

Part 3

School Education: Policies, Innovations, Practices & Entrepreneurship

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NQT to ECT – the New Induction Programme for Teachers in England: An Overview

Abstract

This paper examines the newly introduced Induction Framework for teachers in England. The new term of early career teacher (ECT) has replaced the NQT label and the one-year programme has been extended to two, based on the *Early Career Framework*. The reasons for the change are to aid recruitment, prevent high numbers leaving the profession early and to provide a better, more structured and statutory framework for new teachers' development in schools. However, this has resulted in considerable change and accompanying stress for school leaders and staff, with a greatly increased workload. Training materials have been provided, including programmes for induction tutors, mentors and for the ECTs, though schools may write their own. Funding has also been provided by government to cover the costs of providing meeting, observation and discussion times. The final decision as to passing of the Teachers' Standards is now in the hands of an external body, who will moderate the training provided and make the final decision on each ECT's induction success or failure. First results show agreement from most of those concerned that the more structured approach to induction and longer time is a plus, but there are grave concerns about the rigidity of the programme and the time management of a fluid situation plus, the added responsibilities for staff. The pressures of Covid infections at the present time being immense.

Keywords: induction, early career teachers, mentors, teacher drop-out

Introduction

In its own introduction to the Early Career Framework (ECF), the Department for Education (DfE, 2019) finally acknowledged that the one-year induction programme, previously used for all newly qualified teachers (NQTs) was not good enough.

... too often, new teachers have not enjoyed the support they need to thrive, nor have they had adequate time to devote to their professional development... The package of reforms will ensure new teachers have dedicated time set aside to focus on their development. (DfE, 2019, p. 4)

In the author's experience as a teacher educator over many years, it was clear that the provision of mentoring support, for those in their first year of professional life, was at the least patchy and often poor. Of late, the DfE has also acknowledged that the drop-out rate of new teachers by the fifth year in the profession is alarming (Hilton, 2017). This, though mostly attributed to the massive workload, poor pay rates and poor behaviour of students, a large part was played by the unstructured and limited support provided for some new teachers, by the one-year induction programme. There was a lack of good mentoring by properly trained mentors and the provision was, in some schools, done with an insufficiently serious attitude towards the need for excellent care and guidance, for those new to the profession. Indeed, in some cases in the author's experience, it was entirely lacking and little was done in some schools or departments to challenge this poor response. Now, serious attempts are being made to improve this situation, as noted in the government's documents and the education press and from some limited research undertaken here. However, combining these changes with the stresses of the pandemic are proving extremely difficult for school leaders.

The induction process

The new Early Careers Framework (ECF) sets out much more clearly, what is required in the now two-year induction process, including clear goals to be achieved during this learning and move towards professionalism. The now Statutory Guidance Document (DfE, 2021) must be followed by all maintained relevant schools, and includes the roles of bodies such as Local Authorities, Academy chains, British School Overseas (BSO), Pupil Referral Units, Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges, Teaching School Hubs and Nursery schools. Every teacher employed in establishments where induction is mandatory must complete the two-year induction satisfactorily. The induction guidance is not an official assessment process, that assessment is carried out in relation of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011, revised 2013, 2021). The ECF is however, a structured programme to be embedded in the induction process and in the first year, ECTs will have a 10% timetable reduction and in the second a 5% reduction. This is to enable them to have time to complete the programme, discuss their progress with mentors and induction tutors. In order to begin induction to teaching, the ECT must have been awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), by an approved body. The induction period will be overlooked by what are termed, 'appropriate bodies', appointed by government, who will judge the success of the offered programme and decide if the inducted teacher has achieved the standards required, using the evidence provided by their headteacher. This 'approved body' must be chosen from one of the following groups and the agreement must be in place before the ECT begins teaching (DfE, 2021, p. 16):

A local authority with which the school reaches agreement

A teaching school hub (subject to the conditions)

National Teacher Accreditation (NTA)

The Independent Schools Teacher Induction Panel (ISTip) (for their members and associate or additional members only)

The local authority in which the school is situated (if agreement cannot be reached between the school and one of the above)

This provision will be paid for by the school and the ‘approved body’ will be responsible for monitoring the support given to the ECT throughout the induction process, in addition to making the final decision about the passing or failure of induction by the ECT.

Schools will have an induction tutor who oversees the process and for each ECT, a trained mentor will be in place. The ECT will be regularly monitored throughout the process with two formal assessment periods, mid-way and at the end of the induction period. Part time ECTs will have this adjusted to suit their employment. However, if they can achieve the teaching standards earlier, this is acceptable. Any programme used must ensure it follows the ECF and prepares the ECT for assessment. Any teacher who fails to complete the induction period successfully, will not be allowed to repeat the process (though appeals will be allowed), but may keep their QTS from the training course undertaken. Schools in special measures will not be permitted to employ any ECTs.

Purpose of induction

This is to ensure that there is continuity between initial training and moving towards becoming a professional teacher. The ECF providing guidance for the programme to be followed and the Teachers’ Standards, the level against which the ECT is assessed. The idea is to provide the ECT with ‘the tools to be an effective and successful teacher’ (DfE, 2021, p. 8). However, requirement for induction is related to the maintained or not, status of the school, as many schools are now outside of local government control.

Somewhat confusingly the DfE states that:

There is no legal requirement to satisfactorily complete an induction period if an ECT intends to work solely in the independent sector, an academy, a free school, a BSO, an independent nursery school or an FE institution. However, it may be possible for an ECT to serve a statutory induction period in such settings as set out in this guidance. (DfE, 2021, p. 9)

It will be interesting to observe how these educational organisations will react to the optional requirements but it is possible to speculate, that they will in most cases follow the induction process or the future career of ECTs could be made difficult, if they wish to move to a school which requires that the induction process was successfully passed.

It is essential that the ECT is appointed to a role that is appropriate for their experience and gives them the opportunity to move on and learn. In addition, schools will have to ensure, that the pressure of teaching difficult classes is not normally imposed on ECTs. Nor should they be expected to teach outside of the age range for which they trained. Non-teaching duties are to be supported with guidance and training. As required, independent assessment as to the quality of the induction provided will be made by the named appointed ‘appropriate body’.

Providers of training

Schools have a choice of programme provider. This may be a DfE funded provider, who will design and deliver the funded programme, face to face and online. Schools may also choose to deliver their own designed programme, based on

the ECT Framework, using free DfE approved materials. These include materials for the ECT and the mentor. Induction tutors and mentors must be appointed by the school from teachers with QTS and appropriate experience. All holders of these roles need to be given sufficient time to undertake them and to complete the requisite training, by relief from other teaching duties. In addition, the ECT's teaching practice must be assessed regularly by the induction tutor or another appropriate person, against the Teachers' Standards. Records of these observations must be kept and a discussion be undertaken between the observer and the observed, regarding progress. The formal assessment against the Teachers' Standards are made by the head or induction tutor and judgement from their reports as to the success or otherwise of the ECT, will be made by the appointed body as mentioned above, from the records kept. From these records the headteacher will recommend the passing or failure of the induction period for the ECT; the 'appropriate body' making the final decisions.

The ECF programme was trialled in various areas, prior to universal rollout. Researchers from UCL examined 3 pilot programmes prepared for ECTs and mentors and run by external providers. The initial results (Hardman et al., 2020) demonstrated that the new programme of the training for ECTs and mentors, could become embedded as a normal process in school life, resulting in a cultural change in schools' attitudes to new teachers and to mentors. The programmes also enabled the embedding of current research more readily into school practice. This they believed, could improve retention and enhance teacher standards. However, there were serious concerns about the increasing workloads for all concerned. These findings resulted in a guide produced by UCL Institute of Education, to help schools prepare for and introduce the new ECF (Daly et al., 2021).

Maximising the ECT experience

In order to make most use of ECTs abilities, Sykes (2021) suggests that ECTs should be able to question the status quo in schools and be encouraged to put forward ideas, not discouraged, as often happens. Experienced teachers, can learn from the new ones. For example good digital skills and an awareness of what gaps in their own learning, as well as those of the ECT, may need to be supported, in order for both to improve. In addition, communication between experienced and new teachers needs to be actively encouraged, to enable a sense of belonging for the newcomers. It is essential to ensure that new ECTs have a chance to relate to other ECTs socially, to gain support and to their experienced colleagues, who can be a great source of advice and encouragement. Above all, the role of the mentor can make all the difference to success or failure. Ensuring that mentors carry out their duties well and that they are given the requisite time and space to do so, helps achievement of success for the ECT. Brewer (2021) asks why mentoring now is seen as so essential, yet has featured so little, until the present legislation put it at the core of the in-school training of new teachers? This author also asks why in the past excellent teachers have been presumed to be those who will be excellent mentors, as this should not be assumed. Further questions also have to be asked such as, should all teachers be expected to mentor others; how can mentors be given the requisite time to do their best for the ECT; what criteria should be applied when appointing a mentor (for example good subject knowledge, excellent teaching skills); how can

mentors be supported when their ECT is not performing as is expected, as good coaching from mentors is now expected; how can mentors be prepared to deliver these new skills and use up-to-date research to underpin their coaching of the new teacher?

In addition, Parker and Hallahan (2021) point to the fact that all staff who observe the ECT for a lesson and offer feedback, will need to understand the new observation protocols (they have to occur more frequently), therefore requiring more cover allowance for the teacher observers. They will however, have less of an influence on the final outcome for the ECT. Mentors too they say, will need sufficient time to work with the ECTs and also have time to undertake the training provided and gain a clear, deep understanding of the ECF.

Teething troubles

As for all major changes in policy, well received initially, the ECF as it was introduced into schools in the autumn term of 2021, started to become an area of concern. Severs (2021, p. 3) describes the ECF as an excellent proposal in theory but that, 'it is part of a shifting of responsibility for teacher retention onto schools'. Reports of concerns about the massive amount of time required for ECF's implementation and the lack of early enough training for the new mentors and others involved in the ECF process, began to emerge. Severs (2021) further questions if the teachers delivering the new induction process are sufficiently adept in the skills required, have the necessary motivation and have been awarded the required status for their role to be taken seriously? This author questions if the appointed teachers are sufficiently motivated to undertake the task, in addition to their already high workload? This presents a problem for school leaders, as if they fail to retain ECTs in the profession, the school and its programme will be blamed, rather than a poor salary and difficult working conditions.

At the end of the first term of implementation, reports began to emerge (Hallahan, 2022) that there was frustration over the rigid structure of the ECF, some of it already covered by new teachers in their initial training. There was an absence of an individual, flexible approach to the new teachers coming into schools, with very varied experiences. This is becoming a real issue for schools, mentors and induction tutors are labelling the ECF regime as rigid and criticise its lack of adaptability to serve individual needs. There is a lack of understanding it appears, of the widely differing needs of the ECTs, their strengths and weaknesses and their different initial training regimes. Additionally, there is too much concentration on form filling, reading material and watching videos to a strict timetable, not individually focused or related to specific needs. Teachers questioned by Hallahan (2022) were also concerned that needed changes to the ECF would not occur quickly, or at all. When questioned on this. the DfE up till now (28.01.2022), has not responded, but one provider of course material has agreed that the programme needs revisions and that the work overload is of great concern.

At the end of the first term of implementation the NAHT union, which represents school leaders, reported that after surveying over 1000 schools there were serious concerns about the ECF and its work overload for ECTs, mentors and induction tutors. The results show ninety-five percent of leaders questioned,

believed ECTs workloads were far too high and as a result the ECF will drive people out of teaching (NAHT, 2021). Mentors too are overburdened.

Research

Interviews were conducted within a large secondary Academy (part of a major Academy chain), where the head had opted to offer new teachers the ECF induction package. The school was using government approved materials to deliver the two-year programme and an ‘appropriate body’ had been agreed, in order to judge the progress of the new teachers and their success or failure of induction. The induction tutor (female) and two members of staff (one male one female) who had mentoring responsibilities in maths and English subjects, were interviewed over Zoom. The head however, was reluctant to allow the ECTs to be involved in the research, citing the pressures they were already subjected to. In addition, the head of a small one-form entry primary school agreed to be interviewed. This year no new teachers had been appointed, but the head was well aware of the ECF and what she would be obliged to undertake in future years.

In both schools the idea of mentoring using properly trained mentors and a two-year programme was seen as the way forward, in order to improve the entry of new teachers into the profession. However, the practicalities of the introduction, with Covid still raging, causing multiple absences of teachers and students, was raising great anxiety and problems, particularly in the secondary school. On the whole the mentors and induction tutor were pleased to receive training on these roles, but the aspect of the time involved to undertake the training and oversee the progress of the new teachers, was causing a great deal of strain on the school system. Although extra government funding had been supplied to allow those in positions of responsibility to undertake their new duties, cover teachers had been difficult to find, as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Sometimes it is impossible to find someone to cover my meetings with new teachers, as there are no cover staff out there, as so many teachers are off sick or isolating, due to being near an infected person. I am doing the training in my own time.
(Induction tutor)

Similar problems were encountered by the mentors, the maths teacher in particular explaining:

The country is already short of maths teachers and this is an added burden, there are not the specialists out there to cover lessons. I am having to set work and school staff do the covering. It's not acceptable to burden them in this way, but all we can do in these difficult circumstances. Plus, I then have to correct the work done in these classes taken by anyone who is free.

In addition, the interviewees were concerned with the rigidity of the programme and its lack of an approach that really worked for individuals and their specific needs, which all differ. It was they thought, a ‘one size fits all approach’ which is not helpful and that there should be a possibility to move the sections studied at various times, to suit individual needs of ECTs.

Similar concerns were expressed by the head of the primary school.

We are a small school with little extra staff time to cover lessons, as everyone is more or less occupied all the time. I am thankful that the induction tutor has been able to do the training in her non-teaching time, but what we will do when the

school does have, say more than one new teacher? It will be so difficult to find cover on such an irregular basis, to observe odd lessons and discuss progress with the new teacher and the subject lead teachers in the school. I realise that extra funding will be provided, but this is not similar to cover for a teacher off sick for a week or longer, but small stretches of time for observations, discussions etc. I can see it all being done at lunchtime or after school, which is not fair to any of those involved. The idea is excellent and it is right that new teachers should be given good support and training on the job, but how to organise it worries me greatly. I hope to ask other heads locally how they are managing this experience, before I have to put ours in place practically.

Conclusion

Hardman (in Amass, 2021) suggests that the ECF is major move away from the old system towards a clearer framework, specifying what rights all new teachers have to ongoing support, the knowledge they need to acquire and the stress on research informed teaching. This is aimed at improving quality and recruiting and retaining new teachers in the professions. However, the new system has implications for schools, regarding time allocation, the provision of cover staff, the good use of government funding and more. In addition, in large schools it is possible that a team needs to be established to ensure that all departments are following the implementation of the framework in similar ways. The choice of programme, from one funded by the government or one self-devised, needs careful consideration, as the time required to plan and implement a totally in-house new programme, will impact heavily onto staff. In small schools however, the ECF may be in the hands of only one or two people and ensuring all staff have knowledge of the new system is essential. Timetabling will be another challenge, with training for mentors, the induction tutor, plus mentoring and discussion and assessment times between ECT, mentor and induction tutor, built in. This will change annually depending on how many ECTs are employed. Mentors will need to be carefully chosen and their training and that of others involved in the process, strategically inbuilt. This will require good ICT provision, as the training programmes are based online. Alongside all these concerns, has to stand the realisation that the ECF is not a tick-list, or the only area where a teacher needs to achieve success. Other areas, such as becoming and acting as a professional, successfully acting in the administration/general school roles and constantly increasing subject knowledge and skills, such as online teaching are essential. Plus the need for high standards of ethics expected by the profession, is a requirement for excellent teachers. To achieve all this there needs to be a major cultural shift in schools in the way teachers are inducted into the profession. This move is undoubtably sensible, but it is putting immense pressure onto already stretched schools and teachers, in the middle of a pandemic.

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