



Case study

How to transform your approach to CPD to boost retention: case study

Rethink your CPD approach with inspiration from Greater Manchester Education Trust. Find out what keeps ECTs engaged, and why experienced teachers stay put.

About the trust

- Greater Manchester Education Trust (GMET) is a relatively new and growing secondary trust, with 4 schools all within 5 miles of each other
- The trust's schools are diverse – 1 has been graded 'outstanding' with well above-average progress, and 1 has been in special measures in the past, with high levels of disadvantage and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). All schools are now graded 'good' or 'outstanding'
- The trust's core values are excellence, care and respect

This could work for you if ...

- **You're part of a trust or federation.** You need to have more than 1 school to use this approach
- **You have 1 person who can lead on this across your schools, and be dedicated to staff professional development.** In this case study, it's the trust's director of education, but it could be a senior leader who's responsible for CPD or teaching and learning

Why try this?

Since bringing in this approach ...

- ECTs feel energised and inspired by an enhanced induction



- Teachers and leaders are far more engaged with ECT programmes and national professional qualifications (NPQs)
- There's been hugely positive feedback from teachers and leaders across the trust, on both the relevance and practical application of CPD. One said: "It felt purposeful, shared good practice and was genuinely helpful"
- Teachers report finding CPD more meaningful and valuable, and feel more connected to colleagues across the trust
- Experienced teachers are more "intellectually stimulated", and say the focus on professional learning and improvement is what has "kept me in this job"

Consider giving it a go if, like GMET was, you're struggling with ...

- **A retention and recruitment crisis.** GMET finds it hard to recruit and retain staff, especially ECTs and heads of departments
- **Disengagement with professional development.** At GMET, ECTs were feeling "resigned disinterest" towards the ECT programme and leaders saw NPQs as a "box to tick" in order to progress, and lacking in practical value. Teachers wanted whole-school CPD to be "less generic" and more subject-specific
- **Highly experienced teachers needing "more intellectual stimulation".** At GMET, experienced staff wanted more than progression to SLT, and the trust needed to harness their expertise and share it across the schools

This case study outlines **3 successful initiatives** that Sam Gibbs, director of education at GMET, put in place to successfully tackle these issues.

Bespoke professional qualifications

Bring as much as you can in-house

GMET is moving towards bringing **all** professional qualifications – such as ECT programmes and NPQs – in-house. All sessions are delivered by senior leaders and teachers from across the trust, and most happen in person. The curriculum is highly personalised to the needs of GMET's schools.

Doing this means you can:

- **Add context, with examples and case-studies from your own schools and staff.** On the NPQ, Sam's team added examples of real-life challenges and situations from across the trust
- **Make the training relevant to your specific needs and values.** Sam's team chose to include adaptive teaching, wellbeing and digital literacy in the ECT programme, which is a key focus across the trust
- **Provide more face-to-face sessions, and in-person networking.** At GMET, this was in response to requests from its ECTs

- **Provide the staff who facilitate the sessions with development opportunities.** At GMET, Sam says this convinced some experienced teachers to stay with the trust, rather than seek development elsewhere



Collaborate with local providers

GMET collaborates with DfE-accredited providers to deliver professional qualifications. For the ECT programme, it works with a [local teaching school hub](#) and [The Church of England and Catholic Education Service](#), who it works with for NPQ too.

Both providers allow the trust to contribute its own material, which combines with the provider's 'ready-made' resources, to create bespoke training programmes.

To do this at your trust, approach providers with a good idea of what you'd like your qualifications to include, and a cohort of staff ready to enrol (GMET needed around 15 staff for this to be viable). You ideally need 1 dedicated person to be able to liaise with the providers, and oversee the creation of personalised resources. At GMET this was the trust CPD lead.

Find out more about staying compliant and choosing your approach in our article on [ECT induction](#).

Subject-specific professional learning communities and trust subject leads

GMET created professional learning communities (PLCs) for almost all subjects, led by 12 trust-wide subject leads.

Teachers from across the trust meet in their PLC subject groups 4 times a year, for 2 to 3-hour long twilight sessions, facilitated by the subject lead.

Doing this means:

- Whole-school CPD is supplemented with the subject-specific CPD that teachers at GMET wanted and find more valuable
- Teachers feel empowered to steer their own communities. Sessions focus on challenges identified by the teachers, and are co-constructed with heads of department, such as 'How do we build stamina for extended writing?'
- Subject-specific knowledge and expertise is shared across the trust
- Teachers build relationships with colleagues from other schools and create a support network



How the PLC process works:

1. **Divide your subjects into PLCs.** If 1 PLC per subject doesn't make sense in terms of staff numbers, you can group subjects together, e.g. 'humanities', 'maths and sciences'
2. **Appoint subject leads.** They don't have to be subject leaders or heads of department – GMET appointed experienced teachers, middle and senior leaders who were looking for professional development opportunities
3. **Launch the PLCs.** GMET launched the initiative at its annual trust conference. Aim to create a 'buzz' around PLCs – explain how they're going to be teacher-led and collaborative
4. **Get input from teachers on what they want to focus on in their subject.** GMET did this focus group-style, but you could do this in a staff meeting at the start of the school year, or via a staff survey in your chosen format (online or a paper survey)
5. **Co-construct an agenda.** GMET's trust subject leads meet with heads of department in each school to co-construct an agenda based on the priorities identified by teachers and the priorities of each department
6. **Have the first meeting in person.** GMET held the first PLC sessions in person, to help build relationships.
 - Aim for sessions to be teacher-led. The trust subject lead should facilitate the discussion and mobilise expertise within the group, but they shouldn't always present information
 - Make it special. Provide hot drinks and 'nice' biscuits, so teachers feel it's worth it, especially if they've travelled from another school
7. **Gather feedback, and iterate.** After each session, ask teachers how PLCs are working for them, what they'd like to focus on next and anything they'd like to be doing differently, via staff surveys or informal chats
8. **Continue the process throughout the year.** Hold ongoing meetings (alternating between different school locations) and gather feedback to refine and improve the PLCs as you go:
 - Once relationships are established, you can move to online meetings, if the group wants to
 - GMET has an extra week of holiday in October, which allows it to free up time for 3 twilight PLC sessions a year (staff also return for 2 days of INSET at the end of August). You could also use staff meeting slots for PLC meetings.

Reward and support trust subject leads

At GMET, trust subject leads receive a small additional payment (an 'honorarium') as a thank you for their extra work.

Subject leads have 3 dedicated planning days per year. Sam also meets with trust subject leads regularly, to plan together and provide more support.

Appraisal replaced with continuous 'professional learning and improvement'

GMET has ditched performance-related pay and moved away from traditional appraisal towards a 'professional learning and improvement' (PLI) approach, focusing on ongoing professional growth and development.

At GMET, it's assumed that everyone is doing their best, so the trust prioritises professional learning over reviewing performance. Just like the PLCs, the approach is teacher-led and focuses on development, not judgment.

Doing this can:

- **Help you retain and attract staff.** At GMET, scrapping performance-related pay and introducing PLI has contributed to psychological safety, making GMET an attractive place to work, where staff want to stay
- **Help teachers get better, not just 'stay good'.** PLI is designed to support teachers in getting better at their jobs through structured learning, research and reflection
- **Increase teacher engagement in CPD.** Involving staff in identifying their learning goals, and providing them with support and time to pursue them, increases teacher engagement with professional development, keeping them intellectually stimulated and up-to-date with the latest education research

How the PLI process works:

1. **Staff identify a learning goal that aligns with school priorities.** At the start of the school year:
 - Staff review their previous year's performance, goals and results
 - Staff identify a learning goal that aligns with school and departmental priorities, with support from their line manager or 'PLI partner' (usually their head of department, if they're a teacher)
 - For example, a learning goal might be 'To improve my knowledge and skills in effective scaffolding so that lessons are more accessible to pupils with SEND' or 'To develop my expertise in retrieval practice, so that pupils in year 7 can retain, recall and apply their prior learning more successfully'
2. **Staff carry out active research related to the learning goal.** Throughout the year, staff engage in research and learning related to their goal:
 - This could be in the form of reading, trying out strategies in the classroom, having discussions in their PLCs or observing experienced teachers



- The trust provides tools and resources to support staff with this, hosted on webpages for each subject, and kept up to date by the trust subject leads. Trust subject leads and PLCs provide support, too
 - Remember to keep this light, in terms of workload – there should be no recording requirement for this stage. “Our job is to make it possible for staff to do this within their working day,” says Sam
3. **Evaluation and reflection.** At the end of the school year, staff evaluate and reflect on their learning goal:
- Staff complete a simple 1-page self-reflection, which focuses on what they've learnt
 - They share this reflection with their line manager, head of department and trust subject lead

The capability process is still there, for all teaching staff who need it. All other staff at GMET move through this process annually.

Academies are free to determine their appraisal arrangements

GMET's approach is an example of this.

Maintained schools **must** appraise teachers annually, but you could choose for your appraisals to focus on professional development. Find out more about [staff appraisal requirements](#).

At GMET, teachers receive annual pay progression within their pay range, unless there are significant performance concerns and they're moving through capability proceedings. (In 2024, the DfE removed the requirement for schools to link pay progression to teacher performance. Find out more in [Teachers' pay policy: models and examples](#).)

How to make this a success

Here are Sam's top tips for effectively implementing GMET's approach in your trust:

- **Prioritise teacher learning and professional development above all else.** This is more than just a mindset: prioritise budget, resources and free up time for CPD. “Our core purpose is making teachers better, so they can get better outcomes for children,” says Sam – bring everything back to this
- **Involve staff in designing and shaping their own CPD.** Let them lead the agenda where possible. Co-construct CPD frameworks and charters with staff, for buy-in. Gather feedback regularly, and use it to inform and improve your approach



- **Treat teachers as professionals and trust that they're doing a good job.** "You've got to remove fear and judgement for this to work," says Sam. Create a psychologically safe and supportive environment, where staff feel comfortable taking risks and sharing their learning
- **Don't build systems around the 1% who might not initially engage with this.** "Focus on the 99% who want to improve," says Sam. Accept that some staff may engage with their professional learning more than others, at certain times in their lives and careers
- **Be clear and transparent with staff about what you're doing.** Sam says, "We had to be really clear with staff that this isn't a new kind of appraisal – appraisal has gone." Try to keep processes simple and focussed on development
- **Lead by example.** Engage in your own professional development as senior leaders, to show how much you value it

Sources

Sam Gibbs is director of education at [Greater Manchester Education Trust](#) (GMET).

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