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# Supporting Early Career Teachers to thrive in their first year

*A guide for secondary schools*

## **Project Co-Leads**

Dr Simon Gibbons and Dr Elizabeth Rushton

## **Project Team**

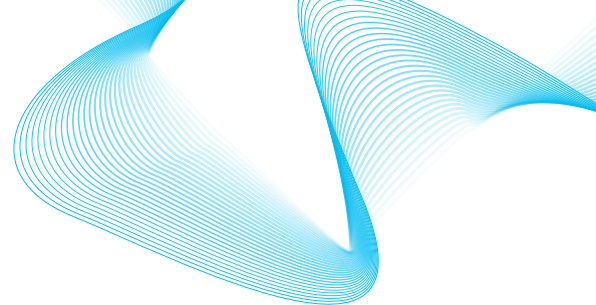
Dr Richard Brock, Ye Cao, Dr Carla Finesilver, Rachel Hesketh, Dr Jane Jones, Dr Alex Manning, Dr Bethan Marshall, Dr Christina Richardson, Dr Sarah Steadman, SooYeon Suh and Dr Emma Towers.

The project team are all based in the School of Education, Communication and Society, King's College London, except for Rachel Hesketh, who is from the Policy Institute at King's.

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# About this guide



The aim of this guide is to provide evidence and guidance to assist schools' efforts in supporting those Early Career Teachers (ECTs) who have trained during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, whose training has been profoundly disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. These trainees are now working as teachers in secondary schools across the UK, and are therefore in need of practical, targeted advice and support to improve their classroom readiness, strengthen their practice and ultimately improve their chances of staying in the profession.

The findings and recommendations presented here are based on evidence gathered in a dedicated research project run by researchers from King's College London. They draw on over 140 survey responses and interviews with secondary school trainee teachers, school leaders, mentors and university tutors conducted between September 2020 and July 2021.



# Our key findings

Individuals completing their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) during the pandemic have experienced a range of challenges and have also had hugely diverse experiences. Ongoing personalised professional development will therefore be hugely important in supporting this cohort. Providing opportunities for ECTs to observe and discuss lessons taught by experienced teachers from across a range of subjects is another vital step that schools can take.

We have identified the following specific areas in which ECTs will benefit from further support during their first year in the classroom:

- ♦ **Adapting teaching** to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils, especially those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- ♦ Developing experience of **varied approaches** to assessment for learning.
- ♦ Implementing effective **behaviour for learning strategies**, including working with parents and carers.
- ♦ Building expertise in **subject specific teaching** and learning, for example practical work in science and fieldwork in geography.

It isn't all negative, however. We also found that the experience of training during the pandemic had allowed trainees to demonstrate and develop significant strengths in key areas. For example:

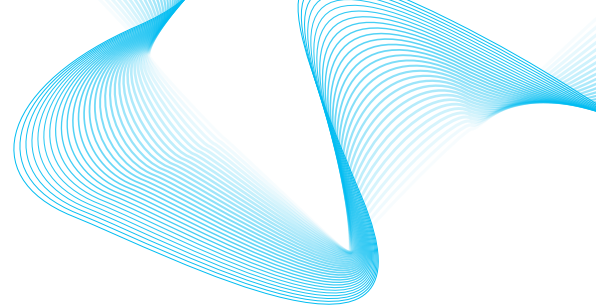
- ♦ Trainees have had more opportunity to develop their **pastoral practice**, which many find very rewarding.
- ♦ Online teaching and learning have enabled trainees to develop a **more diverse set of teaching strategies**.
- ♦ Reduced travel and in-person teaching time has increased the opportunities for trainees to engage in **subject knowledge development**.

A further challenge for schools is to support ECTs to further develop and utilise these skills to support their practice and benefit students.

## **“Teacher quality” and “classroom readiness”**

We understand these terms to broadly reflect the capability of ECTs to be responsible for the learning of the young people they teach.

# About the research



The findings presented here are drawn from a research project being conducted by researchers at King's College London, entitled: *Understanding and mitigating the impact of Covid-19 disruption on trainee and early career teachers in secondary schools to ensure teacher quality and enable retention*. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to Covid-19 [Grant Number ES/W00/1950/1] and is led by Dr Simon Gibbons and Dr Elizabeth Rushton.

The research is designed to assess the impact of the substantial changes to ITE caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on teacher quality, classroom readiness and the retention of secondary school ECTs, who completed their ITE programmes during 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. The research is guided by three key questions:

- How has the Covid-19 pandemic created challenges and opportunities for secondary trainee teachers and ECTs to **develop teacher quality**?
- How might the Covid-19 pandemic affect the **retention** of secondary trainee teachers and ECTs during the period March 2020-2022, especially those teaching subjects which have persistent shortages of teachers?
- What **changes to practice** should be highlighted to ECTs, mentors, schools and training providers to mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19 on teacher quality and retention?

This research is particularly critical given that the global pandemic has hit at a time when, in the UK, the retention of secondary school teachers is an area of concern for policymakers, school leaders and ITE providers, with persistent shortages in subjects including chemistry, computing, mathematics, modern foreign languages and physics. Despite the recent increase in applications to ITE, research from the [National Foundation for Educational Research](#) suggests that teacher supply gaps are unlikely to close.

This guide for schools shares early findings from the first phase of our research, conducted between September 2020 and July 2021. During this period, the project team completed over 80 interviews with school mentors, school leaders, university tutors and secondary trainee teachers from both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 cohorts. In addition, over 60 trainee secondary school teachers and school leaders have responded to a survey about their experiences during the pandemic. These responses were shared with representatives from across the education sector at a policy roundtable in July 2021. The research is ongoing, and subsequent recommendations will be shared in 2022.

# Our findings

Based on our research findings to date, we have two overarching recommendations for schools:

- ♦ Schools should provide extensive opportunities for ECTs to **observe and discuss lessons** taught by experienced teachers from across a range of subjects.
- ♦ Schools should ensure that support for ECTs is **personalised** and grounded in an ongoing dialogue with mentors so that it meets individual needs and recognises the diversity of trainees' experiences due to the Covid-19 disruption.

## What strengths have trainees developed during the pandemic?

Here we outline the areas in which trainees have been able to develop strengths in their professional practice due to the experience of training during the pandemic.

### 1. Pastoral work

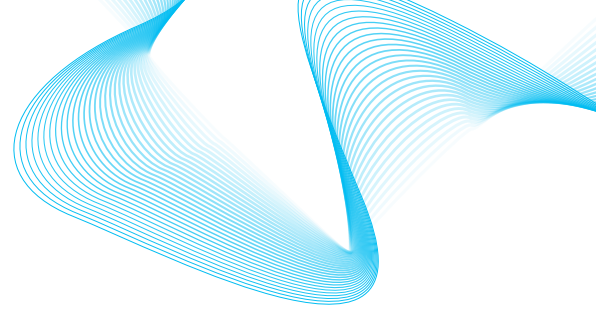
- ♦ Becoming a teacher during the pandemic has provided many trainees with greater insight into the **positive contribution** teachers and schools make to the lives of young people and their communities.
- ♦ Trainees have gone **beyond the requirements of their roles**, embracing their status as “key workers.” They have contributed to a range of efforts, including: tutoring and “catch-up” sessions; providing additional support to form tutor teams; and carrying out wider safeguarding work across schools, to meet the needs of pupils they teach.

### 2. Online teaching and learning

- ♦ During the pandemic, trainee teachers were frequently able to provide their placement schools with support to implement online teaching and learning strategies, with this having a positive impact on trainees' **self-efficacy and confidence**.
- ♦ The combination of teaching **online, in-person and hybrid teaching** has enabled ECTs to develop their expertise using a greater range of approaches to planning, teaching and assessment.
- ♦ Developing capabilities in online teaching allows ECTs to develop **inclusive teaching** that supports pupils who are unable to be physically present in the classroom.

### 3. Subject knowledge development

- ♦ Many trainees used time gained (eg due to reduced commuting to school placements and PGCE sessions) to **develop their subject knowledge** through self-directed reading and online webinars. These have included sessions provided by networks such as learned societies, subject associations, teaching unions and the Chartered College of Teaching.
- ♦ Many schools have valued the teaching and learning resources that trainees have produced, incorporating sequences of lessons into their curricula. While this is



a regular feature of ITE partnerships, this contribution has been **especially valued** when schools' time and resources have been so stretched during the pandemic.

It will be important to build on the many strengths that these cohorts of trainee teachers have developed. Early Career Framework training, particularly that provided through a fully funded programme, may inevitably be somewhat generic; strong mentor support will therefore be needed in schools to ensure ECTs are given personalised opportunities to use and further develop their skills to their own, and their pupils', benefits.

## **What challenges have trainees faced during the pandemic?**

Our research suggests that trainees have experienced particular challenges in four different areas of teaching and learning. We suggest some strategies that schools can employ to help ECTs to overcome these challenges in their first year.

### **1. Differentiation and inclusive teaching**

#### **Challenges:**

- Trainees have had reduced opportunities to work with school-based SEND professionals, including Teaching Assistants (TAs).
- Trainees have had reduced opportunities to work with students from across the secondary age range, of different abilities and in contrasting school contexts.

#### **Strategies:**

- Prioritise the involvement of school Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators (SENDCos) in professional development sessions, where ECTs can gain practical support and insight as to how to develop inclusive teaching and learning.
- Provide ECTs with the opportunity to teach the same lesson to classes with pupils with different support needs and to reflect with a mentor and/or class teacher on the effectiveness of differentiation.
- Provide the opportunity for ECTs to spend a day shadowing a TA with expertise supporting students with SEND and English as an Additional Language (EAL) and then, with the TA, reflect on how to achieve best practice in working together.
- Provide the opportunity for ECTs to spend a day shadowing a pupil with SEND through their different lessons and discuss with them the support which best helps them.



## 2. Assessment for Learning (AfL)

### Challenges:

- ♦ Trainees have had reduced opportunities to develop a range of classroom-based AfL strategies; Covid-19-secure protocols have necessitated mask-wearing, some teachers have not been able to circulate around the classroom and the capacity to mark some pupils' written work has been restricted.
- ♦ Trainees' limited experience of teaching across all secondary Key Stages has decreased the range of contexts in which to develop AfL, particularly giving "live" feedback to pupils and rapidly identifying and addressing misconceptions.

### Strategies:

- ♦ ECTs should be provided with the opportunity to observe teachers across subject disciplines who have noted expertise in AfL and to identify, through subsequent discussions of lessons and lesson plans, strategies to take forward in the ECTs' own teaching.
- ♦ ECTs should be enabled to teach or team-teach lessons across all three Key Stages during their first year as an ECT.

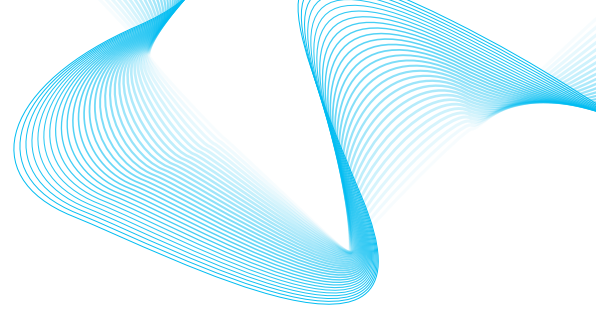
## 3. Behaviour for learning

### Challenges:

- ♦ Reduced and/or disrupted school placements have meant it has been challenging for some trainees to develop effective behaviour for learning strategies over a sustained period.
- ♦ Covid-19 has presented new behaviour for learning challenges, for example limiting the ability for teachers to circulate around the classroom and teachers and pupils wearing masks. This has required trainees and more experienced teachers to adapt their approaches.
- ♦ The lack of contact, in particular in-person meetings, with parents and carers has reduced opportunities for trainees to learn how to engage with those who support their pupils beyond the classroom.

### Strategies:

- ♦ Offer ECTs the opportunity to shadow a pupil for a day to observe how teachers use different behaviour for learning strategies with the same class.
- ♦ Enable ECTs to develop experience working with parents through parents' evenings, and email and/or telephone communications.



- ♦ Provide opportunities for ECTs to engage with the extra-curricular life of the school, for example school assemblies, clubs and trips, to see pupils in different contexts and to gain an understanding of the wider school community.

#### **4. Subject specific teaching and learning**

##### **Challenges:**

- ♦ Many subjects have had reduced opportunities for trainees to incorporate the full range of teaching and learning strategies that are often implemented, including group work and practical activities.
- ♦ Some subjects – for example, science and geography – have had substantial restrictions to core elements of their discipline, including practical work, demonstrations, and fieldwork. This has restricted the opportunities for trainees to practice leading these elements.

##### **Strategies:**

- ♦ Allow ECTs to work with experienced teachers to team-teach lessons to develop confidence, for example science lessons with demonstrations and/or practical activities, geography fieldwork lessons and group work across all subjects.
- ♦ Ensure early mentoring sessions with ECTs include subject specific guidance, with support for ECTs to further develop teaching and learning strategies pertinent to their discipline.

# Next steps

The project team will continue to produce findings based upon responses from ECTs, mentors, school leaders and university based ITE staff during the academic year 2021-2022. Plans for 2022 include a second series of workshops with representatives from across the education sector and to develop further guidance for schools.

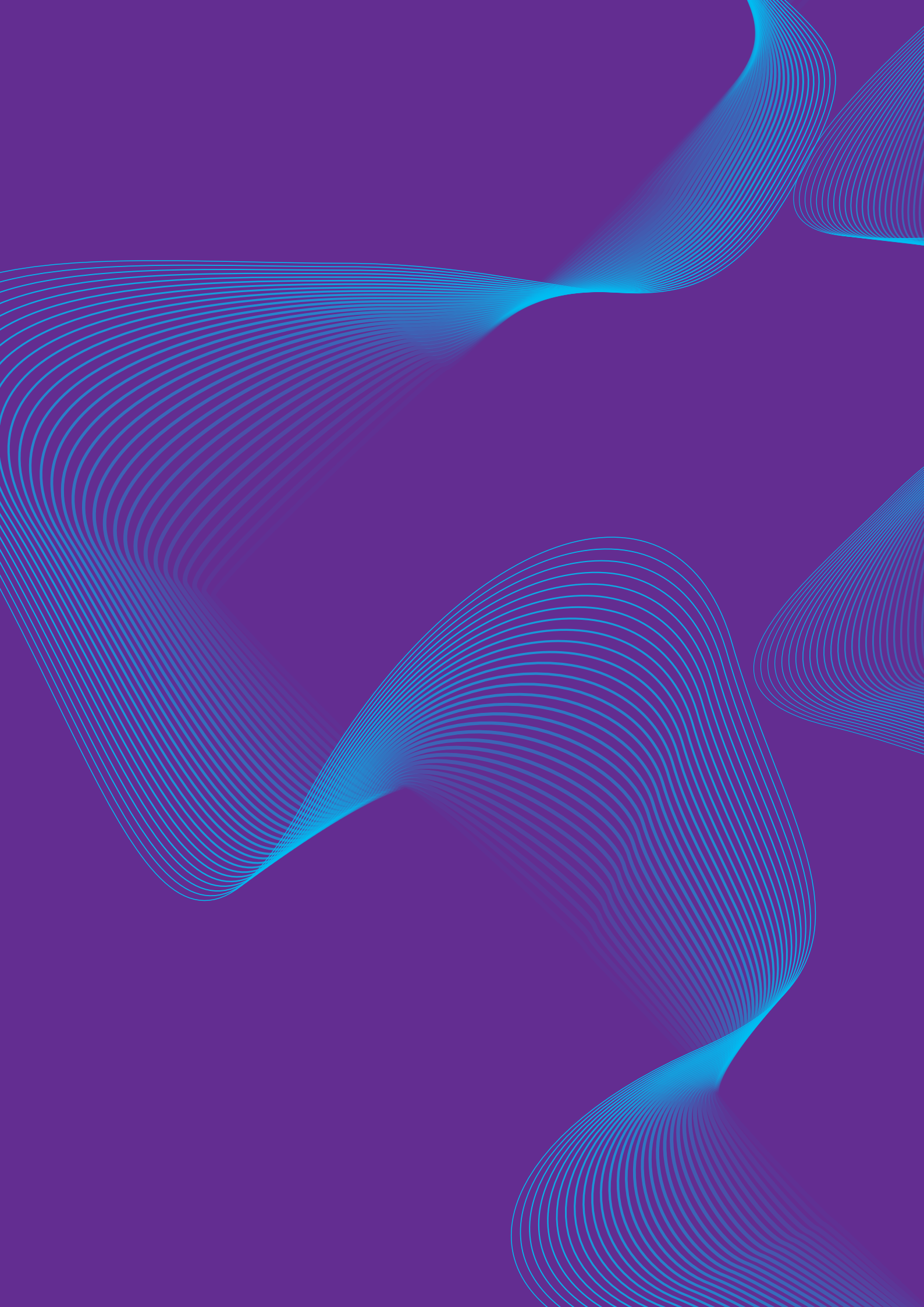
## Join the discussion

**30th September 2021, 4.30-6pm** – a free, online event for teacher educators, school mentors and Early Career Teachers to share your perspectives and find out more about the study and its findings. Register your interest here: <https://kings.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/september-online-event-for-supporting-ect-at-kings-college>

## Get in touch

**Visit:** <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/supporting-newly-qualified-and-trainee-teachers-to-overcome-pandemic-challenges>

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