

# The Early Career Framework

A Guide for Mentors and Early  
Career Teachers

# 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 s

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“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 import



## 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



“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

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 th

## 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.

## The Authors

This guide 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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