



Sichuan Normal University Teacher Inquiry Programme

Programme Outline

UCL Institute of Education

The IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society (IOE), is the world's leading centre for education and social science. With over 8000 students and around 800 staff, IOE is ranked first globally for education in the QS World University rankings by subject for twelve consecutive years. It is also part of UCL, consistently ranked amongst the world's top 10 institutions. Founded in 1902, the IOE has a long and distinguished history of educating teachers, advancing social research and shaping educational policy, and today remains one of the UK's largest providers of postgraduate Initial Teacher Education.

Each year we support the professional development of over 30,000 teachers and school leaders. We work closely with the UK Government and are contracted to design and deliver teacher induction and leadership development programmes at national scale, including the Early Career Teacher Programme and the National Professional Qualifications, which have both been judged to be outstanding by Ofsted in recent inspections. This is in addition to outstanding judgements by Ofsted for IOE's teacher education across the primary, secondary and further education phases. We are also responsible for leading the DfE (Department for Education)-funded £15m National Consortium for Languages Education.

In the 2021 Research Excellence Framework, the IOE was ranked first in education for overall research power and first in education for overall research strength. Our research activity includes more than 170 collaborations worldwide, and our academic community includes 73 researchers named among the world's top 2% most-cited scientists. The findings of our high-quality research have influenced government activity and policy in most areas of education, with academics and staff working on governmental projects worldwide in areas ranging from primary education to literacy, textbook publishing and school leadership. In addition to this, the IOE's scope of work is truly global and we also engage with education systems world-wide through consultancy and knowledge exchange.

UCL Centre for Educational Leadership

This programme is led by the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership (CEL), which is the UK's largest higher education centre for educational leadership, with a strong international presence. We teach master's programmes in educational leadership and supervise a number of doctoral students with a wide range of leadership interests. We are one of the largest providers of the UK Government's Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications for Leadership (NPQs) with 30,000 new and experienced teachers and leaders part of the programmes annually. Our expertise spans educational leadership and leadership development, school system reform,

school improvement and evidence-informed practice across the UK and internationally.[]

Programme Overview

This programme brings together IOE and Sichuan Normal University to support teachers and leaders to engage in structured, collaborative inquiry that strengthens research-informed practice and sustainable improvement. The programme is designed to be co-constructed with Sichuan Normal University, drawing on local expertise, priorities and contextual knowledge alongside IOE's research and inquiry frameworks.

Across the programme, inquiry is positioned as a key leadership practice, strengthening participants' ability to diagnose problems, mobilise colleagues and lead evidence-informed improvement. The programme combines an online induction with a facilitated inquiry cycle, supported by professional learning communities and tutorials. Participants will work in inquiry teams of up to five people to support shared sense-making and the translation of learning beyond individual contexts.

Programme Aims:

By the end of the programme, participants will be able to:

1. Lead structured, collaborative inquiry that addresses a clearly defined improvement priority.
2. Interrogate baseline evidence and craft precise, context-aware inquiry questions.
3. Engage critically with research and apply it to their practice.
4. Design, trial and evaluate change ideas using practical measures of teacher practice and student learning.
5. Strengthen leadership for improvement.
6. Mobilise and sustain effective practices within their schools and communities.

Distinctive Features:

Evidence informed approach:

Participants engage with world-leading research, from experts in our centre and beyond, and apply it to local priorities through a structured inquiry cycle, designing innovations and evaluating their impact.

Development of professional identity:

Through facilitation and peer collaboration, participants are supported to reflect on their own experiences of education, their personal and professional lenses, and how values and assumptions shape decisions and improvement.

Connection between theory and practice:

Through undertaking a structured inquiry project, participants develop their knowledge of their own contexts alongside deepening knowledge of the research base. A clear and practical framework for their inquiries ensures a supportive pathway from baseline to intended outcomes.

Demonstrable impact and sustainability:

Participants make evidence-based claims about what is working and why, and plan for wider professional learning and development, so changes endure beyond the life of the programme. Working as part of inquiry teams allows participants to collaborate on strategic improvement and build supportive professional networks.

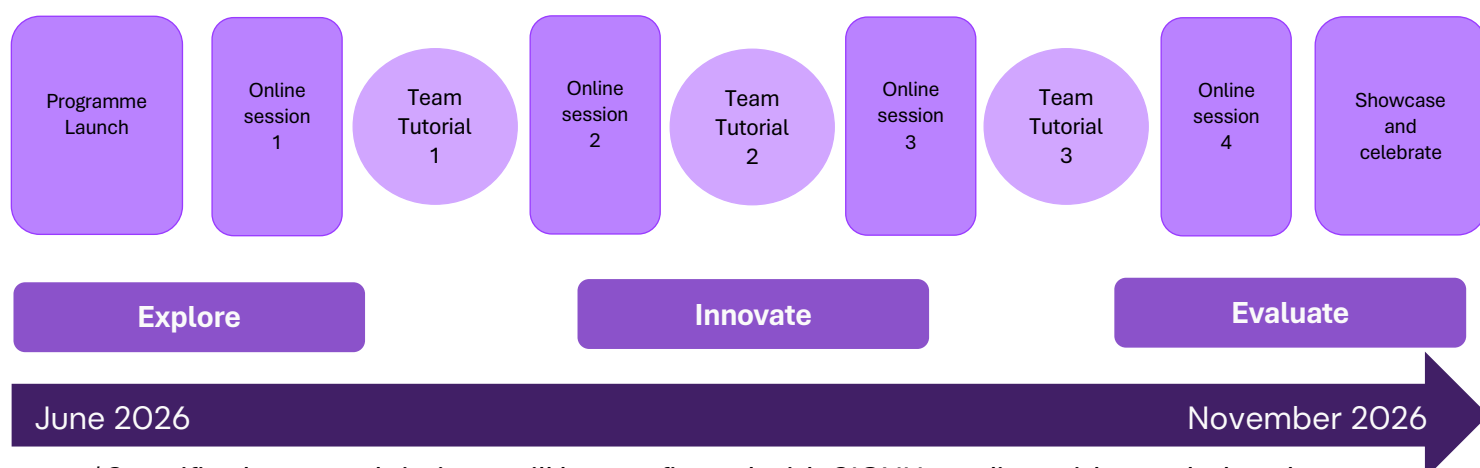
Expert facilitation:

The programme is facilitated by UCL Programme Leaders who hold extensive expertise in the field of teacher development, educational leadership and adult learning. UCL facilitators provide structured input and critical-friend challenge, as well as offering check-in tutorials with the inquiry teams between live sessions. Our preference is to collaborate with partners on co-facilitation of sessions, and we can provide support with facilitator development where required.

Programme Structure

The programme blends a self-directed team inquiry project, an online launch including keynote speakers and an exploration of teachers' professional positions, online facilitated sessions and online tutorial support to help teams enact the inquiry cycle in between sessions.

The diagram below outlines the proposed structure of the launch, four two-hour facilitated sessions, three inter-session team tutorials and a final online showcase for team presentations of their findings:



**Specific dates and timings will be confirmed with SICNU to align with needs, local calendars and major holidays.*

Programme Content

The programme provides a structured approach to undertaking a professional inquiry for educators. The inquiry cycle used by UCL Centre for Educational Leadership has three distinct phases:

- Explore – to understand context and purpose
- Innovate – to design and implement change
- Evaluate – to evidence impact and plan for sustainability

The programme launch events provide an exciting welcome for participants, as well as the structures for them to explore their reality. The four online sessions and inter-sessional tutorials cover the innovate and evaluate phases of the cycle. A final showcase event offers participants an opportunity to share learning and reflect collectively on impact, sustainability and next steps.

Programme Launch:

The launch of the programme establishes the intellectual and relational foundations for the programme, taking participants through much of the explore phase of their inquiry.

The launch consists of four three-hour online sessions. It is proposed that this takes place across two weeks to ensure high-quality engagement. A possible outline for the launch events is shown below:

Session	Purpose	Possible content
1	Foundations of identity, inquiry	Welcome and keynote speaker

	and professional community	• Our identity and lenses: values, beliefs, biography, assumptions • Building the learning community, norms for critical friendship and expectations for collaboration
2	Criticality, assumptions and evidence literacy	• Keynote speaker • Professional judgement, bias and using evidence well • The importance of critical friendship • Framing exploratory questions • Strengthen capacity to see context with clarity and curiosity.
3	Understanding the current reality and the baseline	• What is the current reality for pupils, teachers and leaders? • The value of different sources of evidence within participants' school settings • Establishing a baseline.
4	Moving from exploration to purposeful design	• Beginning with the end in mind: defining the difference we hope to achieve • Create alignment with school and system priorities • Connect to research and engage with programme's impact framework • Drafting early ideas on innovations.

Following the launch's explore phase, participants will be able to:

- Articulate the role of inquiry in improvement and how they will work as a professional learning community to undertake their inquiry
- Specify the difference they want to make for pupils, staff practice and leadership
- Establish a baseline, drawing on multiple lenses through exploratory questions
- Engage with relevant research to inform likely effective innovations.

Main programme sessions:

Following the launch, participants take part in four facilitated online sessions, each lasting two hours. These sessions provide structured opportunities to review learning from earlier phases, apply research to practice, and receive challenge and support from peers and facilitators. Between sessions, participants work in their inquiry teams to implement agreed actions, collect evidence and reflect on their progress.

Each session combines whole-group input, small-group work, peer challenge and facilitated dialogue and reflection. An overview of the focus of each facilitated session is outlined below:

Session	Possible timing	Focus
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1	Early July	▪ Consolidating explore phase learning ▪ Introducing the transition from explore to innovate ▪ Refining the innovation focus
2	September	▪ Designing research-informed change that leads to knowledge creation and practice change ▪ Identifying the key ingredients of the innovation
3	October	▪ Sharing experiences of early implementation ▪ Reviewing early evidence and making tentative claims ▪ Adjusting approaches
4	November	▪ Preparing for impact ▪ Analysing evidence against original claims and evaluating impact ▪ Planning for presentations
Showcase	November	▪ Sharing findings and impact through presentation posters ▪ Collective knowledge-building ▪ Celebration

On successful completion, participants will:

- Demonstrate increased research-literacy
- Be able to design and implement effective innovations that bring about changes to practice in their contexts
- Show strengthened leadership for implementation
- Be able to consider impact at multiple levels.

Learning will be evidenced through staged discussions during online sessions and poster presentations during the final showcase. Certification will be jointly issued by UCL IOE and Sichuan Normal University upon completion and requires participants to:

- Attend all programme events
- Complete all activity required for inquiry team project
- Present findings from the project.

The Programme Team



Greg Ross is Programme Director, Global Development of Educational Leadership, in the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership. In his main role at the IOE, he leads international consultancy projects focused on school leadership and school system reform. This includes the design and delivery of school leadership development programmes with ministries of education, non-governmental organisations, foundations, and school networks. Greg is

experienced in building international partnerships that address complex educational challenges, through knowledge exchange and collaboration across borders.

Before joining the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership, Greg was a senior leader and English teacher in London secondary schools for ten years. Prior to teaching, Greg worked on education and child rights programmes in Cuba, Palestine, and Lebanon.



Elaine Long is an Associate Professor (Teaching) at UCL Institute of Education in London. In this role she leads the provision of professional learning and development for more than 20,000 early career teachers every year, on behalf of the Department for Education in England. She has worked in education for over 20 years as a mentor, teacher, and leader in schools across the world. She began her career as an English teacher in Nottingham where her passion for education was ignited. Following this, she broadened her experience by undertaking a very successful international role at Dulwich College Shanghai and subsequently at the English Schools Foundation in Hong Kong where she developed an expertise in the IB curriculum. She also used her experience to help with the set-up of a new international school in Hong Kong. On her return to England, she worked for many years as an Assistant Principal before moving on to her current role at UCL Centre For Educational Leadership. She is passionate about improving student outcomes through the translation of research into practice, leadership development and knowledge exchange.



Nadia Dellagana is Programme Leader at the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership, where she works on the design and delivery of international leadership development programmes. Prior to this, Nadia worked on the National Professional Qualifications, a suite of leadership qualifications, and led the oversight and strategic development of a national network of Delivery Partners.

Before joining UCL, Nadia was a senior leader in London secondary schools serving areas of significant disadvantage, with leadership experience spanning whole-school responsibility for teaching and learning, professional development, data and standards, and the establishment and strategic growth of a new sixth form. Having begun her career as a Mathematics teacher, she brings a strong commitment to equity, inclusion and improving outcomes for young people through high-quality leadership, alongside a longstanding interest in the leadership conditions that enable sustainable change in education. She is a school governor for a federation of primary schools and a doctoral student at UCL, with research interests focused on teacher retention.

Detailed Programme Content

Programme Launch (Launch – Explore):

Possible session detail for the launch events is outlined below. Each session will run for at least two hours.

Session	Purpose	Possible content
Foundations of identity, inquiry and professional community	Establish the grounding for collaborative inquiry	Welcome and keynote speaker <i>Introducing inquiry as teacher development, linking to international research on teacher professionalism and system improvement</i>
		Our identity and lenses: - Participants exploring values, biography, experiences of teaching and leadership, and how these shape their lens on improvement. - Facilitated dialogue to surface participants' assumptions and lived realities across school contexts.
		Building the learning community, norms for critical friendship and expectations for collaboration - Co-construction of expectations for collaboration, trust, challenge and peer support throughout the programme. - Introduction to the three-phase UCL inquiry cycle, with exemplification.
Criticality, assumptions and evidence literacy	Strengthen critical thinking, evidence literacy and capacity for rigorous inquiry.	Keynote speaker The challenges of making decisions in complex educational environments
		Professional judgement, bias and using evidence well - Exposition around evidence literacy, including types of evidence in schools, basic principles of quality evidence and common pitfalls in interpretation. - Participant review of contrasting evidence sources (e.g., lesson observation notes,

		student work, attendance patterns) and discuss what each reveals and obscures. The importance of critical friendship
		Framing exploratory questions
Understanding the current reality and the baseline	Deepen understanding of the current reality through structured evidence engagement	What is the current reality for pupils, teachers and leaders? Participants consider their school context, highlighting pressure points, strengths, and structural factors affecting improvement.
		The value of different sources of evidence within participants' school settings Inquiry teams examine evidence from their own contexts (shared in advance where possible).
		Establishing a baseline - Facilitators model how to triangulate evidence to build a baseline, using a worked example. - Teams construct a baseline "narrative account" supported by evidence and identify gaps requiring further inquiry. Participants use their baseline insights to refine or reframe their inquiry focus.
Moving from exploration to purposeful design	Support teams to transition to the innovate phase with clarity and alignment.	Beginning with the end in mind: defining the difference we hope to achieve Clarifying intended impact on pupils, teaching practice and leadership.
		Create alignment with school and system priorities Teams map their emerging inquiry aims to school and system priorities to ensure strategic relevance.
		Connect to research and engage with programme's impact framework - Short input on locating and evaluating relevant research. Teams begin linking their inquiry focus to evidence-informed approaches. - Facilitated activity of possible change ideas - Teams outline a working hypothesis: If we do X, then Y will improve because...
		Drafting early ideas on innovations.

Main programme sessions (Innovate – Evaluate):

Suggested detail of each facilitated session is outlined below. Each session will last two hours.

Session	Possible timing	Purpose	Possible activity
Transitioning to Innovate	Early July	Consolidating “explore” phase learning	Recap of explore-phase insights using a whole-group review of baselines and generated inquiry questions.
		Introducing the transition from explore to innovate	Facilitated input on the qualities of effective, research-informed innovations.
		Refining the innovation focus	- Teams sharpen their inquiry questions and agree on a specific innovation focus. - Teams receive challenge and feedback on their proposed direction. - Teams outline initial actions, evidence needs and responsibilities.
Designing Research-Informed Change	Sept	Designing research-informed change that leads to knowledge creation and practice change	- Full design of the change idea and preparation for implementation. - Facilitated discussion of any key research relevant to typical priority areas (e.g., pedagogy, professional learning, behaviour/classroom climate).
		Identifying the key ingredients of the innovation	- Teams articulate the essential components of their innovation and what fidelity looks like in practice. - Teams use tools such as implementation ladders or driver diagrams to identify enablers, barriers and required supports. - Introduction to practical measures and feedback tools.
Early Learning	Oct	Sharing early experiences	Structured team presentations on early progress, using: What? So what? Now what?

		Reviewing early evidence and making tentative claims	Facilitated discussion around early data to identify patterns, contradictions and surprises.
		Adjusting approaches	- Identifying aspects to adjust. - Troubleshooting challenges.
Preparing for Impact & Final Analysis	Nov	Preparing for impact	Teams compare evidence against their baseline and original intended outcomes.
		Analysing evidence against original claims and evaluating impact	- Support to consider pupil learning, teacher practice, leadership and system-level implications. - Facilitators guide teams to craft a clear, evidence-based story about their inquiry.
		Planning for presentations	- Poster design workshop: Practical support for structuring the final presentation posters. - Teams reflect on scaling, embedding and next steps.
Showcase: Celebration and Knowledge Exchange	Nov	Sharing findings and impact	Inquiry teams present findings to peers, facilitators and SICNU/UCL representatives.
		Collective knowledge-building	- Participants engage in structured dialogue to compare insights across contexts. - Whole-group facilitated discussion on key themes emerging across teams.
		Celebration	Recognition of participation and collaborative achievement.

Tutorials (Innovate – Evaluate):

Between sessions, participants work in their inquiry teams to implement agreed actions, collect evidence and reflect on their progress.