IRIS Connect and the 2021 Teach First Training Programme: Guidance for schools

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Introducing our collaboration with IRIS Connect and Teach First

We're working hard designing the best Training Programme experience for 2021 to support our schools and the communities you serve.

One of the changes we're excited about is our collaboration with the team behind the IRIS Connect technology.

IRIS Connect is a video reflection tool used for teacher development. It's a critical tool in our approach to helping our teachers progress quickly.

It allows reflection, observation and feedback to take place remotely, which means teachers and support roles can assess progress more easily and more frequently. Support roles will also be able to interact regularly with teachers and respond faster to development needs.

IRIS Connect improves reflective practice, peer collaboration and coaching opportunities. These are all key to developing effective teachers and leaders. Users can choose when to record, reflect or share their practice and base this around their developmental needs.

It also allows support roles to conduct remote assessments and provide targeted feedback during coaching conversations, which both strengthens the coaching relationship and enhances development.

Have more questions about how we'll use IRIS Connect on the 2021 Training Programme? Have a read of our frequently asked questions below.

What is IRIS Connect?

IRIS Connect is a video reflection tool designed to enhance teacher development. Made up of a cloud-based platform and an app that can be downloaded onto any Android or iOS device, it enables teachers to record their practice, reflect on their teaching and even share practice for contextualised feedback. With its encrypted and permission-led security features, recordings are unable to be accessed or shared by anyone other than the individual user.

Where will Teach First use it?

All 2021 trainees on the Teach First Training Programme will be using IRIS Connect during Summer Institute and in school from September 2021 across both years of the programme.

We're also using it as an early adoption rollout with a small number of 2020 Training Programme trainees to enhance the support they receive during the challenges that continue to be experienced in schools due to COVID-19.

Who is funding Teach First's use of IRIS Connect and is there a cost implication for schools?

There is no cost implication for schools. The use of IRIS Connect was included as part of our funding model with the DfE for the 2021 Training Programme cohort.

Are Teach First providing schools with the hardware / devices and funding the software?

Teach First will provide 2021 trainees with a starter kit that includes an Android device, stand and Bluetooth microphone. Further information provided below:

- The starter kit device will arrive pre-loaded with the IRIS Connect app
- If for any reason the starter kit device is lost or stolen it can be wiped remotely as an additional security measure
- Any software or device updates can be applied remotely and / or automatically.

Trainees will be expected to return the kit at the end of their Training Programme. We're working on the guidance and process for trainees related to providing them with the equipment.

How will our trainees in our partner schools use it on the 2021 Training Programme?

Teachers can use IRIS Connect for lesson recordings for their development, in one of three ways:

1. **Self-reflection** – they review the video clip and personally evaluate their practice in relation to their areas of development
2. **Feedback / coaching** – they share specific clips of a video with their support role or mentor to receive feedback or coaching on an aspect of their practice
3. **Peer-reflection** – they share recordings with other teachers in their school who they're permitted to receive feedback from or share good practice with. This is strictly controlled, and the teacher, in collaboration with the school will decide who to share it with, and when to share it. This is an efficient and secure way to develop through collaboration.

What are the other benefits of using IRIS Connect?

- Users of the tool can watch their lessons, reflect where they need to focus and work on that, or speak to their support role with targeted questions.
- Improved functionality to undertake video observations and supplement with in-person observations.
- Improved functionality to improve skills and progression as users can reflect on a recorded observation.
- Supports more targeted reflections (e.g. trainee and Development Lead or mentor can now focus on this week's development needs across a number of lessons).
- Support roles can help from further afield, which allows us to support more remote locations.
- A Development Lead with a specialism can offer support to a trainee who may be coached by another Development Lead
- Mentors can observe classroom practice that they may normally not be able to due to other commitments – they can view the practice when convenient for them and view specific snippets or whole lessons as needed (depending on what the trainee has uploaded for you to view)

Does the use of IRIS Connect replace any in-person interactions from Teach First Development Leads or mentors?

IRIS Connect is designed to improve the quality of interactions between the Development Lead / mentor and trainee. The 2021 model proposes ten Development Lead interactions in Year 1, and four in Year 2. Some of these interactions will be delivered remotely and Development Leads will have flexibility on whether to use in-person coaching or remote instructional coaching via IRIS Connect.

What training and information will schools get on IRIS Connect, and what is the time commitment?

The use of IRIS Connect by mentors and Development Leads is not an additional requirement, as it intends to be used as an option for some of the reflections on classroom practice that already take place in-person.

We're reviewing the training model for mentors holistically, and we'll share further information closer to Summer Institute 2021. Our training model for mentors will be sensitive to the additional burdens felt by schools this year.

How are mentors being asked to use IRIS Connect with trainees on the Training Programme?

We know our mentors are extremely busy and their work with our trainees is invaluable. All of our Training Programme mentors of 2021 trainees will be provided with a standard license for IRIS Connect.

Excitingly, IRIS Connect will provide mentors with more flexibility in how and when they're able to support their trainees and can reflect on their trainee's classroom practice at a time and place that suits them.

If my trainee or mentor needs tech support with the tool in school, who will help us?

It's important to us that a robust support package was available for our schools so if a technical hitch does come up, you can quickly get back on your feet.

With that in mind, we agreed an additional level of direct support to our IRIS Connect users where technical problems may occur, such as firewalls not allowing access, users unable to upload videos, microphones not connecting, etc.

IRIS Connect have extensive experience in navigating these issues in schools and it makes sense for them to provide this support.

You can contact the IRIS Connect Support Team using their Live Chat feature on the bottom right-hand side of their platform or website from 8.30-5.30 Monday – Friday. For out of hours' contact you can get in touch here.

What if my school struggles with a poor internet / wifi connection?

The recordings of classroom practice on IRIS Connect isn't contingent on an internet connection, but a connection *is* required for the upload to the app's server (this can be anywhere – not necessarily at school).

IRIS Connect already supports schools all over the world and has developed the software to work in some poor bandwidth locations (e.g. Nepal), they have built in functionality to support video uploads in poor connection areas.

Rural locations and locations that are much further afield are one of the motivations for using IRIS Connect for exactly the reason that it provides more options for supporting and developing trainees beyond physically visiting the school.

What happens if my school already uses IRIS Connect?

We recognise schools may be using IRIS Connect in different ways to support teaching and learning.

Licenses will be required for each 2021 trainee and mentor irrespective of the school's existing IRIS Connect agreement to reflect that content is being created for use in association with the Teach First Training Programme.

We have agreed a pricing structure with IRIS Connect that reflects the properties of the Training Programme, which are different to an in-school solution.

Our contract with IRIS Connect reflects the volume of licenses and the different users - trainee, mentor, Development Lead - there is no saving to Teach First if the school already has a license

What security is in place to ensure safeguarding?

IRIS Connect invest heavily in maintaining the security of their online environment and videos remain encrypted when stored here. Once uploaded, only the trainee has access to the video. They can review the video, edit it, add time-stamped comments, and merge it with other videos to create a show reel. They can then share the video with their support roles and selected other trainees. Once shared, only those with access to the video can add comments for feedback. The trainee may decide that this video was for their own reflective practice and not share it with anyone.

As part of the procurement process for video reflection we included requirements that mitigate the risks associated with classroom recording. IRIS Connect have a unique product that provides a powerful reflective tool which also has in-school safeguarding built in by design.

Classrooms are recorded using a dedicated IRIS Connect app on the Android device (a tablet). This app does not allow playback of videos nor does it store the video alongside other videos on the tablet. The classroom video is stored within the app itself and is encrypted. Videos cannot be shared, edited or viewed in the app, but they can be deleted. When ready the app will upload the encrypted video to the IRIS Connect online environment.

Schools can request access to the video and IRIS Connect will provide access under agreed circumstances, e.g. where linked to a safeguarding issue.

Is Teach First's use of IRIS Connect a response to COVID-19?

No – it formed part of our submission to the Department for Education for delivery of the Training Programme for the 2021 cohort and beyond. IRIS Connect has been part of our planning for over two years. It is based on research and evidence that demonstrates how self-reflection using video footage helps teachers develop. As part of the strategic planning we are considering how it can be used on other programmes beyond teacher training.

Will Teach First use IRIS Connect as a COVID-19 response with the current 2020 or 2019 Training Programme cohorts?

We will use it with a small group of trainees who would benefit from early adoption within the 2020 cohort.

Is there a demo available for partner schools?

There are a number of videos on the IRIS Connect website that are a good starting point. Alternatively, IRIS Connect are happy to talk directly to any schools interested in exploring the features in more detail.

Are there any testimonials available from schools already using it?

There are a number of existing testimonials and case studies on the IRIS Connect website.

We'll be working with some of our partner schools in the early adoption programme to write about their experiences of using IRIS Connect that we hope to share later in 2021.

Where can I find out more information about IRIS Connect?

Here are some helpful links if you would like to find out more about IRIS Connect:
- IRIS Security
- GDPR
- FAQs

If you have further queries, the IRIS Connect website has a live chat feature (located bottom right of the screen) where you can get immediate support or answers.

Who do I speak to if I have questions about how IRIS Connect will be used in my school as part of the Training Programme?

Existing partner schools – please speak to your usual Teach First contact in the first instance.

All other schools – If you have a question about the programmes we offer to schools please contact us here, selecting the name of the programme you're asking about from the drop-down menu, and someone will be in touch with you.