

Choosing a Lead Provider for your Early Career Framework Provision: A Guide for Schools, Colleges and Other Settings

This is a brief guide for leaders in schools and other settings deciding which Lead Provider to use for delivery of the Early Career Framework (ECF) to their early career teachers (ECTs) in England. If this is you, you likely know that there are currently six Lead Providers to choose from: **University College London (UCL), Ambition Institute, Best Practice Network, Education Development Trust, National Institute of Teaching, Teach First.**

We at UCL hope you'll want to partner with us and our network of outstanding regional Delivery Partners (DPs): we believe that our programme delivers an excellent experience for both ECTs and their mentors. Whatever your choice, though, you need to partner with a Lead Provider that works for you. We've written this short guide to help you make that decision, and to tell you a little more about us along the way.

Does it really matter which provider you choose?

Yes! Although each Lead Provider's programme for ECTs is founded on the ECF, programmes vary in several very important ways. You should work with the Lead Provider whose values, operating preferences, programme design principles and practices best reflect those of your school, college or other setting.

Choosing a Lead Provider: Values and operations

Values and operating preferences shape how DPs are directed, supported, developed and held to account by the Lead Provider. They therefore underpin how relationships with settings, induction tutors, ECTs and mentors are managed by each DP, as well as by the Lead Provider itself.

You might reflect on the sort of relationship you want with your Lead Provider and their DP:

- To what extent do we want autonomy and/or direction around aspects of our ECF provision?
- How do we like to be supported, heard, held to account and developed?

You might ask prospective Lead Providers:

- How do you and your DPs interact with induction tutors, mentors and ECTs in settings? What structures are in place for communication, support and trouble-shooting?
- What expectations do you have of ECTs, mentors and induction tutors working with your programme?

Our programme is managed centrally but delivered locally through our expert DP network. We choose our DPs with care and value them as equal partners in our programme. We have excellent two-way communication and collaboration with all DPs, encouraging them to propose improvements to programme structures and local adaptations to delivery that work for their participants in their contexts. We expect our DPs to adopt similar approaches with the settings they enrol – maintaining strong, responsive lines of communication and a proactive approach to trouble-shooting. Because ECTs differ in what they know and can do, their strengths, their needs and their interests, flexibility is built into our programme, supporting mentors and ECTs to shape ECTs' learning to match their needs.

We've been really happy with ... the flexibility of the programme. It makes ECTs feel that they're not being taught at. They are adults; they can make choices. Under our previous provider there was little to no flexibility in the delivery of the modules, and I think giving schools and ECTs that autonomy to pick or visit modules a little earlier than they might have been able to before has been really well received.

Delivery Partner, '24

It is a challenging programme, but if it wasn't challenging, we wouldn't be getting the professionals that we want to come into the profession ... we want them to come in and feel intellectual, curious, and want to engage with the research to become innovative. And this gives them the opportunity to do that.

Induction Tutor, '23

Choosing a Lead Provider: Design principles and practices

Design principles and practices are the underpinning beliefs about teaching and teacher learning which inform how the ECF is brought into the programme curriculum and the pedagogies used to bring this curriculum to life for ECTs and their mentors. Just as teachers plan their teaching based on their understanding of how pupils learn and the desired outcomes of that learning, Lead Providers plan their programmes based on their understanding of how the ECF fits into the wider knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that great teachers need, and how these are learned. You will see that there are substantial differences in, for example, the extent to which programmes emphasise the development of teacher decision-making, and values, in the organisation of content that DPs deliver and the pedagogic approaches they use.

You might reflect on your school/college's design principles and practices:

- What do we think is at the heart of great teaching? What do we think it takes to be a great teacher?
- How do we think teachers learn?
- What are our values as a school/college/other setting in relation to teacher development?
- What do we want our ECTs and mentors to feel as they engage with the programme we choose?

You might ask prospective Lead Providers:

- How do you conceptualise great teaching? What sort of teachers are you aiming to develop through your ECF provision?
- What principles of teacher learning underpin your programme and how are these brought to life through the ECT and mentor experience?
- What values underpin your work as a provider of teacher development?
- What do ECTs and mentors say are the strengths of your programme? What are they less happy with? How are you responding to this?

At UCL we offer the only university-led ECF programme, standing on the shoulders of over 120 years of world-leading institutional expertise in teacher education. We believe that teaching is a profession and teachers are highly skilled professionals. The work of teaching is joyful, complex and contextualised; hard but hugely rewarding. Great teachers constantly make values-led and evidence-informed decisions that draw on their knowledge, skill, experience and beliefs. Our ECF programme is therefore based around six High Quality Outcomes - voice, knowledge, application, value, revelatory moments and enjoyment - helping ECTs to maximise, enjoy and value their learning of the ECF so that they are equipped for a lifelong career in teaching.

The design of our programme recognises the power of collaborative professional learning and structured, supported reflection. ECTs and mentors learn through self-study, discursive learning communities and facilitated sessions which make extensive use of participants' experience and knowledge. Our innovative year 2 modules use practitioner inquiry to orient ECTs' learning to aspects of the ECF most relevant to their needs and interests. Setting-based mentoring sessions are founded on the principles of ONSIDE and educative mentoring, promoting dialogic learning in which both mentor and ECT develop their expertise as collaborative professionals.

The development of the ECT is built up over time and as they become more confident with each passing week, the professional conversations have become richer and more valuable. The programme has allowed for the ECT to begin to find their professional voice and become more versatile and confident.

Y1 Mentor, Jan '24

I feel my ECTs are much more professional equals now, leading sessions and inspiring me to engage in professional discussion, problem solving and research.

Y2 Mentor, Jan '24

To find out more about what makes UCL distinctively different as a Lead Provider, take a look at our [website](#) for further information and to find out who your regional UCL Delivery Partner is, or email ecf.nro@ucl.ac.uk to arrange a chat at a convenient time.