

# Our Research Agenda

2024 – 2027

## About the National Institute of Teaching

The National Institute of Teaching is a pioneering institute, established by a diverse community of schools.

Our vision is for a school system that nurtures the talents of teachers and leaders at all stages of their careers, so they can provide children with the world-class education they deserve.

We aim to boost the quality of teaching and school leadership by carrying out research, applying the insights to our professional development programmes, and sharing the findings with the sector.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the teachers, school leaders, professional development providers, teacher trainers, researchers and policy makers who contributed their time, expertise, and professional development questions. We would also like to thank the National Institute of Teaching's Research Advisory Group for their support and guidance throughout.

## Background

The National Institute of Teaching (NlOT) wants a school system that nurtures the talents of teachers and leaders at all stages in their careers so they can provide the world-class education children deserve. With teacher quality being one of the most important school factors in student learning<sup>1</sup>; understanding how to help teachers and leaders develop their practice is essential for schools, teacher educators and all those who support teachers throughout their careers.

Evidence on how to best support and develop teachers and leaders is important for delivering professional development that works. Research begins with asking questions, and often the questions that get answered are chosen by researchers or funders<sup>2</sup>, not those closest to the classroom. A potential consequence of this is generating research findings that are not as relevant or as useful as they could be.

So, to find out what topics matter most to teachers, leaders, and teacher trainers, we asked them. This document briefly describes what we did, what we found, and what this means for us and for research on professional development.



## What we did

Taking inspiration from research priority setting approaches more commonly used in healthcare (see James Lind Alliance<sup>3</sup>), we asked people for the questions they wanted answered regarding how to improve the professional development\* of teachers and leaders in English schools. We conducted online surveys, semi-structured interviews, and held events between February and June 2023.

The questions that we received from the sector in response to the consultation were analysed and grouped thematically; these groupings were summarised with indicative questions to illustrate the underlying themes present in the responses. In a series of workshops the results of the consultation and their implications for research at the NIOT were discussed and prioritised.

The full report, 'Closer to the classroom: Teachers' professional development research priorities'<sup>4</sup> on our consultation and the list of the 21 topics are available online. From the long list, we prioritised the topics we would include in our agenda informed by our vision, mission, and internal capabilities. These eight questions were grouped under four themes: meeting needs, having impact, practical realities and research meets practice.

\*By 'professional development' we mean all the training a teacher and/or leader might experience in their career, including initial teacher education.

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These eight questions in these four themes represent the contributions of many hundreds of participants and careful deliberation to narrow down the list to the topics that the NIoT is well placed to tackle. These questions will guide the research of the NIoT for the next three years.

<b>Meeting needs</b> <p>How can teachers' and leaders' professional development needs be best identified?</p> <hr/> <p>What does effective mentoring that also works for mentors look like?</p>	<b>Having impact</b> <p>Which delivery methods or professional interactions are the most effective at changing teacher and / or leader behaviour to improve practice?</p> <hr/> <p>When is professional development more effective when it is specific to the setting, phase, or subject?</p>
<b>Practical realities</b> <p>How can quality time be made for professional development, and can it avoid unnecessary additional workload?</p> <hr/> <p>Can professional development be used to support recruitment and retention?</p>	<b>Research meets practice</b> <p>How can the impact of professional development be measured?</p> <hr/> <p>How can professional development be informed by research?</p>

While collating responses, it became clear that there were cross-cutting themes (e.g., Special Educational Needs and/or Disability; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, leadership and disadvantage) raised within the other categories. We will incorporate these themes across all research we conduct.

We designed our process to be inclusive, reaching out to teachers, school leaders, researchers, policy makers, and teacher educators via various routes. However, we recognise that will not have been able to reflect the full range of views found across the school system, and the thematic analysis was necessarily subjective to summarise the vast array of questions, so may have lost some nuance along the way. We will, however, continue to refer to the specific responses from the sector as we develop our research projects that respond to these topics.

There will likely be many answers to the questions posed, which will depend on the context in which they are answered; in all our research, we will strive to ensure that we explore when and under what circumstances potential solutions are relevant, and where there are nuances that can help or hinder interventions to improve the situation for teachers.



## What's next for us

We will use this school-led agenda to guide and help us make decisions about what research we focus on, and funding we apply for. We will continue to involve those closest to the classroom when designing research projects.

## Stay involved

If you are interested to follow our research work and help us to shape specific projects, please 'register your interest' on our website. You can also email us at [research@niot.org.uk](mailto:research@niot.org.uk) or reach us via our social media channels.



## References

1. Lee, S. W. (2018). Pulling back the curtain: Revealing the cumulative importance of high-performing, highly qualified teachers on students' educational outcome. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 40(3), 359–381.
2. Liberman, B. & Young, V. (2020). *Equity in the driver's seat: A practice-driven, equity-centred approach for setting R&D agendas in education*. San Mateo, CA: Digital Promise
3. The James Lind Alliance Guidebook Version 10 March (2021): [JLA-GuidebookVersion-10-March-2021.pdf](#) (nih.ac.uk)
4. *Closer to the Classroom: Teachers' professional development research priorities* (2023): [NIOTCloserToTheClassroomReport.pdf](#)