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Teacher Development Programmes Theory of Change

Final report

October 2025

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Glossary of abbreviations

AB	Appropriate body
CCF	Core Content Framework
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
ECF	Early Career Framework – both the content description and the framework of training and support, up to August 2025
ECT	Early Career Teacher
ECTE	Early Career Teacher Entitlement, from September 2025
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
ITTECF	Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework – the common framework for ITT and ECTE from September 2025
LN PQ	Leadership National Professional Qualification
NIoT	National Institute of Teaching
NPQ	National Professional Qualification
SNPQ	Specialist National Professional Qualification
TD	Teacher development
ToC	Theory of Change – used to refer to both logic model alone and the supporting information
TSH	Teaching School Hubs
TSHC	Teaching School Hubs Council

Introduction

To support transformation of the national training and support offer for teachers and leaders at all stages of their career, DfE has made substantial reforms to its teacher development (TD) programmes and associated delivery systems and infrastructure, including revising the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework (CCF), implementing the Early Career Framework (ECF), more recently combining the two to form the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) and introducing a reformed suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). Alongside this, DfE established the National Institute of Teaching¹ (NlOT) and redesignated a national network of Teaching School Hubs² (TSHs).

The TD reforms aimed to establish a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer, centred around high-quality evidence, to provide support, training, and development throughout a teacher's career. The core TD programmes are the ECF³ and NPQs⁴, delivered by lead providers and delivery partners. Various types of organisations, including TSHs, are delivery partners. TSHs also undertake other roles and activity to support TD. Frameworks and evidence sources underpinning the ECF and NPQs are reviewed and validated through panels of experts including the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

DfE commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to develop an overarching Theory of Change (ToC) model for the TD programmes, building on work undertaken by DfE to this point. This report includes this final Theory of Change, alongside a summary of the activities undertaken to develop it. These activities included a review of previous models and input from stakeholders. The core of the overarching Theory of Change is a logic model of the change processes, which is supported by a description of the key delivery mechanisms and the moderators that affect activities and outcomes.

The TD programmes interconnect with the ITT system, and many lead providers and delivery partners engage in both ITT and post-qualification teacher development. ITT leads to the induction period, and this connection is an important reason for the future integration of the current frameworks that underpin ITT (the Core Content Framework) and the statutory induction period which was based on the ECF (the Early Career Framework). From September 2025, there is a single framework covering both ITT and induction, the ITTECF⁵. The focus in this report is on the TD programmes and

¹ [About us – The National Institute of Teaching](#)

² [Find a teaching school hub - GOV.UK](#)

³ *How the early career framework (ECF) supports induction.* GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-the-early-career-framework-ecf-supports-induction>

⁴ *National professional qualification (NPQ) courses.* National Professional Qualification (NPQ) Courses. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-professional-qualification-npq-courses>

⁵ *Initial teacher training and early career framework.* GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-and-early-career-framework>

recognises the interconnection with ITT in the Theory of Change model, but it does not provide a comprehensive and detailed model for all career phases, including all contributors to ITT.

The terminology in the Theory of Change logic model in relation to Early Career Teachers (ECTs) aligns with the frameworks that are operational from September 2025 when the Early Career Teacher Entitlement (ECTE) replaced the ECF training programme. However, in reporting programme moderators and mechanisms, references are made to the ECF programme, as stakeholder input relates to this programme rather than the ECTE. Similarly, after the commissioning of this work, DfE announced a formal review of the existing NPQ suite. This suite will remain in place until the review is complete and, as such, this report reflects the current programme. Further, the Theory of Change model does not include all government-funded TD, such as subject specific continuing professional development⁶, although stakeholders identified this as linked to the ECF and NPQ programmes.

Background

DfE implemented the teacher development system reforms to improve teaching and to support teacher retention and recruitment. Improved retention and recruitment also have the potential to improve educational outcomes through developing a more experienced and knowledgeable workforce (Cordingley et al., 2020; OECD, 2019). The core programmes within this system, the ECF training programme and NPQs, are delivered through a system of lead providers and delivery partners.

Teacher development programmes

The Early Career Framework training programme (and from September 2025, the ITTECF) aims to support ECTs to succeed at the start of their teaching career by setting out what ECTs should learn and should learn how to do. The framework is organised into eight areas that map to those in the Teachers' Standards⁷. These are to:

- set high expectations which inspire, motivate, and challenge pupils
- promote good progress and outcomes by pupils
- demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge
- plan and teach well-structured lessons
- adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils

⁶ For example, *Subject hubs*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-support-from-school-hubs/subject-hubs>

⁷ *Teachers Standards* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>

- make accurate and productive use of assessment
- manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment
- fulfil wider professional responsibilities.

The framework underpins a new entitlement to a two-year induction programme of training, support from a dedicated mentor, and time off timetable for training and work with the mentor. During induction, alongside the programme of training, ECTs' progress is assessed against the Teachers' Standards and, at the end of induction, teachers are required to demonstrate they meet these standards to pass statutory induction⁸.

ECF-based training programmes were first implemented in 2020-2021 in parts of England before national implementation in subsequent years (Walker et al., 2024). As noted, from September 2025, the Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework was updated into a combined framework for ITT and early career induction, the ITTECF⁹. The ECF-based training programmes, which support the induction process for ECTs, will be improved and form part of the ECTE.

The current suite of NPQs was introduced in 2021, replacing previous NPQ courses. Two types of NPQs are available: Leadership NPQs (LNPQs) and Specialist NPQs (SNPQs). LNPQs offer qualifications for leadership at senior, head and executive levels, with participants including middle leaders. Additional support for those who are new to headship and undertaking NPQs is offered through the Early Headship Coaching Offer. SNPQs are designed for teachers and leaders to develop their expertise in specific areas (Leonardi et al., 2023, 2024). Qualifications are underpinned by a content framework that sets out the expected knowledge on completion of each NPQ. During the Covid-19 recovery period, between September 2021 and August 2024, DfE offered fully funded scholarships to cover the course costs for eligible participants working in publicly funded schools. A summary of the TD programmes' features by career phase or role is provided in Table 1.

⁸ *Appropriate bodies guidance: induction and the early career framework*. GOV.UK.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661d459fac3dae9a53bd3de6/Appropriate_bodies_guidance_induction_and_the_early_career_framework.pdf

⁹ *Initial teacher training and early career framework*. GOV.UK.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-and-early-career-framework>

Table 1: DfE TD programmes

Career phase or role	Features
Trainee teacher	Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (replaced by the ITTECF from September 2025) The content that providers draw upon in their programmes Minimum entitlement of all trainees
Early career teacher	Early Career Framework (replaced by the ITTECF from September 2025) Two-year entitlement to professional development, including mentoring support and time off timetable Develop practice, knowledge and working habits
Mid-career teachers	Specialist NPQs Development of specialist expertise in classroom teaching and skills in preparation for a leadership role
School leaders	Specialist NPQs – development of specific areas of leadership Leadership NPQs – Development of leadership skills and expertise for existing and aspirant leaders

The teacher development delivery system

The TD programmes are delivered principally through a system of:

- Lead providers
- Delivery partners (including Teaching School Hubs which must deliver ECF and NPQ programmes as part of their designation)

Lead providers are central to the delivery of the ECF training programme and NPQ programmes. They are contracted to design programmes, including scheduling and training materials, based on DfE-approved frameworks, and ensure delivery of the programmes they lead. They provide training for mentors (for ECF programmes) and TD facilitators, guidance and support to participants and schools on ECT entitlements and manage participant registration. They oversee and ensure the quality of the delivery and, based on this and their own self-evaluation, they innovate and enhance the delivery process. They provide a coordination role through collaboration with delivery partners

and other stakeholders. They administer DfE's funding through contracts with delivery partners. For NPQs, lead providers assess and certify outcomes on completion. For the ECF training programme, lead providers do not assess ECTs for statutory induction against the Teachers' Standards as this is a separate responsibility undertaken by schools and appropriate bodies.

Delivery partners work with lead providers to recruit to and deliver the ECF-based training programmes and NPQs, tailoring implementation for specific localities, contexts and participant groups. They provide face-to-face, online or blended training sessions for participants and ECT mentors aligned with the Lead Providers programme and DfE frameworks. They build relationships with schools and trusts for recruitment and engagement. They distribute or signpost participants to training materials and resources. They collect monitoring data on attendance, progression, and completion, and provide this to lead providers. For the ECF training programme, they coordinate with appropriate bodies that oversee the ECT's statutory induction and assessment, for example to adjust the programme of training to accommodate non-standard induction lengths, where these have been agreed by appropriate bodies. For NPQs, they support candidates to complete the requirements of the course. Delivery partners can deliver ECF training or NPQs, or both programmes, and can be a delivery partner for more than one lead provider.

Teaching School Hubs are centres of excellence led by high-performing schools and multi-academy trusts. The national network of 87 TSHs was established in 2021, replacing the network of Teaching Schools¹⁰. All TSHs deliver ITT, the ECF training programme, and NPQs. They also quality assure early career teacher statutory induction through their appropriate body role. TSHs work with lead providers of ECF training and NPQs through their own contractual arrangements. The Teaching School Hubs Council (TSHC) plays an important role supporting the network of TSHs.

Appropriate bodies (ABs) ensure that schools follow the statutory guidance for ECTs' statutory induction and provide ECTs with entitlements to time off timetable, a dedicated mentor, a programme of support and training based on the ECF, and assessment that is fair and consistent¹¹. TSHs have become the main provider of AB services from September 2024, along with two specialist AB providers for independent and overseas schools. Prior to that Local Authorities had also operated as ABs.

¹⁰ What teaching school hubs do. DfE. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-school-hubs#what-teaching-school-hubs-do>

¹¹ *Appropriate bodies guidance: induction and the early career framework*. GOV UK. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661d459fac3dae9a53bd3de6/Appropriate_bodies_guidance_induction_and_the_early_career_framework.pdf

Quality assurance

The TSHs' appropriate body activity spans quality assurance of statutory induction entitlements within schools and the progress of ECTs against the Teachers' Standards. Additionally, Ofsted provides external independent inspection of lead providers' quality of delivery of training¹². DfE also undertakes quality assurance through monitoring of delivery and its contracting processes.

Evidence application and generation

A key feature of the TD programmes, alongside ITT, is the application and generation of evidence. The evidence base for the ECF was developed and reviewed by EEF with criteria being evidence from syntheses, meta-analysis and quality assessed individual studies. The frameworks for NPQs are developed in a similar way.

EEF has a role in the generation of new evidence through its evaluation of programmes. Additionally, NIoT was established from September 2022 as one of the lead providers of TD, as well as an accredited ITT provider with a specific function to research and disseminate 'what works' in teacher and leader development.

The rationale for developing an overarching Theory of Change

As DfE introduced the TD programmes and the infrastructure, systems, and processes to deliver the programmes, logic models and similar representations of change processes were created. For simplicity, these are all referred to as Theory of Change models in this report. The Theory of Change models were produced within or on behalf of DfE to guide policy development, and monitoring and evaluation, or by TSHC and NIoT to inform their activities.

The Theory of Change models represented different aspects of the TD programmes and delivery system. However, these representations were not fully aligned with each other because the Theory of Change models were developed at different times, by different organisations and for different, if related, purposes. DfE therefore commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to develop an overarching Theory of Change for the TD programmes that builds on and refines the existing logic models for each individual programme or activity. Such a Theory of Change has the potential to:

- support communication between different stakeholders
- develop shared understandings between the sector, policy makers and evaluators

¹² Inspecting providers of the ECF and NPQ programmes. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inspecting-lead-providers-of-the-ecf-and-npq-programmes>

- support future monitoring and evaluation of the programmes

To further these aims, the overarching ToC was informed by stakeholder engagement, as outlined in the methods section.

Theory of Change

Theory of Change models vary to the extent they represent and describe the programme elements and systems or abstract from them to emphasise processes and causes of change. Visual representations of change processes, including logic models (Rogers, 2008), help to identify core inputs, outputs, outcomes and influences and causes of change while avoiding attempting to describe all relevant information graphically. The programme change theory, and mechanisms, can be made explicit in the visual representation or in supplementary formats (Coldwell and Maxwell, 2018).

When considering ToC models as tools, it is important to consider the uses of the ToC for different stakeholders, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Affordances of Theory of Change models for different stakeholders

Stakeholders	Affordances
Funders and sponsors including policy makers	Helps identify performance indicators and formulation of contracts Allows comparisons across programmes and innovations and the relative extent of available evidence Identifies how other systems, processes and policies impact programme outcomes Supports value for money analysis and funding decisions about whether programmes and systems work Supports commissioning of evaluation e.g., helps to focus on individual or holistic policy areas to evaluate
Policy makers, programme developers and deliverers	Supports planning by identifying core activities and the resources needed to enable them Supports articulation of the ‘programme theory’, why and how a programme works Helps to design effective monitoring systems and process Clarifies the evidence base for the programme Articulates the programme rationale, what it is intended to achieve and how it works Breaks delivery processes into steps Maps important links between programme components Identifies potential influences on programme delivery and allows mitigation of barriers to successful delivery
Evaluators	Formulating evaluation questions Identifying appropriate measures for impact evaluation Identifying key dimensions for implementation and process evaluation such as fidelity and adherence criteria Focuses attention on contextual influences, moderators and mediators and on causal mechanisms

These various possible users and uses of the ToC informed its visual representation, discussion of moderators and identification of key mechanisms. The format of the ToC was also informed by considering information accessibility.

Methods

Details of the methods used are provided in Annex A. In summary, these were:

- a review and analysis of existing Theory of Change models produced by DfE or by external bodies
- a review of reports and policy literature on ECF-based induction and NPQs
- 8 interviews with a total of 11 key informants from DfE, TSHC, NIoT and Ofsted either as individual or paired interviews
- 9 workshops with 47 stakeholders with teacher development leadership roles in TSHs, MATs and schools, and / or with teacher development expertise.

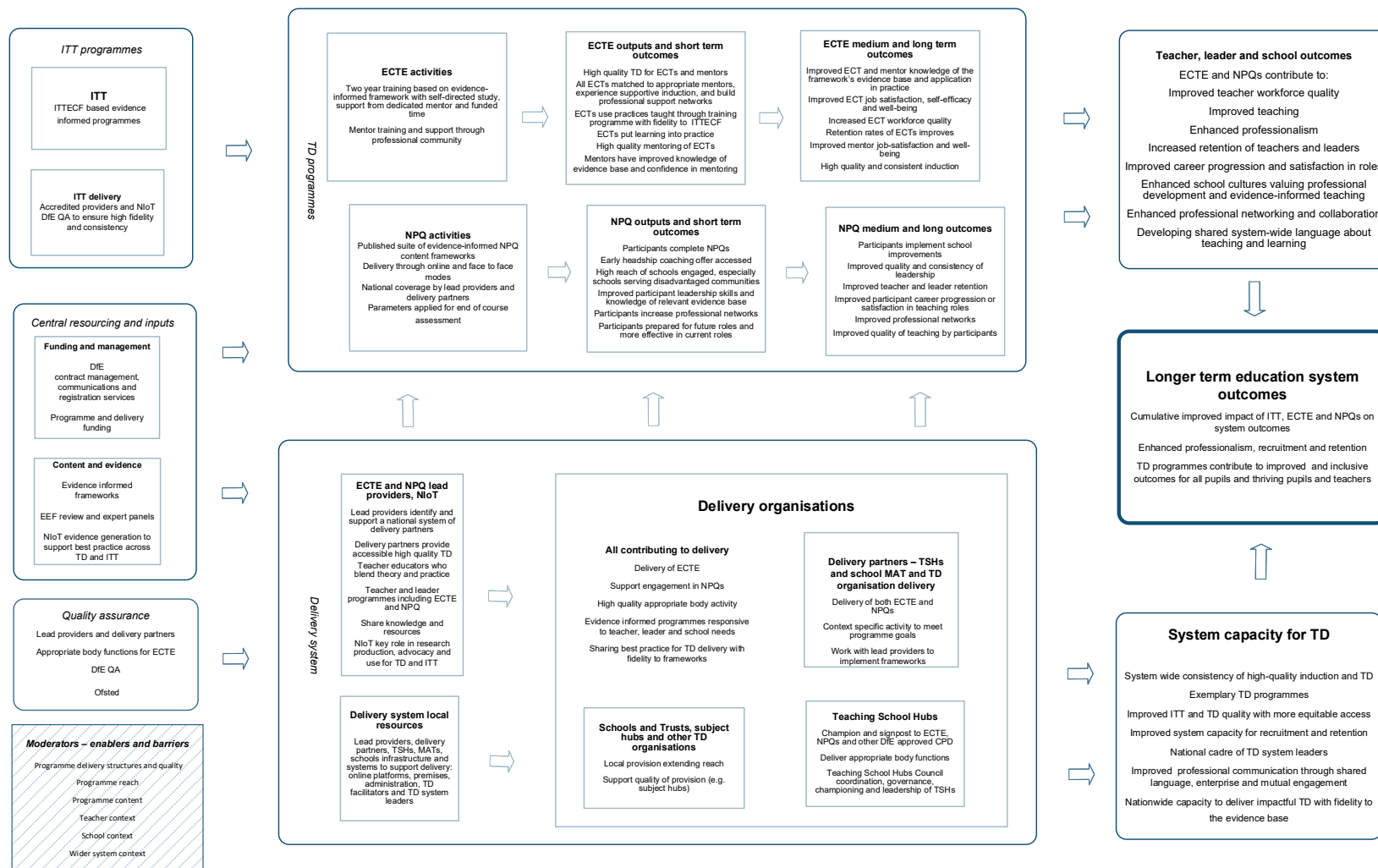
The Teacher Development Programmes Theory of Change

Department for Education Teacher Development programmes overarching Theory of Change

Created by Sheffield Hallam University

Vision

Improved pupil outcomes enabled by an excellent teaching profession through high-quality evidence-based CPD for teachers and leaders, leading to improved teacher quality and retention



Moderators

Moderators are factors that influence programme delivery, activities, outputs, or the relationship between outputs and intended outcomes. Moderators may enable the change process or act as barriers. Some moderators may have variable influences depending on other factors or enable some factors but act as a barrier in others.

These moderators were identified by reviewing those described in published evaluation reports on the ECF-based training programme and NPQ programmes (Walker et al., 2024; Leonardi et al., 2023, 2024) and from interviews with key informants and stakeholder workshops.

Although diverse stakeholders provided input, there are necessarily limitations in the sample and therefore these findings are indicative. Data collection from a representative sample of stakeholders, schools, and participant beneficiaries would be necessary to establish their prevalence and importance.

As indicative findings, the identified moderators can guide DfE, lead providers, and delivery partners to tailor programs and deliveries to mitigate barriers and enhance enablers.

Programme delivery and quality, programme reach, and programme content can influence outcomes. Effective delivery and high quality are more likely to lead to desired outcomes. The extent of programme reach, including delivery models and locations and success in recruitment, can lead to differences in programme success by area or participant characteristics. Programme content may align variably with some intended outcomes or participant's subject or roles.

Contextual moderators include teacher and leader characteristics and circumstances, school or setting contexts, or wider system contexts that may influence programme engagement and activity.

Additionally, DfE's systems and processes, as well as the delivery system may influence outcomes. For example, the level of funding available, procurement processes and contract management systems, indirectly impact the inputs and so the outputs and then outcomes of the programmes.

Programme mechanisms

Informed by the review of previous Theory of Change models for individual programmes or delivery means, and by stakeholder input, Table 3 summarises the mechanisms that underpin how TD activities lead to intended outcomes.

Table 3: TD programme mechanisms

Implementation area	Mechanisms
Programmes	Coherent and aligned evidence-based frameworks that support high quality teaching and progression through teacher careers Tailoring and adaptation to local contexts
Delivery	Procurement processes and contracting between DfE and lead providers and between lead providers and delivery partners, including contract management, KPIs and evaluation Market mechanism as participants and schools choose lead providers and delivery partners Tailored delivery infrastructures through collaborations of providers and partners Regional and local accessibility and networking opportunities for teachers and other participants
TD programme management	A responsive approach to improvement of frameworks, programmes and systems
Evidence	Evidence informed input and review from expert advisory groups and EEF
Quality assurance	Delivered through accredited and formally approved providers DfE's quality assurance processes and monitoring mechanisms including content review processes and user research through the digital service Quality monitoring across the system by lead providers, delivery partners, and appropriate bodies Ofsted inspection

Conclusion

The overarching Theory of Change for the TD programmes, and associated identification of moderators and mechanisms, can inform the activity of stakeholders in the TD programmes and can support future monitoring and evaluation. As DfE's TD offer continues to develop, further refinement will be needed, including, for example, more fully modelling the interconnection with Initial Teacher Training.

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Annex A: Further details of methods used

Overview

The development of the Theory of Change was undertaken in five phases, with key activities being:

- Inception: clarifying the requirements
- Review: reviewing existing Theory of Change models and developing a template for the overarching Theory of Change informed by relevant guidance and frameworks; desk review was supplemented by interviews with key informants
- Design: designing a draft overarching Theory of Change
- Test: the draft Theory of Change was tested through stakeholder workshops
- Refine and validate: the Theory of Change was revised, validated in a workshop with DfE stakeholders and further refined.

Review of Theory of Change models

Table 4 details the previous Theory of Change models that informed the development of the overarching model.

Table 4: Theory of Change models reviewed

Theory of Change	Origins or source
Teacher Development Reforms benefits map	DfE
The ECF early roll out Theory of Change	Produced by DfE then further refined in the ECF early roll out evaluation
The NPQ logic model	DfE
TSHC Theory of Change	Teaching School Hubs Council
NlOT Theory of Change	National Institute of Teaching

In addition, for background information, a logic model for the ITT reforms was also reviewed.

Table 5 details guidance and frameworks for Theory of Change and logic models that informed the language and form for the overarching Theory of Change model. Sources

were selected as ones currently informing Government Theory of Change approaches or What Works Centres in England engaged in innovation and evaluation in education.

Table 5: Sources informing the approach to Theory of Change design

Source	Description	URL
DfE template	Department for Education 'Theory of change model: template'	Research reports: template and style guide - GOV.UK
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation 'Guidance on Theory of Change and logic model development for EEF-funded evaluations'	Set up and recruitment: Resources for setting up EEF-funded evaluations
Magenta Book	HM Treasury 'Magenta Book 2020; Supplementary Guide: Realist Evaluation'	Magenta Book 2020 – Realist Evaluation
EST	The Evaluation Support Team 'The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans'	The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans
TASO	TASO 'Theory of Change: a precursor to impact evaluation'	Theory of Change: a precursor to impact evaluation - TASO
EIF	Early Intervention Foundation '10 steps for evaluation success'	Guide: 10 steps for evaluation success

Key informant interviews

To inform the initial design of the Theory of Change and subsequent revision and refinement, interviews were conducted with the following key participants:

- 5 DfE internal stakeholders with programme and cross programme management and leadership roles
- 4 members of the Teaching School Hubs Council
- 2 senior members of NIoT leadership team
- 3 Ofsted senior HMIs with current knowledge of the quality assurance of the TD programmes through inspection.

Stakeholder workshops

To test the draft overarching Theory of Change, the following stakeholders took part in a series of workshops:

- 6 Lead Providers (including an additional NIoT representative)
- 20 representatives of TSHs (sampled by region and size)¹³
- 3 other delivery partners
- 14 MAT/School TD leads (including MAT leads from trusts that are members of NIoT consortium)
- 4 other TD experts.

Interview and workshop recruitment, conduct and analysis

Data collection was undertaken following institutional ethical review, with informed consent and data collection and processing undertaken in accordance with ethical and legal obligations. Participants were recruited with DfE's support or directly through the support of networks focused on TD. Interviews and workshops were conducted online and video recorded with auto-transcription, except for one interview where recording was declined. The focus of the interviews and workshops was on the content of the Theory of Change and moderators. Data was analysed in relation to components of the Theory of Change such as activities and outcomes, and for programme moderators analysed thematically.

¹³ All TSHs were contacted by DfE and were provided with a link to express an interest in participating in a workshop at specified dates and times, SHU researchers then sampled to ensure representation of different regions and different sizes of TSHs.



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Reference: RR1575

ISBN: 978-1-83870-717-0

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