

## Written evidence submitted by UCL Centre for Educational Leadership, University College London

### **About UCL Centre for Educational Leadership**

UCL Centre for Educational Leadership (UCL CEL), located in the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, is the UK's largest university-based centre for research, teaching, development, and innovation in educational leadership. It is proud to be a nationally and internationally recognised leading voice for innovative research on educational leadership and organisational learning and development in early childhood, primary, secondary, and post-compulsory sectors. The work of the Centre has been strongly influenced by the national policy on leadership and improvement since its establishment in 1997. On behalf of the IOE and in partnership with 29 Teaching School Hubs and two city-wide school alliances across the country, UCL CEL led the pilot and now leads the delivery of the Early Career Framework (ECF) and the full suite of recently refreshed National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), to a total of c24,200 teachers, mentors and school leaders. The CEL's central approach to knowledge creation, exchange and enrichment enables mutual learning with the profession and ensures that not only what we research is relevant, but also how what we have learned from our research is then collaboratively transformed to be used by the profession to make a difference.

### **Key Messages**

1. The solution to teacher retention that has been only based on the human capital approach to developing teachers is off the mark. By focussing narrowly on building individual teachers' learning entitlements, knowledge and skills, many UK-wide teacher development initiatives have largely ignored the integral role of the school organisation in enabling (or constraining) teacher learning and thus failed to bring about the desired results.
2. Teacher leavers are not necessarily 'escaping' from pupils' poor behaviour or excessive workload. Rather, they are escaping from poor leadership and dysfunctional school cultures where teachers' **work** which needs to be *meaningful* (in terms of making a difference) and *motivational* (in terms of inspiring learning) has been reduced to **load**.
3. UCL-led research on the impact of the Early Career Framework (ECF) programme on teacher retention shows that the vast majority of ECTs are enthusiastic about the teaching job and believe that the practice suggested on the ECF programme would make a difference to the learning of their pupils. This is based on survey responses from more than 1,700 early career teachers (ECTs) and Mentors whose demographics are largely representative of the national ECTs' and Mentors' profiles.
4. ECF learning can only make a difference to ECTs' decisions about retention if it is supported by professional learning cultures in school. Evidence points to the significant role of the school organisation in enabling or constraining the impact of the ECF programme on the learning and development of ECTs.
5. The vast majority of mentors are motivated by their role as a mentor and feel that being a mentor has contributed to their own professional development. Evidence suggests that the ECF programme alone should not be blamed for the lack of mentoring time in some schools because workload tensions relating to being a mentor is found to be part of the in-school workload culture.
6. Job satisfaction is not the primary cause of teachers' decisions about their destinations. Our ECF research shows that although in-school job satisfaction may seem to have a direct influence on teachers' decisions, how ECTs feel about their job satisfaction and how well they teach (i.e.,

teacher efficacy) are dependent upon the quality of in-school professional learning cultures that are shaped by school leadership.

**What are the main factors leading to difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified teachers?**

**The Challenge** For nearly two decades there has been no shortage of policy and research attempts to improve the financial and non-financial attractiveness of teaching in England and the other nations in the UK (e.g., European Parliament, 2019; DfE, 2020; EPI, 2021a; Worth & Faulkner-Ellis, 2022). Despite intense investments, within 10 years of entering the profession almost 40% of newly qualified teachers entering English schools in 2009 had left (DfE, 2019); and the overall number of teachers across UK countries has failed to keep pace with increasing pupil numbers since 2011 (House of Commons, 2021).

**The response that is only based on the human capital approach to developing teachers is off the mark. Investing in teachers' development** has been seen by researchers, thinktanks and policy makers as a cost-effective approach to improving retention (DfE, 2019; EPI, 2020, 2021b and 2021c; RAND, 2021; PBE, 2022; Perry et al., 2022), and levelling up educational opportunities for every child in all parts of the UK (IOP, 2020; EEF, 2021; HM Government, 2022). However, by focussing narrowly on building individual teachers' learning entitlements, knowledge and skills, these and other UK wide initiatives have largely ignored the integral mediating role of **the school organisation** in teacher retention. Teachers who excel and whose students excel with them do not just do so on their own (Day & Gu, 2010, 2014; Day, 2017; Johnson, 2019; Gu et al., 2021). Schools are the finders and keepers of teachers (Johnson, 2004, 2019). It is no surprise that irrespective of extensive investment in teachers' human capital, including a fund of £355m for strategic school improvement and teaching and leadership innovation, and a four-year Wellcome Trust Continuing Professional Development Challenge to increase the quantity of subject-specific professional development, these efforts have failed to bring about the desired results. As the education system is still stretched by trying to recover from the effects of the pandemic on pupils' learning and teacher morale, the sector is unlikely to be able to recruit its way out of the teacher supply crisis.

**School cultures and leadership** Toxic school cultures and overly controlling and leadership contribute to the exodus of teachers from schools. For example, research evidence on teacher retention has consistently reported that teacher leavers are not necessarily 'escaping' from pupils' poor behaviour or excessive workload. Rather, they are escaping from poor leadership and dysfunctional school cultures where teachers' **work** which should have been **meaningful** (in terms of making a difference) and **motivational** (in terms of inspiring learning) has been reduced to **load** (e.g., Gu et al., 2017; Sims & Allan, 2018).

Grissom's (2011) study found that higher teacher turnover rates in disadvantaged schools result, in part, from the ineffectiveness of the principal. His analysis of national school and teacher surveys showed that teacher satisfaction is likely to be lower – and the probability for teachers to leave schools is significantly greater – when the leadership of the principal is weak and ineffective. However, when compassion and a sense of belonging are a school's guiding principles, not only do more young people experience a sense of connectedness and friendship and perform better academically, but their teachers also feel more professionally fulfilled and stay longer in the school (Riley, 2022).

The evidence here, together with UCL CEL's research on early career teachers (see below), disagrees with the latest DfE report on the working lives of teachers and school leaders that "considerations of

leaving the state sector are primarily driven by teachers' and leaders' attitudes towards their jobs and, more broadly, their lives" (DfE, 2023, p.171). Our research evidence shows that although in-school job satisfaction may seem to have a direct influence on teachers' retention decisions, how early career teachers feel about their job satisfaction and how well they teach (i.e., teacher efficacy) are the **outcomes of the quality of in-school professional learning cultures** that are shaped by school leadership. Put differently, job satisfaction is an outcome of organisational leadership and culture rather than individual attitude.

**Socioeconomic and geographical factors** In the world of high-income countries, such as the USA, the UK and many European countries, shortage of teacher supply tends to be a particularly pressing problem for core subject areas such as maths, modern foreign languages and science (European Commission, 2012, 2014; European Parliament, 2019) and for schools serving socio-economically deprived and marginalised communities (Ingersoll, 2001; Guarino et al., 2006; Boyd et al., 2008; Allen & McInerney, 2019). There are also troubling indicators which suggest that leadership/headteacher turnover is especially higher and teacher quality is especially lower in schools serving high-need communities (Loeb et al., 2005; Boyd et al., 2008; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009; Day et al., 2011; Sibietta, 2020). Here most children, who are already disadvantaged in accessing or benefiting from rich capital and social capital in their early years, are then denied access to the quality education to which they are entitled when entering the formal school system.

**Teacher quality and qualifications** Although we do not yet have sufficient empirical evidence on the quality of teacher leavers in England, we know from research in the USA that, on average, early career leavers tend to be less effective than stayers as measured by the test score gains of the students in their classrooms (Henry et al., 2011; Goldhaber et al., 2011; Boyd et al., 2011). Other research suggests that teachers with stronger qualifications and more competitive university backgrounds are more likely to exit early and not return (Lankford et al., 2002; Boyed et al., 2005; Guarino et al., 2006; Feng & Sass, 2011).

**Aging workforce** Significant falls in the proportion of graduates applying for teacher training programmes across many European countries have culminated in an urgent call to increase efforts to transform the conditions of teaching and through this, attract more suitably qualified people to the profession (Auguste et al., 2010; OECD, 2011; European Commission, 2012; European Parliament, 2019). At the same time, the ageing population of the existing teaching workforce (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997; Guttman, 2001; Chevalier & Dolton, 2004; OECD, 2005; Matheson, 2007; Aaronson, 2008; European Commission, 2012, 2014) poses pressing challenges to the nature of its composition in the future. Only 7% of all primary and secondary teachers in the EU are under 30 years old, whilst around more than 1 in 3 (36%) are 50 or older (European Parliament, 2019). In England, close to half of the full-time teachers (46%) are aged over 40, with 19% of these aged over 50 (Department for Education, 2020).

### **What has been the impact of the Early Career Framework implemented in September 2021?**

**Research-informed curriculum and pedagogy that enables contextually responsive learning and reduces workload pressure.** The DfE recently published an evaluation of the national roll-out of the ECF induction programmes at the first-year mark.<sup>1</sup> At the point the research was conducted it was deemed too early to ask about overall satisfaction among early career teachers (ECTs). This study did not differentiate between the six national ECF providers. Although the ECF is common to all

<sup>1</sup> IES and BMG Research (2023) *Evaluation of the national roll-out of the early career framework induction programmes Interim research brief (year one)*, DfE  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1145006/Early\\_career\\_framework\\_evaluation\\_interim\\_research\\_brief\\_2022.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1145006/Early_career_framework_evaluation_interim_research_brief_2022.pdf).

programmes, each national provider has created a unique curriculum around it. Pedagogically, the UCL's ECF programme is informed by a spiral curriculum of teaching and learning (Bruner, 1960), which enables ECTs to revisit aspects of the ECF over time as their conceptual and practical learning develops. It is also guided by four principles that are grounded in existing knowledge about adult learning and specifically how ECTs are best supported to become committed and effective professionals over time (e.g., Day & Gu, 2010; DfE, 2016; Gore et al., 2017; Pollard, 2019; Timperley, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Additionally, UCL's ECF programme features an inquiry-based learning approach in Year 2 which helps ECTs to deepen the technical knowledge embodied in the ECF's 'learn that...' statements by applying the learning in their context of work, so that learning on ECF is not an 'add-on' to their workload. Rather, it strengthens their capacity for reflection on their practice as a foundation skill that will underpin their professional development throughout their teaching career. Moreover, UCL's curriculum emphasises flexibility of access and adaptability to the contexts of the teacher and local delivery; we champion the voices of our teachers; and we stress learning as reflective, and teachers as inquiring practitioners.

Research is an integral part of the UCL-led Early Career Framework (ECF) programme. The purpose of the UCL-led longitudinal research is to fill an important evidence gap on the relationship between engagement with the ECF and intentions to remain in teaching. All ECTs and mentors registered on the two-year UCL ECF programme (~12,000) were invited to participate in the end of Year 1 survey and more than **1,700** responded between June and October 2022 – a response rate of 14%. The sample appears **representative** of national ECT and mentor populations for gender, ethnicity, school phase, and contract type – which gives us confidence about the relevance of our ECTs' and mentors' learning and career experiences to their peers nationally. Early indications are positive (Gu, Baines & Eleftheriadou, 2023).

**High retention rate** Nearly all (96%) of ECTs and mentors were intending to remain in teaching next year. This appears to be higher than the most recent national retention statistics<sup>2</sup> indicating that 87.5% of teachers who qualified in 2020 (under the previous statutory guidance) were still teaching one year later. Most ECTs intended to stay in the same school the following year (84%), but a greater proportion of ECTs (12%) than mentors (4%) intended to move schools next academic year. Almost all mentors reported that they were staying in the same school (92%), with 12% having been promoted to a higher level of responsibility.

Despite the negative reports on teachers' working lives elsewhere, the vast majority of ECTs responding to our survey reported their strong enthusiasm for the teaching job. More than 90% of ECTs reported that they are enthusiastic about the teaching job and that their jobs inspire them – with 63% and 58% agreed with these 'strongly.'

**Positive learning experience on ECF programme** The vast majority of ECTs agreed that the ECF programme was based on sound research about teaching and pupil learning (87%), and that the practice suggested on the ECF programme would make a difference to the learning of their pupils (82%). Importantly, around 1 in 5 ECTs had used their learning in context significantly.

More than 70% of ECTs felt confident (ranging from 'confident' to 'completely confident') in relation to what they had learned on programme against each of the eight Teachers' Standards, with close to 80% reporting that they were confident about *setting high expectations*, and *planning and teaching well-structured lessons*. The Standard which the fewest ECTs in our sample were confident in demonstrating – albeit still above 70% – was *good curriculum knowledge*. However, as some ECTs had commented, the reported confidence could not be entirely attributed to the ECF programme.

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Education, School Workforce in England Reporting Year 2021  
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>

**Positive mentoring experience from both ECTs and Mentors** There is strong evidence suggesting that the vast majority of mentors are highly positive about how their mentoring has contributed to the development of ECTs' practice. Structured mentor meetings were the most valued strategy contributing to ECT learning – with 40% of ECTs agreed with this 'very significantly.' Almost all mentors (98%) reported that they have been able to establish a strong mentor-mentee relationship and that their role as a mentor is meaningful to the development of their ECTs' teaching practice.

The vast majority of mentors reported that they are motivated by their role as a mentor (94%) – with 84% agreed 'strongly' and 'moderately'. Additionally, 88% reported that being a mentor has contributed to their own professional development – with almost two-thirds (65%) in 'strong' and 'moderate' agreement.

**Variation in how mentors are protected for their mentoring time** Evidence strongly suggests that workload tensions relating to being a mentor should not be seen in isolation from the in-school workload culture. More than 60% of mentors agreed 'strongly' and 'moderately' to have *adequate support from their schools as a mentor*. It follows that although 29% of mentors disagreed 'moderately' and 'strongly' that they have adequate time to carry out their role as a mentor, around one in three (34%) agreed to the same degree, with another 20% in 'slight' agreement.

Almost half of the mentors (47%) who 'strongly' and 'moderately' agreed that they are *protected* from administrative duties that interfere with their teaching also 'strongly' and 'moderately' agreed to have adequate time to carry out their role as mentors (Fig 1). In contrast, 50% of those who felt 'strongly' or 'moderately' that they were *not* protected from administrative duties struggled considerably with the mentoring time. This points to important between-school variation and suggests that the ECF programme alone should not be blamed for lack of mentoring time in some schools.

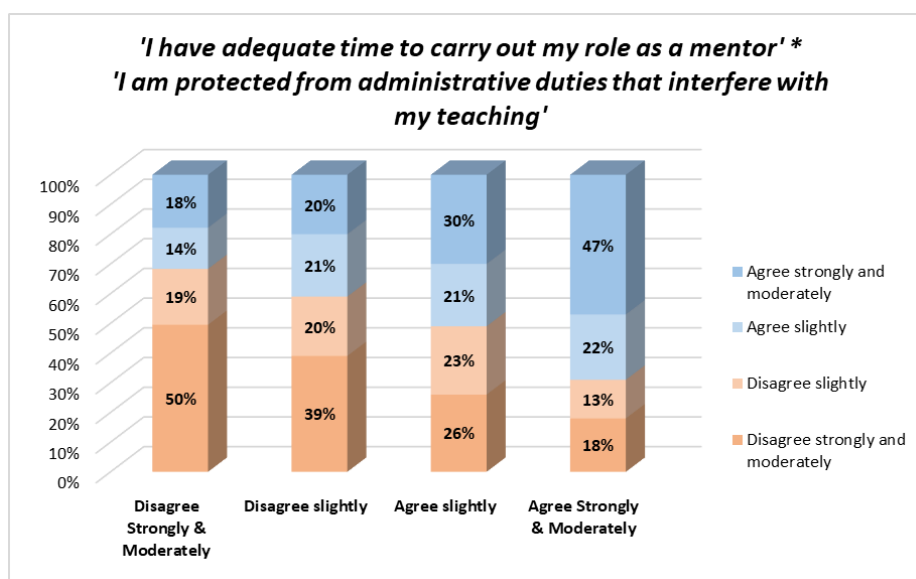


Fig. 1 Mentor responses to items 'I have adequate time to carry out my role as a mentor' and 'I am protected from administrative duties that interfere with my teaching'.

**ECF learning can only make a difference to decisions about retention if it is supported by professional learning cultures in school.** Our evidence strongly suggests that the vast majority of ECTs are positive about their learning experiences, especially in terms of their mastery of the programme content. However, the extent to which and in what ways ECTs are able to master the content of the ECF programme and apply their learning in context are dependent upon the quality of

in-school professional development cultures that are created by school leadership. Research on outstanding school leadership in England shows that mentoring is an essential ingredient of schools' professional development culture (Matthews, 2009; Matthews, Rea, Hill & Gu, 2014). This again points to the significant role of the school organisation in enabling or constraining the impact of the ECF programme on the learning and development of ECTs.

This evidence also supports the strengths of UCL's ECF partnership model with Delivery Partners, which has a strong emphasis on building leadership and professional development capacities in the school system.

**Are there ways in which teacher training could be improved to address the challenges in recruitment and retention?**

**Enhancing school leadership that prioritises collaborative teacher development** Recent research on scaling up innovations for better teaching and learning outcomes in England points to the significance of leadership in enabling sustained teacher professional learning, development and change (Gu et al., 2019, 2020, 2021). Evaluation of the Education Endowment Foundation's Research Schools programme shows that Research Schools' high-quality CPD provision *alone* is unlikely to bring about the intended change in practice in schools. The quality and support of senior leadership in schools that have received CPD training is equally important and is a necessary condition for change in practice. Our survey results suggested the absence of senior leadership 'buy-in' and support was likely to result in little or no change in teacher behaviour or the culture of teaching in participating schools. Put simply, 'A "good" research-informed innovation can rarely travel into the day-to-day realities of classrooms on its own merits without school leaders that can help teachers engage with it and apply and adapt it to their own classroom contexts' (Gu et al., 2021, p. 19).

In line with these research findings is the observation of the strong and positive associations between school leaders' administrative support and low teacher retention rates (Ladd, 2009; Boyd et al., 2011). **Leadership focus on developing teachers and enabling teacher collaboration within and between schools** has been found to be a determining factor in improving teachers' capacity to teach well and their wellbeing and job satisfaction in schools (Gu & Day, 2007; Allensworth et al., 2009; Day et al., 2011; Day & Gu, 2014; Gu, Baines & Eleftheriadou, 2023).

It is then no surprise that where robust evidence is available, evaluations in England consistently point to the 'Matthew Effects' of some major CPD-oriented programmes in England, i.e., schools knowing how to take advantage of funding opportunities to strengthen and transform their organisational capacity and cultures – irrespective of their contexts – can retain their committed teachers and keep getting better (e.g., Gu et al., 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021).

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