



# Exploring school-level professional development in schools with high pupil disadvantage in England – Work Package 2



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## Study Team:

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## Background

This work package is part of a two-year investigation into the Department for Education's (DfE) Coherent Offer of teacher professional development (PD): Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Early Career Teacher Entitlement (ECTE, previously

known as Early Career Framework/ECF-based induction and training) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), underpinned by a shared evidence base. It continues work begun in 2024 (see details in Protocol 1 outline and interim report) and runs to September 2026.

Colleagues across the school system are engaging with the Coherent Offer, from ITT to NPQ Executive Leadership. Earlier evaluations have mainly focused on individual programmes (e.g. ECF, Gu et al., 2023), and we still do not fully understand how schools' engagement with different components of the Coherent Offer, including the evidence base, contributes to school-level outcomes (e.g. enhanced PD culture).

We want to find out how schools are using the learning gained to drive their PD forward, the mechanisms at play, what conditions support and limit PD in schools, and how engagement with and/or development of the Coherent Offer may be related to pupil outcomes. We particularly want to explore how schools make use of the Coherent Offer to produce a combined impact greater than the sum of the individual parts, especially in schools with high pupil disadvantage. The primary objective of the project is to develop and share **tailored strategies** to better support schools especially serving highly disadvantaged communities, to make better use of the Coherent Offer even under challenging conditions to drive school improvement.

Our Work Package 1 identified school culture as a key enabler of engagement with the Coherent Offer, with professional learning embedded in daily relationships and routines. This points to the value of adopting an **ecological perspective** for Work Package 2, focusing not only on outcomes for individual teachers and school leaders but on how people and resources interact within schools and a wider system (Daly et al., 2020). We also adopt a **realist approach**, which examines what works, for whom, and under what conditions (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Realist methods help identify how school contexts enable or hinder mechanisms that mobilise Coherent Offer programme participants and training materials to shape school-level outcomes.

Following Work Package 1, we acknowledge the conceptually complicated nature of 'coherence'. The term refers to both the features of the Coherent Offer's design (e.g. the way ITT, ECF, and NPQs are intended to build on and complement one another) and the results the offer hopes to

bring about (e.g. colleagues developing a shared vision and becoming coherent about evidence-informed teaching). To clarify, 'coherent' in the 'coherent offer' refers to the intended design of PD training and pathways, whereas 'coherence' in this document – and for the project – focuses on how the offer is experienced and enacted within schools.

Additionally, Lindvall and Ryve (2019) observe that coherence can be understood both as a process (e.g. for this project, an ongoing process of aligning PD with school priorities, and/or of strengthening alignment between teachers and leaders) and as an end state (e.g. most colleagues consistently employing evidence-informed teaching). While the coherent offer is designed to create coherence, in Work Package 2, we will continue exploring how this offer is experienced in schools, especially those with high pupil disadvantage. This includes understanding what forms of coherence operate as enabling conditions within a school, how resources (e.g. colleagues participating in the Coherent Offer) are mobilised, how coherence as both a process and an outcome is strengthened and achieved, and which relationships support coherence in practice.

To enable meaningful comparisons between school contexts, Work Package 2 will include a diverse selection of schools to build a full picture of how schools engage with the Coherent Offer, deploy resources, and realise impact under different contexts.

## Research questions

1. How do different colleagues' interactions with the Coherent Offer, and each other, work together to achieve school-level outcomes? **[mechanisms + outcomes]**
2. What are the contextual enablers and barriers of the above? **[contexts]**
3. What methods may help capture contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes quantitatively? **[methodology]**
4. How is engagement with and/or development of the Coherent Offer at the school level associated with pupil outcomes? **[association]**



## Research design

Key objectives & RQs	Design overview
<p><b>To further develop our account of mechanisms and contexts [RQ1 &amp; RQ2]</b></p>	<p><b>A mixed-methods realist approach</b></p> <p><u>Qualitative strand</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups with school stakeholders to refine and consolidate Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configurations using a purposive sample, including schools that might align with our candidate CMOs in terms of having or not having the relevant contextual factors (Byng et al. 2005).</li> <li>• To inform qualitative sampling, we may consider Work Package 1 insights, secondary data analysis findings, and other NIOT research project insights.</li> </ul> <p><u>Quantitative strand</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to feasibility, conduct a national survey to quantitatively capture school-level CMO profiles in a broader sample.</li> <li>• Correlational and/or disaggregated analyses of survey data to triangulate the refined CMO configurations emerging from the qualitative strand.</li> </ul>
<p><b>To explore quantitative measures [RQ3]</b></p>	<p><b>Literature search and review</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To lay a foundation for survey item generation (considering literature that validates surveys and theorises key concepts).</li> <li>• To identify proxies/indicators of our refined CMO configurations that may be obtained from the secondary dataset.</li> </ul>
<p><b>To explore potential associations with pupil outcomes [RQ4]</b></p>	<p><b>Exploratory quantitative analyses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use secondary datasets and/or survey data, pending on feasibility of pairing them at the school level.</li> <li>• Consider qualitative insights from Work Package 1 and throughout Work Package 2 to identify the factors (including covariates) to be associated with pupil outcomes.</li> <li>• Correlational, and/or regression analyses, with or without disaggregating data by demographic and organisational characteristics.</li> </ul>





## Planned timeline

<b>Dec – Jun 2026</b>	Literature search and review
<b>Dec – Jun 2026</b>	Work Package 2 survey development, data collection and analysis (including secondary data analyses)
<b>Jan – Jun 2026</b>	Work Package 2 interviews/focus groups and data analysis
<b>Mar – Aug 2026</b>	Participatory workshops to co-develop strategies
<b>Sep 2026</b>	Sharing strategies outputs and resources with the sector
<b>Jul – Sep 2026</b>	Producing and finalising the summary report
<b>Dec 2026</b>	Producing two academic papers

## References

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