

# System strengthening: teacher professional development



## Why is teacher professional development important?

- Teachers are critical to improving students' learning outcomes. Studies have shown that developing teaching practices is the most effective way that a school can influence achievement.
- Teachers join the profession with varying types of training, ranging from short courses to extensive pre-service programmes. Professional development ensures all teachers continue to enhance their knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout their career.
- Around the world, education systems are facing high teacher attrition rates, which worsen the already severe global shortage of teachers. Access to high quality, ongoing professional development can contribute to teacher retention, by providing pathways for professional growth and fulfilment.
- Teachers need to be prepared to adapt to the evolving needs of students, to a dynamic teaching context and to emerging challenges. Lifelong professional development can respond to teachers needs while fostering inquiry and resourcefulness.

## What role do teacher educators play?

- Teacher educators are a vital but often under-played resource within the education system.
- They can act as trainers, facilitators, mentors and assessors – most teacher educators will play a combination of these roles.
- Teacher educators usually have extensive experience of being in the classroom, but crucially a good teacher educator is one who can facilitate sharing and learning among the teachers themselves.

**Below** Teachers participate in a workshop in Punjab, Pakistan



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## What role do school leaders play?

- School leaders can create a supportive environment for professional development and foster a culture of learning and improvement in their school.
- They can facilitate opportunities for collaboration among teachers, encouraging them to explore their practice, share their experiences and learn from one another.
- Many school leaders have classroom experience, which means they can offer important guidance and support to help teachers improve their practice and find ways of improving learning outcomes that are suitable to the context.

## How can teacher development be organised?

- It is useful to outline the areas of knowledge, skills, behaviours and attributes that teachers need to develop – for example skills in classroom management, subject knowledge, understanding of inclusive practices and assessment.
- Conducting a needs analysis to understand specific needs helps to identify relevant content and design suitable interventions.
- Organised professional development activities, such as training workshops, are one way of providing input. Establishing communities of practice to explore specific topics over time or giving teachers access to a range of resources online which they can work through independently are other approaches – each has its advantages and disadvantages.
- Technology plays a greater role than ever in supporting teacher development. This is true even in lower-resource contexts where messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram can be used in creative ways to support teachers' learning.



Read about using mobile messaging apps to support teacher learning



**Above** A teacher participates in a workshop in Assam, India

## What makes some teacher development initiatives more successful than others?

- Evidence shows that continuing professional development (CPD) programmes need to focus on building knowledge and skills in terms of content (what to teach), pedagogy (how to teach) and beliefs (why we teach the way we do).
- Successful CPD has clearly defined goals that are relevant to teachers' needs and contexts, and build on teachers' current practices and beliefs.
- The focus of any programme needs to be clearly linked to improving student learning, and recognise the shared responsibility that exists for achieving this between the teacher educators, teachers, school leaders, parents and students.
- Effective CPD programmes are sustained over time, with opportunities for reflection, experimentation and peer support built into the design. One off training workshops rarely make a significant difference to teachers' practice, beyond boosting motivation levels and creating links between teachers to continue their discussions.
- CPD is only effective when teachers fully engage with it. Practical considerations such as the mode of delivery, venue, schedule and time teachers need are essential. Similarly, it is important to make accommodations so that all teachers can take part (e.g. considering needs of female teachers and teachers with disabilities).



Read more about the key principles of effective CPD

## Case study 1: Developing a framework of continuing professional development in Armenia

### Background

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MoESCS) in Armenia approached the British Council to design a framework of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers. They recognised the need to 1) upgrade the existing teacher attestation system, 2) take a more systematic approach in line with international practices and 3) provide opportunities for a wider range of CPD providers. The resulting framework was fully adjusted for Armenia's educational context based on the British Council's existing research-backed model.

The framework applies to teachers of all subjects across the state school system in Armenia.

The application of this new framework involves a shift towards a more needs-based and teacher-initiated approach by defining:

- distinct CPD pathways for early career and experienced teachers
- a process for teacher development: the Development Cycle
- a Teaching Portfolio as a vehicle for teachers to provide evidence of their development; and
- a unit-based mechanism for registering teacher development activities.

The approach and the new framework were endorsed by MoESCS in June 2021 and ratified by parliament in December 2022.



THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE,  
CULTURE AND SPORTS  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**

**Below** Representatives of Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and the British Council at the MoU signing event in May 2022



### Implementation

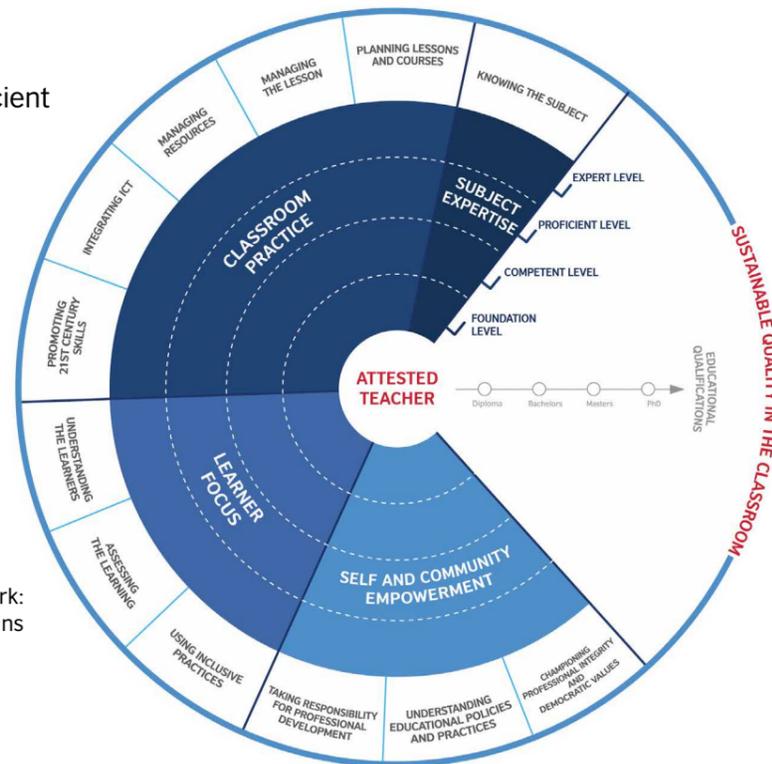
The framework was developed by a working group including British Council experts, academics from Sheffield Hallam University and Armenian stakeholders. Establishing a shared vision and buy-in from senior leadership within the ministry, future implementers and teachers was critical for the success of the project. Public consultations were also held to discuss how the new framework fits into wider education reforms.

The new CPD framework involves four components:

- **Four development domains** of subject expertise, classroom practice, learner focus and self and community empowerment
- **Twelve professional practices**, e.g. planning lessons and courses, understanding learners, promoting 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and championing professional integrity and democratic values
- **Educational and teaching qualifications**
- **Four competency levels** – foundation, competent, proficient and expert

Each of these has detailed descriptors and associated tools (e.g. a self-evaluation survey and a classroom observation tool) to enable systematic use of the framework across the country.

Right Armenia CPD framework: development domains



### Towards impact

Once fully implemented, the development and integration of this CPD framework is expected to redefine the professional development of more than 35,000 teachers across Armenia.

This will result in:

- a shift of paradigm from system-initiated to teacher-initiated CPD by empowering teachers to take responsibility for their own CPD
- effective upskilling of teachers by putting them and their needs at the heart of CPD offers
- a diversified and tailored approach vs one-size-fits-all, recognising that each teacher will have different strengths and areas for development
- a shift from a linear to a cyclical approach of constant growth
- upgraded processes of teacher accreditation, specialisation and career growth.



Scan the QR code for more information about how the CPD framework was developed and embedded within the policy framework in Armenia

### Case study 2: Supporting pre- and in-service teacher education systems in Rwanda

#### Background

The Secondary Teachers English Language Improvement Rwanda (STELIR) project is a collaboration with the Mastercard Foundation (US \$10m), implemented by the British Council in partnership with Rwanda Education Board, building on the success of an earlier project in Rwanda working with primary school teachers ([Building Learning Foundations](#)).

STELIR aims to improve the English language proficiency of lower secondary teachers of English and STEM subjects in 14 districts, supporting the ambition of the Rwandan Ministry of Education for teachers to deliver the curriculum more effectively and for learning outcomes to improve across subjects. English is the official language of teaching and learning for all subjects in Rwanda from Grade 1.

A key strength of the project is its focus on both pre- and in-service teacher education. STELIR is working with more than 6,500 in-service and 1,500 pre-service teachers to support sustainability: future teachers are being upskilled as well as the current workforce. The project is developing the expertise of a cadre of system-embedded English Teacher Trainers and e-Teacher Moderators who will be able to deliver ongoing online and face-to-face CPD after the project has ended.

Right A STELIR English teacher trainer, monitoring group training activities with teachers in Gicumbi district



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**As a visually impaired teacher, I initially feared challenges in keeping pace with others. [However] the live classes were genuinely inclusive, treating me and my fellow teachers equally, providing special care that allowed me to participate in activities alongside others.**

Participating teacher

### Implementation

STELIR runs from 2022 to 2025. It is a three-stage language development programme delivered through a blended mode:

- Stage 1: intensive in-person English lessons
- Stage 2: asynchronous online learning with weekly synchronous live sessions and
- Stage 3: in-person, ongoing CPD led by school-based mentors.

Technology is at the heart of Rwanda's vision for social and economic transformation and regarded as a strategic lever to raise standards in education. The STELIR design aims to support Rwanda in being recognised as an innovator within the region and globally, using cost-effective technological innovations to deliver teacher development initiatives at scale.

Females account for only 33.7 per cent of Rwandan secondary school teachers.<sup>1</sup> This minority status of almost one female to every three males can undermine self-confidence and lower self-esteem, in turn inhibiting participation and learning in CPD initiatives. Therefore, STELIR English Teacher Trainers and e-Teacher Moderators are trained in inclusive teaching techniques, for example ensuring female participants are given equal time in speaking practice. Support is provided to enable female teachers to attend training, considering financial, logistical and accommodation issues. Women trainers are role models and mentors for female teachers participating in the project and beyond.

### Towards impact

At the end of March 2024 (after 15 months of STELIR implementation):

- 2590 in-service (40 per cent female) and 855 pre-service (52 per cent female) teachers have completed the Stage 1 intensive and Stage 2 online English language courses
- 97 per cent of the participating teachers report already feeling more confident to use English in their classes
- 98 per cent of the participating teachers report they have gained skills from the training that will help them to teach more effectively
- A recent sample of 19 per cent of the participating teachers demonstrated there has already been significant improvement in language levels:
  - 98 per cent of the teachers who took the lowest (CEFR A0/A1 level<sup>2</sup>) courses are now at a pre-intermediate (A2) level or higher
  - 88 per cent of those who took A2 courses are now at B1 or higher, and the average speaking score for those on the B1 courses has now increased to mid-B2.



**Below** A teacher in Rwamagana district learning how to use her STELIR tablet for the online stage of her blended English course.



**Before I was shy and ashamed of speaking in English. Now I have self-confidence.**

Participating teacher



**We believe this is the right and sustainable way to prepare our teachers for the important job they have, to prepare students for the complex world of work.**

**Minister of Education,  
Hon. Gaspard Twagirayezu**



<sup>1</sup> Education Statistical Yearbook, 2020/2021

<sup>2</sup> CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for languages. Levels range from beginner (A0) to proficient (C2).



**I have become more confident in sharing my difficulties in teaching English, as well as sharing and learning from the experiences of fellow teachers and colleagues.**

Participating TAG teacher

### Case study 3: Establishing communities of practice with provincial Departments of Education and Training in Viet Nam



Implementing our model of Teacher Activity Groups in Viet Nam has provided a sustainable and scalable approach for the continuing professional development of in-service public school English teachers.

#### Background

Since 2000, the British Council has worked closely with several of Viet Nam's 63 provincial Departments of Education and Training (DOETs), supporting the professional development of thousands of teachers and teacher educators. In 2019, a decision was jointly made to shift from a trainer-led, top-down model to a peer-led community of practice approach, in line with evidence which indicates that this is a more sustainable and scalable approach to teacher development.

The model was designed with careful consideration of relevant education policies, including recently developed Ministry of Education and Training guidelines and the Annual Collaboration Plan between the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP) and the British Council.

#### Implementation

Teacher Activity Groups (TAGs) have been piloted and implemented in several countries by the British Council. In Viet Nam, TAGs were considered appropriate because of their semi-structured, peer-led format: selected key teachers are initially supported with clear session plans and training on effective facilitation skills, before moving into a looser, participant-led approach where the teachers themselves choose the focus and content of each session. In this way, the facilitators and the participants gradually build confidence and familiarity with this mode of professional development, which prioritises discussion of real-life issues and reflection on classroom practice.

Through the UK-VN Teacher Activity Group Programme initiated in 2021, five partnerships were formed between consortia of 10 UK and Vietnamese universities, English language teaching organisations and 11 Vietnamese DOETs. Together, these partnerships established TAGs that aimed to engage with 1,250 teachers across 11 provinces, which included remote and more disadvantaged areas.

**Above** A teacher in Viet Nam participating in a TAG session

It was anticipated that the participating teachers would improve their skills, knowledge, attitudes and networks in relation to English language teaching and learning. The proof of concept for the TAG model was believed to offer an inclusive, practitioner-led and sustainable model which could be further implemented by other DOETs, leading to wider access to quality CPD and improved quality of teaching and learning in Vietnamese classrooms.



Find out more about Teacher Activity Groups

#### Towards impact

This initiative reached 1,527 teachers, comfortably exceeding targets, with more than 80 per cent of participating teachers reporting that they had experienced improvements in their professional skills, knowledge, attitudes, and networks.

An evaluation of the 12-month intervention in 2022 found that the TAG Programme has contributed to enhancing English language teaching practices and fostering a culture of CPD among teachers and facilitators.

- Facilitators have grown professionally, enriching their instructional and facilitation skills
- Teachers have integrated TAG learning into their classroom practices
- Teacher confidence has improved, along with their adaptability to different teaching environments
- Student engagement has been enhanced

Sustainability of TAGs as an effective CPD model was considered from the outset. Based on the lessons learned, the TAGs Programme continues to create an enabling environment with policy advocacy, knowledge dissemination and exemplar provinces all designed to serve as a blueprint for scale up nation-wide.



**Now, I take much more interest in professional development as I know it would upskill me, thanks to my experience in the TAG project.'**

TAG project facilitator

**Left** A teacher in Viet Nam practises skills learned during TAG sessions



## About us

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.

We work directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK. We support them to build networks and explore creative ideas, to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications.

We work with governments and our partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally. Working together we make a bigger difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

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