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This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Inquiry into Teacher recruitment and retention](#)

Ymateb gan: Prifysgol Southampton
Response from: University of Southampton

Inquiry: Teacher Recruitment and Retention

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The following evidence is based on the Society for Educational Studies-funded research project conducted in the South of England entitled, 'Nature and Effectiveness of Mentorship Provision for Supporting Early Career Teachers in England' ([Gupta & Newman, 2025¹](#)).

A. Executive summary

This submission draws on primary research, situated within the context of teacher recruitment and retention crisis, for which data was produced in 2023-24, through 36 semi-structured, hour-long interviews with school leaders, early-career teachers (ECTs) and ECT mentors, followed by three 2-hour long focus groups, one for each group (school leaders responsible for ECT programme), those who receive this support (ECTs) and those who provide it (ECT mentors) across four secondary schools in the South of England, encompassing local authority, multi-academy, independent, and faith-based settings.

The findings, although based primarily in the context of England, may still be applicable to the Welsh case, demonstrate that inconsistent and undervalued mentorship provision is a critical but underexploited factor in the current recruitment and retention crisis. This research calls for targeted investment in mentorship infrastructure, supported by subject-specific training, clearer progression pathways, and systemic recognition of mentors' roles across schools.

The Mentorship Toolkit: A scalable resource for system-wide improvement

In response to the need for high-quality, context-sensitive mentorship guidance, the project team developed a Research Evidence-Based Toolkit for Enhancing Mentorship Practices for Early Career

Teachers ([Gupta & Newman, 2024²](#)). The Toolkit draws on research data (interviews and focus groups with ECTs and ECT mentors) and triangulated effectiveness indicators across four types of secondary schools in the South of England. *Nature and Effectiveness of Mentorship Provision for Supporting Early Career Teachers in England: An empirical investigation*. Southampton: University of Southampton.

the South of England). It translates empirical findings into actionable strategies tailored for schools, mentors, and system leaders.

The Toolkit addresses three core pillars of mentorship provision—the Three Cs:

1. **Culture:** Fostering a school-wide ethos of professional learning where mentoring is integral to identity and development, not an add-on.
2. **Conditions:** Creating the time, trust, and relational space for mentoring to thrive, including clear structures and time allocation.
3. **Customisation:** Developing personalised, flexible, and subject-specific professional development plans that reflect teachers' unique trajectories.

The Toolkit has already been piloted through an increasingly expanding network of currently 15 school leaders from primarily the South of England, who used it to assess and refine their own mentorship provision. Early feedback indicates improvements in the visibility and value of mentoring within their institutions, a renewed commitment to subject-specific CPD, and greater alignment between ECT progression and school development planning.

This Toolkit is freely available, designed to be adaptable to a variety of school settings, and provides a ready-made instrument for supporting the DfE's teacher workforce strategy. It could be scaled nationally to support regional hubs, MATs, and local authorities in self-evaluating and improving their mentorship practices.

Recommendation: The government should consider endorsing and supporting the wider adoption of this Toolkit as part of its regional interventions strategy, particularly in areas facing acute recruitment and retention pressures.

B. Key points in response to the purpose of the consultation

1. Investment in mentorship provisions

The problem is not only one of recruitment volume, but of retention capability. Teachers' long-term commitment to the profession remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels. Current statistics around teacher intended retention indicate that only around 60% of teachers intend to be in the profession in 3 years, down from 75% pre-pandemic ([Teacher Tapp. 2025](#)³)

Our research shows that attrition among teachers is closely linked to the quality and context-sensitivity of the mentorship they receive. Secondary schools in particular require subject-specialist mentors, yet our research found that subject specificity receives less focus than needed in the current mentorship provision and programme content, which undermines the support the ECTs

² Gupta, A., & Newman, R. (2024). *Research evidence-based toolkit for enhancing mentorship practices for Early Career Teachers*. Southampton: University of Southampton.

³https://teachertapp.com/app/uploads/2025/04/RELEASED_Teacher-Recruitment-and-Retention-in-2025.pdf

need to develop classroom confidence and pedagogical identity in subject areas.

We suggest that the government should invest directly in time and training for and recognition of the role of mentors. Mentors are central to ECT development, yet receive little recognition or resources, contributing to workload stress and diminishing the appeal of teaching as a long-term career.

Prioritise retention-through-development

Retention is not solely about incentives or working conditions; it is fundamentally about whether teachers feel they are learning, supported, and growing in their roles. Too often, early-career teachers experience induction as compliance-focused and depersonalised, which leads to disillusionment and exit. A developmental approach to retention focuses on mentoring that builds confidence, identity, and professional purpose.

This means treating ECTs as long-term assets whose needs evolve over time—not just as trainees to be “ticked off” a statutory checklist. When teachers are meaningfully developed, not merely assessed, they are far more likely to stay, thrive, and contribute as future mentors and leaders.

Invest in mentor capacity

Mentors must be given the time and space to support ECTs meaningfully. Currently, many are expected to mentor in addition to full teaching loads, which compromises the depth and responsiveness of support. Ringfenced funding for protected time would allow mentors to plan, observe, meet, and reflect with their mentees—activities that are essential to successful mentoring but often sacrificed under workload pressure.

In addition, formal status incentives should be introduced to recognise mentoring as a skilled and career-enhancing role. This could include creating designated ‘Lead Mentor’ positions, a practice that exists in ITE and would be useful to be adopted in schools. Such recognition would enhance the appeal of mentoring and help retain experienced teachers in the system.

2. Progress in addressing recruitment and retention through distributive leadership across schools

Our study evidences:

- That well-supported mentorship leads to ECTs as well as mentors feeling valued, retained, and professionally ambitious.
- That schools embedding mentorship in their organisational culture may report stronger staff cohesion and more positive recruitment outcomes.
- That ECTs feel demotivated when mentorship is viewed as a tick-box exercise, disconnected from their school’s broader vision or subject focus.

We would recommend a national framework for mentorship, which should define the work that effective mentors do and draw on credible academic and professional evidence that encompasses a

wide knowledge base for mentoring, including subject, pedagogical, professional and relational expertise. Establish an accreditation pathway that formalises and recognises a mentor's significant role in teacher development and raises the professional profile and status of being a mentor. These measures would ensure that all ECTs would benefit from mentors with deep knowledge and receive high-quality guidance regardless of school context and beyond technical proficiency.

To enhance this framework, subject-specific continuing professional development (CPD) must be embedded into mentor training. Partnerships with professional associations and subject networks can provide access to discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge and communities of practice, thereby addressing one of the most commonly cited gaps in current mentorship provision.

Build regional mentorship hubs

The government should support the development of regional mentorship hubs that facilitate peer learning among mentors and ECT Coordinators. These hubs can serve as spaces for sharing good practice, co-developing resources, and offering structured support to schools, particularly those with limited internal mentoring capacity. They would also provide a mechanism for monitoring quality and supporting continuous improvement.

By decentralising mentorship support in this way, the system would foster collaboration, reduce professional isolation, and create scalable networks of expertise across diverse school types and geographies. We are, for example, currently developing resources (using Higher Education Innovation Funding from the ESRC) collaboratively with more than 15 school leaders from schools in the South of England as part of our ECT Coordinator Mentorship Network (co-founded in 2024 by Dr Gupta and Mrs Newman). The government should fund and proactively support such collaborative and collegial spaces, to build mentorship practice regionally.

C. Closing reflections

This evidence makes clear that mentorship is not a peripheral add-on to teacher development but a pivotal determinant of workforce sustainability in secondary education. The government must treat mentorship with the same seriousness as initial training and pay incentives. Support for mentors and the embedding of flexible, relational mentorship models are essential not only for teacher retention but also for improving pupil outcomes through teaching quality.