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# **Cultures of career development: senior leaders' and early career teachers' views of career**

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**DRAFT**

## Introduction

Teachers' careers have been well researched in recent times, with the majority of this work focussed on individuals and their experiences and conceptions of career. Yet the role of schools as organisations in relation to teacher careers has received much less attention. In this paper, we draw on data in the form of interviews with school leaders and second year teachers from the third phase of the TDA-funded NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) Quality Improvement Study (QIS) to consider the issues of early career teachers' (ECTs') careers and career development. The topic is of particular interest, since whilst the picture in terms of teacher supply and retention in the profession overall is much improved in recent years (for example, proportions of unfilled vacancies have declined according to DCSF data, and Smithers and Robinson (2003, 2004, 2005) found that the retention issue tailed off and stabilised over the period of their studies), it is clear that schools vary widely in their ability to recruit and retain staff in their early careers. This paper develops a set of key dimensions in relation to an organisational perspective on teacher careers, which, it is hoped, adds to the body of research that illuminates the reasons behind these variations and others.

## The study

The NQT QIS is a 4 year, England-wide longitudinal, combined methods study of both senior leadership team (SLT) and early career teachers (ECT's) views of key issues in the first few years of teaching. The first two phases of the study focussed on entry into the NQT year and the NQT year itself; the third phase was focused on the transitional step-up from the NQT year into the second year of teachers' professional lives, as perceived by senior leaders (SLs), second year teachers and their previous NQT mentors. The specific foci were the inter-related areas of: perceptions of teacher quality and performance; professional development and support; career development; and progression from the NQT year/retention in second year . Data were drawn primarily from 49 school case study visits undertaken in April and May 2009 (the case study schools were the same schools that were visited in 2008 for part 2 of the study). The first three project reports can be found at <http://www.nqtstudy.info/>

## Teachers' careers: reviewing the literature

It is important to begin by defining what we mean by the term career. Maclean (1992:15) argues that for sociologists the term *career* "implies a long term commitment on the part of a person to obtaining promotion, through the status hierarchy that exists in their occupation, according to some time schedule" as opposed to *occupations* which are 'relatively continuous patterns of activities that provide workers with a livelihood and define their general social status' (Form 1968: 245)" (our italics). However, what Maclean calls 'occupation' is usually taken in the literature we go on to discuss to mean the same thing as career. We follow the majority of educational research literature in using this broader definition of career.

It is possible to distinguish three broad areas of research that relate to teachers' careers from an organisational perspective.

There is of course a literature on *teachers' careers from an individual perspective* going back many years, drawing on the seminal early work of Huberman (1995) and in the UK Sikes et al (1985) and more recently developed by Day, Sammons and colleagues, and Hobson and colleagues. Many of these studies attempt to distinguish typical career stages. Day et al (2006) note that Huberman and Sikes' work suggest five career phases:

1. Launching a career: initial commitment (easy or painful beginnings).
2. Stabilization: find commitment (consolidation, emancipation and integration into peer group).
3. New challenges, new concerns (experimentation, responsibility, consternation).
4. Reaching a professional plateau (sense of mortality, stop striving for promotion, enjoy or stagnate).
5. The final phase (increased concern with pupil learning and increasing pursuit of outside interests; disenchantment; contraction of professional activity and interest, disengagement, serenity). (p174)

Their own study develops this categorisation. Day and Quing (2007) distinguish what they call "Professional life phase 0–3 years" as a period during which the key learning that takes place "builds identity and classroom competence", and suggest that for their interviewees at least it is in "Professional life phase 4–7 years" where "Promotion and additional responsibilities had now begun to play a significant role in teachers' motivation, commitment, and sense of effectiveness" (p436).

From this individual perspective, the importance of the organisation is in relation to the schools' influence on individual teachers' careers. For example, Day and Quing (2007) argue that, along with personal attributes both in relation to teaching (e.g. sense of professional identity, self-efficacy, career aspirations) and beyond, the organisation is important in that different "levels of support available within the workplace, create particular conditions for their professional learning and development and lead to variations in their concerns and needs at different critical moments or phases of their professional and personal lives." (p. 427). However, these studies do not discuss in any detail the kinds of ways organisations can impact on teachers learning, particularly in relation to careers.

Some of this detail is provided in the second broad area of research relevant here: the literature on work place learning. In recent years, this literature has concentrated on the ways in which organisations can influence learning via concepts such as Billett's (2001) workplace "affordances" for learning, Eraut's (2007) "learning factors" and "context factors" and Fuller and Unwin's (2003) "expansive/restrictive learning environments". Much of this work does not, however, address career directly and so is of limited relevance. However, Fuller and Unwin's expansive-restrictive continuum does make explicit reference to career in relation to apprentices, with one of the characteristics of an expansive learning environment is conceived as one that has a "post-apprenticeship vision" of "progression for career" as opposed to the restrictive vision which is "static for job". (Fuller and Unwin 2003 p411). They go on to note that one of "three aspects of the expansive approach to apprenticeship [that] are particularly likely to contribute to personal development" is "the ability to envisage and experience long trajectories and careers" (p417). However, it seems the "long trajectories" on offer in such environments are primarily conceived as being within the current organisation, even where individuals might have other options, and the

authors don't deal in any depth with the inherent contradiction in providing a learning environment that might make it more likely that individuals leave that environment, a key issue in relation to schools. More recent work involving Fuller and Unwin (Fuller et al, 2007) looks beyond apprentices into a range of at different sectors, and does provide more detail on how organisations can deal with career. They note in their analysis one organisation that is highly focussed on "developing and shaping the social relations" that is also focussed on career where "the chairman emphasises the family atmosphere in which people are cared for and where the social life of the 'family' is seen as key to the company's success. The director of Internet operations added to this by stressing that this is a 'long lasting career driven company' in which people's careers are seen as the driving force.." (p713). Later, this same company's performance review system is discussed, where career is central: "At the heart of the process is a commitment to individual career development and the role of the manager as the key facilitator of learning" (p714).

However this issue is not explored further, since learning, not career, is of course the focus of the work. This last quotation showing one organisation's explicit and systemic focus on career brings us to the final area of literature of relevance, that exploring "organisational career management". This field tends to focus on explicit strategies and policies that organisations utilise, as Orpen (1944 p28) notes: "The term 'organizational career management' is usually employed to cover the various policies and practices, deliberately established by organizations, to improve the career effectiveness of their employees".

In this study, Orpen distinguished three inter-related factors - career management policies, employee career development support and career information provision - that were positively related to a set of outcomes defined by Orpen as 'career effectiveness' with impacts greater "for the experiential aspects (i.e. how well the subjects felt they had performed, how satisfied they were with their careers) being greater than those for the external activities of salary growth and promotions received." (p33). However this study, like others in the field, does not address the more informal ways in which organisations deal with careers, and there are no studies in this field that relate to educational organisations in particular.

A more fruitful area of research in this field centres on Hall's (2002) concept of "the protean career". From this perspective, the increased atomisation and individuation apparent in postmodern societies has manifested itself in relation to careers as a focus on the individual rather than the organisation being responsible for career development, labelled 'protean' "because it is characterised by frequent change and self-direction driven by individual needs" (Park and Rothwell 2009, 388). In their study, Park and Rothwell found that individuals with a greater 'sense of calling' tended towards protean careers, and provided some evidence that organisational learning climates can positively influence the career development of individuals pursuing 'protean careers'. The "protean career" concept is not without its critics, for example Baruch (2006) argues that the idea that all careers are becoming increasingly protean and "boundaryless" (Defillippi and Arthur (1994) - a concept of career "emphasising the blurring of career related boundaries within organisation and beyond" (Baruch 2006, p126) - is an overstatement, and in fact "traditional", organisation-directed, more ordered careers have not been completely supplanted. Nevertheless, the protean career concept is important in relation to schools for three main reasons. Firstly, given that schools are relatively small organisations, teachers in England at least have always moved between schools, despite being employed by local authorities in most cases. Secondly, as English schools have become

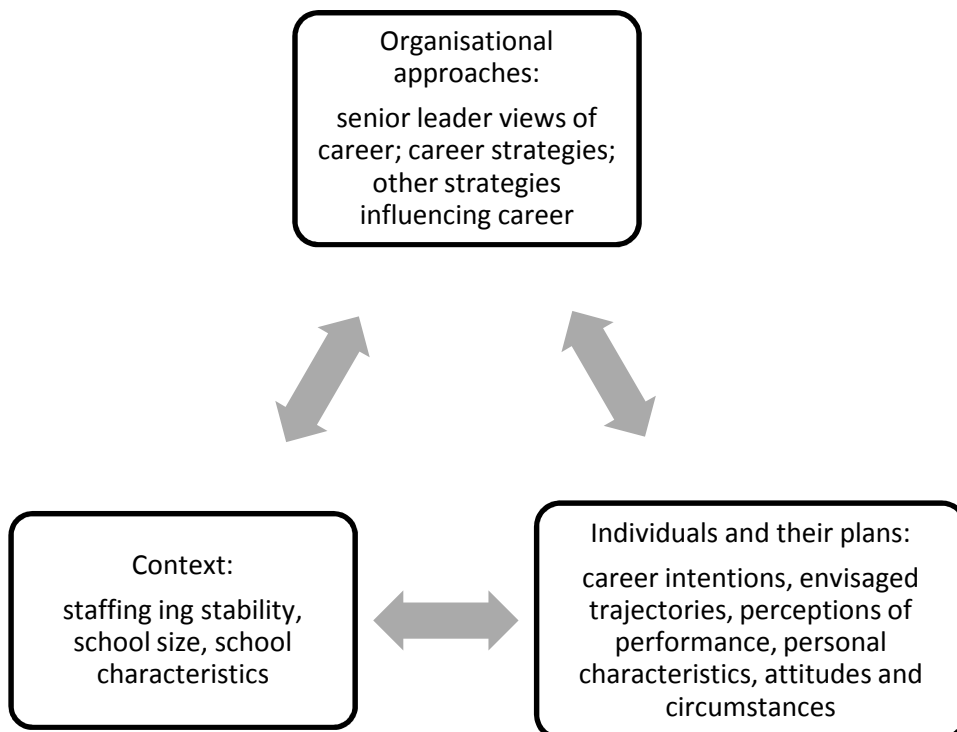
more autonomous since the 1988 Education Reform Act, and as increasing numbers move beyond local authority auspices altogether to become academies (schools overseen directly by central government), the last vestiges of control that local authorities may have had in organising teachers' careers within a district have all but disappeared. Finally, we find in our own work as we will go on to discuss that senior leaders detect that teachers joining the profession are themselves showing signs of wishing to take individual control of their careers and expecting schools as organisations to support them.

This brief review of the literature indicates, then, that whilst these areas of research provide helpful theoretical lenses through which to view teacher careers, there is no specific body of work that lays out the ways that schools as organisations treat teacher careers in general, and early career teachers in particular. This paper aims to begin to address this issue, reflecting on the literature outlined above.

## Organisational perspectives on career: three key dimensions

Drawing on this literature and through an early examination of our data, we framed our analysis around three broad, interacting dimensions in relation to an organisational perspective on teacher careers, as we indicate in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: three dimensions of an organisational perspective on teacher careers**



Whilst our focus is clearly on the organisational approaches themselves, these approaches are influenced by both the wider context and the individuals themselves and their plans. In the next subsections, we examine these three key dimensions in turn.

## Context

Our analysis suggests that there are a number of ways in which school and wider social contexts impact on how school leadership teams deal with the career expectations of their early career teaching staff, principally staff stability, school size and school characteristics, alongside social contexts. We will outline in what ways these factors influence school and individual approaches in the sections that follow. However, it is first necessary to note how these factors themselves interact, since staff stability was itself clearly linked to other contextual factors.

One area of interaction is between staff stability or instability and the likelihood of schools being able to retain good and/or ambitious early career teachers. In particular, small schools in our sample are more likely to report problems with retaining ambitious ECTs and this was cited by five of our primary schools. One interviewee did accept, however, that ECTs moving on can be "good for their careers" (ID48 primary senior leader). It should be noted that retention is not a concern for all primary schools - some are large enough to accommodate the ambitions of their early career teachers or alternatively report enough staff turnover to obviate the problem. One SLT member noted that she is lucky that circumstances (e.g. staff being on maternity leave and secondment) have allowed for this. For example she has been able to give three members of staff temporary experience of senior management as assistant heads. For another large primary there were plenty of opportunities for ECT promotion as several senior staff were moving on. Here the context was set by the combination of a large staff and a high preponderance of social issues (in this case the requirement for EAL) and consequently a large Continuing Professional Development (CPD) budget.

Stability of staffing can set the context in other ways; one secondary school reported that that as the school had become more successful there was less of an issue with retention and consequently less need to incentivise retention. For these schools the TLR structure<sup>1</sup> is designed to serve the needs of the school rather than to provide opportunities for individual staff. One of our sample of special schools also noted that with a stable staff there was no need to use CPD specifically for retention. Paradoxically, another of our study secondary schools due for closure within two years has consequently been able to offer several middle-management promotions to ECTs as more experienced staff have moved on. In this case it was the instability of staffing, rather than the perceived strengths of a school, that formed the context for career opportunities.

A further three of our case study schools reported that fixed-term temporary contracts affected their recruitment and retention. One secondary school noted high turnover due to all NQTs being appointed on temporary contracts, while another which also offered temporary contracts to NQTs reported that once teachers did achieve permanent contracts they are offered promotions including invented posts where necessary. Similarly, one of the primary school initially offered temporary contracts to NQTs but once staff became permanent they had no turnover issues. Another major contextual factor that can affect recruitment is the local housing market. Two of our case study

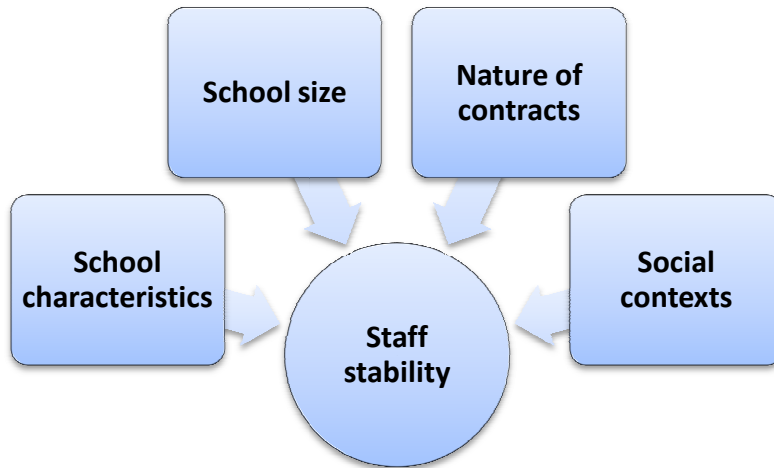
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<sup>1</sup> in English schools, up to five Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payments (or "points") can be given to teachers on top of their salary for undertaking roles related to improving pupil teaching and learning.

secondary schools noted recruitment problems associated with high housing costs in the area; in one school CPD was broadly drawn to include ECTs' own interests while in another in London the school tries to address the issue by offering responsibilities.

One can, then, graphically represent these relationships as indicated below:

**Figure 2: interactions between contextual factors**



## Organisational approaches

### Senior leaders' views of career

The ways school leaders view *'appropriate' career trajectories for early career teachers* were on a continuum. At one end, some SLT members and mentors viewed the early years of teaching as a time for honing the skills required of a classroom teacher and therefore taking on wider responsibilities was not to be encouraged, for example: "if people take on formal, whole school responsibilities too early in their career, it can weigh them down. NQT+1 is a step up from NQT, both with the amount of teaching and the reduction in support" (ID28 secondary senior leader). This is in line with the earlier research on career stages (Day and Quing, 2006).

At the other extreme, however - and rather out of line with this earlier research - some schools actively encouraged taking on such responsibilities as part of their development as teachers, for example one secondary school, where staff are given responsibility early in their career "as a conscious strategy – led by the head teacher – to get the best out of everyone. They need to feel challenged and valued – it encourages development, where appropriate." (ID7 secondary mentor).

Most SLT members tended to be somewhere in between these positions, and almost all felt that for some staff early promotion and responsibility were appropriate for some but not all teachers. For example in the same school the SLT member noted that

"promotion can come too soon, but there is an application process. If the individual isn't up to the job they won't be offered it. They must make sure that the basics (teaching and learning) are right first. Overall balance is needed; you must support ambition. However,



again support is very important. All of the promoted roles have a line manager to monitor and support." (ID7 secondary senior leader)

SLT views were related to the contextual factors outlined above. For example, in one primary school in challenging circumstances, emphasis was placed on developing behaviour management skills, with the SLT member noting that she didn't think early career teachers there were considering promotion yet, rather they "want to consolidate what they did in first year and build on their good practice and confidence" to develop their classroom management skills (ID43 primary senior leader). In another small primary school, the SLT member made the point that

"being an NQT, in a small school, cannot absolve anyone from subject leadership responsibility... our NQT+1 became maths coordinator in her NQT year. She also had to take specific responsibility for modernising the assessment processes for foundation year." (ID29 primary senior leader).

Another primary school SLT member indicated how primary schools have difficulties offering promotion opportunities:

"[There is] no promotion in the school, staff tend to make sideways moves within the departments taking on different roles and responsibilities. Promotion is not really a priority within the school and this has not really happened for any early career teacher although if an opportunity came up would support a 2nd year teacher if they were right for the job. Promoting early career teachers - if there were the opportunities - would inject some life into the post and school" (ID34 primary senior leader)

From our case study interviews there are two main perspectives on *teachers' own views of their career progression* from the school's point of view, which seemed to relate to an increasing expectation of development from the viewpoint of individuals - and perhaps relates to Hall's (2002) assessment that workers' careers are becoming increasingly protean. Firstly they provide ongoing CPD throughout the early years of teaching and beyond to ensure that teachers remain suitable for the roles expected of them; secondly all schools report that they are willing to offer internal promotions when they feel early careers teachers (ECTs) are ready, and to this end much of the CPD is leadership development focussed. However, many schools report that they face difficulties retaining ambitious ECTs (i.e. those that want rapid promotions) and there is a perception among some SLT and Mentor interviewees that schools have to tailor their CPD so that there is more emphasis on leadership training than on teaching and learning. For some respondents there was a degree of resentment about the impact of this development on school priorities:

"Sometimes people expect more than they're given – they have some responsibility and they expect more. They have to be reminded that they are lucky to have what they have got!" (ID 7, secondary mentor)

"Schools have to be about what's good for the pupils. They shouldn't be doing things just to keep staff" (ID 5 secondary mentor)

Another interviewee noted that there is now a culture of people moving on (for promotion) much more quickly than they used to – again, this chimes with Hall's notion that careers are becoming increasingly protean. This tendency was not restricted to the secondary phase; a primary school

mentor thought that that here should be something in the CPD for ECTs that reminded them that they are relatively new teachers so that expectations are more realistic.

## Career strategies employed

Our analysis identifies two main types of career strategy employed by schools. First, a number of schools - almost all secondary schools - employed ***specific career development strategies and policies***. Rarely, these were explicit and formalised, as with ID7 (see Case Study 1 below).

More typically, they tended to be semi-formal, and linked to wider professional development policies (see below) for example one secondary school where a variety of methods were used both to retain staff and benefit the school:

"We use bolt-on TLRs to encourage people; this gives them the whole school, bigger picture view. This moves forward the school and is good for their career development. You often get more value for money with someone who early in their career taking on these roles, because they are keen and enthusiastic. These are roles like responsibility for Citizenship, cross curricular responsibility, numeracy, etc. This might be roles within their area, but that also have a whole school element. These are usually year-long projects." (ID11 secondary senior leader)

Larger secondary schools typically found managing a career strategy in terms of providing paid promotion easier than smaller primary schools, as with this school:

"We can offer a career structure within the school. The evidence of the last 7 or 8 years shows that we have a high degree of promotion within school and that there are relatively few who feel they have to move to another school in order to further their career." (ID20 secondary senior leader)

Sometimes, this meant engineering posts for staff:

"Early career teachers are looking for promotion very early on and the school recognises this and sometimes can offer the right opportunities and sometimes there is nothing available. In some instances posts are created to keep good quality staff." (ID32 secondary senior leader)

For primary schools, these strategies tended to be dependent on there being opportunities, for example one headteacher noted that "More senior staff may be moving up and out, newer teachers taking roles and passing skills on to NQTs. I seek to inspire emerging leaders to do so." (ID40 primary senior leader). She acted to offer guidance to NQTs about competencies they would need for their next career stage, and aimed to link this to the school's more formal CPD strategy.

Virtually all schools utilised a second set of ***other, related formal policies and strategies***, particularly professional development, performance management and retention strategies.

One primary senior leader articulated the importance of CPD to career development in the current climate of 'protean careers' well:

"In the past, the emphasis in the school may have been on craft of teaching and not fostering progress toward promotion, but now we have a head who is proactive in

developing people and more encouraging for them to move on. Also in the past people may have been reluctant to move around within school; they need to establish themselves self with an age group but [the head] thinks they need then to get experience with different age groups". (ID21 primary senior leader)

In addition, performance management was often linked both to promotion and retention, as indicated here :

"I've noticed that post induction teachers 'want more'. Some want management experience; others want to develop highly specialised subject leadership. They are keen to take all CPD opportunities and are more active in this. In performance management meetings they are much more interesting in seeking opportunities than they used to be. ... If people feel they're in a dead end job and not developing they want to move on. It takes years to be a fantastic teacher, but CPD (not necessarily the kind that involves going on courses) gives you instant results; it enthuses and motivates. Any school who doesn't consciously offer CPD opportunities is foolish. It does impact (positively) on standards of teaching." (ID10 primary senior leader)

These links between performance management processes and CPD were evident in many schools, for example in this secondary school:

"The EPD [early professional development] programme fits within the whole school CPD programme. There are, for example, programme elements for those experienced teachers who are new to the school. The programme links with the school's performance management. Individuals are required to plan their own development programme throughout the year and account for it at the end of the year." (ID28 secondary senior leader)

Retention strategies that impacted on career typically involved offering leadership-focussed CPD. Among our interviewees those from five schools admitted that they use CPD to retain good staff. However, only three schools specifically cite the use of promotion to retain staff, all of which were secondary schools reporting stable staffing with few internal promotions available.

## **Early career teachers' views of career**

This section presents early career teachers' perspectives on teaching as a career showing that in our study the vast majority envisaged a medium or long term career in teaching, although they were less certain about the trajectory they would follow. Factors that influence their decisions, such as their teaching performance, perceptions of work load, school context, emotional attachment to their school, attitudes towards moving school and promotion, and their personal characteristics and circumstances are illustrated with reference to our cases. The section concludes by outlining teachers' perceptions of school career strategies.

## **Teaching as a long term career**

In our case studies nearly all the second year teachers intended to either pursue a long term career in teaching, or at least stay 'for the foreseeable future'. This together with the findings of our national survey of NQTs, were 91% (n=270) were intending to stay in teaching, contrasts with much

of the literature on teacher retention. For example, Smithers and Robinson (2003) estimated wastage during the first five years to be 27% in primary and 30% in secondary schools. The greater commitment to a long term career in teaching in our study may reflect our sampling strategy, since schools self-selected to participate, and the impact of strategies put in place to reduce wastage since the earlier studies.

At the time of our second year interviews only one teacher was definitely not expecting teaching to be a long term career. Two other primary teachers had been intending to leave teaching in the UK when interviewed at the end of their NQT year, but by the end of the second year had no immediate plans to leave. Another primary teacher talked of returning to India to undertake voluntary teaching, but not for at least another year, and one secondary teacher, in a National Challenge school, thought at the end of her NQT that teaching may become too stressful to continue, but by the end of her second year was more positive. All these teachers had struggled with some aspects of their teaching and found it difficult to manage their workload and maintain a work-life balance - one talked of 'wasting' much of her holidays catching up on sleep and another felt she was 'drowning' trying to introduce a more creative curriculum in her second year and could not envisage maintaining the pace required to be a teacher over time. Likewise, of the twenty four NQTs in our survey who were thinking of leaving teaching 15 cited the heavy workload. However, even those teachers who were committed to a lifelong career in teaching found teaching demanding and challenging, and many talked about the difficulties of maintaining a work-life balance and the 'ups and down's' of teaching.

The difference for those committed to teaching was that positive experiences outweighed the negatives, as one Special School Teacher (ID50) explained - "I love it and really enjoy getting up and coming to work even if I'm exhausted". The status of teachers was an issue for one teacher who perceived teaching in the UK to be very demanding and poorly paid, making unfavourable comparisons with the earnings of her GP father, and saying that her friend who teaches in South Africa is less stressed, better rewarded and has a better standard of living. School factors also influenced these teachers' perceptions of teaching as a long term career. ID43, located in a school that had been subject to a Notice to Improve and had a high staff turnover and a very high proportion of newly qualified staff, felt she had not been supported adequately for her new role as a PSHE coordinator. For two teachers changes within the school led to them becoming much more positive about remaining in teaching -one explained that a new Head had been very supportive, introduced new teaching styles, and raised staff motivation, whereas another pointed to the stability brought by a new Head of Department. In summary our cases indicate that early career teachers are more likely to leave teaching when they find teaching difficult, struggle to manage their workload, perceive that other careers have greater salary and lifestyle benefits, and are located in schools with challenging circumstances.

### **Trajectories within teaching**

While most of the case study teachers perceived teaching as a medium or long term career they were less certain about the career path they wanted to follow. Five case study teachers (three primary and two secondary) had not identified any trajectory. Three of these, as discussed, were struggling and unsure about a long term career in teaching: the others (one primary and one secondary), although performing well, preferred to focus on their immediate roles rather than look

forward. Indeed, even where when teachers had a clear sense of career trajectory their main preoccupation was becoming a 'good' classroom teacher and gaining an appropriate range of experience in the short to medium term:

"I do not want to take on too much responsibility until I have proved myself to be an outstanding teacher, as I will not be able to suggest what others should do until I have shown I can do it myself." (Primary second year teacher).

The most frequently mentioned career aspiration was middle management (thirteen teachers - four primary, seven secondary and two special). Only one teacher, a female in a primary school, expressed the intention of progressing to headship. This teacher, who was very reflective and self-aware and succeeding well with new responsibilities, envisaged reaching headship through a role such as Local Authority advisor. A male primary teacher aspired to be a deputy head. He perceived teaching as a well regarded profession and an opportunity to pursue different interests. A male secondary teacher at the end his NQT year envisaged a trajectory to senior leadership, but probably not headship, and had become a Head of Year at the beginning of his second year of teaching. He appeared to have strong expectations that he could progress quickly, commenting that without the promotion he may have felt 'in limbo' and wondering where his career was going. In contrast most secondary case study teachers considered it too early to take on this level of responsibility, instead perceiving the early years of their career as a time for broadening their experiences with activities within their departments such as taking on responsibilities for organising guest speakers or educational visits or co-ordination of key stages within the subject.

The early career trajectory for primary teachers differed markedly from secondary teachers. Echoing the findings of the Becoming a Teacher Study (Tracey et al, 2008) most case study primary teachers had already embarked on the first stage of formal career progression by taking on additional responsibilities at the start of their second year of teaching, most frequently as a subject co-ordinator. Additional responsibility was perceived to be the normal trajectory for second year teachers - "this is what is expected" (ID34), "second year teachers are frowned upon in this school if they don't take on extra responsibilities" (ID17). Only one primary teacher wanted to concentrate on teaching rather than taking on these extra responsibilities. Three teachers (two primary and one special) did not wish to progress into management roles. All three were mature entrants who pointed out that management roles were very different to teaching. One of these perceived that school management posts were effectively office jobs, and having done this work in the past was not keen to return to it.

Case study teachers varied in their opinions on the 'right' period of experience needed before promotion, with nineteen feeling it too early for them to seek promotion. Generally, they thought that promotion should be based on individual qualities and not time served:

"Promoting early career teachers depends on the individual. It's not about age or experience, it's about the skills and qualities they can bring to a role. Early career teachers should be given the same opportunities as all other members of staff." (ID 50)

Generally the case study teachers' narratives indicated that they perceived that they were the main drivers of their career trajectory, and they did not expect this to be planned out for them by the school, reflecting Hall's (2002) conceptualisation of a protean career.

## Staying or leaving their current school

Integral to early career teachers' conceptualisations of their career trajectory were their orientations towards staying or leaving their current school. Well over half, including the vast majority of primary school teachers, intended to stay at their current school for at least two to four years to develop experience:

"it is important that NQTs stay at the school for at least a few years to get the experience taking on more responsibilities as they progress. If early career teachers change schools early on they are not getting the right experience and not enough time to learn the teaching strategies." (Primary second year teacher)

Around a further 10 teachers – including three special and three independent school teachers intended to stay for the long term. However, teachers on temporary contracts had no choice but to look for other posts and envisaged uncertain and fragmented career trajectories:

"I'm worried that it maybe difficult to get a new job because so many people are applying.... may have to consider supply but [I don't] really want to go down that route; even though the money is good, it's not a permanent job. [I] would like to get a job in a school where [I] can progress and move on." (Primary ID??)

Primary teachers tended to describe their future plans as leaving their school for promotion only if no opportunities arose at their currently school, whereas secondary teachers were more open to seeking promotion per se irrespective of location. Moving for promoted post was not the only motivation for seeking posts in other schools. Four primary teachers (and one secondary had moved to or were looking to move to gain new experiences and challenges to broaden their horizons and develop their identities as teachers.

Some case study teachers had a strong emotional attachment to their school which underpinned their decision to stay in their current school, and would ultimately determine the career options available to them. One special school teacher (ID50) thought she would "stay here forever" stating "I feel as though I have come to the place I belong in". Some other teachers felt a moral obligation to repay their school for the support that they had been given as an NQT by staying, at least for the medium term. This resonates with the importance of the emotional dimension in early career teacher development found in other studies, as McNally et al (2008) claim:

"there is little option but to enter life as a teacher through a kind of emotional labour that is in effect an investment in the formation of relationships that are fundamental to the beginner's sense of development as a teacher ". (p289)

## Personal circumstances

Personal circumstances influenced teachers overall orientation towards their career as well as the decisions about moving school. Three female teachers talked of working part-time if they had children, and another thought she might take a career break. For a few teachers family moves or concern about house prices determined their decisions to move schools. As one secondary teacher explained although there were aspects of her school context that she thought impeded her development it was family circumstances that actually led her to change schools:

"This is not directly a result of the lack of training here as my family were moving anyway, but it is an opportunity to get proper training. The new school has offered to provide training... many retention issues are personal, but the structure the school has for promotion is also an important one." (ID37)

## Teachers' perceptions of school career strategies

CPD and performance management were the key school strategies that early career teachers identified as supporting their career development. However they placed less emphasis on these as career development tools than their senior leaders.

Only one teacher (ID7 secondary), located in one of only four schools to have a dedicated CPD programme for early career teachers, explicitly stated that she was receiving the support to prepare for a long term career- "the Beginning a Career in Teaching course is a reflective process that allows you to think about your long term career aspirations". She explained that the course, together with several in-school professional development meetings helped her consider which roles she aspired to and the steps needed to get there. She was also just about to shadow the Head of Department for a week to gain an understanding of the role. In contrast another secondary teacher, in a National Challenge school, said no one had talked to her about her long term career goals. Although fifteen case study teachers (three primary, seven secondary, two Independent and three special school teachers) mentioned that their school had supported their career development through access to CPD, this was mentioned less frequently by second year teachers than their senior leaders. Most teachers were satisfied with the level of support provided, however those who would have liked more support pointed to CPD needs related to career progression and additional responsibilities. Teachers varied in their perceptions of CPD as a career strategy. Some teachers thought their school invested in CPD to encourage them to stay, even to the extent of feeling a 'little bit selfish' (ID10) for considering moving, whereas other teachers thought that CPD was limited to immediate school priorities and not intended to encourage them to stay. The majority of second year teachers were articulate about their CPD needs and considered it their responsibility to be proactive in seeking out CPD, again indicating a protean (Hall 2002) approach to career.

The influence of CPD on remaining in teaching was highlighted in another large scale project, the *Becoming a Teacher* (BaT) study. This found that "teachers who reported receiving additional training in their third year of teaching were more likely, than those who stated that they did not receive any additional training, to report that they expected to be teaching in two years' time" as were those that rated the additional CPD as 'good' or 'very good' (Homer et al, 2009 p65)

Far fewer teachers (four primary, four secondary and one special school) identified performance management as a support mechanism for career development than senior leaders (40 in total),

although for some of these teachers it was important in helping them find "where they could go as an individual in the school" (ID13).

In this section early career teachers personal perspectives on their career have been illustrated. Each teacher's conception of teaching as a career and the trajectory they envisaged following emanated from an interaction of their personal commitment to teaching, their experiences as an early career teacher -including their perceptions of their own performance and the extent to which they could manage a sustainable work-life balance, their personal circumstances, school context and school strategies.

## **Concluding discussion: narrow versus broad organisational conceptions of career**

The findings we present above indicate that schools in different circumstances employ a range of strategies in relation to teachers' careers, but that they rarely employ formal career management strategies as such, rather aiming to influence teachers' careers more broadly via informal strategies, and other formal strategies - particularly professional development, retention and Performance Management. Drawing together these analyses, it becomes apparent that these issues - the school's view of teacher career, school views of why development is important, the context, the individuals' needs and plans, and the strategies the school employs - interact in a variety of ways, which can be explored by considering how the school views career for early career teachers. In summary, the school's views of providing career opportunities are linked to two key factors:

- the needs of the teacher: developing the teacher's classroom potential; developing their wider potential as a teacher; meeting their needs and wants (linked to their own view of career, and commitment to the school)
- the needs of the school: meeting the needs of the pupils; meeting the wider needs of the school (filling leadership roles and other responsibilities; ensuring appropriate retention and recruitment)

The first of these will also be influenced by the wider world of the individual teacher (as we lay out above - e.g. family commitments); the second by the wider school context (as we note, these are in particular the size and phase of the school, and the relative deprivation of the school's catchment)

It is important to note that the SLT and teacher data on career expectations we present here indicates that the research on early career teacher careers to date, which focus on consolidation and development of classroom practice, underplays the multiple roles and expectations of teachers in their first career phase. We found that whilst teachers and senior leaders did find this to be very important they both to varying degrees were committed to wider responsibility and sometimes promotion. The tensions arise - as we note above - where there is a mismatch between the two: where the school, for example, feels that teachers need to develop their classroom skills, yet teachers want to gain promotion, this can cause problems, and - particularly if the school has retention problems in any case - the school may have to make decisions it is not happy about. Yet these issues do interact: if a school provides high quality career development opportunities, this can influence recruitment and retention, therefore easing the tensions. These issues are brought out clearly in the case studies below of two schools.



### **Case Study 1: ID7 – a school deploying a range of career development strategies**

ID7 is large, high performing secondary training school, in an area of low deprivation.

There is an expectation in the school that early career teachers will take on responsibility, but not necessarily take on formal promotion in their first 1-3 years.

The school has an explicit career development strategy. Every year there is a programme of development opportunities: "We look for individuals with potential and move them on. We like to use the talent that we spot. We've got staff on all likes of programmes – e.g. one of this year NQTs has got a place on an NQT leaders programme. We have found programmes to enhance the talents of the people that we've got." In addition, in this school, there was a specific programme for early career teachers, with conferences run three times a year.

This work is closely tied to the school's professional development strategy: "There are things we can do via CPD to support career development. For example, I and a colleague have just been to train as facilitators for the outstanding teacher programme with London challenge. Next year we will run this here, focusing on staff in their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year of teaching." This sits alongside a general commitment to training and development in this school, and other strategies.

There are no retention issues with the staff that have been appointed as NQTs, but "we are not complacent about that... We have been careful with the appointments we have made and we know we need to look after them - they are a precious resource." The senior leader claimed the school "values people, look at them as individuals and they try to help them plan their career and meet their needs".

The school senior leaders aim to support career development through a range of CPD opportunities, giving teachers responsibility (even unpaid, such as presenting at a departmental workshop), and find that giving staff this responsibility is very motivating. Paid promotions are all advertised posts and they have to be interviewed for them. This includes "research posts" which provide opportunities for staff who are not ready to take on leadership roles.

The Early Career Teacher we spoke to had two TLR points for responsibilities within her (mathematics) department, and felt well that the support she received was preparing for her career in the longer term, when she would eventually like to be Head of Department. She had requested CPD to prepare her for this – for example at the end of the term she was to job shadow the Head of Maths for a week to get a better understanding of what the job entails. She is worried about progression within here department, and so may leave in the future. However, she would not be leaving because she feels unsupported or not encouraged here, and noted "in an ideal world [i.e. if progression in the department was possible] I'd stay forever".

### **Case Study 2: ID29 – A school with few career development strategies**

ID27 is a small primary school in a deprived area.

The Senior Leader in the school did not outline any specific, proactive strategies for supporting career development. He saw issues around career development as a combination of each teacher articulating their needs and aspirations, with him prompting where he feels it is necessary.

There was no specific early career development strategy, and no distinction was made between Early Career teachers and any other post-NQT teachers with regard to training and support. CPD is “a school requirement for all.... Overall, there is a greater awareness and positive acceptance of CPD than in times gone by.”

For CPD in general, staff are encouraged to assess their own needs in relation to the stage they are at in their professional development and the training demands generated both internally and externally. The CPD strategy described was thus largely dependent on the priorities set by staff themselves, in the context of their current responsibilities, rather than focusing on development for the future.

This rather reactive approach may well link to retention problems: “Of the five people in KS2, four will not be in the school in September. This is the second time this has happened in five years. With a small school, such changes are significant.”

The Early Career Teacher we spoke to in this school did not feel particularly under-supported, but was quite experienced prior to being appointed and perhaps had the equipment to deal with a situation where her inexperience was not really recognised: very little of what she had done in the year we spoke to her had been focussed on her early career status. Courses and support have been around her responsibilities, for Foundation Stage and Mathematics. She initiated a lot of access to training opportunities – especially to do with her specific responsibilities. All her training this year had been in these areas.

These cases illustrate how schools' approaches can differ markedly, and how these link to contextual factors. Drawing on Fuller and Unwin's concept of expansive and restrictive learning environments, we can delineate how schools can provide narrow or broad career development environments. Table 1 below presents a set of dimensions of such environments, which could be explored in more depth in future work on organisational approaches to careers in a school context.

**Table 1: Career development environments continuum**

	<b>Narrow</b>	<b>Broad</b>
<b>View of early career</b>	classroom focussed	Additional opportunities to take on responsibility
<b>Range of strategies employed</b>	Narrow range of strategies, not well linked	Broad range of strategies, used coherently
<b>Formal strategy/policy for career development</b>	Limited or none	Well developed
<b>Use of other formal strategies/policies relevant to career</b>	Used to support career development in restricted range of ways focussed tightly on immediate pupil outcomes	Used in a range of ways with longer term, broader range of outcomes possible
<b>Informal strategies</b>	Limited in scope to a few individuals	All considered
<b>Strategic approach</b>	reactive to circumstances	proactive - aiming to affect circumstances
<b>Contexts</b>	smaller schools, challenging circumstances, retention problems	larger schools, less challenging circumstances, few retention problems

Clearly Case 1 provides a good example of a broader career development environment; whereas Case 2 provides a narrower environment. However, as the section above on individual teachers' views and the comments from the teachers in the case studies indicate, the provision of such environments is only one small factor in teachers' career decision-making, alongside their own motivations and - according to our data - increasingly protean views of their own career, and factors external to the school altogether such as their family circumstances.

Nevertheless, providing a range of professional development, effective performance management and paying attention to the informal and - in some cases - formal career plans of early career teachers does seem to enable schools to manage their teachers' needs better, create positive school cultures and in turn support retention in the early years.

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