



# Delivering the Early Career Framework in small schools in rural and coastal communities: Brief summary

## What is this study about?

This report explores experiences of delivering Early Career Framework (ECF) programmes across England, with a focus on rural and coastal communities and on small schools. The study was conducted by the National Institute of Teaching (NlOT), the South West Institute for Teaching (SWIFT), and the David Ross Education Trust (DRET).

## What did we do?

This is a mixed methods study, conducted in February–May 2024. It involved a survey of 132 participants in 68 schools across England, and qualitative interviews with staff from nine schools within six Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in rural and coastal communities.

## What did the study find?

- The ECF was valued, and most experiences were positive overall, although all schools are facing similar challenges. There were some schools that are struggling to deliver ECF programmes, but this did not appear linked to school context.
- There were some differences in delivery of ECF programmes for schools in rural and coastal communities, compared to urban and inland schools, but this did not seem to affect overall satisfaction. Overall, there were different approaches to delivering the ECF, linked to school culture and context.
- Small schools had particular strengths in delivering ECF programmes, for example offering whole-school support to ECTs. However, fulfilling the requirements of the ECF, particularly around staff time and timetabling, could be challenging for schools with small staff bodies, and the support of trusts (or other external) was very important, particularly in rural and coastal communities.
- Key mechanisms were important for successful delivery of the ECF, across school contexts.

## What does this mean for how schools can be supported?

We have highlighted key mechanisms, and considerations for schools, school trusts and ECF providers:

Key mechanisms	Considerations
Individuals that have the motivation, skills, and support	<input type="checkbox"/> Are individuals recognised and celebrated? Are they supported to work sustainably? Is there sufficient focus on workload and wellbeing?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Are there opportunities for other staff to learn from, and sustain the work of, these individuals?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Is handover of key staff planned for and supported?
Strong ECT-mentor relationships	<input type="checkbox"/> Can ECTs and mentors meet in a way that works for them?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Does the programme content offer sufficient space for ECTs and mentors to build a positive relationship?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Are mentors motivated to mentor? Are other options explored when there are no motivated mentors available?
School culture and structure facilitate professional learning and support	<input type="checkbox"/> Do all staff in schools know about the ECF? How could more be made of the ECF materials to support staff development? Is there sufficient focus on workload and wellbeing particularly for mentors and ECTs?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Are there materials for school leaders and ECF staff to share information about the ECF with other staff, to promote wider awareness?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Are there materials or guidance for school leaders in using the ECF as a broader PD tool?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Does guidance for delivering the ECF take account of different modes of delivery in different schools?
	<input type="checkbox"/> What strategies and processes are there for schools to share great practice?
ECF programme is contextualised for the school and the ECT	<input type="checkbox"/> Can ECT baseline assessments facilitate a flexible and tailored approach?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Is staged content available for ECTs, that front-loads practical guidance and emotional wellbeing?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Do programme materials allow mentors and ECTs to adapt them to their school context?
External support for in-school delivery	<input type="checkbox"/> Is the registration process straightforward? Is this taken off induction tutors and other school staff as much as possible?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Are there resource-sharing banks and co-planning opportunities for all ECTs? Is this available for ECTs in schools that are not part of MATs?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Are providers sharing strategies with each other, to centralise workload and streamline approaches?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Do all small schools have access to external support? Is this available for schools that are not part of MATs?
External support for in-school delivery	<input type="checkbox"/> Are there opportunities for mentors and ECTs to network with other schools? Are these formal where needed, informal where needed, and genuinely useful?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Are in-person delivery approaches on offer for ECTs, and are these being made the most of for ECTs that travel long distances?

## What's next?

The NIOT, SWIFT and DRET as providers of the ECF, will consider these findings as we continue to deliver the ECF. We hope that these findings are similarly useful to ECF providers and schools across the country. If you would like to hear details of our webinars and future outputs or to find out about our next research project, you can register for updates at [niot.org.uk/form/eoi](https://niot.org.uk/form/eoi) or email us at [research@niot.org.uk](mailto:research@niot.org.uk).