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# **A SYSTEM THAT EMPOWERS**

**THE FUTURE OF  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

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with foreword by  
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April 2025

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# SUMMARY

**Our education system faces a significant and urgent challenge: ensuring equitable access to an excellent education in the context of acute budget pressures.**

We need to keep improving education standards, and tackle inequalities in achievement, both for pupils from low-income families and for children with special educational needs and disabilities. This is critical not only for economic growth, but for social progress and the strength of our democracy.

Educational attainment is linked to greater earnings, improved civic engagement, stronger social trust, and increased participation in democratic processes (OECD 2023). In England, educational achievement has improved over the past decade, but continues to lag behind other high-performing countries (OECD 2022). At the same time, after some limited progress, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is widening again and is now at its widest in a decade (EPI 2023) – and this deterioration is exacerbated by the school attendance crisis (EPI 2025). It is also clear that too many pupils are missing out on the broad and balanced education they deserve (Harris et al 2025).

This is all in the context of significant pressure on public finances, and the challenging economic circumstances the country faces. Whilst education may receive some protection in the upcoming spending review, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, spending across all public services is only forecast to grow by 1.2 per cent annually between 2026/27 and 2029/30 (OBR 2025).

**The scale of the challenge and the tight financial climate means transforming outcomes for children and young people in this context will require a new approach, one that is cost-effective, sustainable and enabling.**

Efforts to improve the education system tend to fall into four categories:

- increasing direct funding
- increasing accountability and direct intervention
- structural reform
- investment in workforce capability and capacity.

While increased school funding is much needed, a significant amount of additional funding is unlikely given current fiscal constraints and will not deliver change on its own. Robust accountability and intervention can deliver basic standards, but rarely drives excellence. Structures matter, but structural reform can be a distraction and takes a long time to deliver results.

Investment in workforce development is the most promising and sustainable policy lever in this context.

**Investment in the expertise of *all* teachers and the wider education workforce is the best way to unleash a powerful cycle of improvement.** The evidence is clear that the quality of teaching is the school-based factor with most influence over pupil outcomes. We know that effective teaching disproportionately benefits pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and disabilities. If we want high and rising standards in our schools, then investing in developing expert teachers is our best option.

**But the scale of inequity in our system means we must go further, and direct most of this investment in expertise towards schools that serve low-income communities and those that serve high numbers of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.**

Some schools face greater challenges than others, but the support they receive does not always reflect this. While a universal, trusted, high quality offer for *all* teachers is critical, we need a system where opportunities for the highest quality professional development are disproportionately available to teachers working in schools where the need is greatest.

**Our current professional development system needs to evolve further and faster, and support the delivery of a world class entitlement which empowers teachers to tackle the system's biggest challenges.**

A world class Professional Development Entitlement should include provision that is government led, school or school trust-led, and teacher-led. All elements are critical. Government should mobilise a national evidence base to ensure a common body of knowledge is shared with all teachers, and build workforce capability in areas requiring system-wide improvement, such as special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Schools and trusts should ensure teachers can access contextualised and personalised development, addressing school improvement priorities, and allowing them scope to pursue their interests and priorities.

Schools, school trusts and teachers need to have a clear understanding of what is available to them from government, over what timeframe, and with what funding. Schools and trusts can then build and set out their offer, which in turn gives teachers a clear sense of what is available so they can choose the options that are right for them.

The Department for Education (DfE) already spends significant resources on professional development for teachers but, because of the way this has evolved, provision does not come together to form a coherent offer for schools or individuals. This means that existing spending does not have as much impact as it could.

The DfE could maximise the impact of their system interventions in three ways:

1. establish a more joined-up approach to the allocation and prioritisation of professional development spending, which is focused on clear priorities and areas of need
2. move to longer-term funding commitments, which would support schools and teachers to plan further ahead, and therefore make the most of the opportunities available
3. set out a clear entitlement for teachers which supports their career-long professional development.

**A new world class professional development entitlement must build on the good foundations already in place.**

The current 'golden thread' of programmes – initial teacher training, the early career entitlement, and national professional qualifications – provides strong building blocks for a career-long entitlement to high quality professional development. Grounded in evidence-informed frameworks and delivered through a national network of lead and local providers, they have already supported the development of over 50 per cent<sup>1</sup> of the workforce in the first four years of delivery, which is an important step forward. However, while evaluations show there is much to celebrate, they also point to a need

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<sup>1</sup> SSince 2021/22 there have been 76,000 ECTs, 67,000 ECF mentors, and 107,000 unique NPQ participants, giving a total of approximately 250,000 who have engaged in the golden thread, out of a workforce of 510,000 in 2023/24.

for ongoing review and adaptations. The golden thread should also provide better for those who want to deepen their classroom expertise rather than move into leadership, and leaders who want to upgrade their skills in a specific area. These gaps should be addressed through a suite of new, shorter courses structured around existing or newly created rigorous evidence-based frameworks.

The rigour and reach of golden thread programmes means they can provide the shared foundations and common language the school workforce needs. They should though be seen as a base, not a comprehensive or total offer.

A world class entitlement must go further. It should provide greater breadth and variety — both in content and in course length — to match teachers' capacity and context, and to allow them to pursue individual interests as well as contribute to local improvement priorities. And in its delivery, a new entitlement must eliminate 'cold spots' of high-quality professional development so that all teachers, everywhere can access the support they need to perform their crucial roles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The government should articulate a clear role for professional development as a means of driving system improvement.** An entitlement for teachers should be made up of three elements:
  - a golden thread of professional qualifications, including new short courses
  - 'system priority' programmes
  - school-initiated or trust-initiated professional development.
- 2. An expanded and fully funded golden thread should lie at the heart of the new entitlement to professional development.** It should take teachers from career entry through to leadership and should include a new suite of quality-assured short courses so that all teachers can access the development they need throughout their career. These should be structured around rigorous, evidence-based frameworks, in line with existing golden thread qualifications.
- 3. As a common foundation and shared language for the school workforce, golden thread programmes should be free at the point of access for all teachers and leaders.** Funding for these programmes should be placed on a long-term footing. As is the case now for early career framework (ECF), national professional qualifications (NPQs) should move into the baseline DfE budget. In the future, golden thread short courses should be made eligible for the growth and skills levy.
- 4. Government should invest £260 million as a first step towards this universal entitlement to the golden thread.<sup>2</sup>** This would fund over a quarter of a million teachers to complete an NPQ or short-course qualification during the current parliament. Taken alongside the existing commitment to fund the ECF entitlement, this investment would provide 75 per cent of the workforce with funded access to quality assured professional qualifications over the next four years.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Based on an estimate of £25 million for 20,800 NPQ places across the autumn 2024 and spring 2025 cohorts. Then an additional 40,000 NPQ places per year between 2025/26 and 2028/29. Assuming a proportional spend, it would cost £48 million per annum for 40,000 places a year, totaling an additional spend of £190 million over four years. Total NPQ spending from 2024/25 to 2028/29 would be £210 million, and provide 180,000 places. Short course qualifications are estimated to cost £66 million to provide 110,000 places across 3 years. Therefore, additional spend is estimated to be £260 million and would provide an additional 270,000 places for an NPQ or short course, making a total of 290,000 places across the parliament.

3 Accounting for the 25,000 early career teachers each year from 2025/26 until 2028/29 gives a total of 100,000 ECTs. Combined with the 290,000 from NPQs and short courses a total of 390,000 teachers would be trained out of a workforce of approximately 510,000 (DfE 2024a, 2024c).

5. **The government should move to a new strategic approach for further professional development spending.** This would involve pooling all other professional development budgets so that investment is focused on building workforce capability in priority areas of system improvement, for example SEND or early years. This would support the scaling up of evidence-informed, proven interventions, introduce new nationally available professional development programmes, as well as building the capacity of smaller local, and emerging providers.
6. **Teachers' professional development should be commensurate to the challenges they face, and those working in schools in challenging circumstances should receive the greatest support.** Places on government-funded programmes should always be free at the point of access to teachers and leaders working in schools in challenging circumstances. These schools should also receive capacity grants to support take up of the professional development opportunities available (eg to fund cover costs).
7. **Government and sector organisations should take action to increase the sector's understanding of effective professional development.** This should be done by commissioning a review of the professional development standards; exposing all teachers to high quality professional development through the expanded golden thread; encouraging all schools or responsible bodies to have at least one in-house expert who has undertaken the NPQ in leading teacher development; and generating new knowledge about effective professional development through research and robust programme evaluation.
8. **Ofsted should shine a light on schools' commitment to workforce development** as part of school inspections and also do so as part of any new inspection framework for responsible bodies.
9. **Government and the sector should engage constructively on the evolution of the professional development system.** This should include making the process for developing golden thread frameworks more open and transparent, and agreeing 'system priorities' for other professional development funding. The intention should be to move towards a more autonomous and self-governing system over time.



# FOREWORD

This government has inherited one of the most challenging contexts for public services since the second world war. Optimists will point to the legacy of New Labour as evidence that recovery in the coming parliament is achievable. However, in many ways the inheritance facing this government is more challenging than in 1997.

First, the starting point in terms of public service performance is worse than in 1997, second, the fiscal environment is more challenging – making additional investment in services harder, and, finally, the demographic and geopolitical headwinds are much more daunting. The pandemic will cast a long shadow, and we will only begin to understand its impacts as they unfold over time.

Education, whilst demonstrating some resilience in overall performance, has faced numerous post-pandemic challenges. The attainment gap is widening, absence and persistent absence are at record levels and there is an acute workforce recruitment and retention crisis. The additional funding committed by government in the last autumn budget will provide some limited relief, particularly in restoring public confidence in existing services but higher spending alone won't solve the underlying issues.

The scale of the challenge facing schools and other public services demands a bolder approach; one that can equip the system to deal with the challenges of the future. The last national vision for public service reform, inspired by the new public management reform levers of markets, managers and measurement delivered improvement in specific circumstances but government will need to go further if they want to achieve true reform in complex and challenging circumstances.

In this report, and Ambition Institute consider the evidence on workforce empowerment to set out an optimistic new paradigm for delivering system reform. This goes beyond new public management and is specifically designed to deliver future facing reform, equipping leaders to transform the underlying delivery model to one that is more sustainable, and leverages the capacity and talents of teachers and school leaders.

In education, this shift will require government to play its role in building a professional development system that equips teachers and leaders with the expertise they need to solve the ever-more complex challenges our schools face.

Implementing the levers and methodology presented in this paper will require our leaders to be braver than the reformers of the past, but it is the only route that has the potential to deliver the reform dividend that is so necessary in a changing world.



**Avnee Morjaria, associate director for public services at IPPR**

# 1. THE PATH TO A CONTINUALLY IMPROVING EDUCATION SYSTEM

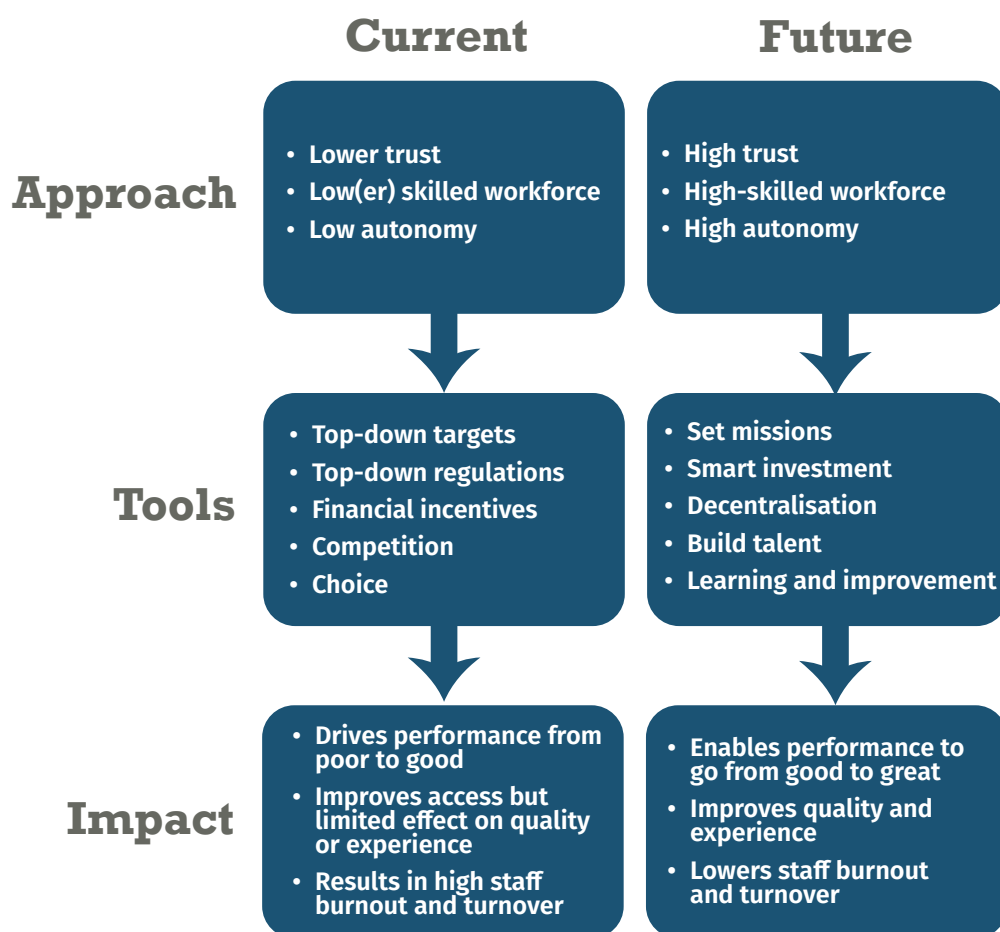
Our schools have improved in recent decades, but there is so much further to go. Inequality is still baked into the education system: which school a pupil attends - and where - plays far too great a role in determining the quality of education they receive and the opportunities they have access to. Even between classrooms there is too much variation in quality. There has been too little progress in tackling this. Standards have risen for some, but too many young people are still being left behind.

Securing high and rising standards for *all* requires high expectations combined with world-class support so that constant improvement becomes the system's *modus operandi*.

Our education system should be relentlessly focused on unlocking opportunities for *all* children and young people. There is no single, magic, reform that will deliver this bold ambition. Nor, in the current fiscal climate, can it be achieved through large injections of additional funding. Instead, government needs to unleash a virtuous-cycle of continuous improvement - a cycle that cannot simply be mandated.

In IPPR's 'playbook' for public service reform, Harry Quilter-Pinner and Halima Khan (2023) explain why our historic fixation with 'new public management' has run its course. They argue that the old approach "overemphasised extrinsic motivators and undervalued the need to unlock intrinsic motivation". They therefore call on government to shift from "a low trust, low skill, low autonomy public service model to a high trust, high skill, high autonomy one". This would involve a heightened focus on 'talent building' and 'smart investment' (ibid). Similarly, Demos call for a new approach to 'liberated public services', founded on professional expertise. They estimate that switching to this approach could unlock a 'reform dividend' of up to £41 billion a year (Glover 2024).

FIGURE 1.1: A 'SMARTER STATE' APPROACH TO PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM



Source: Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023

This new approach requires government to concentrate on empowering teachers and leaders to solve the challenges they face in their schools. But what do we mean by empowerment? According to Professor Gretchen Spreitzer (1995), empowerment involves competence and personal mastery - alongside agency, self-efficacy and a sense of meaning.

So, for teachers to be truly empowered, they must not only care about and be trusted to respond to the challenges they face, they also need expertise and capabilities commensurate with the challenges they face.

'Improvement through empowerment' means that alongside nurturing teachers' sense of purpose and autonomy, the education system should help teachers to feel *and be* – capable (Menzies 2023, Pink 2009). This depends on government investing in an expert school workforce. If deployed strategically, that investment would provide a new lever for system change, far more powerful than the previous reliance on carrots and sticks.

As the government's 'opportunity mission' acknowledges, teachers should be supported to "develop their skills so they're confident, expert practitioners" (Labour 2023). Doing so would unlock a future in which "there is no class ceiling on the ambitions of young people in Britain" (ibid). This is a bold ambition, but

teachers are only too eager to embrace big goals - so long as challenges are matched with support.

The shifts described above cannot all be mandated or centrally directed. After all, England is already one of the most highly centralised countries in the democratic world (Glover 2024). But schools also can't do it on their own. They need to be part of a system that values and supports professional development. This system cannot be taken for granted, particularly if excellence is to be the norm in every corner of the country.

Chapter 2 therefore sets out the role government must take in building a world-class professional development system. Chapter 3 then proposes a new entitlement to professional development for all teachers. Chapter 4 turns to the system architecture needed to oversee and enable this. Chapter 5 describes the conditions and capabilities needed to unlock the envisaged opportunities. Finally, chapter 6 concludes by describing how the steps set out in the report can lay the foundations for a system in which professional empowerment drives improvement.

## 2.

# THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN BUILDING A WORLD- CLASS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

*“High and rising standards in all schools and trusts. Not just for some of our children, not just in some cities, some schools, some trusts, some pockets of excellence here and there.”*

Bridget Phillipson, Confederation of Schools Trusts Conference, 7 November 2024

Great teaching is the best lever schools have for improving pupil attainment (EEF 2023) and, encouragingly, the quality of teaching is not fixed: teachers can improve with effective professional development (Collin and Smith 2021). Moreover, so long as teachers are well-rewarded and in healthy workplaces, professional confidence and professional support can improve retention whilst insulating from the effects of high workload (Chiong et al 2017). But as we saw in chapter 1, professional development also has a far deeper role to play in system improvement, by making constant improvement the education system’s *modus operandi*.

In 1998 the Labour government introduced the Teaching and Higher Education Act, guaranteeing new teachers support from an experienced mentor-colleague, as well as a 10 per cent reduction in their teaching load. Ever since, the English education system has been on a journey towards better equipping teachers to deliver transformative impact, most recently through the introduction of the ‘golden thread’. Teachers now benefit from a two-year induction period and to support this, between 2021 and 2024, over 60,000 teachers were trained to mentor their new colleagues (DfE 2024a) as part of the early career framework (ECF). Recent data suggests this may have contributed to improved retention of early career teachers (EPI 2024).

### BOX 1: THE GOLDEN THREAD OF EVIDENCE-LED TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

A golden thread of evidence, reviewed and approved by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) now underpins a continuum of professional development that runs throughout teachers’ careers. A network of ‘lead providers’ and delivery partners is responsible for delivering programmes as part of this, with teaching school hubs playing a crucial role. Meanwhile, Ofsted is responsible for quality assuring different aspects of the delivery infrastructure. The golden thread begins with a framework to which initial teacher training and an extended, two-year early career training entitlement needs to be aligned. As teachers gain experience and progress in their careers, they can then choose from a menu of funded professional qualifications covering specialist and general leadership roles. This structure is already beginning to have an impact (see below) but it will require sustained support and refinement if it is to deliver on its long-term potential to transform England’s teaching workforce into a truly evidence-informed profession.

Teachers need to continue to learn and develop throughout their career. It is therefore encouraging that 17 per cent of the school workforce has now embarked on one of the reformed national professional qualifications (NPQs) (DfE 2024a) and that over half of teachers have now completed – or are currently completing an NPQ (Hallahan, 2025). Most teachers report that completing an NPQ has had a positive impact on their skills or practice (Hallahan 2025). Between 2021 and 2024 nearly nine in 10 participants on specialist NPQ programmes reported that their readiness for their role; confidence in the evidence base; and confidence to implement change, had increased (IES and BMG 2024). However, these programmes are still a work in progress, with evaluations highlighting several areas for improvement (ibid).

Meanwhile, there has been a revolution in the role of research in education. Under the leadership, first of Sir Kevan Collins and then Professor Becky Francis, the EEF has become the envy of other countries, fundamentally altering the educational landscape by bringing together and expanding the research evidence available to the profession. It is this research that now underpins the golden thread, placing robust evidence in the hands of teachers and leaders at key milestones in their career. England is now world-leading in this respect, with jurisdictions around the world seeking to emulate its robust, evidence-rich model (see, for example, Australian Government 2023, Paul et al 2021).

At its best England's professional development system involves a clear offer of evidence-based learning, delivered by strong institutions with deep expertise. This can be seen with the EEF but also with the best teaching school hubs, and national providers which have been consistently judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted. These bright spots have led to promising work but there is still a long way to go.

The professional development offer available to England's school workforce is not yet adequate to the society-defining challenge we entrust to teachers. Once teachers complete the ECF, there is no clear route to further quality-assured professional development focussed specifically on classroom expertise. And whilst significant numbers of teachers (around 250,000) have accessed an element of the golden thread in a relatively short space of time – showing workforce demand for high quality development opportunities – too many have not. 440,000 teachers qualified before the early career framework became an entitlement. Whilst approximately 65,000 of these teachers have trained as a mentor through the ECF entitlement and around 110,000 have completed reformed NPQs, this still leaves around 265,000 teachers – nearly 50 per cent of the total – who have not accessed any element of the golden thread.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the system lacks coherence, and the institutional architecture needed to guarantee access to high quality professional development has yet to be established. For example, different types of 'hubs' – ranging from edtech demonstrators and behaviour hubs to flexible working ambassadors – have developed in a piecemeal manner (Booth 2024). How they fit into a coherent wider architecture is unclear. This results in poor linkage to system priorities, patchy reach and an over reliance on direct management from Whitehall.

We should be particularly concerned that one in five teachers report that they are struggling to access the professional development they need (TeacherTapp 2025). Yet teachers remain optimistic about professional development's potential to help them develop in the future (Allen et al 2024).

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<sup>4</sup> Based on around 510,000 teachers in the workforce in 2023/24. Since 2021/22 there have been 76,000 ECTs; 67,000 ECF mentors and 110,000 NPQ participants. The number who have not accessed the golden thread is likely to be an underestimate as people may have done two NPQs, a mentor may have also done an NPQ, and some teachers will have left the workforce since engaging in an element of the golden thread (see DfE 2024a, 2024c)

## TOWARDS AN ENTITLEMENT TO HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

If teachers are to flourish professionally and play their part in delivering the government's opportunity mission, they should all have a right to access England's suite of professional qualifications for free. These qualifications should evolve to build on feedback and evaluations; to respond to teachers' needs at different stages of their career; and to address some of the greatest challenges our system faces.

Meanwhile, a richer, fuller professional development offer should be built around the golden thread. In Singapore, teachers have a right to 100 hours a year of professional development (Schleicher 2020) and across the OECD, teachers participate in an average of 62 hours of professional development a year (Van den Brande and Zuccollo 2021b). In contrast, the median reported time spent on professional development by teachers in England is only 21-30 hours a year (Coe 2023). The scale of our ambition should not just keep pace with these international benchmarks; England should lead the way.

## THE CHANGE WE NEED FROM GOVERNMENT

This report focusses on what *government* can do to build the professional development system our teachers, schools and pupils need, but research has shown that it is the professional environment teachers are embedded in that is critical to their development and flourishing (Kraft and Papay 2014, Kurtz and Maurice 2018, See et al 2020, Sims 2021).

So, while schools would benefit hugely from a world in which high-quality professional development was the norm, they are also the hinge on which such a system turns.

Given this, and given teachers' strong appetite for autonomy and agency over their professional development (Allen et al 2023), government should not try to control or deliver every element of teachers' professional development entitlement. Instead, it should provide a core backbone of qualifications that equip teachers and leaders for their roles and then focus on building a flourishing ecosystem of high-quality professional development, from which schools and teachers can choose freely.

A flourishing ecosystem does not yet exist for the following reasons.

- **The system is not yet a system:** Despite spending of over £1 billion on professional development programmes<sup>5</sup> both within and beyond the golden thread, there is no overarching theory of change, delivery model, data architecture, or evaluation approach across *all* government funded programmes. There are promising foundations for coherence in the design and delivery of the golden thread, but the same cannot be said for the professional development system as a whole. As a result, there is limited data available on programmes' impact on pupil attainment, limited learning about the most effective mechanisms for improving teacher expertise and few mechanisms for scaling the best provision. Meanwhile despite considerable progress, there remains a disconnect between knowledge generation through research, and the dissemination of that learning and evidence.
- **Access to professional development is inequitable:** Different groups within the profession have unequal access to professional development: teachers are less likely to access continuing professional development than leaders (DfE 2024b) and less likely to feel that it meets their needs (Allen et al 2024). Meanwhile

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5 Estimate based on the total for all the contracts issued by DfE that have teacher training or professional development as their main focus, the funding for time off-timetable for early-career teachers and mentors, and spend on teaching school hubs (Hamer 2025).



teachers from Black, Asian, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds are more likely to have an unmet desire for development and progression (Small et al 2018). Overall, there is considerable variance in the amount of professional development undertaken by teachers: nearly half (48 per cent) of teachers accessed fewer than 20 hours of professional development in 2022/23, while only 10 per cent of teachers accessed over 50 hours. This is important because teachers who participated in over 50 hours of provision were significantly more likely to say that the professional development had a high impact on their ability to perform their role (DfE 2024b).

- **Outside the golden thread, there is limited quality control and insufficient understanding of what quality looks like:** Despite the historic short-comings of research on teacher development (Sims and Fletcher-Wood 2020), the rigour of the evidence base has increased in recent years (see, for example, Collin and Smith 2021). However, this has not yet translated into widespread changes in teachers' professional development diet. Four in 10 report that they rarely – or never – experience professional development that supports them to embed their learning (Ofsted 2023). Given that professional development is mainly delivered 'in-house' by school leaders or teacher educators (Ofsted 2024), this suggests that expertise in effective design and delivery is scarce. The variability in the quality of external provision does not help either and there remains too much ineffective and weakly-evidenced provision, further undermining faith in professional development's efficacy (Allen et al 2024).
- **There is a lack of alignment between professional development and system priorities:** The government has not articulated professional development's role in helping the education system get better, and how this relates to other policy levers. Recent years have seen a proliferation of short-term, reactive and centrally directed programmes which are constantly being turned on and off. This undermines continuity, drives waste and disrupts the accretion of expertise among providers. Uncertainty regarding what will be available year on year limits schools' and trusts' ability to plan for effective use of Department for Education (DfE)-funded programmes.
- **Schools and teachers lack the bandwidth to prioritise professional development:** Teachers and leaders lack sufficient, dedicated time for professional development, and workload frequently impinges on the available time (Ofsted 2023). Teacher shortages and strained budgets are considerable obstacles to professional development. The cost and availability of cover further hampers access (DfE 2024b, Ofsted 2024).

Alongside ensuring schools and teachers have the capacity to engage in professional development (see chapter 5), government should address these challenges by curating the professional development system. By this we mean that it should do the following.

1. **Tilt** funding towards system-level priorities and the schools facing the greatest challenges.
2. **Ratchet up** the quality of provision and eliminate cold spots.
3. **Invest** in teachers' and leaders' understanding of effective professional development.
4. **Build** strong institutions to generate ever-greater understanding of effective professional development.

We now turn to how government can deliver a new entitlement to professional development by fulfilling these four roles.



### 3.

## A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ENTITLEMENT FOR ALL TEACHERS

Professional development should be the foundation of a continuously improving system. However - as noted in chapter 2, despite considerable progress, there is still a long way to go before all teachers have access to high quality professional learning. We now set out our plan for a world-class entitlement to professional development.

### A COHESIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Government should begin by articulating professional development's role in driving improved and more equitable pupil outcomes. This role involves the following.

1. **Providing common foundations and a shared language for the school workforce** so that teachers are equipped to respond to the complex and demanding challenges they encounter at every stage of their career.
2. **Tackling system-level challenges** like inadequate support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and early maths through capacity building, rather than relying on the narrow levers of new public management, such as performance metrics.
3. **Supporting teachers' professional flourishing** by responding to their development needs and professional interests.

The professional development entitlement for teachers should comprise three components that balance the need for oversight with teachers' desire for agency.

1. An enhanced golden thread of tightly quality-assured professional qualifications – including new short courses based on robust evidence.
2. Programmes that drive improvement in national system priorities that have been agreed in partnership with the sector. These programmes should be delivered for free to schools in challenging circumstances by high-quality providers.
3. A wider choice of more personalised development, initiated at a school or trust level but chosen from the thriving ecosystem of provision.

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FIGURE 3.1: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ENTITLEMENT FOR ALL TEACHERS



Source: Authors' illustration

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Each element in this entitlement is already present in the system to some degree but coherence is lacking; there is insufficient strategic direction; and there are too few mechanisms for ratcheting-up quality, beyond heavy-handed central direction.

In addition to growing teachers' expertise, the three elements of the entitlement would be mutually reinforcing: the enhanced golden thread would help teachers and leaders better understand the characteristics of effective professional development, and strategic investment in training linked to system priorities would help scale-up proven approaches and build capacity. Teachers, schools and trusts would then be able to choose from more widely available high-quality provision that meets their needs and interests.

We now turn to the three elements of the entitlement, noting the role each would play in building a system that empowers teachers to drive improvement.

### RECOMMENDATION 1

**The government should articulate a clear role for professional development as a means of driving system improvement. An entitlement for teachers should be made up of three elements:**

- a golden thread of professional qualifications, including new short courses
- 'system priority' programmes
- school-initiated, or trust-initiated professional development.

### THE GOLDEN THREAD

As part of an expanded golden thread, all teachers should have a new, guaranteed right to a fully funded suite of professional training and qualifications, designed to accompany them through every stage of their career. This would provide a common 'passport' and ensure that no matter where a teacher has worked or trained, they share in a common language and evidence base.

The golden thread should continue to encompass initial training; early career induction; and progression to leadership - whether pastoral, pedagogical or institutional. A new suite of equally rigorous but shorter qualifications, structured around evidence-based frameworks should also be developed. Frameworks should be reviewed every four or five years and a proposed approach for doing so is set out in chapter 4.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

**An expanded and fully funded golden thread should lie at the heart of the new entitlement to professional development.** It should take teachers from career entry through to leadership and should include a new suite of quality-assured short courses so that all teachers can access the development they need throughout their career. These should be structured around rigorous, evidence-based frameworks, in line with existing golden thread qualifications.

#### *Career entry*

Career entry training - including initial teacher training and the early career entitlement - should continue to introduce the school workforce to a common body of expertise and knowledge, ensuring teachers can be effective from day one in the classroom.

#### *National professional qualifications (NPQs)*

Gold-standard NPQs should continue to be developed and the current review completed so that they equip teachers to progress through the profession and be effective in the many roles our schools depend on - not just as school leaders but as expert practitioners too.

NPQs should align with three career-pathways, that build on the current specialist NPQs.

- **Pastoral leadership** including behaviour, culture and inclusion.
- **Pedagogical leadership** including as expert classroom practitioners, subject leaders and leaders of professional development.
- **Institutional leadership** including headship and executive leadership.

NPQs should continue to be based on quality-assured, evidence-based content aligned to the relevant framework. Sequencing of content is critical in ensuring teachers can engage with the complexity of research in increasingly nuanced ways.

NPQs should be fully funded, since they are a core building-block of the nation's schools' workforce. Funding should move onto a long-term, sustainable and predictable footing by building annual funding into the baseline DfE budget. As a first step, the DfE should commit an additional £190 million over the course of this parliament to fund 40,000 NPQ places a year. Combined with existing government commitments, this would allow more than 180,000 more teachers to the secure gold standard professional qualifications over the course of this parliament, empowering them to drive improvement across the system.<sup>6</sup>

### Short courses

There is a gap in the golden thread, whereby there is no quality-assured, robustly constructed and evidence-led training to sit between teachers' entry to the profession and their progression into leadership. Partly as a result, we estimate that 260,000 teachers have not accessed the golden thread.<sup>7</sup> Improved training during this career phase would reduce variability in teaching quality and could improve retention given that research suggests professional development is valued by teachers more than the equivalent salary rise (Lovison and Hyunjung Mo 2024).

Furthermore, a full NPQ is not what every experienced teacher is looking for: some are already in leadership, or have recently taken on an additional responsibility and want to upgrade their skills in a specific area. Others simply want to get better at their current job. Life circumstances might also preclude some teachers from committing to a full NPQ.

New courses and qualifications are needed to fill the gap in the golden thread. Substantial investment goes into developing NPQ frameworks. Sections of these could form the basis of shorter courses, leveraging the value of existing investments. Additionally, a new framework on expert inclusive teaching could underpin a range of short courses for teachers. Our estimates suggest that it would cost £66 million to fund an initial 100,000 teachers to participate in new, quality-assured short course by the end of the current parliament.<sup>8</sup> Teachers working in schools in disadvantaged circumstances should be prioritised as part of this initial funding to drive more equitable outcomes for pupils and ensure that the support we provide our teachers is commensurate with the challenges they face.

In the longer-run, government should use the growth and skills levy to put funding for this expansion to the golden thread on a sustainable footing. Over the last decade, the apprenticeship levy (which the growth and skills levy is replacing) has been the main source of government-controlled funding to train new and existing staff in most sectors of England's economy. However, many schools and trusts find that their own levy contributions are locked-away beyond their reach, due to the inflexible apprenticeship model that underpins current training programmes.

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6 Based on an estimate of £25 million for 20,800 NPQ places across the autumn 2024 and spring 2025 cohorts. Assuming a proportional spend an additional 40,000 NPQ places per year between 2025/26 and 2028/29 would cost £48 million per annum for 40,000 places a year and a total of £190 million for four years. Total NPQ spending from 2024/25 to 2028/29 would be £210 million, and provide 180,000 places.

7 Based on around 510,000 teachers in the workforce in 2023/24. Since 2021/22 there have been 76,000 ECTs; 67,000 ECF mentors and 110,000 NPQ participants. The number who have not accessed the golden thread is likely to be an underestimate as people may have done two NPQs, a mentor may have also done an NPQ, and some teachers will have left the workforce since engaging in an element of the golden thread. (DfE 2024a, DfE 2024c)

8 We estimate that a short course would be between 10 and 18 weeks in duration and would be delivered through a combination of individual online learning and facilitated group sessions. Given the average cost of a 12-month NPQ is £900, we expect the average cost per short course would be £600.

The government has instructed Skills England to prioritise 10 sectors as part of planned reforms to the levy but education has been left out. This should be corrected. Once the new short-course qualifications have been developed, Skills England should add them to the list of approved, non-apprenticeship programmes that are levy-eligible. Combined with a commitment to funding the ECF and NPQ through core budgets, this would ensure all teachers can access an expanded golden thread in the long run.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

**As a common foundation and shared language for the school workforce, golden thread programmes should be free at the point of access for all teachers and leaders.** Funding for these programmes should be placed on a long-term footing. As is the case now for ECF, NPQs should move into the baseline DfE budget. In the future, golden thread short courses should be made eligible for the growth and skills levy.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

**Government should invest £260 million as a first step towards this universal entitlement to the golden thread.** This would fund over a quarter of a million teachers to complete an NPQ or short-course qualification during the current parliament. Taken alongside the existing commitment to fund the ECF entitlement, this investment would provide 75 per cent of the workforce with funded access to quality assured professional qualifications over the next four years.

## SYSTEM PRIORITIES

Progress towards system priorities like inclusion of pupils with special needs in the mainstream (Harris et al 2025), and primary maths all depend on teacher development - as will the roll-out of a new curriculum.

The disparate pots of funding currently allocated to initiatives involving professional development – outside of the golden thread – should be brought together and allocated strategically as part of teachers’ new entitlement. Priorities should be identified in consultation with the sector, drawing on advice from the Chartered College of Teaching, teaching and leadership unions, and providers. Priorities should be established for an extended time-period, aligning with a full spending review. Providers should receive funding to ensure schools in challenging circumstances can participate for free, with other schools opting in on a paid basis, but at a capped cost.

A combination of national and local providers should be funded to deliver training linked to system priorities. Large providers should be commissioned at a national level and a tranche of money should be delegated to the DfE’s regional directors and regional improvements for standards and excellence (RISE) teams to fund provision from local experts such as exemplary schools, trusts, existing organisations like teaching school hubs, and smaller training providers. This would place contextual insight at the heart of decisions. It would also drive the growth of school-to-school networks and build a pipeline of future national providers.

The DfE should take a proportionate approach to quality assuring provision. Large contracts with national providers should involve programme and content-level oversight and support the scale-up of proven approaches, whereas funding allocations by regional teams should focus more on the providers’ expertise and capacity.

Funding should be allocated on a long-term basis to provide the extended time-horizons that are needed to foster the trust and relationships that system learning depends on, and to reduce the wastefulness of short-term procurement processes. This would support the approach to 'liberated public services' set out in chapters 1 and 2.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**The government should move to a new strategic approach for further professional development spending.** This would involve pooling all other professional development budgets so that investment is focused on building workforce capability in priority areas of system improvement, for example SEND or early years. This would support the scaling up of evidence-informed, proven interventions, introduce new nationally available professional development programmes, as well as building the capacity of smaller local, and emerging providers.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**Teachers' professional development should be commensurate to the challenges they face, and those working in schools in challenging circumstances should receive the greatest support.** Places on government-funded programmes should always be free at the point of access to teachers and leaders working in schools in challenging circumstances. These schools should also receive capacity grants to support take up of the professional development opportunities available (eg to fund cover costs).

### **SCHOOL AND TRUST-INITIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Beyond the golden thread and system-priority training, schools and their responsible bodies (including trusts and local authorities) should help teachers access professional development that helps them do the following.

- Follow their passions; for example, by developing their subject knowledge in an area of interest or in relation to an area of professional practice.
- Be part of their local subject community.
- Build on, add nuance to, and contextualise learning gained through core, foundational training.
- Participate in an ongoing, collaborative professional conversation about education - including about cutting-edge research.
- Address their school's improvement priorities.

The median reported time spent on professional development by teachers in England is only 21-30 hours a year (Coe 2023) whereas:

- in Singapore, teachers have a right to 100 hours a year of professional development (Schleicher 2020)
- across the OECD, teachers participate in an average of 62 hours of continuing professional development a year (Van den Brande and Zuccollo 2021b).

As the quality of professional development rises and recognition of its role in school and system improvement increases, schools and trusts should move at least into line with the OECD average by supporting their teachers to participate in 60 hours of professional learning a year or more. This benchmark should encompass all forms of professional development, from working towards golden thread qualifications, to teacher-initiated peer learning.

Government can encourage this shift by doing the following.

- Providing schools in the most challenging circumstances with capacity grants to ensure they can make the most of the opportunities available.
- Helping teachers and leaders to understand the value and characteristics of effective professional development, for example by exemplifying good practice in the golden thread qualifications and ensuring these introduce teachers and leaders to the principles of effective professional development and adult learning.
- Commissioning a review of the professional development standards.
- Reviewing schools' approaches to planning for professional development, as part of Ofsted inspections.
- Building the capacity of high-quality providers through funding for golden thread and system priority programmes.
- Freeing up resources for school- or trust-initiated professional development by fully funding golden thread programmes.

We return to these capacity and capability-building activities in chapter 5.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

**Government and sector organisations should take action to increase the sector's understanding of effective professional development.** This should be done by commissioning a review of the professional development standards; exposing all teachers to high quality professional development through the expanded golden thread; encouraging all schools or responsible bodies to have at least one in-house expert who has undertaken the NPQ in leading teacher development; and generating new knowledge about effective professional development approaches through research and robust programme evaluation.

## 4.

# WHAT INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE DO WE NEED TO ENABLE THIS?

Securing the shifts proposed in this report requires a robust system architecture. This should ensure that:

- the teaching profession's knowledge and wisdom is continually developed
- a thriving ecosystem of high-quality organisations disseminates professional expertise
- quality assurance and oversight is robust but proportionate.

### THE TEACHING PROFESSION'S KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM IS CONTINUALLY DEVELOPED AND REFINED

An evidence-informed profession should act in line with its accumulated and evolving expertise. This should draw on evidence from large studies of 'what works' in general, through to more contextual judgement, based on classroom experience and professional values– or what Biesta (2007) calls 'practical wisdom'.

*“Knowledge is hard to come by and without it we cannot deliver effective public services. We therefore need to invest in knowledge capture systems at a local level and find ways to store, interpret and disseminate that information to those that need it.”*

Glover 2024

Existing institutions can support ongoing knowledge development.

The EEF has a crucial role to play in the professional development landscape as a trusted 'what works centre'. Its role should be to:

- synthesise learning from the most generalisable studies
- help providers and practitioners navigate research findings through published guidance
- make judgements about the quality of research evidence and advise framework designers, particularly in relation to the 'learn that' components.

In the long run, an increasingly mature Chartered College of Teaching could also play a role, as steward of the profession's 'practical wisdom'. This would involve operationalising research evidence and bringing together insights on how practitioners are approaching complex and emerging problems. All schools and trusts could be involved in contributing to this learning and the college could draw on this insight to provide advice on the 'learn how to' elements of gold standard frameworks, as well as when contributing to consultations on system priorities.

Universities and other research organisations also have a critical role to play in enhancing the profession's collective knowledge, and in contributing to ever-evolving theories about education. A vast amount of education research is published each year, drawing on a range of methods and a mix of research traditions. A balance is needed between directly actionable, and more basic and theoretical, or small-scale research. There may be scope for further coordination between large funders to strike the right balance between funding for different



types of research, and to channel sufficient resources towards the sector's research priorities.

As well as generating knowledge about effective teaching and leadership, we need to accumulate greater understanding of effective professional learning. Government should ensure its own research commissions and programme evaluations play a part in this.

## A THRIVING ECOSYSTEM OF ORGANISATIONS

A mix of national and local providers is needed to ensure high-quality professional development reaches every corner of the country.

Larger, more established national providers have the benefit of scale and are well placed to:

- accumulate know-how and world-class expertise
- invest heavily in programme development
- provide reach and universal coverage (including through local partnerships).

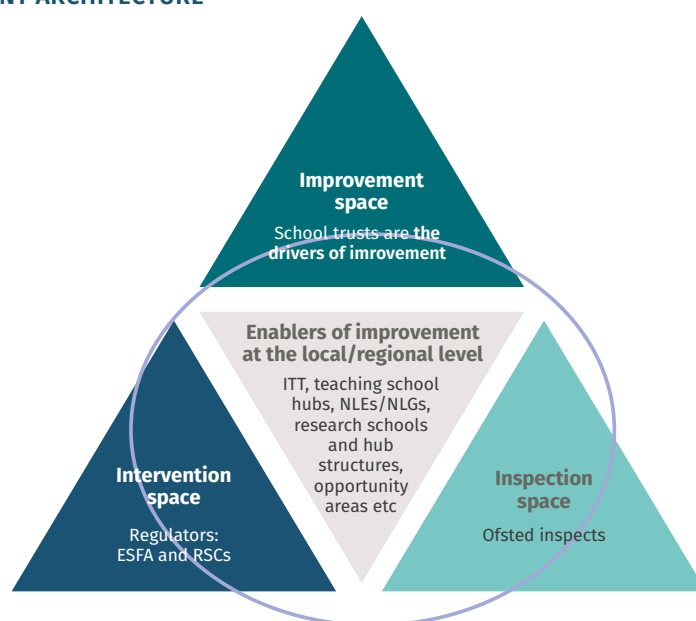
Smaller and sub-national providers – including trusts, LA based networks and hubs as well as subject associations, can contribute to strong supportive networks through:

- contextual knowledge and local legitimacy, founded on deep, trusting relationships
- a responsive approach that mobilises local civic assets and social capital – for example through partnership with local universities or museums
- domain specific expertise – for example in relation to special needs, inclusion or oracy
- a pipeline of potentially scalable providers.

This aligns with the role of 'improvement enablers' in the Confederation of School Trusts' proposed improvement architecture (figure 4.1).

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**FIGURE 4.1: THE CONFEDERATION OF SCHOOL TRUSTS' PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT ARCHITECTURE**



Source: Cruddas 2018

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Golden thread provision will generally be offered by national providers given the onerous procurement processes, requirement to deliver at scale, and degree of quality assurance involved. However, these providers will often work in partnership with local delivery partners. Meanwhile, beyond the golden thread, schools and teachers should be able to choose provision from a thriving and dynamic ecosystem of national and local providers.

National and local government can contribute to the growth of this ecosystem by building the capacity of smaller providers and supporting innovation as part of its funding allocations. This would ensure a small group of established providers does not become overly dominant. Funding should be allocated on a medium to long-term basis so that expertise can be built up, continuity maintained, and trusting relationships nurtured.

For example, as part of the 'system priority' strand of the professional development entitlement, a RISE team might fund a local trust that has expertise in inclusion to support nearby schools in challenging circumstances - on condition that it adheres to the national standards for professional development. In doing so, the RISE team would help that trust to develop its system leadership capacity.

At a national level, the DfE might commission an organisation specialising in the early years to deliver a new national short-form professional qualification. This funding would help the organisation to become a more established provider, with an expanded offer.

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND OVERSIGHT IS ROBUST BUT PROPORTIONATE**

### ***The golden thread***

In recent years there has been an important shift towards basing professional qualifications on robust evidence. Now that this norm is established, it is time to refine the process, clarify different actors' responsibilities and ensure the same standards of rigour are applied to the proposed new, short courses.

This report sets out a vision in which professional development is a lever for shaping the education system. Since ministers are democratically accountable for the performance of the education system and for the delivery of manifesto priorities, it is right that they should be involved in shaping the professional development system.

Ministers should be responsible for approving the decision to create a new framework, and for approving it once completed. However, in the past, there have been concerns regarding the degree of politicisation and lack of transparency in framework development, so once the decision to create a framework has been taken, expert advisory groups (EAGs) should be trusted with the development work. They should also be given responsibility for conducting periodic reviews of existing frameworks.

EAGs should comprise individuals with a mix of expertise, tailored to the framework's focus, but generally including:

- experts in adult, professional learning
- subject matter experts
- practitioners (including teachers and leaders)
- relevant specialists - for example psychologists.

An open application model for membership should be introduced.

EAGs should be supported by a DfE secretariat and conduct their work in consultation with the EEF and Chartered College of Teaching. The EEF should

approve the final content and produce a public report on the strength of evidence underpinning different areas of content. This would be an opportunity to highlight any gaps in the evidence base that might benefit from further research, supporting the knowledge-building activity described above, as well as increasing transparency and trust in the process. The DfE secretariat should support the EAG throughout the writing process. This would provide consistency and coherence across frameworks and ensure all frameworks align with the new professional development standards.

Programme delivery should be closely monitored, and providers should continue to be subject to Ofsted inspection. This approach is proportionate, given golden thread qualifications' role in building the country's school workforce and acting as a 'passport' across the profession.

### **System priorities**

Oversight of national providers delivering system priority programmes should be more extensive than for smaller, local or regional providers, reflecting the scale of funding involved. The quality assurance regime for national providers should resemble that applied to Golden Thread provision.

Local and regional providers could be overseen by the DfE's regional groups and RISE teams. The focus of any oversight should be on whether a provider has the capacity and expertise to deliver support; whether they are meeting partner schools' needs; and whether provision aligns with the professional development standards.

### **School provision**

The professional development a school or trust provides has significant spillover effects. When a school helps its teachers thrive, the whole system benefits: teachers are more likely to stay in the profession and to contribute positively in the future, wherever they go on to work. Meanwhile, when teachers leave the system because they are not being supported, this does not just affect their current school; it is a loss to the system, and a wasted investment. It is therefore appropriate for Ofsted to continue taking a schools' provision of professional development into account as part of a reformed inspection framework.

Any new framework for the inspection of responsible bodies, such as local authorities and trusts, should consider how a body is contributing to the national school workforce through professional development. Information from responsible body inspections should be considered as part of school brokering and re-brokering decisions, as well as in RISE teams' decisions about how to resource school improvement plans. Inspection reports can also shine a light on exemplary practice, encouraging schools and trusts to build environments conducive to professional development, driving demand for high quality provision.

## **RECOMMENDATION 8**

**Ofsted should shine a light on schools' commitment to workforce development** as part of school inspections and also do so as part of any new inspection framework for responsible bodies.

Even the best-designed architecture will fail if institutions and actors don't have the right capabilities. In the next section we therefore turn to the expertise and capacity required for success.

## 5. CREATING THE RIGHT CONDITIONS

*“Capabilities are the real freedoms that people have to achieve their potential doings and beings.*

*Real freedom in this sense means that one has all the required means necessary to achieve that doing or being... it is not merely the formal freedom to do or be something, but the substantial opportunity to achieve it.”*

Robeyns and Byskov 2023

Empowerment does not simply follow from freedom and autonomy; it is a capability that requires expertise and the right enabling conditions.

### STABILITY

Teachers and leaders need to know what they are entitled to and who can provide it. They cannot be expected to navigate a system in constant flux. Providers also need predictable funding and clarity over priorities if they are going to develop solutions that equip professionals to tackle complex problems. As Ben Glover (2024) argues in his roadmap to liberated public services: “the short-term nature of funding restricts the ability for experimentation and creativity, because the benefits of innovation can take time to appear”.

Too many efforts to squeeze out risks through ever-more onerous and complex contracts and reporting inadvertently generate waste and erode relationships and trust (Ball and Menzies 2023). Procurement and contracting therefore need to be more long-term and collaborative.

*“Providers come and go as contracts exchange hands, hindering long-term planning and making it difficult to establish the trust that is needed to secure ‘joined up’ working.”*

Elliott et al 2022

### UNDERSTANDING AND MAKING JUDGEMENTS ABOUT QUALITY

Teachers, leaders and the government itself need to understand what high-quality professional development looks like if they are going to be empowered to make informed decisions. Without this knowledge, quality suffers, teachers become disillusioned and calls for tighter central control grow louder. A better-informed sector would break this vicious cycle and ensure good provision grows and spreads.

An updated set of standards for professional development would provide the foundations for a shared understanding of quality. ‘Professional development about professional development’ is also needed to improve the sector’s understanding of quality. Golden thread framework content should include reference to updated standards for professional development, so that all teachers and leaders know what to look for. Eventually, all schools or their responsible body, should have an in-house expert in professional development who has completed the NPQ in leading teacher development.

Mentor training can help experienced teachers learn about adult and professional learning. The recent decision to lighten requirements for mentor training in initial teacher training (ITT) and the early career entitlement is understandable, but teachers should still be supported and encouraged to develop this vital expertise, for example through a golden thread short course. Meanwhile ‘train the trainer’ provision - particularly for schools and sub-national providers would grow the

number of experts in professional learning within the system. There may also be a place for governor training to ensure professional development is championed at every level. Finally, the capacity building activities proposed in chapter 4, along with partnerships between established national providers and local or regional providers would help cascade expertise through the system.

Evaluations and reviews of provision should not be designed solely to identify whether a programme is effective - they should also be lesson-learning exercises that contribute to the sector's collective-understanding of quality. At the moment evaluations often use inconsistent approaches. Greater consistency would provide more opportunities to learn lessons about effective professional development as a whole, and mean that findings relating to a particular provider could be collated across different programmes, improving transparency.

## CAPACITY AND RESOURCING

A reformed landscape is not enough on its own. Schools are currently grappling for the resources to respond to growing pupil needs and rising costs. Meanwhile, teachers find themselves focusing on urgent and immediate demands, with little bandwidth left to consider long-term development. As we saw in chapter 2, research has consistently shown that teacher shortages, strained budgets and unmanageable workload are key obstacles to professional development, with the cost and availability of cover also curtailing access (DfE 2024b; Ofsted 2023, 2024).

Setting out solutions to the recruitment and funding challenges that stop many schools and teachers from participating in professional development is beyond this report's scope. However, providing capacity grants to schools in the most challenging circumstances (as suggested in chapter 3), would be a first step.

## DYNAMIC NOT STATIC

As expertise and capacity grow, the professional development system will evolve to become more autonomous and self-managing. Over time, different actors will likely move into different roles, for example small, local and regional providers will provide a pipeline of new, national providers (see chapter 4). Approaches to quality assurance might also shift as expertise becomes more widespread.

So far, we have taken it as given that the DfE's regional offices and their new RISE teams will be responsible for coordinating and curating sub-national provision. However, large regions may not be the right size of unit and a 'goldilocks-sized' structure - bigger than local authorities and smaller than regions, may be needed to make the most of the potential in the system. This is not the place to address the question of local government reform, but Demos have proposed that combined authorities could take an enhanced role and work with stakeholders like multi-academy trusts as part of public service reform boards (Glover 2024). The government has also announced reforms to local government that will result in more unitary authorities. The system architecture proposed in this report has been designed to evolve as these structures develop.

### RECOMMENDATION 9

**Government and the sector should engage constructively on the evolution of the professional development system.** This should include making the process for developing golden thread frameworks more open and transparent, and agreeing 'system priorities' for other professional development funding. The intention should be to move towards a more autonomous and self-governing system over time.

## 6. CONCLUSION

As part of its opportunity mission, government has set a bold vision for ‘high and rising standards in all schools’. This will not be achieved solely through outdated approaches based on mandating, measuring and enforcing. Instead, government should unleash a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement by investing in professional expertise.

A quarter of a million teachers have yet to access the golden thread, and every year, teachers in England access less than half the OECD average of professional development. So long as this remains the case, we cannot claim to be adequately supporting teachers to take on some of the biggest challenges in society.

A thriving professional development system has the potential to make constant improvement the education system’s modus operandi. Work to build that system can begin today.

We conclude by setting out a proposed theory of change for a system in which a capable and fulfilled workforce is empowered to drive educational improvement.

**TABLE 6.1: OUR THEORY OF CHANGE FOR SYSTEM THAT EMPOWERS**

Action	Impact	As a result...	Vision
<p>All teachers, starting with those working in the most challenging circumstances, are given access to an enhanced golden thread of quality-assured professional development that supports them at every stage of their career.</p> <p>Government works with the sector to identify system priorities and aligns funded professional development beyond the golden thread with these.</p> <p>Government commissions a review of the standards for professional development.</p> <p>Funding for professional development beyond the golden thread is directed towards scaling-up proven approaches and strengthening local networks of support through capacity-building.</p> <p>Schools and school-trusts support teachers to access at least the OECD average of professional development each year.</p>	<p>Teachers and school leaders understand the importance of, and characteristics of high-quality professional development.</p> <p>Teachers experience the benefits of professional development and believe in its potential impact.</p> <p>Teachers and schools can choose the professional development they engage in from a rich ecosystem of high-quality provision.</p> <p>Professional development drives system improvement, reducing reliance on the levers of compliance and sanctions.</p>	<p>Professional development equips teachers with a robust, evidence-based body of common knowledge that gives them the capability to succeed at every stage of their career.</p> <p>Professional development acts as a lever for tackling system improvement priorities.</p> <p>Professional development helps teachers to flourish professionally, supporting improved workforce wellbeing, recruitment and retention.</p>	A capable and fulfilled workforce is empowered to drive
<p><b>Necessary enabling conditions</b></p> <p>Teachers and schools have the resources and capacity needed to prioritise professional development.</p>			

Source: Authors’ analysis



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