

Reflection prompts: Data-informed professional learning

Introduction

These reflection prompts have been developed to align with the research on data use in professional learning and to support school and trust leaders in making evidence-informed decisions about how professional learning is designed, led, and sustained. They highlight key strategic questions to consider when shaping approaches to data use that strengthen teacher judgement, collaboration, and learning over time.

The prompts are intended to help leaders think critically about strategy, culture, and conditions, rather than tools or compliance processes. They focus on how evidence is used within professional learning to support teachers to interpret information, make professional judgements, and work collectively, rather than on how data is used for accountability or performance management.

In addition to the research evidence, they are shaped by the [Education Endowment Foundation's A School's Guide to Implementation \(2024\)](#). They reflect the guidance around adopting behaviours that drive effective implementation, attending to contextual factors that influence success, and following a structured but flexible process. The prompts are informed by the EEF's four implementation phases – Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain – to provide a manageable and sequenced approach. While leaders may wish to consult the EEF guidance directly, its principles are embedded throughout this tool to support thoughtful planning, delivery, and review.

Phase 1: Strategic Alignment & Awareness

- What professional learning challenges in our school or trust could be supported by more disciplined use of evidence, and what sources of information currently inform these judgements (for example teacher feedback, assessment patterns, participation data, or external review)?
- Why are we prioritising data use within professional learning at this point in time?
 - What makes this a strategic need rather than a technical fix?
 - How does this connect to our improvement priorities, values, or trust-wide learning strategy?
- How clear are we, as a leadership team, about what we mean by “data use” in professional learning, and what we explicitly do not mean (for example, surveillance, performance ranking, or compliance reporting).

- How will we communicate the evidence base, including its strengths and limits, to senior leaders, governors, and staff so expectations are realistic and trust is protected?
- What existing beliefs, experiences, or anxieties about data might shape how this work is received by staff?
- How will we position data use as a long-term capability-building investment, rather than a short-term initiative or accountability response?

Phase 2: Design & Preparation

- What teacher-level outcomes are we aiming to strengthen through data use in professional learning (for example confidence, shared understanding, decision-making quality, or collective problem-solving)?
- How will professional learning be designed so that data supports professional judgement, rather than replacing it?
- What balance of structure and flexibility will be built into the design?
 - What shared routines, frameworks, or inquiry cycles will provide coherence?
 - Where will teachers have space to interpret evidence, question assumptions, and adapt learning to their context?
- What kinds of evidence will be prioritised in professional learning conversations (for example pupil work, formative assessment patterns, participation data, or collaboration indicators), and why?
- How will we ensure time and space for collective sense-making, rather than expecting individual teachers to interpret evidence in isolation?
- Who will be involved in co-designing this approach so that ownership and credibility are shared across roles, phases, and settings?
- How will we test and refine the approach on a small scale before wider rollout, and what early signals will we pay attention to during that phase?

Phase 3: Launch & Communication

- How will we introduce data use in professional learning in a way that clearly separates it from performance management or appraisal?
- What messages will help staff understand that evidence is being used for learning and improvement, not judgement?
- How will we create early opportunities for teachers to engage with evidence collaboratively, rather than receiving conclusions second-hand?
- What structures will allow leaders and facilitators to listen carefully to teacher feedback and adjust the approach during delivery?
- How will we ensure consistency of message across senior leaders, middle leaders, and facilitators so that data use is framed coherently?
- In what ways will data use be integrated into existing professional learning routines, rather than positioned as an additional layer of work?

Phase 4: Evaluation & Iteration

- What evidence will help us understand whether professional learning is strengthening teacher capability, confidence, and collective decision-making, rather than simply increasing activity or compliance?
- How will we distinguish between short-term learning gains and more durable changes in professional behaviour?
- What role will teacher voice play in evaluating how data use is experienced in practice?
- How will we notice and respond if evidence use begins to feel burdensome, performative, or misaligned with professional values?
- What opportunities will we create for facilitators and leaders to reflect on their own use of evidence and refine their approach over time?
- How will we revisit our original rationale for using data in professional learning and test whether it still holds?

Phase 5: Scaling & Embedding

- Before scaling, how will we decide whether the approach is worth sustaining, adapting, or stopping?
- What internal expertise needs to be developed so that effective use of evidence does not rely on a small number of individuals?
- How will we support leaders and facilitators to continue developing their capability to work with evidence in nuanced, professionally meaningful ways?
- As this work expands, how will we protect the cultural conditions that support trust, openness, and collective learning?
- How will we ensure that data use within professional learning remains aligned to evolving priorities, rather than becoming a fixed or ritualised process?
- What signals would tell us that data use is genuinely embedded as part of professional learning culture, rather than maintained through compliance alone?

Full reference: National Institute of Teaching. (2025). *The NIoT Evidence Toolkit*.

<http://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit>