

## **ASE Futures – Supporting teacher development**

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# ASE Futures – Supporting teacher development

● Claire Seeley ● Emily Perry

It is in the DNA of teachers and educators to continue a life-long learning journey throughout their careers. We all know that professional development is important. However, in reality, as wearers of several hats, teachers can have periods of feeling time- and energy-poor. What is sometimes offered in terms of professional development is not always what is useful. There can be a real sense of 'being done to' rather than teachers being given agency, empowered to seek out what they need. Fairman (2023) comments that 'teachers often engage in professional learning passively without opportunities to engage with colleagues or instructional coaches over the long term, or to observe expert teachers, and they lack professional autonomy or choice in directing the focus, timing and method of their professional learning'.

So how do we reimagine professional development that is transformative, truly meeting the needs of both science educators and making a real impact on students' learning? How can teacher developers create professional development that allows the right learning to happen, at the right time, for the right purpose?

ASE Futures seeks to explore this very question. Its main purpose is to support teacher developers – all those who support teaching colleagues. This may be through initial teacher education, continuing professional development (CPD), mentoring and coaching, subject or departmental leadership, or the design of curriculum materials. If you are working with a teacher at any stage of their career, you should think about joining ASE Futures.

## Why is ASE Futures working with teacher developers?

Teacher developers are on a particularly complex professional learning journey. They are trying to understand the needs of their colleagues as science educators in terms of the subject knowledge and pedagogies that will make most impact on their students' learning. At the same time, they are also thinking about how to create transformative professional development; unpicking how to craft learning that is relevant and memorable for the participant. So, teacher developers need their own professional development that can support this process. Perry and Boylan (2018) comment that *'What is clear is that, with the increasing importance of Professional Development Facilitators in the education system, it is important to develop opportunities for facilitators to collaboratively reflect on, analyse, understand and improve their practice'*.

This 'unique' form of practice is because teacher developers hold 'second order' roles (Murray & Male, 2005), one step removed from the classroom. Supporting new and practising teachers requires different expertise from teaching, although teaching expertise can be important in demonstrating credibility in the role (Perry, 2020). These practitioners often work for multiple organisations and carry out a variety of activities (Perry & Boylan, 2018). They also increasingly maintain a classroom teaching role, and are therefore sometimes known as 'hybrid teacher leaders' (Margolis, 2012).





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There is some evidence of the professional learning needs of teacher developers, including:

- knowledge and skills relating to teaching, including curriculum knowledge and pedagogies;
- knowledge and skills of how to support teacher developers in their own professional and career development;
- role-specific and system-level knowledge and skills relating to teacher education; and
- professional development, and subject leadership (for example, Ofsted frameworks, DfE priorities and funding opportunities).

Education leaders worldwide recognise the importance of professional development, and many systems have invested in greater opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development. For example, the Early Career Framework (Department for Education, 2022) has arguably moved the English system closer to an entitlement to professional development for all teachers, although its lack of subject specificity and increased demand on mentors means that it is not without critique (Murtagh *et al*, 2022). The English government has also recognised the importance of teacher developers through the Leading Teacher Development NPQ (Department for Education, 2020). However, overall there is still a lack of formal, subject-specific professional development for teacher developers and others in these ‘second order roles’ (Perry & Boylan, 2018).

ASE Futures seeks to be a place where teacher developers can learn from each other: a place for networking, where critical conversations and complicated discussions can happen. We aim to bring in experts from the fields of research and teacher development in order to widen and challenge our thinking. We hope that we create places where we can evaluate the effectiveness of different modes of professional development, allowing space for analysis and evaluation of teacher implementation back in their contexts, resulting in improved student outcomes.

As a group, we are really interested in what makes for transformative professional development that makes an impact on social justice. Also, questions that we ask include: ‘How can we improve the learning on offer so that we allow teachers more agency?’, ‘How can we provide better, more impactful CPD and ITT?’ We also want to understand the part that professional development plays in giving back teachers their sense of professionalism and empowerment. We know that good quality professional development can play an important role in tackling the teacher retention crisis. Lennon Audrain *et al* (2023) note that ‘*Teacher education can support collaboration and autonomy and, by extension, a sustainable longevity for teachers in the profession*’. So, we want to work out more effective ways of working with our colleagues.

ASE Futures plays an important role in actively advocating on behalf of all members of the teacher developer community, often speaking to issues around curriculum design, pedagogy, or access to good quality professional development. ASE Futures aims to represent a range of insights and expertise from across its professional network and community.





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## Plans for the future of Futures

Going forward, we would like to create a stronger Futures community, with a stronger sense of identity within ASE. We plan to host ASE Futures get-togethers twice a year, both through a bespoke programme at the ASE Annual Conference and then a one-day, face-to-face meeting in the summer term. We also plan to create termly teacher developer network meetings, where our members can sign up to share their practice, invite researchers with a lens on professional development, or hold seminars with opportunities for discussion. In the future, we hope to create a peer mentor scheme through which Futures members can support each other.

## How can I get more involved with ASE Futures?

This is a very exciting time to be working in professional development and we would welcome your thoughts and ideas for the next phase of the Committee's work. Please share them via <https://shorturl.at/bsIS4>

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