mentors to be supported with access to sustained, high quality professional learning *(e.g. Langdon, 2017).* Some Mentors in the pilot evaluation reported their previous experience of becoming a Mentor as having to "sink or swim", lacking guidance on effective mentoring practices. The pilot programmes that we evaluated included access to online and/or face to face Mentor development, peer-exchange of ideas and experiences and remote access to mentoring resources. Mentoring was increasingly recognised within schools as a skilled professional practice requiring specific professional development. It is important that mentoring ECTs includes an opportunity to access structured, high quality professional development.

> *"I did find that [receiving feedback on coaching of ECTs] particularly useful to see…nobody ever observes how you're being as a coach, so actually it's quite useful and...it is quite nice to have people just observe". (Mentor)*

> *"I quite like the idea of online learning, where we can do it on our own time, as opposed to having to go to a set venue at a set time". (Induction Lead/Mentor)*

Equally important is peer-support for Mentors and the positive support offered to Mentors by senior leaders through regular meetings.

"I am taking opportunities when I have Mentor meetings to just check in on how they're [the Mentors] finding it". (Induction Lead)

"We have our own Mentor meetings, so the three Mentors will meet up and have a discussion about how things are going or how we do things. So we support each other in school." (Mentor)

2.2 Mentors need time for mentoring. Time for regular mentoring conversations and observations of ECTs' teaching was universally recognised as essential by the Mentors and ECTs involved in the pilot programmes. To support ECTs to engage with the external support programmes, Mentors planned for the ECTs to carry out weekly or fortnightly programme activities, based on reviewing their progress. Mentors also became familiar with related research material provided as part of development activities. Whether schools decide to opt for an external programme of support for the ECF or design their own school-based provision, Mentors need time to support the ECT's engagement with the ECF on a regular basis.

2.3 Mentors also need support to prioritise demands on the use of protected mentoring time. It is vital that mentoring responds to ECTs' needs in a timely way, with sufficient attention to thoughtful, unhurried dialogue about the ECT's teaching and the inevitable challenges that will arise. The ECF should of course be complementary to ECTs' needs. At the same time, every ECT is an individual, with particular needs on transition from Initial Teacher Education and shaped by the context of their school and their pupils. Senior leaders can play an important role in guiding Mentors about their priorities, helping both Mentors and Mentees to avoid feeling pressurised to 'get through' a common programme and to select the most appropriate elements to focus on at any time.

"Having those [mentoring] conversations does take time. I think sometimes you always worry at what cost. If I invest all of my time into [mentoring conversations driven by individual needs], am I not giving them all of the information they need? Are there other things we need to get through in our meeting?" (Mentor)

Professional development for Mentors should help here. Support for mentoring from senior leaders who are responsible for ECTs is also vital. Senior leaders should refer to **The Early Career Framework – A Guide for Implementation** for further advice about providing time for mentoring and supporting the Mentor in allocating time to the varying needs of the ECT throughout the induction period.

3. Establishing a formalised mentoring routine.

3.1   ECTs need to have a specific, dedicated Mentor responsible for closely supporting their professional learning. Mentors and Mentees benefit from formalised, protected dates in the diary for regular meetings. In the pilot support programmes, this happened weekly or fortnightly – a lot can happen in that time. Wherever possible, this was in 'non-tired' time – not always after school and not fitted into lunch breaks. Informal talk is also greatly valued by ECTs. This is important but is only part of the learning process and can too easily become the complete experience for the ECT. It is easy for mentoring to disappear from busy teachers' priorities – especially when things seem to be going okay. A calendar of protected mentoring meetings helps to ensure this can be avoided.

> *"What I would really like is an actual hour on my timetable that's protected where I know that I can work with [the Mentee]. I've got my three PPAs and my two leadership hours for the department stuff, and it's like: "Where does this extra hour need to fit in?" (Mentor).*

3.2   Explicit expectations of mentoring meetings are valued by ECTs. Mentors and Mentees can plan an agenda in advance to ensure that attention is paid to specific aspects of teaching development – otherwise it can be easy for Mentor meetings to become dominated by information-giving about school routines and administration, or an over-emphasis on generally supportive conversation (sometimes called 'buddy mentoring' *(Stanulis and Brondyk, 2013)*. Some schools have Mentor-Mentee 'contracts' from the start that set out expectations of the mentoring relationship. The pilot support programmes suggest it can be very helpful to have explicit ground rules about: the purpose of each meeting; attendance; timing; who records notes and actions; what is confidential; what to do if it becomes difficult to stick with this – both parties should be prepared to work out how to maintain mentoring during pressurised times in the year. Mentees should play a large part in agenda-setting to encourage taking shared responsibility for their professional learning.

> *"It's streets ahead of what my experience was…it's disciplined and structured and the meeting is structured" (Mentor).*

3.3   Decide a pattern of regular lesson observations that work with the meetings pattern and that focus explicitly on developing teaching, not assessing against the Teachers' Standards.

3.4   Decide what will count as evidence of ECT learning that can be discussed – including rich evidence of relationships with pupils, pupil learning, working with pupil voice to inform teaching etc.

4. Establishing productive Mentoring conversations.

4.1 Productive Mentor-Mentee dialogue needs to be carefully planned for. Professional development helped many of the pilot Mentors develop the active listening skills that underpin productive dialogue, particularly benefitting those with less mentoring experience.

"[The Mentor learned that mentoring can be] about not doing all the talking and getting the NQT to talk more during the session and getting them to basically lead the session". (Mentor)

Planning can enable the ECT to have time to think deeply about focused aspects of their practice and be able to voice their needs and priorities. It is important that the ECT voice is core to Mentor dialogue, when exploring their progression and when considering the appropriate use of external resources. ECTs involved in the pilot valued the ways that some Mentors planned for productive dialogue, through an explicit focus on both ECTs and Mentors preparing for mentoring meetings.

"I can carve out time during my day, or when I'm feeling like it, to sit and really reflect. I make notes and share them with my Mentor ahead of time and then she reads them and then we have a conversation about it". (ECT)

4.2 Mentors found that mentoring provided opportunities for their own professional learning, when questions around practice demanded a deeply reflective approach to complex challenges.

"It was a behavioural issue with a child that was particularly difficult. So I said to [the ECT] "I'm going to have to go away and have a think of how I can help you with this one." Because it didn't come to me straight away and then when I thought about it, I said, "Try this." And she did and it helped...sometimes you've got to think a bit more outside of the box, for a bit longer"." (Mentor)

4.3 Informal mentoring through supportive dialogue is also highly valued by new teachers. This is both in relation to the ECF and other aspects of being a new teacher. Such opportunities contribute to ECTs' sense of wellbeing. It helps to be clear about how important it is for ECTs to feel able to approach their Mentor informally, while at the same time making it clear that the Mentor may not always be able to respond immediately due to workload demands at a specific time. Flexibility and openness are key, so that informal chats between Mentor and Mentee can be accommodated outside of formal meetings.

"I see my Mentor most of the day every day – break time, lunch time, after school, before school – so we have those conversations naturally." (ECT)

"It's nice that I can go to my Mentor, whenever." (ECT)

5. Getting the balance right – managing priorities for professional learning.

5.1 A complex range of influences impacted on the focus of mentoring ECTs as part of the pilot support programmes. Individual needs are vital and can be pressing. Wider school contexts, the ECF and local/national requirements also set expectations for what new teachers need to focus on, reflected in *Figure 1*. The mentoring process needs to take all of these into account when planning activities throughout the induction period.
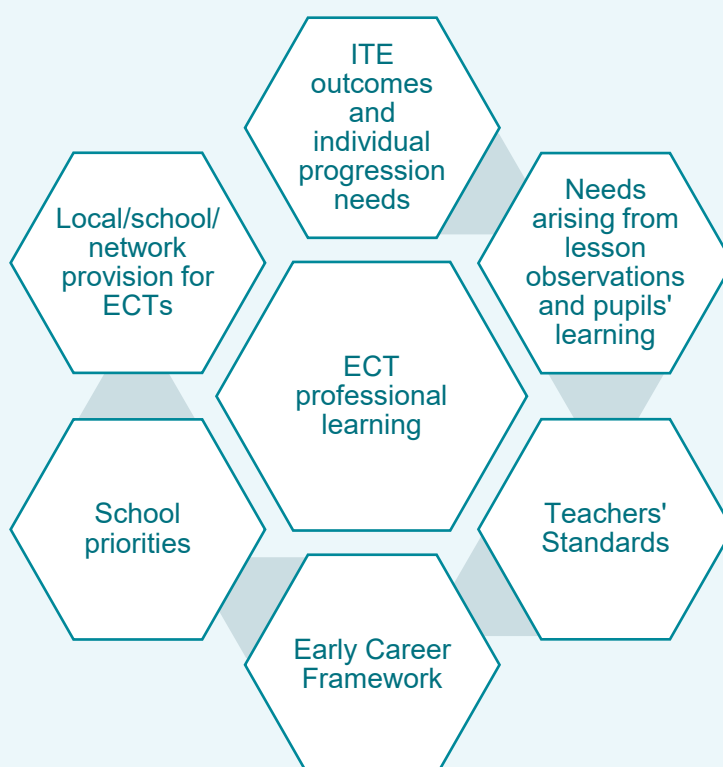

Figure 1. The range of individual, context-specific and winder/national influences on ECT professional learning.

The range of individual, context-specific and wider influences and requirements for ECT professional learning means that mentoring needs to address agreed priorities. Both Mentor and Mentee need to plan for the ECT's development over time and agree how to balance individual needs and enthusiasms with external requirements and sources of support. Mentors and senior leaders have found it extremely helpful to work with programmes that provide a clear structure for the duration of the mentoring process. Avoid overloading ECTs with an abundance of riches that become hard to manage in practice. Day to day demands from the classroom, existing school provision for ECTs and an external programme may all include excellent learning opportunities – but ECTs need to prioritise and Mentors play a crucial role in helping them to do this.

"There aren't enough hours in the day for me to manage two systems...I know it's helpful and I'm not arguing that the content isn't good but...directing me efficiently to the right content is what I need'. (ECT).

'Having a better-mapped, better-resourced programme to refer to has increased the quality of what I've been delivering." (Induction Lead)

5.2   Addressing the individual professional learning needs of ECTs is paramount in steering the most effective use of mentoring time. Programmes that offer systematic support for ECTs through the ECF can make a valuable contribution to their learning. This always needs to be considered in the context of the particular ECT, their previous experience and accomplishments and the needs of their pupils. Mentor-mentee dialogue needs to be mindful of school contexts and the opportunities, expectations and challenges they bring for new teachers. All of this means that individualised mentoring is crucial, drawing on wider programmes and resources to provide carefully targeted support when it is most appropriate. This requires Mentors to make professional judgements about the best use of available resources. Mentors need to feel confident in making such judgements. Mentors and Induction Leads involved in the pilot programmes became increasingly aware of the need to retain a focus on individual ECTs' differences when participating in structured external programmes.

"I guess it's that one size fits all...I think we need to find a way of making it...bespoke to individuals' circumstances or schools' situations." (Induction Lead/Mentor)

6. Managing workload and well-being

6.1   A positive mentoring experience can make a great difference to ECTs' experience, wellbeing and perceptions of the ECF. At the same time, it can be difficult for some ECTs to talk openly about the inevitable challenges involved in developing as new teachers and in managing workload (e.g. Hobson and McIntyre, 2013; Hobson and Malderez, 2013). Mentors can be instrumental in steering positive conversations that focus on professional learning in challenging situations, rather than 'survival'. Trust is at the core of such conversations. This can be difficult to establish when the Mentor is also involved in assessing the ECT (which is most usually the case). Mentors need to consider this dilemma. As outlined in Section 3, being explicit about the purposes of mentoring activities and developing joint mentoring agendas can help. Being realistic about what the ECT can reasonably manage as part of an external programme and ensuring that the programme is used to support individual development needs in the context of the school is a prime consideration.

"It is quite a lot to ask from [an ECT] but then at the same time, as long as your Mentor is quite relaxed and it's not like you have to do absolutely everything, it works quite well." (ECT)

5.2   Ultimately, this is about mentoring ECTs within the learning community of the school, where school-wide attention to well-being is transparent and part of a coherent approach to professional learning. Mentoring is most effective where it is recognised as a skilled professional practice, attracting time and support. Mentoring ECTs is a rewarding and important professional responsibility, with impacts on the profession as well as the individual school. Where this is given the fullest recognition, ECTs and Mentors stand to make the strongest ongoing contributions to their schools as professional learning communities, with wider benefits for pupils and teachers.

References

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Langdon, F. (2017). Learning to mentor: unravelling routine practice to develop adaptive mentoring expertise. Teacher Development. 21(4), 528-546. https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2016.1267036

Milton, E., Daly, C., Langdon, F., Palmer, M., Jones, K., & Davies, A. J. (2020). Can schools really provide the learning environment that new teachers need? Complexities and implications for professional learning in Wales. Professional Development in Education, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1767177

O'Grady, E., Guilfoyle, L., & McGarr, O. (2018). "Biting one's lip" and "distancing": exploring pre-service teachers' strategies in dysfunctional professional relationships. Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 46 (4), 369–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2018.1469115

Stanulis, R. & Brondyk, S. (2013). 'Complexities involved in mentoring towards a high-leverage practice in the induction years'. Teachers College Record, 115 (10), 1–34.

Other useful resources

Early career framework reforms: overview (Department for Education, 2020).
An overview of the Early Career Framework policy and Early Career Teacher entitlements. This page has been regularly updated as more information becomes available.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-career-framework-reforms-overview/early-career-framework-reforms-overview

Early Career Framework: Core Induction Programme (Department for Education, 2020). This website outlines the purpose of the Early Career Framework and links to the four suppliers for national rollout of Early Career Support. https://www.early-career-framework.education.gov.uk/

Early Career Framework (Department for Education, 2019).
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/913646/Early-Career_Framework.pdf

Early Career Support (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020).
Information about the pilot programmes and evaluation, including the pilot evaluation report.
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/early-career-support/

Further resources

CollectivED: The Mentoring and Coaching Hub @CollectivED1
https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/carnegie-school-of-education/research/collectived/
CollectivED is a network of teachers and other professionals interested in how mentoring and coaching can be used to support all learners - teachers, other professionals, children and young people, leaders, governors or other partners. See current working papers on developing mentoring:
https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/carnegie-school-of-education/research/working-paper-series/collectived/

Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) @CUREE_official
http://www.curee.co.uk/resources/publications/national-framework-mentoring-and-coaching
The 2005 *National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching* remains a helpful resource today. It sets out ten principles, based on research evidence and consultation, to underpin effective mentoring and coaching in schools. These principles are supported by a table of the practical activities required (the who, what, where and why?) and the skills and professional development that underpins them.

David Didau: Mentoring through co-planning, modelling and observation: *'Modelling and observation. A low threat model for teacher development'.*
https://learningspy.co.uk/training/modelling-and-observation/

Mentoring new teachers is harder than lots of people think
The Education Workforce Council blog by Daly and Milton (2017) identifies eight principles to guide the development of mentoring as a professional practice.
https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/about/staff-room/son-archive/43-english/about/staff-room/blog-archive/595-caroline-daly-emmajane-milton-mentoring-teachers-is-harder-than-lots-of-people-think.html

This resource is also available on our website
www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-cttr

Enquiries regarding this report should be sent to
ioe.cttr@ucl.ac.uk

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