



**Alban Teaching School Hub**

# **My ECF**

**Volume 1  
2021 - 2023**



**Education  
Development  
Trust**

Celebrating and sharing the reflections of colleagues involved in the Early Career Framework with Alban TSH.

Volume 1

2021-2023

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## **Dan Smith**

### Alban Teaching School Hub

The national rollout of the Early Career Framework (ECF) induction programme took place in September 2021. Eighteen months earlier, we saw the start of restrictions as the UK government attempted to curb the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic. During this challenging time for us all; our new, Early Career Teachers (or ECTs as they're now more affectionately known) were also battling with the challenges of training to teach, for the most part, behind a computer screen as they faced the unnerving prospect and unprecedented challenge of remote education. The ECF therefore was both timely and required. Entitling ECTs to two years of professional development, designed to help develop practice, knowledge and effective working habits. Much like the pandemic years, these last two years for everyone involved, will be ones we will never forget, but also ones we can reflect on, to build on, for future generations of ECTs, to learn from. The generosity of many have allowed us to bring together some of these reflections in Volume 1 of the Alban TSH ECF Journal. We hope that it will serve as something of a time capsule, reminding us of the time when our newest teachers were given the opportunity of support and certainty, off the back of the very uncertain times.

The title of Volume 1, 'My ECF' gives an indication of the content you can expect to read. Anyone who has played a part in the ECF over the two years, was invited to contribute. The message was simple enough; write freely for others to learn, understand and enjoy hearing about your two-year ECF experience. We have honesty, humour and insight in abundance. We hope you'll find something of interest and feel inspired to write for us next year!

A massive thank you to all who have contributed articles this year. We have been overwhelmed by the quality of the writing and insights shared. They have taught us a lot, caused us to think, reflect and appreciate what we might sometimes take for granted. We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we have.

## **Mima Griffiths**

The Astley Cooper School

The last two years have shown me what I am capable of and how far I have come since I began my training. It has been an opportunity to see and do so many different things within the role. Lots of things outside of my comfort zone including teaching subjects outside of my own from day one. The behaviour management methods really helped with that from the start because students always know when you're not quite sure about something!

The most useful things have been the real examples to employ in a classroom setting but also hearing the stories of the others in the cohort because it makes you feel less alone.

Over the last two years, my practice has changed dramatically because I will forever be learning new things and tweaking how I teach. To be a good teacher is to be a reflective teacher. I have taken on board lots of different examples of tasks and of behaviour management as well as workload management and making sure that there is a healthy work-life balance.

I wish I had known from the start that it's okay to be human. We all make mistakes and can't be perfect all of the time, no matter what we tell ourselves! It's so important to take time to breathe and allow a little time to rest. I now make sure that I will sit and eat lunch without working more than once a week to keep a few minutes to decompress.

I am most proud of reaching the finish line and coming to a new beginning.

The one piece of advice I would give is to make time for yourself. I refuse to take work home so that is my time and I will stay later to make sure I take nothing home. Just find a balance that works for you.

## **Stacey Douglas**

Cassiobury Infant and Nursery School

It has been great to network with other ECTs in the same position as me, often finding that ECTs at local training sessions are also in the same moderation groups.

The guest speakers at regional events has been a highlight; it has been fascinating to see so many different opinions and thoughts on the same profession and has allowed me the opportunity to choose my own thoughts and ideas.

I sometimes feel that the online content is not always relevant to EYFS. Being a reception teacher, it would have been useful to have more ideas and examples based on a reception class, although it is useful to have strategies for the older years for the future.

In year one some of the training content felt repeated from my training year and although a good reminder, it would have been good for it to have been in a little more depth or taken on a different perspective.

I found the blocks around learning and assessment useful as the base of it we had learnt in training but it added to the learning and provided useful examples and strategies to try in class. It also provided a starting point for discussion with my mentor, whom in turn could then provide more useful strategies relevant to my class.

I also found the guest presenters insightful and inspirational. They provided the scope to see where you can choose to take your career and the opportunities available. They also provided opportunities for further learning.

I really enjoyed reading 'The Inclusive Classroom' by Daniel Sobel and Sarah Alston. I found that it made me think about the children differently and provide strategies individual to the children's needs. I also found that it has ideas and strategies that are less obvious and helps you to look at the children in your class in a different way.

I feel that my whole teaching practice has changed since I started this journey three years ago. I feel that in my first year as a qualified teacher I spent lots of time trying to figure out what type of teacher I wanted to be and crafting my own teacher identity. I thought at the start of my second year I was confident and secure in this and then quickly realised that my teaching style needs to adapt slightly dependant on the cohort. For example my first year I had two EHCP's and five children that needed additional support. Year one became a lot about adaptation and ensuring that each child had the right amount of scaffold. Whereas Year two I have a high ability class where behaviour is the focus. Therefore, I would say that the biggest thing I have changed is my mindset and ability to adapt to new classes based on their needs whilst still maintaining my own integrity and standards.

Planning, preparation and organisation is key. In order to make your work/life balance work ensure that you are aware of deadlines in advance. Ask for a list of big-ticket jobs at the start of the year; reports, ppms, parents evenings etc, and ask for dates. Then check with colleagues about the amount of time you will need to dedicate to each task. I found Year one tricky when I was caught out by approaching deadlines but in Year



two I had learnt how much time etc I needed for each task and managed my time more efficiently.

The relationships and connections I have built with the children have been key. It makes me incredibly proud when my children from last year come back to see me. I had one child bring a Christmas gift and another a Diwali gift. It is these times when you realise how much you meant to that family. That is why I joined teaching and it makes me proud when I see evidence of this.

Be kind to yourself. You will not get everything right all of the time but you will make a difference to a lot of children's lives and for a short period of time you will be their safe space. Try to remember in the hard times (September) why you decided to be a teacher and find that one bit of light in the children's faces on those days. The children always make me feel more positive and happier on not such a great day. Be yourself, you're good enough, you're amazing...there is only one of you!

## **James Keefe**

### **The Adeyfield Academy**

The highs have been successfully navigating through my first two years of teaching and gaining the role of Head of KS4 maths at my school. I also think that the observations I received greatly contributed to the highs as I was able to see how to improve my practice.

The lows have been my initial struggle with balancing my time and trying not to bring work home. I found that in my first few months I would work at weekends, however I have been able to overcome this.

I found that the most useful sessions were on behaviour management as I had a tricky Year 9 class that I was able to successfully work with well due to some of the behaviour management techniques.

I found that I have improved my practice through my questioning which I feel is something I have developed effectively. For example, I often use the multiple choice questions that were shown to me.

Now, I make sure to spread my time out and not work on weekends. I feel I now know when it is time to stop working and my work life balance has improved considerably.

I wish that I had known from the start that sometimes it is okay to make mistakes. I found that I held myself to an impossible standard during my years as a teacher, one that no one would be able to live up to. I feel that knowing I could make mistakes earlier would have saved me a lot of stress in the long run.

I am most proud of getting the role of KS4 maths curriculum lead as I feel it is something that I worked hard towards getting and I have enjoyed doing.

I would advise a colleague in my position to not put so much pressure on themselves, teaching is difficult and there will always be room to improve. As long as you are doing your best, that is what matters.

## **Rachel Clarke**

The Priory School

The last two years have not been without challenge.

In year one, I was teaching all year groups except Year 13. KS3 were set against maths lessons which meant I was teaching some low ability students and some groups that contained students with challenging behaviours. I came in to teaching from industry and wasn't used to people not listening. I wish I had been more strict with some of these pupils much sooner.

The best bits have been meeting other ECTs and exchanging experiences. I would make the most of the subject sessions and try to meet people who teach your subject. There aren't many teaching my subject. It's good to get to know these people so you can swap ideas.

I found some of the online course a bit onerous, and a bit like another thing that needs to be done. My mentor changed in year two, with my year two mentor following the guidelines set out by the EDT so the meetings have felt more purposeful. Year one meetings were useful but often ended with me moaning about behaviour for an hour.

The larger sessions at the university have been good, and the guest speakers at these events have given some good advice and tips.

I have become better at making resources and making sure the pupils are doing more work than me. Building differentiation into the lesson will stop you creating multiple versions of the same lesson. Share resources and ideas as much as possible

## **Anthony Lambert**

Katherine Warrington School

Teaching is quite simply a joy, it is my second profession in life and has clicked from the first day, in a way that my previous career never did. That does not mean it feels like a joy every day or that any progression has come easily. The greatest high of the programme has been realising that I can do this! That I have found a profession that will drive me bonkers, mentally and physically exhaust me but has given me purpose and a love of what I do; because it is important. Not everyone is so lucky.

Sometimes that love is bittersweet, the crushing lows can come precisely because you care so much about what you do. The hardest part of the programme has been the continued pushing of my comfort zone. I do not enjoy being the centre of attention, I used to need the loo 10 times before each lesson as a PGCE student due to nerves. The hardest part of this programme is continued growth but the rewards are worth it.

I wish I had known at the start how all encompassing being a teacher is. You're sitting and watching TV whilst a small part of your brain is thinking 'that'll be great as a video in my Year 7 lesson'. You'll be attending a training course and thinking 'that's not how I would have organised it'. Switching off is hard, but it is equally essential to avoid burnout. I'm still working on that.

As I have developed as a teacher I have tried many different techniques. My method of feedback and questioning are constantly evolving, my differentiation of lessons still requires improvement. A huge change from the beginning of the programme is that I am no longer afraid to be myself. Teaching personas are useful tools (particularly for behaviour management) but I have gradually allowed more of my own personality to filter through. Showing enthusiasm for my subject and the parts that really interest me adds a layer to my lessons that goes beyond the curriculum. It sparks those spontaneous conversations with students, where I learn as much as they do.

The one piece of advice I would give to a colleague or new ECT is to be curious. Whatever you do, go into it with a burning curiosity. Apathy breeds apathy, taking an interest and being actively involved will make it easier to do so again next time round. Be curious about how to improve your practice. Be curious about which teaching books are really worth reading. Be curious, professionally, about your students: what makes them tick, what buy-ins can you get with them.

## **Ilaria Agostini**

Saint Joan of Arc Catholic School

Being a teacher is definitely not an easy job. When I started in my current school, I was very excited but at the beginning of the second year, the excitement went down. I was scared that maybe this wasn't my forever job, and that teaching wasn't actually for me. Thankfully, one day, an anonymous student left a note in my pigeonhole which was delivered by his form tutor. This was the loveliest note I have ever received; it was written to thank me for being a supportive teacher and to have helped him during the year to improve in Italian. I still have that note, and every time I feel sad or hopeless, I go back to read it and to remind myself that I am a great teacher after all. I made an impact on him and this is what matters.

Thanks to this job, I have the opportunity to help students to become the best version of themselves. I am not just an Italian and Spanish teacher; I am a form tutor, a role which I had not experienced before. I was born and raised in Italy, and we don't have this figure. In fact, I had to learn the role from scratch, as I had no knowledge of this profession. Being a form tutor is completely different from being a teacher. I have to solve lots of friendship problems, as well as supporting my tutees differently. Despite seeing them every day, I never fully know how they do in their lessons. I listen carefully to their complaints about other teachers, and I give them the best feedback I can. I love meeting them and seeing them growing up and being there along their journey.

When I started this job, I would have appreciated knowing a little bit more about how to organise myself, how to manage my time better, how to be more productive and how to work smarter rather than harder. Unfortunately, no one helped me in this, and I am still figuring out how to do it. Although I teach exactly the same content of last year, I still find that I have lots of work to do. I often find myself to be very busy with endless marking, replying to emails, chasing parents, filing documents about every single SEN student, and so much more. I spend many weekends working and I don't like this. While it is easy for people to say that I shouldn't do it, I would risk being unprepared when Monday begins, which is why in order to avoid this I prefer to work and to be fully prepared. As a goal of mine for the future, I would like to reduce the amount of workload, but I think it will take time.

On the other hand, I am very proud of how my social skills have improved. I couldn't imagine six years ago when I arrived in the UK that I would have become a teacher in a foreign country, speaking in a foreign language - that I used to hate in school because I wasn't good at it - and having amazing conversations with students and colleagues. Six years ago, I wasn't even close to the person that I am today. I had not yet obtained a degree, didn't speak English well and didn't know who I wanted to be. I always try to use myself as an example for my students, as I came to this country knowing no one. What was clear at that time was my goal, which was to live abroad. I had this objective since I was in high school, and this helped me to be motivated in finishing my studies with good grades. I try to motivate my students to believe in themselves and to never give up, as dreams can come true.

I always aim to improve myself. Sometimes I can be too self-critical, but I need to have precise goals to keep me motivated. My next goals are to teach Spanish more, a language that I loved since I was at university in Italy. I would also like to keep learning

new teaching techniques, be observed, and be given constructive criticism to learn more. I want to make a positive impact on my students by supporting them, believing in them, and motivating them.

Advice I would give to a future ECT; enjoy the ride, perfection doesn't exist and sometimes it is better to do less and breathe more. Ask for help when needed but try to find the best option, following your gut.

## **Georgia Fletcher**

St Peter's School

Reflecting on the last two years is something that I haven't done enough as an ECT and it is crazy to think back on how far I have come since I began my training. My confidence has increased hugely not just when delivering lessons but with all of the other things that come with being a teacher (presenting in front of parents and putting on a school production etc.). You are definitely thrown straight into the deep end when you become a teacher: (stepping into a classroom full of 30 strangers who look to you and rely on you for 6 hours a day!). Yet the ECF programme eases you into it brilliantly. The weekly meetings with your mentor are a godsend and I really don't know how I would have managed without them. Having somebody to rely on, approach for advice or just vent to was something that I have really benefited from during my time as an ECT and I'm grateful that the structure of the programme allowed this. I have enjoyed attending the regional training sessions which have given me the opportunity to meet other teachers in the local area and to share ideas.

I enjoyed the sessions which focused on the cognition behind learning (block two) and the assessment and feedback (block five) as I feel these were the two blocks I got the most out of. I trialled methods and considered different things when planning after completing these training blocks and found that these were the most useful. My practice as a whole is still developing and improving every day but when I became confident that I completely knew my class and the children within it, I was then able to improve what I was doing and how I was doing it (tailoring my planning, managing behaviour, providing feedback etc.). This is the main piece of advice I would give myself as an ECT starting out... just take your time, don't expect to be amazing at everything instantly and get to know your class as much as possible!

**Laura Herschell**

Broadfield Academy

The highs of my first two years teaching have been building relationships with the children, parents and staff within my setting. I have learned so much about the importance of routine, boundaries and consistency but equally experienced the difficulties that come to establish and maintain these. The conference sessions have been really helpful, particularly to share experiences with other ECTs.

Moving to a new school and new year group after two terms into my final ECT year has been a challenge and a reminder of how much more there is to learn. I wish I knew from the start not to waste my time on unnecessary written marking and feedback – I have wasted HOURS giving Year 1 children feedback that they can't and won't read. The most influential an experience to my learning has been working with incredible TAs – they are worth their weight in gold and I could not have got through the first year without them!



## **Yasmeen Shkokani**

The Astley Cooper School

I have found the ECT course both effective and challenging. Becoming a professional teacher was never going to be an easy ride but the important thing is how you take those challenges and use those in supporting the way you teach. As an art teacher there is never a correct answer in a piece of work. You need to consider your students and how well they may produce their outcome and how you can support them in achieving what they are capable of. I found it really beneficial to attend CPD courses at St George's School to work and learn alongside other ECT art teachers in the same position as me. We shared techniques for teaching and skills that may be our strengths in certain areas, different ways of teaching a project, etc. It was a great time to learn techniques and use materials that I had not yet experienced in my training year and this has continued to support me in my teaching, definitely recommend attending as many CPD opportunities as possible for your subject!

Advice for the next intake of ECTs would be to observe as many teachers within your department and around your school as possible. You can learn different teaching techniques as well as behavioural techniques. There may be a particular student that is challenging in all your lessons but may be great elsewhere - what can you take away from this?

Take time for yourself, whether it is in the evenings or weekends you need to block out time that is not related to your job! Prioritise what must be done and then come back to the not-so-important tasks later on. I aim to leave my work duties at school so I can get home with a clear head and not feel exhausted the next day because I've not given myself a break. I very rarely take things home with me to mark/create as I would much rather stay a little longer at school to complete it.

## **Daisy Smith**

Sandringham School

The highs and lows of the ECF programme are as follows:

- Face to face events have all been meaningful and useful towards my practice. I felt I was able to take something away from each one and implement it with support from the reading online too. All those who delivered sessions were highly knowledgeable, supportive and understanding.
- I felt the transition between providers was simple and supportive. This provision has been easier to follow than at my previous school (Canvas/Best Practise).
- Repetition of content - though useful to consolidate knowledge, I felt the amount of reading and online content could have been reduced. The most useful parts of the programme have been completing the mentor booklet and setting personal targets in line with the block. This was generally mirrored by what I read in the materials online, however sometimes it felt a little onerous to have to read through content which did not always link to my subject.
- Videos felt childish and at times patronising. Instead perhaps videos could have been real life teaching scenarios/teachers speaking about their experiences.

I found block 10 'Revisiting the importance of subject and curriculum knowledge' to be the most useful session.

The most influential research in developing my practice was on interleaving. It was something I was already doing without realising it, but being aware of it in more detail has allowed me to give students a deeper understanding of content. I have made more effort to verbally link lessons together so students can make connections on how the work they're producing will be useful later on down the line. It has also meant I can pick apart exemplar pieces of work in a new way, but explaining how it has been pieced together using skills developed throughout a term or unit.

The one thing I do know, that I didn't do before is to allow for time at the beginning of the year to establish routines and boundaries even if it means sacrificing some lesson content. This will benefit you in the long run and lessons will be more productive and successful as a result.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Collaborate with colleagues, use what is already there, share resources.

I'm still proud of the first lesson I ever taught - I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to speak in front of 30 teenagers. I'm also proud of the progress I've made in behaviour management - having confidence to use my voice and creating a calm, supportive environment has been a big focus for me.

My advice; teaching attracts perfectionism - it's okay to be good enough. Do not take work home at weekends - preserve your personal time and space, and make time for the things you enjoy most. This will make you a happier, more productive person in school!

## **Alison Feeney**

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

I have enjoyed being an ECT and being able to continue working in the same school I have been at for ten years. I have found the online programme a challenge at times. Completing the work has added to my workload considerably and I am often trying to fit it into my free time. I have enjoyed working across two different classes over the past two years. However, this has had its challenges.

In the first year, my class had a lot of additional needs and trying to meet them all at times without support was a challenge. I had to fight to be listened to at times and I found this hard and often thought about giving up. However, I completed the first year and saw this as an achievement.

I have now moved to a mixed KS1 class. This is the age group I prefer to work with and I have enjoyed this year. However, it has had its challenges, such as planning, meeting the children's needs and ensuring I am meeting the needs of both year groups. Working in a small school and with strains in every classroom, I have found it a challenge to ask for support when needed. I have also taken on the role of subject lead. This takes up a lot of my time, including my free time, meaning I have struggled to find a work life balance. My mentor has been fantastic and I wouldn't have got through the last couple of years without her!

I have found the group sessions the most useful! Getting together with other ECTs and knowing you're not alone was great! It was nice to be able to talk about the ECF training and what others are finding useful and not so much. I have taken a lot of ideas from colleagues and put them into my practice. I have thought a lot about assessment this year and how I can use formative assessment more effectively. We have also been completing a lot more group work in the class, using the strategies shared.

At times the online material has not been relevant to the key stage or class that you are in at the time. Therefore, I have been unable to apply some of the teaching into my practice.

If I was at the start of my journey now, I would plan my time better, so that I didn't spend all my holiday time and every evening working. I would tell someone starting this journey now to plan their time effectively so they have some down time. I would also advise them that even though every day has a challenge, write down a positive from every day in a book and look back at it and remind yourself why you do this job. Find the positive in everyday. Also, make sure you plan in the mentor meetings, they are essential and mentors are there to support you.

I am most proud of the relationships I have made with the children and the safe space I have provided for them, especially this year.

**Helen Oldham**

Broadfield Academy

The highs of the programme have included the fact that we have had two years to develop as ECTs with detailed guidance and a structured programme with material which is relevant to practise in the classroom as opposed to being purely theoretical.

The lows have included the note taking which was time consuming and not particularly constructive.

The most useful sessions and research have been those relating to cognitive development, feedback and assessment, I am now better at differentiation and providing effective scaffolded support within the classroom.

I wish I had known quite how much paperwork was involved on top of that associated with usual classroom practice.

I am most proud of classroom management and my relationship with the classes I have taught, which has been very positive.

My advice to a colleague in my position would be to be prepared and be adaptable in all your teaching practice.

## **Millie Irish**

Galley Hill Primary School

The highs of my first two years' teaching have been forming great relationships with children, staff, parents and volunteers/future trainees. I have learned a lot about consistency, routine and finding the right work-life balance. It has been nice being able to catch up with other ECTs and share experiences and ideas.

Something I know now that I didn't before is that taking time out to go and view other schools is so beneficial. Seeing how they run their EYFS has really helped in developing our own this year.

Something I wish I had known from the start is that not all feedback has to be acted upon. Some ideas/suggestions from external support staff will not always work for your class. You know them best.

I am most proud of how well myself and my EYPs have developed our Early Years Classroom this year. We have transformed each area into such an engaging and inviting space, the children gain so much more from it now.

Advice – do what works for you. Fancy planners and diaries or stationary are only good if you will actually use them. Notes pages on your phone and writing on the back of your hand can be just as useful.

## **Celia Henson**

Samuel Ryder Academy

Teaching 'is like a box of chocolates: you never know which one you are going to get.'

Being an ECT.

Wow, I actually made it! Two years can go by so very fast but taking this time to reflect has given me the opportunity to realise how far I have come since stepping out into the teaching world on my own.

My biggest realisation over the past two years would be to not put so much pressure on myself. Some lessons just won't go to plan, some lessons the behaviour could have been managed better, some lessons students just don't enjoy the topic but we have to remember as teachers that we are human too. It is ok to plan a less complicated lesson or ask for help from another member of staff.

I have also realised that students can judge you, swear at you, walk away from you or ignore you but after all of this, they will always appreciate you. Never has a thank you at the end of the lesson or a student's smile as they get a question right ever made me remember the bad things. The highs definitely outweigh the lows.

Teachers are organised people; we can happily juggle or do two things at once. But if I have to give one piece of advice about the ECF it would be to not let your list become endless and don't let the ECF blocks be last on your list. For one, it'll mean endless time catching up but the blocks have helped me to remember basic teaching skills which I had forgotten from my training years.

I now expect teaching as one big rollercoaster. The nerves as you wait in line, the experience of stress and anticipation as the carriage tips and rises, but then you get to smile and glide, you get to see others enjoying themselves too. When the rollercoaster slows, you can take a breath and reflect, forgetting how it all started, remembering the good times. And when the roller-coaster's engine starts up again, it all doesn't feel so bad after all.

## **Rianna Roston**

Samuel Ryder Academy

I am slowly coming to learn that teaching is a profession that I will never be perfect at – and although at first, the realisation was terrifying and frustrating, it has become simultaneously comforting. I have learnt that I am not going to be able to mould myself into becoming a teacher I am inspired by, but in fact, I am going to be myself, and that is the best I can be.

Of course, I have changed quite a bit since the beginning. I have developed many successful strategies for feedback, questioning and differentiation. I have learnt the significance of modelling and most of all consistency. Students absolutely love a routine.

I believe my personal strength within teaching is being able to develop a relationship with a student and class. I have let my students know that I am also a person, just like they are. I am fair with students now instead of being maybe too lenient. I care a lot and I am competitive.

A highlight of the ECF programme for me was during a face-to-face session. We were introduced to a group activity based on questioning and using sources to retain information, which I really enjoyed. I adopted this technique for an observation lesson and received positive feedback! I have found it incredibly useful to be able to connect with other ECTs and more specifically those who teach the same subject as you. You have the opportunity to share stories, and we begin to recognise how we're all in the same position, experiencing and being challenged by similar situations.

It is vital to not hold a grudge; I think I have understood this from the start and my students are aware. Remember to give a consequence when necessary - students may 'hate' you for a day, possibly a week or more, but they will forgive and forget. Remember to reward, you don't realise how much it means to them - and then remember to contact home about it, you don't realise how much it means to their family/carer either.

Teaching is not easy. There can be many 'lows', especially when you least expect them. However, I don't think I would have it any other way. Personally, I like a challenge, and I'm a firm believer that if there isn't a bit of stress here and there, then it becomes mundane.

It's difficult to explain the reward/the 'highs'. When I arrive home at the end of a school day, or leave the school carpark on a Friday afternoon I always feel incredibly proud of myself as no matter how the day has gone, I have accomplished something. I have made a difference.

## **Jodie Rose**

### **Samuel Ryder Academy**

My highs have been getting to know my form. On the last day of school before the Christmas break, we sang karaoke and they gave me a card from all of them wishing me a Merry Christmas. It made me realise how much they care about what I do for them and how much they enjoy being in my form, I felt incredibly proud of the environment I have built for them over the past two years.

The lows are when students take a dislike to you and you know you may never win them over. This isn't because of who you are necessarily, it's just a clashing of minds and sometimes it can be difficult to mend those relationships once they're broken when you only see them once or twice a week. You want to, but it can feel like there isn't enough time to do so.

I am now more confident in challenging students in the corridors. It comes with time, I think. You need to get to know the students before you can challenge them openly in front of their peers and once you have that relationship with them, it becomes much easier for you to challenge and for them to follow the rules.

I wish I'd know from the start that the majority of A Level teachers feel like frauds. It takes at least three years of teaching the same specification for you to feel confident with teaching it and feel secure. Just keep going, learn your spec inside and out as much as possible, take on additional training if necessary, and remember, they can learn the same way as KS3 and KS4 do, just make sure they still get all the detail.

I'm most proud of my\_current Year 11s. When they left to go on study leave, I felt confident in the knowledge that they would do very well and their exams will go smoothly. They have improved so much over the past two years, and the progress is reflected in their mock exams where they improved by a grade or so. When they said goodbye, I was so happy knowing that the lessons I had with them would hopefully be talked about for years to come.

My advice - there will be incredibly difficult, stressful, overwhelming moments and as easy as it is to go home and watch Netflix to try to forget, it is so much better to take some time to talk it through with someone, work on looking after yourself and give yourself a break from the chaos that school can feel like. You deserve to relax in your evenings and on your weekends and you owe it to yourself to do the things that you love!



## Amanda Oscar

Saint Joan of Arc Catholic School

My initial beliefs about precisely what teaching and learning is have been shaped further by my practice as an Early Careers Teacher over the last two years. Coming into teaching directly from a career as an Early Years professional, I knew that the step into teaching secondary science would be a big one but one which I felt would have a common thread of understanding how we learn. Prior to early years, I worked in the science industry as a laboratory officer, before moving into sales and marketing of diagnostic products. This varied background, coupled with having three children who were all in secondary school when I embarked on my secondary teaching career, significantly influenced my feelings about teaching and learning.

A major factor that has influenced my experience as an ECT is the ability to reflect. Schön (1991) advocates taking time to evaluate what we do and why we do it, as professionals. Attributes, I hasten to say, teachers seldom have time to do. Being an ECT however, enabled me to pause and reflect in preparation for meetings with my mentor, during these meetings, after observations and indeed during group sessions with my peer ECTs. I value my growing ability to reflect *in-practice* which Schön advocates. I have planned for lessons and found the direction of the lesson may change because of student understanding. This would unsettle me early on in my ECT journey but, as I develop my understanding of what teaching and learning looks like, coupled with Schön's reassurance that reflecting-in-action is advantageous, I am more confident. The ability to redress my plans 'in the moment' to align with where my students are is a skillset that I can declare, comes with time!! And I am okay with that.

Another useful learning nugget that I would like to share is my maturing confidence in understanding what self-regulation is, and supporting students to adopt practices that underpin it. Why? Because I believe that lifelong values are inherent within these principles and no matter what subject you teach, students need practice in these skills to prosper in life. For instance, when challenged by a Year 9 student with the remark 'I don't see how biology's going to help me in the future, Miss', I could confidently remind her of the skills she continues to develop relating to ways of thinking, techniques that she uses to problem solve and ways that she has demonstrated motivation in aspects of her learning. I acknowledge and remind students that learning involves a necessary struggle (Willingham 2004) and that whatever their chosen paths, it is inevitable that they will have to apply principles related to self-regulation for success.

Along with reflection, I found that creating purposeful action plans ensures that learning continues. Following the reflexive cycle outlined by Gibbs (Bassot 2023) underpins practices that I was first introduced to during my EYP training and which I have continued to follow through my practice as an ECT. Collectively, my mentor and I ensure that we develop action points at the end of our meetings. I have applied this same principle to personal reflection on topics that I teach. How do I feel about how the topic is being taught? (I believe that taking time to acknowledge specifically how I *feel* about something is essential). What went well and what can be developed? (evaluate). How does this influence my practice? (analysis). What are my conclusions and what am I going to do about it? (Personal action plan). Taking time to pause and

apply reflexive practice significantly enhances the purpose behind my teaching. The skill to find time within the fast-paced life of a teacher to reflect is one that I believe pays dividends.

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## **Louise Mills**

Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School

My ECT journey has been a true learning experience. I already had a lot of classroom experience and had been working in outdoor learning for several years, but being responsible for the subject learning of over 400 students is a different thing altogether.

My highlight in my first year was discovering that my most challenging class to teach made the most progress of all my classes. This was probably due to my own determination to 'crack' the difficulties within the class. Every week I would talk to my mentor about the problems within the class and every week we would come up with a plan for the next steps. After a while I kind of found my own way of dealing with things and I was so chuffed with their results.

My second year highlight has been looking back and seeing how far I have come. Some of the things I found difficult last year I had forgotten about because they are now just part of the job that comes naturally. I remember being frustrated towards the end of last year and telling my mentor that some students had started doing (or not doing) x, y, z. She told me "Some students were always that way but you were focussed on other things. You are now noticing these smaller things because you have overcome the larger ones. Fantastic progress!"

The hardest thing for me is stopping! There is always another task to complete and I want to do them all to the best of my ability. I am at school too many hours a day and often take work home at the weekends. They warned us of this at the start and I can remember having to write how I would prevent 'burnout'. I need to find my plan, re-write it, and stick to it!

The most useful aspect of my ECF was my meetings with my mentor. Having the opportunity to sit and discuss my teaching on a regular basis has been really advantageous. She has trialled many of the activities herself over the past two years and it was great to be able to compare results and adapt the ones that worked for me.

After listening to Daniel Sobel present at one of the ECT training days I was inspired to buy one of his books "The Inclusive Classroom". This has been a fantastic addition to my learning and I now use many of his strategies in my classroom.

My advice to new ECTs would be;

- Tell someone if things go wrong
- Listen to advice and constructive criticism
- Try lots of different strategies
- Find your own way!

## **Tim Dillamore**

Saint Joan of Arc Catholic School

Having spent two years working for an IT firm, I knew that the competitive world of corporate IT wasn't for me. I was unhappy working for a company that didn't seem to value education and personal development. As a graduate of maths, I knew that I could probably pursue a more lucrative career in other industries but deep down I knew that teaching was something I would be good at as I have a deep love of learning and thought I could take this with me to inspire my pupils (how naive of me!).

I decided to train to become a teacher and enrolled on a PGCE course. Having been placed at a school, I quickly realised that teaching is a lot harder than it looks. What always seemed unfair is that the observing teacher would tell you to plan a lesson on a particular topic but give very little guidance on what to do. I distinctly remember being told by one teacher that my lesson was 'awful' - the fact that he had been teaching for 30 years and was on autopilot didn't seem to cross his mind.

However, after successfully obtaining QTS, I was appointed to my first teaching position at a non-selective Catholic school in Rickmansworth called Saint Joan of Arc. My first few months in teaching were incredibly stressful: constantly feeling that my lessons were inadequate. This feeling was usually accompanied with a frustration that I was not able to spend enough time planning. But then to be fair to myself, I would have spent my entire evening the night before working - whether it be planning for a full day of lessons or marking assessments.

So on the whole, my first few months in teaching were not particularly positive. I was given a top set Year 11 class, and while at first this was something I was excited by, reality met expectations and I was left disappointed. The class came across as arrogant and I naively thought I could demonstrate my enthusiasm for maths and that somehow this would wear off on them. And this is part of a wider theme that I've discovered in maths teaching: teaching a method so that the pupils can answer questions seems to be a maths teacher's MO. Showing pupils underlying concepts is time consuming and as I have to teach a large scheme of work, teaching a topic quickly usually means just teaching a method. But ultimately you have to teach maths in this way because if you have a class of 30 pupils in front of you, while one or two may be interested in underlying concepts, the rest won't and they won't want to listen, so you will quickly lose their attention.

The biggest change that I've seen within me since starting teaching almost two years ago is the way that I deal with pupil behaviour. I've realised that the best way to manage the pupils is by building a rapport with them and coming across as authentic. This, I believe, has been the difference between feeling a sense of dread before going in to teach a difficult class and feeling a sense of 'let's just enjoy this.' Having been able to make this change in attitude has made all the difference to me and my relationships with my classes.

But ultimately the great thing about working at Saint Joan of Arc has been the fantastic colleagues. It is a particularly sociable school and it seems there is always a group of colleagues wanting to go to the pub after school on a Friday. I feel I have made some wonderful lifelong friendships here and it has been the support of colleagues in my

department in particular that helped me get through those early months of teaching and have enabled me to get to the place I am now at: able to enjoy teaching and, I think, have a reasonable work-life balance.

## **Lynn Duffy**

### **Roundwood Park School**

I admit to feeling a bit daunted being asked to reflect on the past two years in this written piece. I have learnt more about myself than I expected, overcome challenges I never anticipated and laughed like a drain every day. How to sum that up in a few paragraphs?

When it's going well, teaching is a joy. Building a relationship with a class, watching them improve and grow in confidence - there truly is no other job like it. It consumes your life - I find myself constantly thinking about my classes; little video clips I come across that I could show them, jokes to tell my form, behaviour tips online that I could try applying...it's a real passion.

On the other hand, it consumes your life. When you put so much of yourself into something, it can be heart-breaking when it goes wrong; when that lesson doesn't quite deliver, when a student's behaviour takes a nose dive after some improvement. It can be very hard not to take it personally, to dust yourself off and be ready to go for the next class waiting at the door.

At those times, my mentor, other teachers and the ECF meetings become invaluable. Talking to other teachers, sharing ideas or even just commiserating over a tough day - having this support network is essential. Even simple tips like different ways to group students for different activities can make a world of difference to the classroom atmosphere.

It's been a uniquely tough two years. The Covid impact on children's progression, strikes and changes in the monarchy have all disrupted the natural ebb and flow of the school year, challenging routines and consistency. But we have made it to the end. I have learnt much but still have a long way to go. I suppose that's one of the joys of the profession - you're never complete as a teacher. There are always lessons I would do differently, conversations with students I wish I could redo, changes to my approach to the never ending marking.

So - what to say to future ECTs? Watch as many teachers as you can, both in and out of your department. It's a great way to pick up tips as well as see what students are like in other lessons. But ultimately, the only teacher you can be is yourself. Forcing yourself to be a different person seven hours a day is the fastest way to burnout. That's not to say you shouldn't challenge yourself. I've always been a people-pleaser, so making sure I'm consistent with consequences has been something I've really had to work on. Recognise your strengths and be honest about your weaknesses. There will always be people to help you if you're open to it.

## **Gemma Turone**

Tanners Wood JMI School

Highs:

- Having 2 years of support, with access to various external parties to approach.
- The seminars with Ellie and Chris, always welcoming, friendly and approachable with any questions.

Lows:

- A lot of lengthy reading that is often repetitive.
- Not all material and examples are relevant to Primary education.
- Finding the time to access all the reading and tasks – even with the extra time out of class.

The most useful session for me were; introducing 'hinge questions' as a form of mini assessment, at the start of lessons. I trialled this in both my English and History lessons this term. I used a variety of carefully chosen hinge questions to gauge which children had understood my input/tasks which proved very effective when planning the next lessons.

Using my mentor time effectively to ask to be shown areas / tasks that I want support with.

Exploring alternative strategies to best challenge the more able children in my class and will continue to build on my practice of differentiated activities, with a focus on the more able children and higher order questioning.

I wish that I'd known to choose one or two areas to focus on at time, you simply cannot do it all, from the start!

I am most proud of the strong relationships I have with both my pupils and their parents, which has enabled for a positive atmosphere within the classroom. Starting in a new year group, with a new year group partner has been a challenge, but one in which I have felt supported and confident with as a result.

I feel that I have also built a solid relationship with my mentor, and through discussions with her have enabled me to generate ideas to address areas that were suggested for my development after observations.

I will embrace these areas for development, and I have also found that these are useful targets for me further develop my practice in the classroom in the coming year.

## **Lucy Smart**

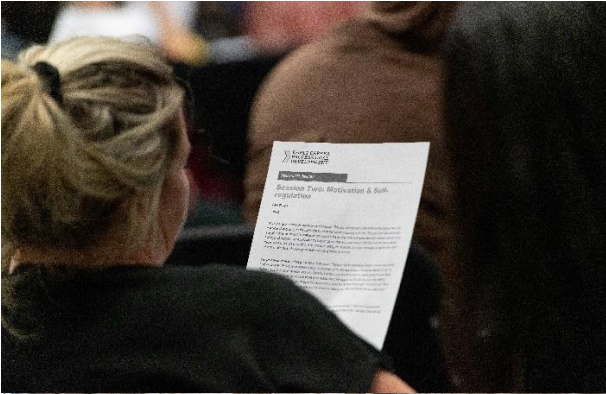
Yewtree Primary School

Reflection has been the key element of the past two years. I have sometimes thought too much about my practice but have learnt how to find a good balance and understanding. I know that everything does not always go to plan and there are many reasons for this. I have used this to learn and it has only helped me to grow as a teacher. I have found comfort in the sessions as it has always felt like a safe space to discuss with other teachers. It has been wonderful to make the most of these moments by learning and sharing experiences with the local teachers in my community. How often in your career will you meet with other teachers from different schools with many experiences? I enjoyed the large group session as it was inspiring to hear from guest speakers. I would advise an ECT to enjoy it, as this is the chance to use your ECT time for you. Enjoy the online blocks as they are a really great conversation topic for you and your mentor. Observe, learn and ask all of the questions you can! Have lots of fun as this is your chance to experience everything you can. I feel more confident than I ever have done, I am ready to continue learning from myself and my colleagues.









## **Kolima Akthare**

St Albans Girls' School

The highs have been the training sessions with effective and informative training to help support with the programme, as well as observing the progress in the ECTs confidence and professional development. The mentoring sessions have been useful in refining my own practice and sharing advice as well as receiving feedback on the progress and the expansion of knowledge. The lesson observations conducted with the professional mentor and the curriculum leader were met positive feedback and successes in the ECTs lesson.

I found the first local group session when we were embarking on the programme as it helped with the guidance and direction of the programme. The delivery of the session was very clear and helpful, as well as a chance to meet and speak to other colleagues, understanding their experience and ideas on the course.

The research on psychological flexibility, helping individuals to explore how to manage their mindsets under pressure and build resilience was the most influential in developing your practice. This was delivered by the keynote speaker Liz Margee and was very interesting.

I now provide support and guidance to an ECT in a more broad and wholesome way, that is considerate and reflective of their needs. However, I wish I'd have known about the content of all of the blocks in advance, in order to tailor them to the academic year.

I'm really proud of my ECT's growth in confidence and development as a professional.

To others, I would advise, being open minded and patient with any queries or issues raised by the ECT, as their journey is unique and so are their needs. Try to assist in a manner that you are able to that is beneficial to the ECT and appropriate to the time you are able to dedicate.

## **Katherine Bamber**

Dame Alice Owen's School

The failure to appoint an Assistant Director of Music led us to hedge our bets on the second round, advertising for both an Assistant D o M *and* a Teacher of Music. Fortunately the second round led to an excellent and suitably experienced candidate for the main job.

The next day, my line manager found me in a lesson and conspiratorially told me that some over-staffing had come available in the school; "you know how much we liked Matt, the BT, at application....if he would come, as well as the Asst DoM, we could find the scope for your requested reduced class sizes for Years 7, 8 AND 9". I recalled the excitement Matt had elicited on the interview day from the choir with his warm, (youthful) enthusiasm; Dom (an experienced teacher in the department who observed his lesson): "he was brilliant - he did this cool improvisation thing with Year 9s!".

So, the following September I was presented with the opportunity to finally throw out the desks from the music classrooms - as I had dreamt of doing ever since my first week at Owen's - and to launch our 'new' KS3 curriculum, based around a fully practical-based, integrated approach to learning, where the students are able to create their own music in groups and empowered to produce authentic, **musical** outcomes.

Professionally unnerved by the previous two faltering years at Owen's, I now found affirmation in the energetic, enthusiastic engagement from the new curriculum music team. I saw the classroom materials and ideas from my previous school's blossom again and be reborn in their Owen's guise, with the fresh enthusiasm of Matt's approach, along with his thoughtful appreciation of the musical thinking behind the units of work. Watching students arrive smiling and happy in Matt's classroom, and hearing his frequent exclamation "Oh, I *like* [student's name - often a slightly naughty one]" accompanied by a look of genuine delight.

I had purchased each member of staff an mp3 recorder to encourage them and embed the expectation that students would have frequent tangible outcomes to their classwork. Matt embraces this, and in his lessons, his students' progress is driven by his clearly committed expectation that they will all record their work, which they do, without fear of failure, with the confidence built on clear developmental opportunities and guidance, and with good-natured risk taking.

Watching the week-by-week operations of the departmental eco-system, where the energy of the ECT, drawing upon and feeding into the practice of three current/former HODs (David, Dom and myself) made a potent mix, I felt invigorated.

We shared nuggets of our classroom practice, including Matt leading all of us in effective delivery of African drumming. Together, we re-evaluated curriculum units and their delivery, learning outcomes, assessment, resourcing, ensured curriculum delivery was genuinely musical, and considered the role of singing. We developed the first ever Year 9 Music Festival at the end of Matt's year one of ECT. A reminder of how the spark of aspiration and motivation, delivered and followed-through with excitement and energy, it seemed natural (and inevitable) that it was one of Matt's classes that emerged victorious at the end of the festival.

As someone frequently at fault of unleashing too much musical activity, for too many within the department, in our ECT I find a partner in crime, and together we grapple with how to effect exciting curriculum opportunities in a way that takes *just enough* of a risk!

The high points of the two years? Developing together, immersing ourselves within a team - learning from each other and thinking together. Finding the fount of our development within the music-learning in our classrooms and in our interactions with colleagues. Matt taking over the leadership of the A-level Music Technology when the Assistant Director of Music was ill, including holding resourcing conversations with SLT and overseeing the engagement of two unqualified teachers helping with the delivery.

The low points? Trying to fit within the boxes and blocks that are presented by the ECF. The content of the blocks is often not directly relevant to our subject, and we spent lots of time trying to reimagine the equivalent application in a music classroom. Or worse, it sometimes puts unwarranted emphasis on certain aspects of the subject in a bid to fit boxes designed for more core, desk-based subjects. The inflexibility of the timescale we found stifling - surely the base tenet of classroom management is the quality of the learning in the classroom, and yet we seemed to spend two blocks on organisation and management before we officially got to more learning and teaching-based considerations!

If we did it again, we would like to be able to dip into the blocks as and when was appropriate for our unique journey, in our subject, with our particular strengths, in our particular department in our particular school. Much of the content in the programme IS interesting and useful, and some of the research. But there is also lots of research in music education, and the need to focus on the ECF programme felt like it precluded our more subject- and school- meaningful engagement with CPD elsewhere.

I left my previous school as I was falling into stale habits after 17 years at the same place. My start at Owen's wasn't easy, and integrating took a while to feel natural, and there was Covid. The experience of working with an ECT has been part of a journey of rebirth and reinvigoration, both for me personally and for the music curriculum at Owen's, which we now aspire to make the beating heart of DAOS music.

## **Emma Johns**

Hitchin Girls School

I have thoroughly enjoyed my role as mentor. It has allowed me to develop a very positive working relationship with my ECT. The fact that we are in the same department has been a real strength as it has allowed us to personalise the programme, not just to him as a teacher, but to him as a subject specialist. The contextualisation of the materials to his classroom and students within the framework of our curriculum has, for me, been where the most success has occurred.

As an experienced teacher (who did their PGCE a fair old while ago!), reading and learning from literature and research has been an interesting opportunity for me to develop my own teaching in tandem with my ECT. This has led to engaging and meaty discussions about aspects of pedagogy and learning. This has led to whole department level additions to lesson resources, schemes of work and ways of working.



## **Chris Tanner**

Dame Alice Owen's School

Overall the experience of being an ECT mentor has been a very positive one - I have enjoyed the opportunity to work closely with my ECT and help shape her practice. I believe the programme is a real step forward in terms of teacher induction. It has given me a fresh perspective on my own training and practice - my ECT has certainly been well supported in the start of her career compared to previous generations of NQTs. It has also been empowering to take on the role of 'coach' rather than overall assessor, and I feel this has led to some very open and useful discussions about classroom practice.

However, at times the experience has been challenging: either because of technical problems with the platform, or because the course itself has been overly structured and bureaucratic. At these times the sessions have felt like a frustrating waste of time - we've tried hard to avoid 'box-ticking' exercises in favour of more personalised support for the ECT, but it is difficult to ignore the course when there is so much to get through.

I think the best elements of the course from the ECTs perspective have been those that enable the her to observe peers. My ECT found this very helpful, and having observations focused on particular areas of classroom practice were really productive. Personally, I have enjoyed the opportunity to reflect openly and regularly on my own classroom practice.

It was rewarding to refresh my knowledge of pedagogical research - particularly on areas that were not part of my own training. The focus on using the EEF website to investigate the effectiveness of different interventions was helpful. If I were to do it again I would like to make time to dig a little deeper into this, because it is clear that this kind of academic curiosity is something few ECTs (or even experienced colleagues) have time for among the tumult of the working week.

Because the course materials haven't always coincided with the needs of the ECT, we've had to make a lot of adjustments. Although the course is well thought-out and sequenced, it has been frustrating having to deal with specific aspects of teaching at specific times that were not appropriate for our subject and / or situation. More subject-specific materials and a more flexible approach, with a clearer overview of the main themes from the start might be more useful from this perspective.

We found the most efficient way of using the time was for productive (modelling?) tasks like joint planning. If I were to do it again, I would do this more regularly. I would also use more of the time to do collaborative marking.

What do I wish I had known from the start? That the role can conflict with my role as a HoD. The fact that the ECT mentoring counted for all my CPD has meant that I either ended up doing extra CPD, or missing out on development work that would have been of more benefit to me in my leadership role.

I'd really recommend mentoring to an established main scale teacher, or one looking to develop their confidence and expertise as a practitioner.

What I'm most proud of? My ECT. She has made excellent progress over the last two years, despite having been a very strong PGCE student. She has transitioned from the role of the bright and curious trainee into a more grounded and resilient classroom practitioner. I've been really impressed at her determination to maintain a semblance of a work-life balance. I also feel the progress she has made of late with classroom management has had an impact on both her enjoyment of the job, and on the emotional sustainability of the profession for her.

I feel like the week I spent with my ECT in Spain - nothing to do with the formal ECT programme - was a powerful teaching moment for us both. She was initially there to support a Spanish colleague and 'learn the ropes' of running a trip, but ended up taking a much more proactive role with me (as a non-hispanist) supporting her. I was so impressed with how easily she stepped up to leading the group, and to mentoring me as a beginner Spanish learner.

As much as I have enjoyed the experience of mentoring my ECT, I feel that the separation of the ECT programme from whole school CPD has narrowed her experience - especially as she has been developing within a languages 'silo'. She has missed out on some of the 'esprit de corps' that comes from working with colleagues from other departments, and especially with other ECTs.

My ECT is gaining in confidence and contributing more to the school as whole now that she has had responsibilities as a form tutor, and with running extracurricular activities. We've discussed this, and I think we agree that the different relationships this allows her to build with students (and with colleagues from different departments) will contribute to the sense of job satisfaction she eventually gets from the profession overall. I hope she realises how good a teacher she is, and how much better she will get at dealing with the pressures of the job as she gains in experience and confidence.



## **Ellie Nolan and Julie Macqueen**

Broadfield Academy

Our ECF journey over the last two years has been one of learning, reflection and improved practice for both our mentors and our ECTs. We have benefited from having a robust programme and research-led guidance to support mentor meetings and as a result, our ECTs have thrived.

Sharing research, such as materials from the EEF, in digestible chunks has allowed our ECTs to engage in the latest thinking and reflect in a meaningful way that has had a direct impact on their practice. Face to face regional training sessions allowed us all to network and make links with other practitioners in similar and contrasting settings.

As mentors, we have been encouraged by the EDT framework to put research back at the heart of our own practice. We quickly realised that we needed to strike the right balance with our contact time, to ensure that we were creating space for our early career teachers to engage fully in the self-directed study materials, but also to ensure we were adapting to meet the context-specific needs of the ECTs in our setting.

We are most proud of the individual progress that our ECTs have made, particularly with their positive classroom climates and behaviour for learning strategies. They are adaptive practitioners, who think flexibly about providing for the needs of the pupils in their class.

If we had to give one piece of advice to colleagues taking on the role of mentor in the future, it would be that consistency is key. Setting aside and communicating regular time for mentor meetings and drop-ins is crucial to offer the level of support needed.

**Kirsty Macnish and Laura Dilks**  
Cassiobury Infants and Nursery School

Are You Still an ECT?

Highlighters, post-it notes, pencils and pens  
Scribbles and annotations, so much to learn  
Teachers and mentors, friends and support  
How can I do it all? Two years, that's so long!

Meeting the children, meeting the parents  
Having discussions, tough ones and fun  
Seeing the children start to succeed  
Seeing the children begin to be able to read  
Planning the lessons, where to get ideas?  
Days getting shorter and going home in the dark

A new year is starting, a new topic for the term  
Confidence growing, resources accrued  
Parents evenings held, assessments submitted  
PPMs completed, children monitored, success stories written  
Spotlights provided and interventions completed  
School trips and sports days, reports and work nights out  
Your first year has finished, rest all summer long

You're back with a bang, Year 2 now begins  
It's more of the same, but you know what to do  
New children, new challenges,  
New successes, new lessons, new plans  
Confidence soaring, more challenge – yes please  
Shadowing roles, learning more than you need

You're holding your own

Are you still an ECT?

It's coming to an end, be proud of what you've done

A passion is seen in all that you do

You've found your vocation

The kids have been lucky to have you

Two years, where have they gone?!

## **Emma Birdsall**

### **Cherry Tree Primary School**

**Reflective.** You always reflect on all your lessons. You welcome feedback and always make changes towards your teaching.

**Energetic.** You are full of energy in your teaching with Year 1. On occasions there is energy on our runs! However, I look forward to running a 10k with you.

**Be Brave.** You led your first music CPD session. You might have felt very nervous, but it didn't show.

**Extra-Curricular Activities.** You go above and beyond to always make sure you take part to ensure the children have the best start in their life.

**Kind.** You are kind to yourself and to others. We all love working with you and look forward to working with you for another year.

**Achievement.** You have achieved a lot in the last two years. You can see the progress you have made in not only your teaching but in your confidence.

**Hard Working.** You always give 100% to your class and to the school.

**Music Leader.** You have been an inspiration to music and the curriculum. You not only take music assemblies but have taken children on music trips.

**Caring.** You care about everyone in your class ensuring they all achieve their full potential.

**Communication.** You have worked hard over the last two years to develop your communication skills when speaking to some of our lovely parents!

**Ambitious.** You are extremely ambitious to ensure that all your children make excellent progress. One child in particular you are encouraging to speak by the end of term and for the phonics test!

**Friend.** I believe that many staff in our school now count you as a friend and not only an ECT.

**Fantastic.** You are fabulous and fantastic and Cherry Tree are very lucky to have a teacher like you.

**Engaging.** You think about how to engage all children in your teaching and often think about differentiation for all.

**Resilient.** Some of the children in your first year of teaching might have pushed every button going but you didn't give up and you can see the enjoyment you are having with your class this year.

**Teamwork.** You fully understand the benefits of working as a team and I can see how you are working in a team within KS1.

**You.** You should be proud of your first two years of teaching and everything you have achieved. I certainly am!

## **Rob Thorp**

Hitchin Boys' School

Seeing the ECTs develop and grow in confidence has been a real highlight over the two years. They now feel comfortable to articulate their views and make valued contributions to our day-to-day running within the department.

Trying to balance the workload of this with other school commitments has been challenging. It can sometimes impinge on your evening or weekends.

Reading some of the resources developed for the ECTs has also benefited my own teaching practice or at least reminded me to try new things. It really does make you unpick your own teaching style and look at strategies to improve it. This has been further enhanced by the dialogue with the ECTs.

I am most proud of watching the ECTs deliver high quality lessons, having great relationships with the students they teach and really enthuse their students with their subjects.

## **Sayyeda-Maryam Jessa**

Watford St John's Primary School

The programme has been a fantastic opportunity for my ECT and I to develop our practise. The two-year programme allowed ECTs to focus on developing teaching practice before being expected to take on responsibility. I personally feel that this has allowed, my ECT, to blossom as a teacher. Although, I joined the programme for the second year only, I have found and would advise that, while the materials may aid the self-study side of the training, it is important to use the time with your mentee to best suit the mentee, discussing points that are most relevant to the week to support them in the challenges they are facing at that time.

It has been an absolute pleasure to get to know and mentor my ECT, Tom. With the children at the centre of his practice, Tom always put in his all and should be proud of the outcomes he has achieved in his time as an ECT. I have no doubt, he will go on to do great work with children.

**Laura Hodgson**

St Paul's C of E VA Primary School, Chipperfield

How can two years have gone by quite so fast,  
All the things that you've learnt and you've got there at last.

The planning, resourcing, it takes such a while,  
You make it fun and engaging and teach with a smile.

Dealing with parents and all of their woe,  
'It's ok, they are fine and now you must go!'

Two classes of children you have now taught,  
And many changes in staff that you've had to support!

Too many things to fit in, you don't know how?  
Should it be next? Or should it be now?

But together we talked, took our time, thought it through,  
Compiled different plans, worked out what to do.  
(Well most of the time!!)

But not just coping with teaching, other changes in life,  
Buying a house and becoming a wife!  
(and a baby on the way!!)

You've been a pleasure to mentor, now we've come to an end,  
You're a fully-fledged teacher but also my friend.



**Lorraine Hoskins**

Highfield School

It has been a pleasure to mentor my ECT, Mollie Laycock, over the last two years. Her endless efforts and commitment to her role as a teacher has been incredibly rewarding to observe and support. We navigated our way through the ECF together and utilized the support material to suit our needs. This flexibility allowed for informative discussions about pedagogy and the opportunity to trial and experiment. I learnt a lot from this experience also which kept my teaching practice fresh and ever evolving. I think that is what is important when you teach. The need to trial, experiment, find what works but always be open to change. What works for some will not work for all and this constant variation is what makes our job so exciting. My ECT, Mollie took each opportunity to trial and explore these ideas and always gained from it. I could not have asked for an ECT that worked so hard over the years and managed each up and down so well. Congratulations to all ECTs on making it through. You deserve it!

**Nick Phillips**

Verulam School

The programme has provided clear structure and with increasing confidence allowed me the opportunity to adapt resources without being hamstrung by the session notes. The research guidance has provided back up to the pedagogical skills you have developed with your mentee.

My practice has changed by seeing the two year programme as not just about giving but taking back as the ECTs have been at the forefront of up to date teaching practice. I have therefore, been able to reflect on the modules to question my own practice and re-think ideas.

It has been important to share your understanding of the process with your fellow mentors as it keeps you centred. Informal discussions are helpful and avoid you working in a 'silo', instead corroborating what you are doing and where you are at.

## **Charlotte Gunns**

Hitchin Girls' School

I have found it useful to have the programme sketched out in terms of focus areas for the week. I sometimes found it confusing when the modules didn't fit with the school year (for example, communicating with parents should be in Sept/Oct, not July?) I have enjoyed reading about Rosenshine's findings. Being an ECT mentor means that I can push myself and try new things that I have seen my trainee try / heard them talk about. I am more confident with trying new things. I am proud of my trainee getting to the point where she doesn't really need me as she has become so independent and so confident. If I were to give some advice I would advise a future mentor to make sure they stay on top of the resources, reading in advance where possible.

## **Heidi Lewis**

Skyswood Primary and Nursery School

Highs have included building a really positive relationship with my ECT. It has been lovely to be part of her development and to see the relationship she has with the children and adults alike. It has also helped me personally reflect on my own teaching. There have not really been any lows. As always, time can be an issue, but the protected time has certainly supported this.

All of the sessions have been useful in their own way but blocks 5 and 6 were particularly useful. Block 5, because it focused on assessment and what we mean by high quality assessment and feedback in order for children to make progress and block 6, with it relating to it being a 'people profession'. Building trusting relationships in teaching is essential.

I am most proud of the confident, assertive teacher that Lucy has become. Watching her flourish has been wonderful. I am also proud of being there for her and supporting her through as a colleague and friend. I have in turn, learned from her.

The one piece of advice that I would like to give to a colleague in my position is do not panic before you begin the process. The role of the mentor is to do exactly that, mentor and be there for your ECT. Yes, there are the blocks to work through and these provide great structure, but there is the opportunity to have the flexibility to go 'off-piste' if necessary because of an issue that has arisen in a particular week for example.

## **Amanda Rayment**

Monks Walk School

Mentoring using the new ECF after years of mentoring other mentees, including NQTs, meant that the prescriptive nature of the new programme felt strange to work with. My new mentee also joined us with many very considerable strengths and so much of the programme was superfluous to our needs. Indeed, in her second year, my mentee took on a 'Teaching and Learning' responsibility, leading a group of about 15 fellow (including experienced) teachers in after-school INSET sessions. The compulsory CPD programme at our school is also very strong and has covered in detail over the last couple of years topics also covered by the ECF programme e.g. feedback, retrieval practice, also making much of the new ECF programme not useful for us.

We ensured that we met every week in the first year and every fortnight in the second year. My mentoring approach has always been largely coaching in style, and so, although I quickly checked the material for each session to see what was there, we didn't follow the programme's suggestions for timings and detailed advice. Noting what topics were being covered did start some useful discussions, however. It always bothered me that what was being covered should have been covered in the training to reach QTS. I understood the importance of revisiting ideas previously addressed, but I did wonder how trainees who have been given QTS still needed this level of close monitoring.

I understand that a big incentive for the new programme was to address the number of teachers who leave the profession within the first five years. Of the people I know who have left the profession within this time frame, I am sure that this programme would not have made a difference to their decision to leave. Indeed, with all of the extra time expected of the trainee to follow the programme, it may well have put them off sooner. Yes, I believe that ECTs need regular, meaningful and useful support in their first year or two after achieving QTS, but I believe that this needs to be based on the individual needs of the ECT.

The main positive outcome for my ECT is that she knew she had that protected allocated regular time slot with me, in which she felt safe to be open and honest with whatever we felt should be the focus at that time. Unlike with the previous NQT system, where the mentor also did the formal lesson observations and assessments, knowing that someone else was undertaking that role meant that again we could discuss ideas freely to try and assess how successful or not they might have been. Through my questioning, informal observations and our discussions, I was able to provide our own highly personalised programme aimed specifically at my mentee's needs.

## **Lauren Edwards**

Sandringham School

The ECF has provided a cohesive structure to support ECTs with a similar framework to that they received in their training, and effectively guarantees them a substantial level of support over two years. The dedicated time we have had in our timetables each week has ensured that the ECT's professional development remains vital in their first two years, instead of becoming overwhelmed by wider school priorities or with workload. It has not only held us both accountable, but it has been substantially research based and helped to root our pedagogical discussions. I have often used the recommended session materials to form the foundation of our weekly meetings, as well as supplementary pedagogical material and subject specific guidance.

The basis for our mentoring relationship has gradually shifted towards the ECT taking ownership themselves, as often they guide the discussion and bring issues to the weekly meetings. We have consistently ensured that wellbeing and workload are priorities for our discussions and have worked through multiple scenarios over the past two years.

I am proud of seeing my ECTs development since they joined the school as a trainee teacher, having fully immersed themselves in the faculty and become an integral member of the team. It has been fantastic to see my ECT build on their training at the school, to take ownership of particular schemes of learning in the faculty, to share resources with other team members, to contribute important decisions, and ultimately to continue reflecting and developing their practice.

It has been a fantastic experience to mentor them and to also learn a great deal myself in the process. I hope my ECT is proud of their progress; they have become a highly confident and competent practitioner and subsequently will be taking on a position of responsibility from September.

## **Katherine Rowe**

Hitchin Girls School

I was an NQT mentor two years prior to starting the ECT mentoring, so I am able to compare both experiences. My previous mentoring involved meeting my colleague on a weekly basis, and talking about what they had done, and any concerns they might have. One of the best aspects of the ECT mentoring programme is that the carefully defined framework allows us to have potentially difficult conversations which we may have avoided if we were not having to focus on that aspect of teaching because of the way the session has been structured. The module on behaviour for learning was particularly useful as I knew that there were some issues which my ECT was struggling with, but they didn't feel they could address them with me for whatever reason. The sessions we had were very helpful in allowing us to unpick behaviour issues in a general, safe way, using the research as our basis. We could then look at theoretical ways to address the issues, finally arriving at the key issues that were causing difficulty in the classroom. The fact that I was a supportive colleague rather than the person judging performance and writing the reports was beneficial to our professional relationship.

It has helped that our meetings have been timetabled, but we have also been impacted by times when we haven't been able to meet for various reasons (our meetings have been on a Monday this year). We also both struggled to access the course initially due to technical difficulties we both faced, but I am sure that these were just teething problems for the course itself.

I have enjoyed having the opportunity to engage with all of the research materials. I have taught for over 25 years, and it has been something of a revelation to be able to access academic studies which ratify some of my classroom practices and often encourage me to change certain behaviours! The research on the psychology of memory, namely moving knowledge from the working to the long-term memory, has been particularly impactful. Coe's research on what makes effective learning has also been helpful. I am much more mindful of how my students are learning in (and out of) the classroom, and I try to create activities to ensure that they can activate the knowledge they have.

I wish I had known that the tech issue would eventually be resolved. The difficulties at the start did taint my perception of the programme somewhat, and we had to rush to catch up during the first term, which was not ideal.

I am most proud of how my ECT has developed as a professional. They have found the confidence to test out new teaching methods and activities, and have embraced the idea of trying new ways to gauge students' understanding, for example, using mini-whiteboards (a potential behaviour minefield, but worth the effort required in terms of managing the class) and different assessment software. They had experienced little live teaching prior to joining us as they had trained during the pandemic, and still had to wear a mask in the classroom at the start of their first term with us. This year they have organised and led a trip to Verulamium for a coachful of Year 9 students, and showed how capable and resourceful they were on our departmental trip to Greece at Easter.

I would advise a colleague in my position to try to find/make the time to observe small chunks of lessons. This hasn't been easy due to timetabling issues – not being free to observe and not being able to ask for cover. The observations I have undertaken have allowed me to quickly see areas of strength and areas that require further development.



**Caroline Evans**

Hitchin Girls School

I have really enjoyed the time with my ECT in these sessions over the last two years. It has been great to have time set aside to talk about our practice and be creative in ways to develop it. The evidence-based research and progressive tasks have given us a platform to discuss areas we wouldn't have done otherwise. This has led to an increased depth and breadth to our discussions, which has come up naturally from the programme, rather than a criticism of the ECTs practice. It's been easy to apply the theory directly to our subject, and share our experiences. I have learnt a lot from my ECT and we have worked well as a team. I enjoyed going to watch my ECT teach, and seeing her put something we had planned into practice. We were able to reflect and build on the task she had created, and she fed back in a departmental meeting for others to use in their lessons. She has been really proactive at putting theory into practice both personally and on a departmental level on other occasions as well, which has been brilliant.

I have found it helpful to print off the full notes to read ahead and during the session. It's great to have answers to the questions there as a guide, and be able to spend more time on parts that are most relevant. We sometimes use the time to talk about departmental specific events coming up, etc, so we have to be disciplined to get onto working through the programme.

I'm really proud of the progress she has made, and her creativity in addressing the range of topics.

## **Claire Griggs**

### The Marlborough Science Academy

I have enjoyed the mentoring process over the last 2 years and feel that the ECF modules have been a great guide, especially in the first year. We used and adapted the materials to suit our needs. The opportunity for ECTs to experiment with new ideas and then reflect on the successes created an open dialogue and also made me reflect on my own teaching too. In year two it felt a bit restrictive at times, and we had to 'shoe horn' in tasks/focus areas a little when the meeting time could have been better spent focussed on addressing the current ideas/schemes/students/issues etc.

As a small (often solo) department it was really interesting to mentor an ECT from another small (solo) subject, it made our meetings and discussions focus on pedagogy to develop lesson ideas and solve problems, rather than on the course content. The process has also encouraged me to reflect on my own teaching and develop a new SOW and activities too.

Helen has been a brilliant ECT to mentor, she is a great teacher and has built a great rapport with her classes across three subject areas, which is a huge achievement as an ECT. Helen is reflective and responds to feedback in a really positive way, often coming back to meetings at a later date having tweaked something in a lesson after discussion and it been a success.

Helen has also contributed to the wider school running a 'Game Changer' day and textiles club which students talk fondly about. This in turn has generated enough student interest in the subject to run textiles at KS4, which is a brilliant and testament to Helen's hard work. Congratulations Helen, and all the ECTs!

## What One Thing?



“Children will rarely say if they don't understand something, because they don't know it's a misconception.” *Caitlin Carey, St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School*

“Teaching for neurodiversity works for all - all children are able and have the right to learn.” *Kathryn Orviss, Garden Fields JMI School*

“The work never ends so have a finishing time and don't stay too late. Prioritise!” *Claire Bilsborough, Green Lanes Primary School*

“My school's aim and vision; ‘Anything is Possible’.” *Hannah Smith, Parkgate Infants and Nursery School*

“All behaviour is a form of communication.” *Megan Tierney, Bishop Wood C of E Junior School*

“No two days are the same, reflect on the bad days and celebrate the little wins.” *Kay Smyth, Yavneh College*

“We have to meet children where they are, not where we'd like them to be.” *Ruairí Hegarty, St. Alban & St. Stephen Catholic Primary School*

“Remember tomorrow is a new day.” *Aishah Mohammed, Oaklands Primary School*

“You might be the one constant in that child's life.” *Danielle Males, St Mary's Welham Green*

“Smiles are contagious.” *Millie Irish, Galley Hill Primary School*



“You are the climate in your classroom, bring the sunshine and positive energy focused on learning!” *Deanna Christou, Sandringham School*

“Model the behaviour that you want to see.” *Atif Akhlaq, Sir John Lawes school*

“Sometimes good enough is good enough. Not everything will go perfectly. Be flexible and adaptive.” *Ben Reddings, St George’s School*

“Examining methods of teaching and learning opportunities in order to narrow the attainment gap. Launched a scholars programme for students of pupil premium status to support cultural capital, academic learning and aspiration and developing skills in independent research.” *Siobhan Kelly, Marlborough Science Academy*

“Always say something positive to each student, school may be the only place that they get praise.” *Ellyse Wyse, Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School*

“There are always 3 versions of what you say; what you think you’ve said, what your students think you’ve said and what you’ve actually said! Always check for understanding.” *Anthony Lambert, Katherine Warington School*

“Kindness and patience can go an incredibly long way.” *Olivia Hitching, The Hertfordshire and Essex High School and Science College*

“Importance of positivity in the classroom. Making time for my wellbeing.” *Lauren Herlock, Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School*

“Work hard in the beginning with a new class to build strong relationships, clear expectations and routines so you can enjoy the rest of your year (mostly).” *Giovana Picone, The Ridgeway Academy*

“Passion is contagious!” *Kady Leigh, Goffs - Churchgate Academy*







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