

# The Early Career Framework

## A Guide for Implementation



# Introduction

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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 senior leaders in primary and secondary schools. It will be of particular importance to leaders responsible for planning staff development including the induction of early career teachers, for those responsible for planning budgets and for timetabling. 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 Mentors and Early Career Teachers](#)

## 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.

**ECS** Early Career Support: the means in which the ECF is delivered.

## 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.

Whichever approach is taken, this guide focuses on recommendations for ensuring that the programme of support offered to Early Career Teachers and their mentors in your school is implemented effectively.

# Key recommendations

1. **Start as early as possible to develop your implementation plan.**
2. **Identify where there is overlap between Early Career Support entitlement and your school's (or MAT's or Local Authority's) pre-existing provision for ECTs. Adapt activities to avoid duplication.**
3. **Ensure that mentors and ECTs have sufficient directed time allocated to enable full engagement with the Early Career Support entitlement. This includes attendance at induction events.**
4. **Assess your timetable and cover arrangements to ensure that mentors and ECTs are able to meet regularly during the school day and to ensure that a range of teaching can be observed.**
5. **Check compatibility of e-learning platforms with your school's IT facilities and make any adjustments before the start of the Early Career Support programme.**
6. **Consider how you will tailor your chosen Early Career Support programme to your school's context.**
7. **Make the most of the opportunity to support mentor development and a whole-school culture of mentoring.**

# 1. Start as early as possible to develop your implementation plan.

Implementation experts recommend that you should allow a long lead time before introducing a new initiative (*Sharpley et al., 2019*). Schools are facing particularly extreme challenges in 2021 but starting to plan as soon as possible will help ensure the Early Career Framework has the greatest possible chance of success. This time should be used both to plan how each element of the ECF will be implemented in your school and to prepare people for the part they will play in implementation. You may also need to consider what might need 'deimplementing' in your school – activities, practices and habits that are superseded by the ECF and need to be changed or which do not support it and need to be stopped.

It is good practice to establish an implementation team (*Moir, 2018*). Depending on the size of your school, this might include one or more senior leaders, the Induction Lead and one or more Mentors. It should include a senior staff member with the authority to make school-level decisions (*Moir, 2018*). We found that the pilot programmes were most successful in schools with high-level support from senior leadership.

Our evaluation showed that the role of the Induction Lead and wider Senior Leadership Team was a key factor in how ECT development is valued and addressed within the school, and in turn impacted on engagement from Mentors and ECTs and affected the perceived promise of the programme. We also found variation in the role of the Induction Lead between schools. In some schools, aspects of the Induction Lead role were delegated to Mentors and the Induction Lead her/himself stepped back after setting up the programme. In other schools, Induction Leads were very hands-on in supporting ECTs and maintained an active role throughout. Regardless, Induction Leads have a key role in securing quality Mentor engagement.

During the early stages of implementation planning you will need to familiarise yourself and other leaders with the ECF so that you are able to support it once it is in place. You will also need time to address the areas below, including budgeting, timetabling and identifying and preparing Mentors. You may need to give time to shaping expectations, particularly when working with experienced Mentors, so that they are aware of the ways in which the ECF differs from their accustomed prior practice.

An early decision to be made is whether to implement the Full Induction Programme (FIP), Core Induction Programme (CIP) or to devise your school's own programme.

ECF programmes have been carefully designed as complete interventions. To get the best out of an intervention it is important to implement it as closely to the original model as possible (*Sharpley et al., 2019; Lendrum & Humphrey, 2012*). You will need to identify the core elements of your chosen programme and make sure that they can be delivered as intended.

During our evaluation we found examples where schools had diverged from the programmes as planned. Often this involved leaving elements out, or reducing their frequency, because there was not enough time available to complete tasks (see *recommendations 3 and 4*). Another issue was moving away from coaching models described by developers. Some programmes prescribe a specific model of coaching. We would advise that you familiarise yourself with the recommended model and explore the extent to which experienced Mentors' practices diverge from this.

You may need to persuade some colleagues of the importance of the ECF and of the support programme, particularly where these colleagues will be required to invest personal time and effort into their success. Some Induction Leads found that experienced Mentors were unwilling to engage in the programme or change their practices.

One pilot programme was perceived as providing a good 'refresher' for experienced Mentors. Some Mentors perceived this as a strength of the programme, however it also comes with a risk that experienced Mentors did not always appreciate the depth of engagement with the research materials that was needed to fulfil the research-informed dimensions of the role. One Induction Lead understood it as her role in any future programme to *'be more explicit with [Mentors] telling them to do that'*. One area where significant 'reculturing' might be required is in implementing new models of coaching or mentoring. The pilot programmes made use of 'instructional coaching', a specific approach to coaching with clear models to follow. The approach was well-liked by many for its use of short drop-ins and structured follow-up conversations. Some Mentors preferred to adapt the format of mentoring conversation models.

Your implementation plan should also include opportunities for reflection and review (*Moir, 2018*). This should involve discussion with colleagues, problem-solving and can involve using the engagement data provided by some programme developers. The Induction Lead can play a key role in monitoring. Programme developers may provide the Induction Lead with detailed information about how participants are engaging with the programme. You should familiarise yourself with what will be supplied and how it might be used supportively. It is always important to check this data for accuracy.

## **2. Identify where there is overlap and adapt activities to avoid duplication.**

The ECF is a significant amount of work for those involved in it and there is a risk that it contributes to excessive workload if not implemented carefully. Mentors were particularly at risk of this during the pilot programme, but some NQTs and Induction Leads also found themselves affected. A significant contributor to excessive workload in schools was where there was overlap between the ECS programme and programmes already being run by schools, multi-academy trusts or local authorities, sometimes resulting in duplication of activities or topics.

In most schools in our evaluation, the ECF programme ran alongside the pre-existing NQT induction programme, offering complementary provision. In a small number of schools there was no pre-existing programme and so the ECF was adopted fully. However, there are elements of NQT provision that are not incorporated into the ECF programmes, including statutory observations and assessment points. It was often found that the requirements of statutory induction were prioritised over the ECF and in some cases ECTs missed out on their ECF entitlement when statutory induction activities had to be completed. Statutory induction guidance has recently been updated to bring it in line with the ECF. However, tensions may still exist between the two.

One Induction Lead had spent worthwhile time mapping their school's existing NQT programme to the ECF programme in order to streamline the NQT experience. This important, one-off activity helps to keep workloads manageable and avoid repetition. We anticipate that after the first year, it should be even more straightforward to integrate programmes.

However, while the pilot programmes were very highly regarded by many participants, it is likely that Mentors will need to make time to discuss issues outside the ECF. At first, schools stuck closely to the pilot programme models. We found that this dropped off over time, whenever they found the programmes fitted less well with ECTs' development priorities or with wider school priorities. Several Mentor-ECT pairs highlighted the need to focus some mentoring time on other important issues such as support with lesson planning, preparation for formal (assessed) observations, preparing for parents' evening, guidance on engaging in school assessment activities, and supporting pastoral responsibilities. Whereas previously these issues could be picked up during a weekly Mentor meeting, Mentors have had to find other ways to address them (for example, during shared PPA time, break times, or before and after school) or to split their weekly time together to manage both pilot programme and more general school-related work. This is a consequence of the ECF promoting a sequential approach to ECT development that may not always map directly to contextual needs. You should take into account the need for the range of development priorities to be supported.

A small number of schools experienced difficulties in our evaluation, where an ECT was not making good progress and was at risk of failure. There are two issues to highlight here for implementation. One is to ensure that the school maintains a holistic overview of ECTs' progression. Ensure that rigorous adherence to a specific aspect of the programme requirements does not make it hard to identify where an ECT is struggling in another area of development. The other issue is to maintain some flexibility so that ECTs can focus on meeting threshold induction standards where necessary, without feeling compelled to participate in all the programme requirements.

In some cases, there was overlap with programmes for ECTs running as part of wider networks, e.g. by the Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust. If your school is engaged in such programmes, you may want to have an early conversation with colleagues at the LA or MAT in order to negotiate a way forward.

Concerns arose where a Mentor or an Induction Lead was perceived to have competing roles in relation to an ECT, e.g., being responsible for both development and for assessment. This was a particular issue in primary schools and where line management was also part of the role set. You may need to make decisions about how best to deploy staff involved in mentoring for development and in assessing ECTs and to explore possibilities for keeping these roles distinct.

### **3. Ensure that Mentors and ECTs have sufficient directed time for full engagement with the entitlement.**

Where schools allocated Mentors and ECTs sufficient directed time to participate fully in the programmes, the programmes were rated more highly. We found that the pilot programmes did take up a significant amount of time. As one Mentor commented on her weekly commitment:

*I have the drop-in session, that's half an hour. I then have the coaching session, that's an hour ... I would spend Thursday evening preparing ready for the coaching session. About an hour.*

Similarly, the programmes generated reading and reflection activities for ECTs to engage with, as well as coaching sessions and group activities.

The success of the programmes depends on Mentors' familiarity with them and their capacity and confidence to draw on them in an adaptive way. Mentors need additional time to familiarise themselves with the programme in order to use the materials flexibly and creatively in school.

Mentors frequently used substantial amounts of their own time to prepare for and lead coaching sessions and to support their ECTs beyond timetabled meetings. For example, one Mentor reported that:

*I would do a lot of the reading in my own time. I wouldn't do it at school because I wouldn't be able to. But I do a lot of the reading at home in preparation for the meetings and I'd do other notes at home in preparation for the meetings and stuff like that.*

The induction events were cited as particularly valuable for Mentors and Induction Leads, in helping them understand the programme and how to implement it. Induction requirements vary by programme, with the longest induction conference in our evaluation taking two days plus travel to a regional venue.

In one school time was initially provided for ECTs by removing the requirement for them to participate in whole-school development activities. However this was found to be counter-productive and the decision was later reversed.

It is worth noting that during our evaluation, developers tended to underestimate the amount of time Mentors and ECTs needed to engage with the programmes. We found that Mentors needed approximately 1.5-2 hours per week to do all the work involved in supporting an ECT. ECTs needed up to an hour a week, depending on the programme. We would expect the amount of time needed by Mentors to prepare to reduce in subsequent years as they gain familiarity with the programme.

Some activities, including collaboration with colleagues at other schools, may be offered by providers as synchronous (live) online activities. You should review whether such offers align with the school calendar, identify where there are any clashes with planned school or wider network activities and consider what action to take to ensure that Mentors and ECTs can participate fully in their programme.

You will need to familiarise yourself with all of the one-off and regular activities associated with your ECF support programme and ensure that sufficient time is provided for them. Activities may include, but are not limited to: induction events, Mentor training, preparing for regular mentoring sessions, observations, mentoring sessions, time for Mentors and ECTs to engage with ECF materials, completion of follow up work, e.g. logging targets.

## **4. Review your timetable and cover arrangements to support ECF activities.**

A strength of the pilot programmes was the emphasis placed on ECT development through developing high-quality mentoring and the expectation that schools would resource Mentors' time through reducing timetabled teaching commitments in order that meetings could take place during the school day. Nevertheless, in several cases Mentors commented that timetables had been planned before schools committed to the pilot programme and so they were having to complete the additional work associated with the programme in their own time, including after school and evenings.

Giving Mentors and ECTs time in their working week to participate means that schools need to resource time off timetable and have the staffing cover to do so. In order to do so, resources, funding, and information need to be available early enough in the preceding school year to support timetabling at the time it is planned. Not all pilot schools gave Mentors and ECTs protected time on their timetables for the ECF and this led to notable differences in how the programmes were implemented, with ECTs in some schools having four times the amount of engagement with the programme as others (ranging from 30 minutes per fortnight to one hour per week). ECTs are entitled to a reduction of 10% in their teaching timetable in their first year of teaching and 5% in their second year, in order to make time for professional development activities.

In some cases, the Mentor had time allocated on their timetable, but this only facilitated observation of one particular lesson or class. We recommend that you plan in advance how Mentors can observe and provide coaching in response to a range of lessons or classes.



There may be particular challenges in relation to this, for example where primary school Mentors and ECTs teach within the same phase, or where schools are on split sites. Video observations may offer some flexibility.

In some cases Induction Leads stepped in to release time from Mentors, for example through supporting the online learning aspect of the programme. In one school the Induction Lead used their leadership time to cover three Mentors for up to an hour per week each so that they could carry out observations.

The Treasury has now promised funding to support Mentor time (*HMT, 2020*) and we would strongly advise that ECT, Mentor and Induction Lead timetables are planned with sufficient time made available within directed time to fulfil the ECF requirements.

A related issue is deciding who to appoint as Mentors, bearing in mind the other commitments and calls that some members of staff have on their time. In one pilot school, Mentors who were Lead Teachers found it easier to engage with the ECF programme because it aligned more readily with their role and perspective, while Mentors who were Heads of Department found it harder because of the many diverse and competing demands on their time.

Engaging with research materials to increase their own research literacy is a key element of Mentors' professional development in the programme. Some experienced Mentors recognised that they would find the content overwhelming if they had not already been exposed to research in their existing school roles. These same Mentors often mentioned how useful they found it to engage with contemporary literature and educational materials. They recognised the potential of the programme materials to develop their own mentoring practice and reported a fundamentally deepened understanding of their Mentor role.

## **5. Check compatibility of e-learning platforms with your school's IT facilities.**

All of the ECF pilot programmes depended on access to the online learning platforms, making it critical that these could be used easily within school systems. The learning platforms hosted highly-rated resources and participants valued the easy access to research-informed materials that fitted well with priorities for their professional development, and the flexibility of being able to revisit these resources at other times convenient to them.

In some schools there were issues at the beginning of the programmes with teachers being unable to access interactive and video resources, due to firewalls, availability of computers and the lack of a quiet space in which to access materials. Some ECTs and Mentors reported, for example, having to miss wider school CPD activities and meetings in order to go home to attend online sessions that were part of this pilot programme. You should check with your ECF programme provider which platforms will be used and ensure that they can be accessed within your school network to avoid difficulties with content being blocked.

In case there are any set-up issues with password access, etc, make sure that you know how to contact relevant support personnel. In the pilot programmes, the programme teams were very quick to respond to such issues when they arose.

In some cases programmes may make use of more than one platform. Familiarise yourself with the platforms used by your programme so that you can support colleagues if any difficulties arise.

## **6. Consider how you will tailor your chosen Early Career Support programme to your school's context.**

Some Mentors and Induction Leads observed that ECTs were making better progress as teachers as a result of participating in the programme than would be expected based on the previous induction programme used at the school. Others thought that the programme was less effective than previous provision because it was not related to the specific context of the school.

By necessity the ECF support programmes are somewhat general in character. They also differ from one another in terms of the specific activities on offer and their underlying philosophy. When choosing a programme for your school, you should seek to choose one that aligns well with your school's priorities and approach to professional development.

There may be specific aspects of your school's characteristics or needs that are not covered fully in the programme you choose, for example one Induction Lead felt that ECTs in her school needed more emphasis on EAL than was included in the pilot programme. You may need to be prepared to create additional content if there are particular contextual priorities for your school requiring specialist knowledge.

A very important part of the Mentors role is tailoring the programme resources to the individual ECT's needs, which may require additional support.

## **7. Make the most of the opportunity to support mentoring in your school.**

The ECF provides a unique opportunity for schools to invest in Mentor development and to create a whole-school culture of mentoring. Many pilot schools joined the programme because they valued mentoring and wanted to learn more about it as well as being part of the new ECF.

Induction Leads regarded the pilot programmes as a professional development opportunity for new Mentors and were deeply committed to extending their schools as sites of professional learning for ECTs and Mentors. They were also interested in the potential wider

impacts on their schools through accessing resources and the coaching model presented in the programme.

Many Induction Leads and Mentors agreed that the pilot programme had the potential to improve ECT provision with programme goals and content generally thought to be aligned with school improvement priorities around research-informed teaching and targeted development goals for ECTs.

You might want to consider how you could capitalise on this and use the programme to enhance professional development and improve mentoring, and teaching and learning, throughout your school. For example, Mentors in one school presented to colleagues, as part of wider school CPD, *'how it had improved their practice as well as the ECTs practice'*. In another school, resources were used with student teachers as part of their ITE provision, and other Induction Leads also mentioned their intention to use the coaching model or resources in their wider CPD provision, perceiving that the programme was *'a useful support process for all teachers at all levels'* and *'a way of developing staff and of observations not being related to performance management but actually being linked to proper development.'*

You could consider training more members of staff as Mentors than those currently needed for ECT induction. In one school we visited all members of staff were mentored by a colleague and mentoring was highly valued as part of professional development for all.

Some Induction Leads mentioned the potential of the coaching model and of some online resources available via the platforms to be used more widely across their local and regional schools' networks. This highlights the potential of support programmes to contribute to wider Initial Teacher Education and CPD provision.

Mentors and ECTs very much valued the opportunity to work collaboratively with others where this was available on their programme – although there were issues with access to such sessions due to timing. You may want to consider the extent to which collaboration can be established within your school, for example by setting up a mentoring programme, or making ECF materials available to a wider group of teachers. Where you have more than one ECT in your school, or within your wider networks, there is an opportunity to identify how ECF support programmes can be enhanced by collaborative ways of working among new teachers.

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## 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](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/>
- Putting Evidence to Work - A School's Guide to Implementation** (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). This website provides guidance and resources to help schools implement evidence-based interventions. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/a-schools-guide-to-implementation/>

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This guidance was written by researchers and educators from The Centre for Teachers & Teaching Research as well as colleagues at the UCL Institute of Education.

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