

Participant Information Sheet

Exploring school-level professional development across diverse school contexts in England (National survey)

Invitation

*You are being invited to take part in a research project by: the National Institute of Teaching (NIoT), the South West Institute for Teaching (SWIFT), the David Ross Education Trust (DRET) and OneCornwall. The research project is funded by the Department for Education (DfE). The study has been approved by the NIoT Research Ethics Committee (Approval code: **NIOT-26-5**). Before you decide whether you would like to participate, please take time to carefully read the following information.*

1. What is the purpose of the study?

In recent policy reform, the Department for Education (DfE, 2022) have created a 'golden thread' of evidence that underpins Professional Development (PD) that covers every stage of a teacher's career at school [Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)].

The Golden Thread policy's theory of change outlines that ITE, ECF, and NPQs *together* contribute to an improved teacher workforce and enhanced teaching quality (DfE, 2025). However, the mechanisms through which these reforms operate, and the contextual conditions that enable or constrain their success at the school level, remain poorly understood.

To address this, our research adopts a realist evaluation approach (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Realist inquiry seeks to move beyond the question of whether a programme works, instead asking what works, for whom, in what contexts, and why.

In the earlier stages of this project, we conducted exploratory interviews to identify a set of candidate ideas of what works, for whom, and in what contexts. The current phase seeks to test, refine, and consolidate those, and aims to build an explanatory understanding of how ITE, ECF, and NPQs and their evidence base work together in a school and how school-level impact is achieved in diverse school settings. Such an understanding will lay a foundation for us to co-develop strategies with school leaders for schools, especially those serving high pupil disadvantage, to make better use of PD.

2. Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to take part because you have experience of leading and/or shaping the design and delivery of CPD in your school. Your school may have been selected because it represents particular contextual factors we want to understand more fully, such as regions, educational phases, school sizes and types, and levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility.

3. Do I have to take part?

Participation is **voluntary**. You have the right to decline to complete the survey and/or withdraw your survey responses after submitting the survey, provided that you contact the research team. We offer two withdrawal options: participation withdrawal and data withdrawal.

- Participation withdrawal: you have the right to stop continuing to participate in this research **at any time** before you submit your survey responses.
- Data withdrawal: you can withdraw your data before the data have been anonymised. This will be **1 week after your survey submission date**. After this point, it will not be possible to remove your data because it will have been anonymised and combined with other study material and included in the early stages of analysis.

You can contact Dr Yuchen Zong y.zong@niot.org.uk (research fellow) to let us know your decision or have a discussion with us.

4. What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to complete a one-off survey via Microsoft Form, and we envisage it will take 12-15min approx. The survey can be completed in your own time on a computer or smartphone, but your survey progress cannot be saved for a later date due to the technical limitations of anonymous surveys.

Please note that the consent form is provided **at the end**. Your responses will **only be saved once you provide consent** and **click the submit button**, so you are welcome to look through the questions first without committing to participate. If you



do not agree to any of the consent statements (except the final one regarding consent for future research), you may **exit the survey**, and **none of your data will be saved**.

During the survey, you will be asked to answer questions about your professional role; professional development practices in your school; leadership, policies and school structures that support school-level professional development; and teaching and learning practices.

You will also be asked to provide your school's Unique Reference Number (URN) *OR* your school's name and postcode. We ask for this mainly because:

- 1) It would allow you to withdraw your survey responses after submission should you wish to do so;
- 2) We hope to link survey data to secondary datasets obtained from the DfE regarding pupil attainment and participation in ITT, ECF and NPQ programmes to explore whether any patterns emerge; and
- 3) We may derive demographic information about schools and thus provide richer context for interpreting the findings.

Please rest assured that survey responses will be **anonymised for analysis and reported in aggregate form**. This will be done by assigning a randomised code to replace your school's URN OR name and post code when survey responses are downloaded, prior to any data being entered into statistical software (e.g., R). Our findings will be reported at an aggregate level, for instance, focusing on overarching patterns of PD engagement among schools with higher-than-average and those with lower-than-average FSM levels. This means that **no individual or individual school will normally be identifiable in any survey-related findings**.

It is also important to emphasise that this survey, and the wider project, aims to support schools in making better use of the DfE's PD offer to drive school improvements by exploring, refining and consolidating the ideas of what works, for whom and under what circumstance. This study does **not** intend to evaluate the performance of any individual schools.

To thank you for your time and effort, we will offer participants the opportunity to enter a prize draw for the chance to win one of **6 x £50 e-vouchers** for their schools.

Participation in the prize draw is **voluntary and optional**. You will see a specific link to the prize draw form *once you submit the main survey responses*. We do not collect any personal data as part of the main survey. If you choose to enter the prize draw, we will collect your name, contact details, and region. Providing this information is optional and only required to enter the draw.

Your data will be used **solely to administer** the prize draw (e.g. contacting winners, issuing prizes, and publishing limited winner information). By opting in, you consent to this use. Your data will be stored securely, **kept separate from main survey responses**, and will not be used to identify you in the research. It will be retained only for as long as necessary to run the prize draw and then securely deleted.

You can find full details in [Prize draw terms and conditions privacy statement.pdf](#).

5. What are the potential risks and how will my data be protected?

We do **not** anticipate any risks in taking part in the research, although we will provide you with contact details (please see Section 7) in case you have any concerns.

The data we will store will include:

- **Your consent form.** This will be held securely at NIoT and will not be made public. This will be retained for a period of 10 years.
- **Anonymised survey data.** All identifying information will be removed from data. Please speak to the research team if you have concerns about this. All survey data will be held securely at NIoT and will not be made public. They will be stored for a period of 10 years and, with your consent, may be used for future research purposes.

Your data will be kept confidential, except when legally required (e.g., required by the court) or there is disclosure of harms. The data will be used in accordance with the [Data Protection Act 2018](#) and [the UK GDPR](#).

6. What will happen to the results from the research?

Following the research, we will analyse the data and turn it into research and professional outputs such as a project summary report, conference presentations, journal articles, and strategies sources for teachers and school leaders. We will share these with you, the NIoT, the Department for Education, and with the broader sector. We may share interim findings through the NIoT LinkedIn account, providing updates through our research newsletter and our [project webpage](#).

7. If you have questions or would like to keep in touch, please see the following:

- Questions about the study and/or your participation, please contact
 - Dr Yuchen Zong, y.zong@niot.org.uk (Research Fellow)
- For concerns about ethical issues, please contact research.ethics@niot.org.uk.
- If you have a concern about the way this study processes personal data, we request that you raise your concern with us in the first instance (see the details above). Alternatively, you can contact NIoT's Data Protection Officer, Shaun Dillon, at s.dillon@niot.org.uk, and/or the NIoT's Research Ethics Committee at research.ethics@niot.org.uk.
- If you remain dissatisfied, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office, the body responsible for enforcing data protection legislation in the UK, at <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>

Thank you for taking the time to read through this information sheet.