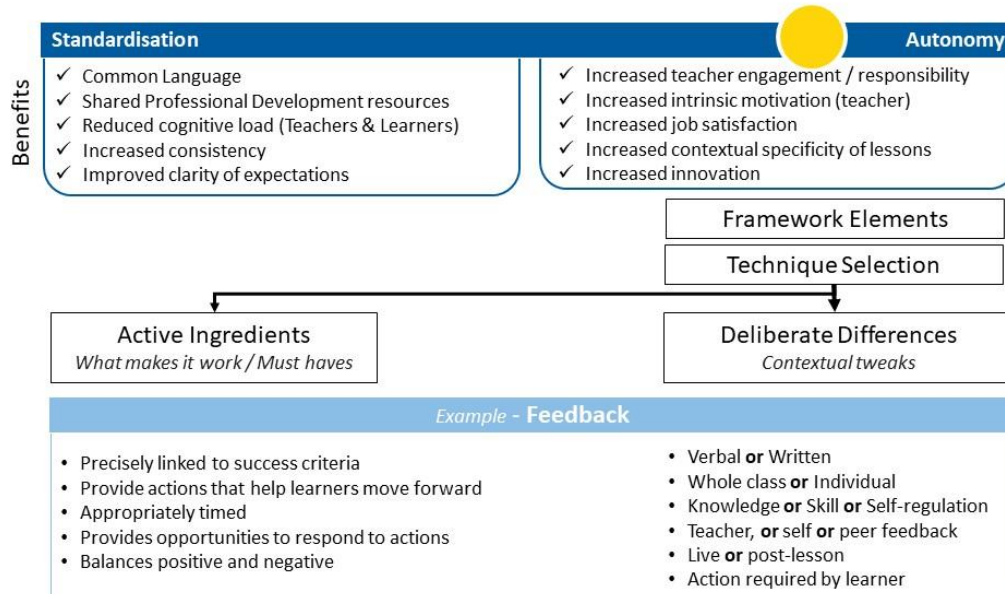# Where's the Sweet spot of Consistency Vs Autonomy?

Stimulus Slide

Effective T&L Frameworks find the 'sweet spot' between standardisation and autonomy

In the sweet spot, teachers are provided with the **FLEXIBILITY** to make considered choices about their teaching, encouraged to create deliberate differences to suit their learners and have the confidence that these choices sit **WITHIN** an evidence-based **STRUCTURE**.

Benefits

Standardisation
- ✓ Common Language
- ✓ Shared Professional Development resources
- ✓ Reduced cognitive load (Teachers & Learners)
- ✓ Increased consistency
- ✓ Improved clarity of expectations

Autonomy
- ✓ Increased teacher engagement / responsibility
- ✓ Increased intrinsic motivation (teacher)
- ✓ Increased job satisfaction
- ✓ Increased contextual specificity of lessons
- ✓ Increased innovation

Framework Elements

Technique Selection

Active Ingredients
What makes it work / Must haves

Deliberate Differences
Contextual tweaks

Example - Feedback

- Precisely linked to success criteria
- Provide actions that help learners move forward
- Appropriately timed
- Provides opportunities to respond to actions
- Balances positive and negative

- Verbal **or** Written
- Whole class **or** Individual
- Knowledge **or** Skill **or** Self-regulation
- Teacher, **or** self **or** peer feedback
- Live **or** post-lesson
- Action required by learner

🐦 @drchriswb

WHAT

When we talk about a sweet spot, we are thinking about the point at which something is at its most effective. The idea of a sweet spot is something we see across various domains from sports where arousal needs to be moderated and in education where students need to work within their zone of proximal development to maximise their learning. An even broader example is the fact that planet Earth exists within something called the Goldilocks zone where the conditions are 'just right' for life to thrive.

In T&L Leadership we are faced with the challenge of how much standardisation we need in order to provide a high-quality educational experience for all our learners versus how much autonomy we need to give staff for their own professional development, well-being and so that they can responsively provide the best educational experiences for their specific classes.

WHY

The image above highlights some of the benefits of both standardisation and autonomy and of course we want to strive to gain as much of each of these as possible hence the pursuit of the sweet spot.

The trickiness of finding that spot comes from a range of different factors:

- Teaching is a complex endeavour with lots of moving parts and unpredictability.
- Responsiveness is at the heart of effective teaching.
- There is no absolute consensus on what effective teaching is.

- Prescription can damage engagement, agency, accountability, and well-being.
- There is a growing evidence base which we shouldn't ignore.
- Our learners deserve to have consistently high-quality teaching.

HOW

We often use the pillar and flame image to describe the balance of standardisation and autonomy within the CLF with the pillar containing centrally aligned areas such as curriculum and summative assessment and the flame describing elements that are empowered to the academies such as teaching and learning and leadership.

In Dr Dan Nicholl's recent [blog post](#) around Collaborative advantage, he takes this a little further by suggesting that we need to:

Exploit the complicated | Standardised Provision
Perhaps the biggest advantage afforded to Trusts is the ability to standardise aspects of provision to secure school improvement and greater consistency in provision. Despite some negative connotations or overly simplistic views of "standardisation," it has tremendous power to liberate, support and give permission (and opportunity) for colleagues to focus on the Main Thing(s). The creation of standardised approaches, strategies and artefacts builds a platform for colleagues, to focus on meeting need, without the distraction of re-designing areas of provision that just need to happen reliably and consistently. Strong Trusts intentionally and deliberately standardise 'complicated' areas of provision: Complicated areas act largely the same way each time. These areas can often helpfully be reduced to a checklist; if this, then *do* that. Trusts should play in these areas and standardise as there is limited need for local decision making or creativity and, importantly, this offers the opportunity for a Trust to improve provision for all learners (and colleagues). Co-creating and co-designing shared curriculum and assessment are particularly potent areas for the dividend.

And

Empower and guide the complex | Empowered Provision
Areas that are largely **complex** should be empowered to schools and colleagues. Complex areas respond differently each time and are typically influenced by the unpredictability of human action and interaction, requiring in the moment decision making. In complex areas of provision, we need to push *decisions closer to the action* where quality and outcomes are linked to the situation as it emerges, contextually influenced. There are areas of provision in each academy that is better owned and empowered locally, they are largely complex, influenced by context and improved by local decision making. Of course, it is desirable to standardise aspects of these largely complex areas in academies to (fractally) create the standardised platform for colleagues in academies.

So where does that leave us with Teaching & Learning? The answer, I think is at the start of a conversation around the following:

- Should we seek to describe CLF Teaching and Learning in terms of the pillar and flame?
- How will that improve teaching & Learning?
- What are academies currently standardising and empowering in terms of T&L?
- What impact is that having on teaching?
- What impact is that having on learning?
- What impact is that having on teachers?

We will pick up and continue this conversation in our TLPD meetings over the rest of the year.