

Golden Thread or Gilded Cage?

An analysis of Department for
Education support for the continuing
professional development of teachers

Prepared by the Continuing
Professional Development Forum
of the Universities Council for the
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Authors

Paul Vare (CPD Forum Chair), Lizana Oberholzer (CPD Forum Vice-Chair), Mohammad Shamim Ahmad, Hannah Durham, Jon James, Hilary Lee, Caroline Linse, Rachel Lofthouse, Sarah McGrath, Una Meehan, Tanya Ovenden-Hope, Louise Price, Chris Rolph, Lynn Sampson Chappell, Marnie Seymour, Rebecca Smith, Soo Sturrock, Karen Watson plus other members of the UCET CPD Forum with support from colleagues who have both delivered and received the ECF and NPQs.

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Executive Summary

This report was developed over a ten-month period building on extensive consultation with over 50 professionals directly involved with CPD provision for teachers in England.

The report seeks to highlight the strengths, weaknesses and unforeseen impacts of the Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), one year into the national roll-out of the ECF.

Particular strengths of the ECF include:

- Provision of a coherent programme of professional development over an extended period
- Recognition of the importance of mentoring and coaching in professional development
- An emphasis on wellbeing particularly in relation to introducing strategies to manage workload
- Different providers developing their own programmes based on the ECF has the potential to provide comparative learning opportunities across the sector.

In addition to these benefits, the NPQs offer a range of different pathways that help to map out opportunities for alternative career stages.

Concerns with the ECF and NPQ programmes are sub-divided into content and implementation.

Concerns with content include:

- A high level of repetition both between the initial Core Content Framework (CCF) and the ECF as well across the NPQs; this discourages learners and means content is missed
- A lack of progression from CCF to ECF through to NPQs; statements are repeated rather than reinforced in any meaningful manner
- A limited research base underpinning these programmes; alternative views that would serve to deepen teachers' professional understanding are not presented
- Generic content that cannot be contextualised; a limited range of case studies are used rather than drawing on practice in the teacher's own setting
- The place of Special Educational Needs and disability (SEND), particularly the 'behaviourist' approach taken to behaviour management which is counterproductive with many children
- The absence of any reference to the climate crisis and ecological emergency which represent the context within which our economy is developing.

Concerns with implementation include:

- The need for mentors to 'backfill' the programme with contextualised learning due to the uniform content; this can add significantly to mentor workload
- Providing mentors and support for their development places considerable strain on schools; this represents a huge risk to the programme
- Mentoring costs are such that some schools avoid recruiting newly qualified teachers; this is exacerbated by diminishing pay differentials between recruits and experienced teachers
- The ECF assumes a common starting point which is rarely the case; continuity from initial training to CPD is actually lost, despite the golden thread narrative
- The sequencing of material needs to be more flexible to reflect the experiences and concerns of early career teachers
- There is a misalignment between Ofsted requirements, the Teacher Standards and the ECF and NPQ frameworks; this needs to be addressed

- ECF and NPQ facilitator training is prescriptive and often led by non-experts; this hampers the development of professionals in this role
- The critical role of the induction tutor within schools is underplayed or absent, yet this role is key to supporting early career teachers.

The ECF and NPQs represent a significant investment in teacher professional development; we hope that this paper will contribute to ensuring that this investment is effective in challenging and inspiring teachers in order to retain them in the long run.

There are welcome signs that feedback from schools on the ECF programme is being listened to and there is an opportunity here to respond further to feedback in order to build a more effective model.

Two survey-based reports on the ECF (IMS/BMG 2022; Ford et al 2022) highlight challenges faced in its implementation and the likely weak effect on teacher retention. This report provides details that can help to explain some of those survey results. It will be important to study the impact of the ECF and NPQs on the recruitment and retention of teachers and to ensure that the programme adapts to future feedback and the changing needs of the profession. We trust that our analysis will contribute to that process.

1. Introduction

The ambitious Early Career Framework is now in its second year. Designed to guarantee consistency, if not uniformity, of continuing professional development for early career teachers, the ECF offers newly qualified teachers a package of mentor support, online learning and live professional development materials throughout the first two years of their career. Similarly, the new suite of National Professional Qualifications provides a standardised framework intended to provide development pathways for teachers to enable them to progress on a career-long journey from early career to headship.

The Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) recognises that, taken together, the Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) present a serious, well-resourced programme of continuing professional development (CPD). UCET also recognises the importance of reflecting critically on this provision as it becomes established in our schools.

An earlier paper authored by the UCET CPD Forum (Appendix 1) highlights the need for CPD to be contextualised, bespoke and individualised as well as enhancing teachers' ability to become reflective practitioners, with a critical understanding of their practice and with a strong knowledge base to impact positively on the learning of others and their organisations (Vare et al, 2021). It is with these principles in mind that we have examined the content and implementation of the recently introduced ECF/NPQs.

1.1 Sources of evidence

This paper was prepared by members of UCET's CPD Forum over a ten-month period from December 2021 to September 2022. The Forum has over 125 members with hundreds of years' experience of CPD provision among them. As well as drawing on this formidable bank of knowledge, particular emphases was given to capturing members' first-hand experience of delivering the ECF materials to facilitators, mentors and early career teachers (ECTs) as well as working with more senior colleagues who were following various NPQs. Throughout the process, CPD Forum members also met with colleagues in schools who were involved in delivering the ECF and NPQs and, through them, teachers who were receiving these materials, in order to gain a clearer picture of the impacts of this provision including any unintended consequences that may have arisen. The paper itself was drafted over three writing sessions through the first half of 2022 and early drafts were reviewed at two meetings of the full CPD Forum as well as the UCET Executive.

2. Background

2.1 Teacher learning

While the DfE's focus on the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers is very welcome, it does raise professional dilemmas for the teacher education community. Frameworks that privilege a government-approved evidence base and prescribe knowledge solely in terms of the need for teachers to 'know that' and 'know how' may not be the most effective approach to developing the high-quality teaching workforce that our children deserve. Teacher learning is complex and takes place in multiple domains (Korthagen 2017). Teachers are required to be adaptive and responsive in their teaching, taking account of context, something that is best supported by a wide knowledge base combined with deep theoretical understanding.

There is widespread agreement that the development of teachers is a key priority, as Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis highlights, teachers can make a significant impact on learner outcomes; a point well made in the Department for Education's recent White Paper (DfE 2022a). In addition, Hattie (2009) and Leithwood et al (2019) point out that school leaders can make the second biggest impact, so it is imperative to develop future school leaders with the same rigour to support schoolteachers to in turn support their learners effectively. Responding to the effect sizes identified by Hattie can, however, lead policy makers to apply simple, linear models to teacher development in an effort to bring about rapid shifts in practice. Such an approach fails to recognise the complexity of teacher learning, as Opfer & Peddler (2011) demonstrate, three subsystems – the teacher, the school, and the learning activity – all interact to influence teacher learning. This recognition of complexity underpins the interconnected, non-linear model of professional growth developed by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), the implications of which suggest an emphasis on 'change sequences' and 'growth networks' rather than relying solely on the delivery of content. Even Coe et al (2014) who identify six components of great teaching, including content knowledge and classroom management, include teacher beliefs and professional behaviours as aspects that rely on the engagement of the whole person rather than simply focusing on the cognitive domain. A CPD approach that offers depth of learning and the capacity to collaborate, to learn and resolve issues will help to build a more sustainable, resilient education system.

2.2 Teacher development in England

This issue has come to the fore with a teacher supply crisis prompting the Department for Education (DfE) to outline a teacher retention strategy in 2019, which in turn resulted in the development of the Early Careers Framework (ECF) (DfE, 2019a). The ECF was soon followed by the National Professional Qualification (NPQ) reforms with the NPQ Framework, comprising a wide range of programmes, being rolled out in 2021/22. This aims to provide career pathways for teachers with opportunities to develop as specialists in Behaviour, Teaching and Learning, Leading Teacher Development, Senior Leadership, Headship and Executive Leadership. Further NPQs are becoming available with a focus on Literacy, Early Years and, in the most recent Education White Paper (2022), a new Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator (SENDCo) NPQ. The DfE characterises this training offer as a 'golden thread' of teacher development leading from the Core Content Framework (CCF) for initial teacher education through the ECF to NPQs up to executive head level.

This was not the first attempt to support continuing professional development nationally. Prior to 2010, recently qualified teachers were supported with the aid of the Career Entry and Development Profile (CEDP) as well as golden handshakes in shortage subjects while funding for Masters programmes was available through the Training and Development Agency (TDA).

Consistency of practice can vary across the sector and the 'golden thread' is no exception. While a small number of national providers have been appointed to lead on the delivery of the ECF, schools and multi-academy trusts can opt out and offer their own version of the ECF to their Early Careers Teachers (ECTs). Similarly, the take up of NPQs will depend on the decisions taken at school or academy trust level; in this way the picture is similar to practices prior to 2010. Since 2012 Headteachers are no longer required to hold an NPQH, and can also acquire alternative leadership development to support them in their roles (DfE, 2011).

This section has highlighted the tension between the complex nature of teacher learning and the need to provide teachers across England with a consistent offer of professional development. The notion of a 'golden thread' is not at issue, rather it is the rigidity of a framework that, if imposed as instructed, has the potential to undermine the very processes of teacher learning that we are all so keen to support.

Even Coe et al (2014) who identify six components of great teaching, including content knowledge and classroom management, include teacher beliefs and professional behaviours as aspects that rely on the engagement of the whole person rather than simply focusing on the cognitive domain. A CPD approach that offers depth of learning and the capacity to collaborate, to learn and resolve issues will help to build a more sustainable, resilient education system.

3. Perceived Benefits of the ECF/NPQ Approach

In recent months the ECF roll out has been met with mixed reactions; for some it is a welcome opportunity to support ECTs more consistently while for others, it presents a variety of challenges. The NPQs have been met with a similar range of reactions. To summarise, we see the most positive aspects of the new CPD arrangements as follows:

- The ECF offers a coherent programme over an extended period of time; it is thus seen as a step in the right direction in supporting ECTs
- The ECF guarantees two years' worth of support; with such funding in place, teacher development can once again be a priority in schools
- The profile of mentoring and coaching is raised by acknowledging the mentor's role in ECT development (this however raises resourcing issues as discussed below)
- There has been an effort to ensure that wellbeing runs through the ECF programme. This commitment appears through face to face ECT sessions, with one live session in the first year being devoted to discussing teacher wellbeing and how to manage workload. Script notes emphasising that ECTs consider the impact of their actions, for example, live marking rather than taking books home to mark. ECTs are encouraged to identify these high impact, timely actions and question activities which take time but make little difference to learning (again this raises issues: e.g. Why do we include strategies to avoid burnout rather than tackling the issue at source?)
- Because the NPQs offer a range of different pathways they can map out opportunities for alternative career stages
- There has been some attempt for training programmes to be evidence-based although the breadth of that evidence is open to question, an issue discussed below
- Delivery offers opportunities for collaborative learning and professional challenge; different providers developing their own programmes based on the ECF, for example, provides an opportunity to research and evaluate the differences between the programmes - this is potentially a huge learning opportunity for the sector, assuming the opportunity is taken
- The audits within the ECF are useful tools for both ECTs and mentors so they can pinpoint strengths and areas of development in order to have a clear focus for progression and development
- There is more emphasis on special educational needs and disability (SEND) than in previous frameworks but there is a consensus amongst the workforce that this is still not enough to ensure that capacity within mainstream provision is improved in order to meet the needs of increasing numbers of SEND learners (DfE 2021). This aspect is also highlighted below.

There is clearly much to build on and it is in the spirit of continuous improvement that we turn to areas that have raised concerns among the teacher development community.

4. Concerns with the ECF/NPQs

Here we outline some of the significant challenges or issues; these are divided into (a) content and (b) implementation.

4.1 Issues with Content

Firstly, there is serious concern with the level of repetition both between the CCF and ECF and across the NPQs. This presents difficulties for tutors and mentors when teachers, particularly ECTs, find themselves covering similar, if not identical, material to that covered earlier. This repetition is not only off-putting for learners but also represents a missed opportunity in terms of critical content that is either missing or seriously underplayed as discussed below.

Progression from ITT CCF, ECF through to NPQs is lacking. Those who teach across these frameworks note that many statements are repeated rather than being reinforced in any meaningful manner and there is little evidence of steps to development being identified. These general observations apply across the whole golden thread. Further concerns raised in this section have been gathered into four broad sub-themes; these are: teachers' engagement with research, contextualising teacher learning, the place of SEND; addressing the climate and ecological emergency.

4.1.1 *Teachers as professionals, informed by – and engaging in – research*

The ECF and NPQs focus on teachers being consumers of restricted/approved existing research that informs them how to deliver content rather than encouraging teachers to critique research or engage in research-based activity themselves. Engagement with research in the ECF focuses on evidence prescribing 'what works' and discussion of 'evidence' with colleagues. This evidence is based on a very narrow range of research produced by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) and tends to focus on 'progress' and 'improvement', which are important but little heed is paid to the professional confidence and agency of teachers as professionals. In our enquiries we learned of ECF programmes being developed with an extensive research base only to have all reference to that research removed by the DfE, leaving only EEF-supported research in place.

In addition to this serious weakness, we would highlight the following:

- The ECF identifies the need for teachers to be responsive and engage in adaptive teaching yet it does not develop the skills of ECTs to problem-solve and enquire for themselves; this leaves them ill-prepared for dealing with unforeseen circumstances
- Similarly, the NPQs refer to a 'deep' understanding of context, community and pupils, yet the prescriptive content and particularly the recommended delivery methods do not generally support this approach
- 'Effective Professional Development' makes no mention of teacher enquiry, reflective practice or teacher-led problem-solving
- More reference might be placed on the value and skills of conducting teacher-led enquiries, problem-solving, building on reflective practice within ITT
- 'Professional behaviours' implies opportunities for collaboration and reflective practice, but this not embedded throughout (in contrast to TPL in NI document) https://gtcni.org.uk/cmsfiles/Resource365/Resources/365/UCETNI_Teacher-Professional-Learning-Framework.docx
- All of this is in tension with the Ofsted expectation that teachers will engage critically in research.

Specific concerns with the NPQ research base include:

- The NPQs focus on an 'evidence-informed understanding of what works' while drawing upon the same evidence-base as the ECF with a strong emphasis on the EEF guidance and research. The research base is shallow and often dated, it does not mirror the current thinking in the field
- The NPQs often share the same limited range of case studies; as well as being repetitious as highlighted above, this underlines the narrow evidence base as well as pointing to the need to build on practice in schools
- Similarly, the lack of progression mentioned above plays out in access to research, this is particularly true for delegate who may wish to progress to an NPQSL or NPQH. As teachers progress in their career, one would reasonably expect them to access a wider range of independent research, including a consideration of alternative views
- The NPQ: Leading Professional Development in particular appears to promote a limited notion of the 'expert' teacher. Again, this focuses on the same evidence base, existing knowledge and skills with limited scope for innovation
- The NPQs often miss out core elements of leadership development that one would find in all sectors not only education; significant omissions, each underpinned by a wealth of research include: leadership behaviours; strategic leadership; leading change; team development; systemic thinking.

The above points suggest that there is a narrow conception of what constitutes 'evidence informed practice' and research as well as a misunderstanding of how professionals need to engage with this. Greater opportunity needs to be built for teachers to reflect on the evidence base and translate it into their own research-informed practice. In the current model, crucial elements such as critical reflection and an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative approaches are absent. We hope that this will be addressed as a matter of urgency in any revision of the ECF/NPQs.

4.1.2 Contextualisation

Ostensibly the ECF is flexible enough to meet the personal and professional needs of all ECTs. In practice this has not necessarily been the case, with reports of a rigid approach, especially by the large national providers, all of whom are tightly regulated by the DfE and require EEF sign-off of content and programmes. The ability to contextualise ECF learning appears to have been compromised by an imperative for uniformity which has led to a degree of disenchantment and disengagement for some ECTs. Essential elements missing from the framework include learning to adapt to new and potentially difficult situations, how to apply subject-specific pedagogies or how to integrate new insights from research.

Secondary colleagues report that the materials used throughout the ECF are perceived to be primary or Key Stage 3-centric. This imbalance of materials will depend on the provider as in some cases there is a strong secondary focus. Furthermore, when materials with a secondary-focus were requested from one national provider, the schools were told to write their own. Apart from the workload issues that prevented this, such a response rather undermines the drive for coherence that prevents schools elsewhere from adapting the programme.

Primary and early years ECTs and their mentors have indicated that the materials are often unsuited to their roles and contexts.

While the principles of early career learning and the knowledge and skills for teaching can be argued to be generalisable, the support and sequencing of learning needed to meet the needs of both the ECT and their context should allow a more bespoke engagement to align with each setting and individual. As Hargreaves and O'Connor remind us, "Whenever a new method, practice, or protocol surfaces in education, there is a common tendency to spread it too far and too fast, with little thought as to what else may be needed for the particular model or design to be effective in a sustainable way" (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018, p. 121). The risk of the ECF is that this causes disaffection with professional development and mentoring at a time that new teachers most need to feel that they bring unique talents to the profession and are developing in ways that allow them to thrive in their first teaching appointment.

An alternative to presenting the ECF as a rigid sequence of inputs would be to see it as a palette of skills, knowledge and dispositions that should be applied in varying degrees to suit the context. This idea is used in relation to a framework of educator competences for sustainability called A Rounder Sense of Purpose: <https://aroundersenseofpurpose.eu/framework/palette>. By contrast, the ECF offers an arid painting-by-numbers approach in the way that it is 'delivered'.

4.1.3 Special educational needs and disability (SEND)

A sensitivity and awareness of context is perhaps most apparent in the development of SEND strategies. We note that both the ECF and NPQs are framed for mainstream schools and lack consideration for SEND contexts and alternative provision (AP). Adaptations are required for differing contexts so that materials are contextualised appropriately to ensure that teachers and leaders are fully equipped for their future roles in relation to SEND and AP. The following points highlight the need for more explicit guidance within the ECF and NPQs on SEND provision; this extends to the need for schools to have clear and agreed variations to their standard behaviour procedures for children whose behaviour is particularly challenging.

- Language and phrases evident in the ECF and NPQ indicate that 'some' teachers may benefit from particular approaches. It would be helpful to ensure that SEND-specific strategies and 'person centred' approaches would benefit all staff and all students to ensure that schools are fully inclusive and provide life chances for all. In its current form, the ECF represents a case study of the incompatibility of mainstream programmes with SEND
- NPQs cover 10 content areas (golden threads) and SEND is one of these. SEND content does not feature in all NPQ programmes as a distinct theme (e.g. it is omitted from NPQ Leading Teacher Development)
- The NPQ leadership frameworks are all very similar with no real content about leading SEND. More guidance is needed on how to lead and implement effective policies and practice in SEND, e.g. how to achieve consistency in approach across school; how to plan and ensure quality SEND CPD
- The ECF and NPQ Leading Behaviour Culture (NPQLBC) need to make more explicit reference to the importance of relationships when considering behaviour. This is a complex issue and in relation to SEND it is all the more important to know students and their specific needs rather than adopting a formulaic or template response to issues. This calls a more strategic and responsive approach to behaviour needs particularly when focusing on senior leadership development and headteacher development
- As well as relationship building, effective behaviour management demands an understanding of attachment issues yet this is not reflected in the ECF. The prevalence of attachment and trauma issues has grown significantly post COVID; this is likely to have a significant impact on ECTs

- As discussed above, the research underpinning the NPQs is restricted and restrictive; this is of particular concern regarding SEND, especially in the NPQLBC where, in ‘understanding behaviour’, there is no reference to SEND, Attachment, Trauma or Mental Health
- Both the NPQSL (Senior Leader) and NPQH (Headteacher) need a stronger focus on the strategic aspect of the role and how it needs to align with policy development at a whole school level including governance. Alignment with the SEND CoP 2015/Equality Act 2010 is not included here in enough depth or with a strategic and governance focus
- NPQLBC also fails to align with the key principles of SEND CoP 2015/ Equality Act 2010; references in this NPQ stem from ‘behaviourist’ approaches only; balancing this with relational approaches would leave teachers better equipped to manage behaviour effectively
- NPQLBC reflects a ‘medical model’ approach; it does not explore alternative approaches and may conflict with differing settings’ approaches and policies
- The NPQH as well as the NPQSL need to be more firmly embedded in leadership behaviours and strategic leadership approaches; it is neither strategic nor helpful to learners to centre around behaviour management and in some areas, classroom practices
- As mentioned under 4.1.1, the NPQs draw on a limited range of reading, which provides limited scope for future progression as the reading is often the same across the different NPQs. A limited range of case studies is provided; these are often drawn directly from the EEF’s work and do not consider a wide range of contexts, including SEND and alternative provision.

According to the Education White Paper (2022), the SEND Coordinator (SENDCo) qualification will now be aligned with the NPQs, however, the level of depth and detail required for this qualification requires deep reflective and reflexive practice and future SENDCos need to have a firm grasp on the appropriate and relevant research to enable them to support learners in the most effective way. There are concerns that this development signifies a move away from Masters level study across the board which will reduce rigour.

Ultimately, we need a pedagogy for everyone that embraces and responds to all situations. Suggesting that teachers do not need to know relevant SEND practice and that these children can be removed elsewhere is simply not a sustainable solution – it also happens to be more expensive in the long run.

4.1.4 Climate change and the ecological emergency

Sustainability and climate change represent a persistent and growing concern for young people and their teachers; multiple ecological crises now represent the context within which our economy must develop. We acknowledge the publication of the DfE’s new Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy (DfE 2022b). This cites the ECF as an example of teacher professional development yet it is alarming to discover that the entire ‘golden thread’ from CCF to ECF to the NPQs is silent on these issues. The impacts of climate change in particular are becoming the backdrop to daily life in the ‘real’ (physical) whether this is acknowledged in teacher education or not. The precise timing and nature of these impacts cannot be known so faced with this uncertainty, Coles et al (2016) call for teachers to adopt a stance of openness, to re-examine their practice in light of shifting realities. Inculcating a disposition of openness will serve teachers well in all aspects of their work given that classroom interactions inherently entail complexity and uncertainty for both teachers and students.

The Department’s Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy does note an aspiration to launch a specific sustainability NPQ, which in turn raises questions regarding the level of strategic responsibility

of this role. It should not fall to an isolated 'champion' but be distributed across all leadership roles, recognising that this touches on all aspects of the school including mission and purpose, curriculum design, estate management and procurement policies. This whole institutional approach to sustainability needs to be acknowledged throughout the 'golden thread' from initial teacher education to the most senior levels of leadership. Hence the following recommendations:

- Systemic thinking should be included as a central competence to help professionals recognise the connections across different aspects of their work and that of others, as well as the implications of changes taking place in the wider school system and beyond. This omission is particularly concerning in relation to NPQSL and NPQH
- Like behaviour and SEND, sustainability requires specific attention as a cross-cutting theme with relevance to all teachers in all subjects
- Within the ECF we would recommend that integrating the development of learners' awareness of – and their reactions to – sustainability and climate change without creating unnecessary workload be included at the very least under Standard 5 'Adaptive teaching'
- Similarly, for the NPQs, sustainability should be embedded across all NPQs as a strand of leadership across all roles
- Provide references to relevant support materials for teachers and school leaders such as those prepared recently with the support of the National Association of Environmental Education (NAEE 2022) or the Teacher Development Trust (Hoath & Dave 2022).

The Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy highlights the new Natural History GCSE with a mention of the new model curriculum for Primary Science. While this focus on the science of climate change and the ecological crisis is welcome, the issues are multi-faceted and need to be part of the fabric of school life to bring about a sense of positivity in the face of potentially debilitating media coverage as well as preparedness for the unforeseen impacts that will challenge us all – but chiefly our students – in the long term.

Linked inextricably with sustainability is the issue of social justice, again not something that is raised explicitly in the ECF; the issue of tackling racism for example is not explored in the ECF or NPQs.

4.2 Implementation

4.2.1 Implementing the ECF-NPQ framework

In many ways, the points highlighted below echo the concerns that we have registered in relation to content. In relation to the issue of teachers' engagement with research, the findings of a BERA-RSA inquiry (2014) framed this in three ways:

- 1) A predominantly passive relationship with a body of knowledge
- 2) Activation of knowledge through engagement in research and enquiry as a professional learning process
- 3) A transformative social practice.

The ECF-NPQ approach to research reflects the first of these to some extent and goes no further.

According to the BERA-RSA study, effective CPD should support teachers in conceptualising the roles of knowledge, context and dilemmas in learning and enable them to teach through a more critical lens. The prescriptive nature of the ECF and NPQs ('non-compliant' research appears to have been filtered out), coupled with the limited range of research, hampers teachers' ability to critique academic sources; a failure to address this will seriously harm the intellectual development of the whole profession over the long term.

Because of the uniform nature of the ECF with no reference to context, a great deal of 'backfilling' is required for individual ECTs by mentors and providers; this has serious implications for the workloads of all those involved. There is some irony that a programme designed to support the recruitment and retention of new teachers appears to have added to their workload, certainly compared to previous NQT provision. This is the case for mentors, most of whom are also juggling senior leadership responsibilities.

Both mentoring and coaching of ECTs presents a huge issue for schools, particularly with mentoring capacity. Providing support for the development needs of mentors themselves places considerable strain on schools; this is an area of risk that has the potential to seriously undermine the ECF. These costs are such a concern that some schools are actively avoiding recruiting NQTs because it is more cost effective for them to recruit a teacher on spine point M3 rather than cover the hire and mentoring for a newly qualified teacher – a situation that is particularly acute in outstanding schools where NQTs are keen to work. The situation has also been exacerbated by the diminishing pay differentials between recruits and experienced teachers.

The prescriptive nature of the current framework assumes a common starting point and therefore common content and approach. The old continuum from initial training to CPD for newly qualified teachers through the Career Entry and Development Profile (CEDP) process is lost, despite the golden thread narrative. The focus on knowledge and content delivery does not demand engagement or activity on the part of ECTs.

In light of the above we would suggest that:

- The ECF should require professional learning portfolios or some other form of accreditation process so that (a) teachers have some role/agency in their CPD and (b) this becomes an impactful exercise in learning as well as teaching
- Continuity for ECTs who move school or start mid-year should be considered
- The sequencing needs to be more flexible, for example, the session devoted to discussing teacher wellbeing appears late in the year, experience shows that by the time this is reached ECTs are often already concerned about getting behind with their ECF online work
- Linkages need to be made explicit between Ofsted requirements, the Teacher Standards and the ECF NPQ frameworks. Currently there is a misalignment leading to misunderstandings around roles and priorities, e.g. the Ofsted requirement to engage with research and the lack of opportunity to do this as outlined above
- The Appropriate Body function in securing a judgement of competency following ECT induction is misaligned to ECTs engagement with the ECF (and potentially unnecessary for those holding QTS)
- Teaching School Hubs provide the DfE approved list of CPD to schools, which undermines the credibility of alternative CPD for teachers that may enhance their deep thinking and criticality, such as an MA in Education.

4.2.2 Stakeholder development

ECF facilitator training is prescriptive and often led by non-experts in coaching and mentoring in this field. Similarly, with NPQs, facilitator training is 'done to' professionals showing a limited understanding of how to develop these adult learners to progress. Again, this reflects the fact that training is often delivered by individuals less skilled in the field, with limited experience regarding leadership development and research.

A serious omission is the role of the induction tutor and the development of this role within schools and an understanding of the key part that this plays within the support for ECTs, as well as working closely with delivery partners regarding development and support; this in turn links to mentoring and coaching as a means of developing the role.

Again, the prescriptive nature of the programme leaves no agency for facilitators to personalise and deliver bespoke provision for future leaders. We recognise that these are new programmes and that some uniformity is required in order to ensure parity of provision and for monitoring contract delivery. The points above, however, all stress the urgent need to build more flexibility into programmes and to allow more agency on the part of trainers who should, in turn, model this to teachers who will ultimately help to develop self-confident, successful learners.

5. Conclusion

We will retain good teachers by offering professional development that truly develops professionals, that provides opportunities for deeper engagement in different facets of education chosen by the learner, that encourages teachers to contribute to knowledge rather than simply receive it and which builds their sense of agency. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic reminded us all that the role of teachers and schools involves so much more than academic achievement. The central role that schools play in supporting learners' mental health and well-being, and serving the wider community became abundantly clear. The analysis here highlights ways in which the Department of Education's proposed 'golden thread' is out of step with this view. Indeed, the tendency to narrow the professional development of teachers is following a very different direction to that of most jurisdictions in relation to their vision for a professionalised teacher workforce.

The Government has sought to alleviate workload pressures, an ambition that we commend; however, it seeks to do so not by increasing the workforce but by removing the need for teachers to be creative problem solvers. In this way the DfE appears to be 'contracting out' important elements of the role such as curriculum development. This is unlikely to contribute to the retention of teachers because it removes agency and creativity. The capacity of the whole system to think critically appears to be undermined by an approach across the ECF/NPQ framework that belies a narrow definition of what a teacher/school should be; far from being a 'golden thread' this looks more like a gilded cage, restricting meaningful professional development. Diminishing the role of teachers and de-professionalising them in this way will surely exacerbate the retention crisis.

Two survey-based reports on the ECF (IMS/BMG 2022; Ford et al 2022) highlight challenges faced in its implementation and an apparently weak effect on teacher retention. This report provides some explanation for those findings. There are welcome signs that such evaluations and feedback from schools is being heard. New freedoms were given to schedule live meetings to avoid the summer term when schools were busy with SATs, phonics checks, GCSEs, A levels, etc., and to double up some live meetings. Schools are now able to tackle online materials in the order which suits them and their ECTs rather than following a prescribed sequence. Mentor meetings for the second year of the programme are reduced, in an acknowledgement perhaps of the need to consider mentor wellbeing. Providers are however, tied to DfE guidelines on programme design and are unable to reduce the length of sessions or to alter content without approval. This maintains the fidelity of the programmes at the expense of flexibility and denies time to develop learning communities. Being faithful to a programme that is not achieving what it set out to do will prove counterproductive and wasteful; there is an opportunity here to respond to feedback to develop a more effective model.

The ECF and NPQs represent a significant investment in teacher professional development; we hope that this paper will contribute to ensuring that this investment is effective in challenging and inspiring teachers in order to retain them in the long run. It will be important to study the impact of the ECF and NPQs on the recruitment and retention of teachers and to ensure that the programme adapts to future feedback and the changing needs of the profession. We trust that our analysis will contribute to that process.

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Appendix 1:

Summary of UCET Discussion paper on Continuing Professional Development, January 2021

This paper, based on the wealth of experience and scholarship shared by UCET colleagues, reflected on key aspects of CPD-related policy, practice and research over the past 50 years and highlighted the following principles:

- Education professionals require an **expanding range of competences** over their career; these are often **context-specific**, unforeseen and go beyond any single framework
- As well as being **research-informed**, CPD should **engage educators in theory** so they can adapt their learning creatively to enrich their own setting
- **Reflective practitioners** are best cultivated by supporting teachers' in conducting their own research
- Effective CPD is built on **trusted relationships** between deliverers and learners and include a strong element of **coaching** and/or **mentoring** often by peers
- For sustained impact, CPD needs to be **sustained over time** (at least across two terms), making use of **multiple formats**
- By engaging teachers in their wider social, economic and environmental contexts, CPD will ensure **responsible professionals** in the fullest sense
- Developing teachers' **agency** will enable them to consider their practice critically, lead their own learning and thus maximise the positive impact they have on their learners
- All CPD should be subject to **robust quality assurance** mechanisms.



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