Emerging findings from the NPQ evaluation: Interim report 1

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Glossary of terms

ASO – Additional Support Offer

CPD – Continual Professional Development

DfE – Department for Education

ECF – Early Career Framework

EHCO – Early Headship Coaching Offer

LNPQ – Leadership National Professional Qualification

NPD – National Pupil Dataset

NPQ – National Professional Qualification

- NPQEL – NPQ in Executive Leadership
- NPQH – NPQ in Headship
- NPQSL – NPQ in Senior Leadership
- NPQLT – NPQ in Leading Teaching
- NPQLBC – NPQ in Leading Behaviour and Culture
- NPQLTD – NPQ in Leading Teacher Development
- NPQML – NPQ in Middle Leadership

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

SNPQ – Specialist National Professional Qualification

SPA – Sampling Point A

SPB – Sampling Point B

SPC – Sampling Point C

SWC – School Workforce Census

VLE – Virtual Learning Environment

Authors and acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Introduction

The DfE commissioned CFE to deliver a process and impact evaluation of the 2021 reformed National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). This evaluation includes NPQ cohorts between autumn 2021 and spring 2024. The aim is to understand how these latest reforms are being implemented and their impact on NPQ participants and schools — including the development of participants' leadership skills, teacher retention and progression, positive impacts on participants' school colleagues, and positive outcomes for pupils.

The 2021 reformed NPQs

The current delivery of NPQs is part of a wider set of teacher development reforms which together create a 'golden thread' of development available through the entirety of a teacher's career, which is rooted in the best available evidence.

The new suite of qualifications was first delivered in autumn 2021, replacing the previous 2017 NPQ courses. Three existing qualifications in Senior Leadership, Headship, and Executive Leadership have been reformed to ensure that they reflect the latest and best evidence, and together these are referred to as Leadership NPQs (LNPQs). The 2017 NPQ in Middle Leadership has been removed; instead, the suite now includes Specialist NPQs (SNPQs) for teachers and school leaders who want to broaden and deepen their expertise in specialist areas.

The courses are designed to be completed flexibly around professionals' personal and professional responsibilities. This includes a new method of summative assessment designed to minimise the workload burden on participants while still providing an opportunity for them to apply their knowledge. The reformed LNPQ courses will typically be delivered over a period of 18 months, while the study of SNPQs lasts for 12 months.

For those NPQ participants starting in the academic year 2021/22, the full suite of qualifications available consists of the following:

- NPQ in Leading Teaching (NPQLT): Participants will learn how to lead the teaching and learning of a subject, year, group or phase.

- NPQ in Leading Behaviour and Culture (NPQLBC): Participants will learn how to create a culture of good behaviour and high expectations in which staff and pupils can thrive.

- NPQ in Leading Teacher Development (NPQLTD): Participants will learn how to become a teacher educator and successfully support teachers in their school to expand their skills.

- NPQ in Senior Leadership (NPQSL): Participants will develop their leadership knowledge and expertise to improve outcomes for teachers and pupils in their school.

- NPQ in Headship (NPQH): Participants will develop the knowledge that underpins expert school leadership and apply it in order to become an outstanding headteacher.

- NPQ in Executive Leadership (NPQEL): Participants will develop the expertise needed to become an outstanding executive leader, leading change and establishing supportive networks to drive improvement across the group of schools or multi-academy trusts.

Each qualification is underpinned by a [content framework](#) that sets out what participants should know and know how to do after completing an NPQ.

Alongside the NPQH, the Department also introduced in 2021 a support offer specifically aimed at new headteachers. This offer must be based on the NPQH framework, enabling headteachers to apply the best evidence, knowledge and skills in their own context. For those starting their course in the academic year 2021/22, this offer was branded as the Additional Support Offer (ASO) and was available to headteachers who had been in the role for less than two years. In April 2022, the offer was rebranded as the Early Headship Coaching Offer (EHCO), and the eligibility criteria were expanded from the first two years to the first five years in headship.

The Department has contracted nine lead providers to deliver the reformed NPQs in different regions across the country to ensure that professionals at all levels are able to access this support regardless of their location. Providers will deliver two cohorts of courses during each academic year, namely in autumn and spring. NPQ providers are subject to a quality assurance mechanism through an Ofsted inspection to ensure the best support for schools and teachers.

Since October 2021, fully funded scholarships have been available to NPQ participants working in state-funded educational settings. These scholarships are part of the government's education recovery programme and are available until the end of the 2023/24 academic year.

The reformed NPQs are designed to achieve a range of benefits for both participants and schools. Key desired outcomes for participants include enhanced career progression, improved confidence, competence, knowledge and skills, and increased job satisfaction. Outcomes for schools include increased staff retention and pupil attainment along with improvements in school culture.

About the evaluation

CFE is implementing a mixed-method approach for the process and impact evaluation, designed to capture insight into the delivery of the NPQs and assess their impacts. The approach is designed to go beyond self-reported impacts by analysing administrative datasets that objectively track change in relation to key outcomes. The perceptions of participants' line managers and colleagues are also being captured to provide a holistic understanding of the changes achieved as a result of the programme, particularly at the school level. More information on the methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

About this report

This report presents the interim findings from the first stage of the evaluation, which includes process learning from Cohort 1 and the baseline position for Cohort 2 against which impacts will be subsequently measured. It provides insight into how effectively the NPQs are being delivered in order to inform the ongoing development and improvements to the programme.

The process learning is based on the first of two planned rounds of interviews with 30 participants in Cohort 1 (eight LNPQ and 22 SNPQ). In addition, interviews with one representative from the DfE, nine lead providers, and six school representatives were undertaken.

The baseline SPA survey was completed by Cohort 2 participants. A total of 3,250 responses to the SPA survey were received, which represents a response rate of 23%. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the responses achieved for each qualification.

Table 1: Number of survey completions at SPA, by qualification

Qualification name	Number of survey completions
NPQ for Executive Leadership	125
NPQ for Headship	387
NPQ for Senior Leadership	919
NPQ for Leading Teaching	875
NPQ for Leading Teacher Development	519
NPQ for Leading Behaviour and Culture	425

Following this introduction, the report is structured into seven further chapters: **Chapter 2** investigates awareness of the reforms, **Chapter 3** explores recruitment, and **Chapter 4** examines the application process. **Chapter 5** explores participants' early experiences of delivery, and **Chapter 6** investigates early outcomes and impacts. Finally, **Chapter 7** summarises the key conclusions.

Differences in the survey findings by school and respondent characteristics are explored. All differences have been tested for statistical significance and only those that are statistically significant at the 5% level are reported in the commentary of the report. Where figure proportions do not equal 100%, this is due to rounding.

For this study, interview data were thematically coded. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, no inference can be drawn as to the scale or frequency of attitudes or opinions.

Throughout the report, findings from interviews are presented alongside survey findings. All findings from providers and school leaders are based on interview data. When SPA survey findings are reported, NPQ participants are referred to as 'survey respondents' or 'respondents'. Interview findings are referenced as 'NPQ participants' or 'participants'.

Chapter 2: Awareness of the NPQ reforms

Key findings

- Broadly speaking, awareness of the NPQ reforms was mixed.

- Those in more senior positions were more likely to be aware of the reforms prior to starting their qualification.

- For some, the reforms influenced their decision to undertake an NPQ.

- There are some misconceptions and there is a lack of understanding of the target audience for the SNPQs.

- Further communication regarding NPQs is required in order to raise awareness and resolve misconceptions.

Overall awareness of the NPQ reforms

The majority of survey respondents (57%) were aware of the NPQ reforms before they applied for their NPQ. Furthermore, one third became aware whilst applying for/starting their qualification. Thirteen per cent were unaware of the reforms even though they were undertaking the new qualification (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of respondents who were aware of the NPQ reforms
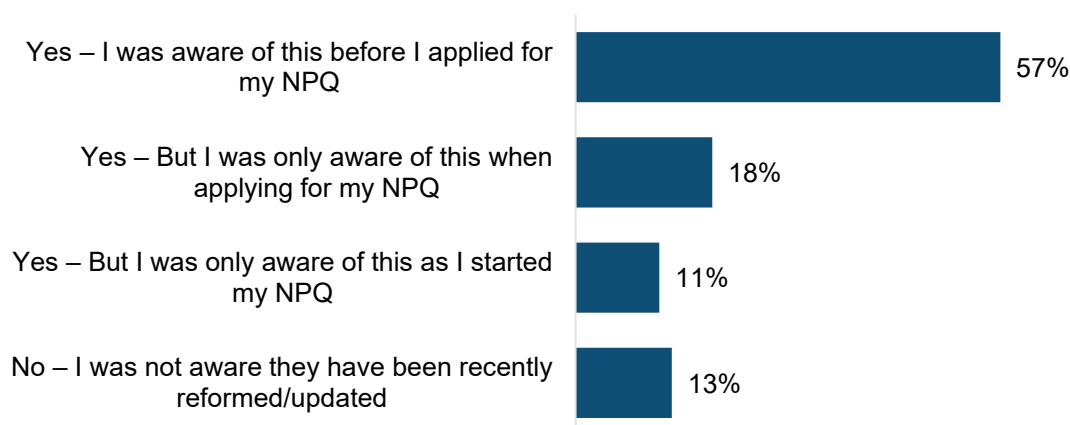
Source: SPA survey. Base=3,250.

Awareness of the reforms differed by respondent role and qualification undertaken:

- **Respondent role:** A higher proportion of those who were teachers (19%) were not aware that the NPQs had been recently reformed in comparison with middle leaders (13%) and those in Senior Leadership Team (SLT) positions (8%).

- **Qualification:** A higher proportion of those undertaking the NPQLBC (24%) were not aware of the reforms in comparison with those undertaking the NPQSL (10%), NPQH (7%) and NPQEL (5%)[1].

Similarly to the results of the baseline survey, the interviews with NPQ participants, schools, and providers also suggest that awareness of the NPQ reforms across the sector is mixed. For example, on the one hand, it appears that some participants were fully aware of and understood the reforms (e.g. they knew about the full suite of qualifications introduced and the revised assessment methods):

> I've been in charge of professional development in my school for a number of years, so I was familiar with all the NPQ programmes, and I knew obviously that they were being reformed, and had received lots of information about the reformed qualifications through my usual email deluge. – *NPQH participant*

However, on the other hand, most were aware of only some changes (e.g. they only knew that they had been reformed or that SNPQs had been introduced) and, thus, did not have a comprehensive understanding of the full suite. In some limited instances, NPQ participants indicated that they had not even heard of NPQs before they applied:

> I didn't even know what NPQ stood for [...] but then nobody else knew what one was, and even now, people say, 'What's your course called again?' […] Not many people know, and these are teaching colleagues as well in other schools. – *NPQLT participant*

NPQ participants who were aware of the reforms had heard about the changes via social media, direct provider communication, and colleagues in their schools. Some had found out about the reforms when searching on the DfE website for information to inform their decision regarding which NPQ to make an application for.

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[1] A higher proportion of those undertaking the NPQLT (15%) were not aware of the reforms in comparison with those undertaking the NPQSL (10%), NPQH (7%) and NPQEL (5%). Thirteen per cent of those undertaking the NPQLTD were not aware, but this was only statistically different from those undertaking the NPQLBC, NPQEL and NPQH. This may reflect the higher proportion of SLT participants who are undertaking this qualification in comparison to the other SNPQs (please see Figure 5).

Awareness of the LNPQs

The three LNPQ content frameworks were updated in autumn 2021, but the names have remained the same as previous iterations. Levels of awareness were highest for these qualifications (e.g. NPQSL, NPQH and NPQEL), and both NPQ participants and schools understood their purpose, but not all were aware that they had been reformed or what the specific reforms were. Providers and some school leaders noted that LNPQs were more fully understood by the sector because they had been in the market for a longer period of time.

Awareness of the SNPQs

NPQ participants, schools, and providers believed that there was limited awareness of the SNPQs across the sector as well as a lack of understanding of the people at which they were targeted. As one provider emphasised, schools and teachers are *"not as aware of* [whom] *the specialist programmes are for and there needs to be more clarity on that".*

Although not common, NPQ participants and schools were still under the impression that there was an NPQ for Middle Leadership (NPQML). A few SNPQ participants explicitly mentioned that they wanted, and had attempted, to apply for the NPQML:

> I was doing some Googling about what [the NPQ] involved, and then I realised I couldn't find anything on the Middle Leadership course, which is what I thought I'd applied to do. – *NPQLTD participant*

A few NPQ participants described how they found it more challenging to find a course that 'felt right' for them since the removal of the NPQML. A common theme described by providers and participants was that participants incorrectly assumed that the SNPQs were a direct replacement for the NPQML and they did not fully understand the differences in objectives and the emphasis on specialist knowledge in the SNPQs. As a result, there were misconceptions regarding the intended audience for the SNPQs (only those who are a middle leader) and who is 'right' for each qualification. For example, one participant incorrectly expressed their belief that the six qualifications ran sequentially:

> I didn't know much about the courses beforehand, but you can see they're in linear order from less experienced teachers all the way to academies and principals. So, I chose the second-to-lowest one to relate to my experience as a teacher. – *NPQLTD participant*

Although not a common theme, NPQ participants perceived that the NPQLTD is *only* suitable for the member of staff in the school responsible for early career teachers.

A further issue reported by providers in relation to schools' understanding of SNPQs was a lack of understanding of where they 'fit' within school leadership structures, particularly in small and primary schools in which the delineation of responsibilities may be less clear and/or specialist roles are undertaken by those in senior leadership positions. Providers emphasised that the makeup of participants undertaking the SNPQs is varied and ranges from teachers who are at the beginning of their teaching career to senior leaders, including deputy heads seeking to develop specialist knowledge regarding an aspect of their role.

Although not a common theme, NPQ participants highlighted how they were not always clear as to which SNPQ was best for them, and reported that they had chosen the wrong NPQ as a result. In a limited number of instances, providers described how some participants had changed course once they realised what their chosen NPQ actually entailed and the people at whom it was aimed. For one provider, this happened on a surprising number of occasions:

> One of the things that surprised us early on was the number of people who were withdrawing from the specialist programmes, having realised they'd gone on the wrong one. People were moving about; they'd pull out of one and come back in on another. – *Provider*

As a result, these providers decided to put more time in with applicants ahead of their starting than they originally expected so as to ensure that they enrolled on the appropriate course. Although this has impacted on the time available for other activities, such as recruitment, providers believe that this has been effective and reduced the number of participants who have subsequently withdrawn from or switched programmes.

Awareness of assessment process

Providers and NPQ participants described how there were misconceptions regarding the reforms in relation to the assessment process. For example, participants appeared to still believe that they needed to undertake an in-school project. What is more, in some limited instances, participants thought that the reforms to the assessment process had been to move from one large project to smaller assessments throughout the qualification. However, colleagues in participants' own schools (who had not seen this information) questioned those undertaking the NPQs regarding whether they had misunderstood this, as they thought that they needed to conduct an in-school project. This made participants doubt themselves and created uncertainty surrounding the assessment process. There was agreement among providers that this misconception will be addressed once the new approach becomes embedded and more widely known and understood amongst the educational sector, therefore, overriding the misconceptions asserted by people who

completed previous iterations of the NPQs with different assessment processes. This will be further investigated in the planned 2023 evaluation research.

Ways to increase awareness

Both providers and NPQ participants reported that a lack of teacher- and leader-facing communication from the DfE with regard to the reforms was the key reason for the low levels of awareness within the sector. In the participants' view, information was often difficult to find and this added to the confusion surrounding the purpose and the target audience of the different courses:

> When I went digging [for information], I still felt like it was something that was just waiting to be found or stumbled across. It just wasn't published enough at all. There were no teachers in my school that knew about this, and if they did, no one was talking about it. And that for me [...] was surprising — it was quite shocking. – *NPQLBC participant*

NPQ participants and schools agreed that more information is needed, particularly in relation to the eligibility criteria and the purpose of the SNPQs. From the providers' perspective, it can be inferred that greater clarity should ensure that the right people undertake the right NPQ for the right reasons, which in turn should help to ensure that the objectives of the programme are achieved in the longer term.

Providers stated that they would like to know more about the content and timing of the centralised communication strategy for the reformed NPQs so that they can align their own activities with it. They thought that this would help to ensure a more joined-up approach across the sector.

Although less common, providers also suggested that schools had limited time to process new information, which may have contributed to their lack of awareness of the reforms. This was due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, budgetary cuts, the requirement to deliver catch-up initiatives, and the introduction of wider changes such as the ECF (Early Career Framework):

> They introduced NPQs at the same time as the Early Career Framework — literally at the same time. So, some feedback we had was, 'This all sounds great, but there's enough to do to get the ECF off the ground and we need to focus on that'. I guess it's just a challenge of introducing so many things at the same time to a sector that's under pressure, struggling with retention and recruitment and dealing with [COVID-19] all at the same time. – *Provider*

Influence of the reforms on NPQ uptake

Although in-depth knowledge of the reforms is low, the findings suggest that the reforms had a positive impact on uptake by teachers and leaders in the sector. Some of the respondents to the SPA survey reported that the reforms influenced their decision to undertake an NPQ. Eight per cent of LNPQ respondents *only* undertook an NPQ because they had been reformed, and a further 34% stated that the reforms played a part in their decision (Figure 2). Almost one fifth (19%) of SNPQ respondents indicated that they *would not* have undertaken an LNPQ in the absence of the SNPQs (Figure 3). The findings indicate that the creation of the SNPQs has encouraged uptake of the NPQs amongst participants who would not have otherwise engaged.

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents who would have undertaken an LNPQ if they had not been reformed

The reforms did not influence my decision	58%
The reforms played a part in influencing my decision	34%
I only undertook a NPQ because they had been reformed	8%
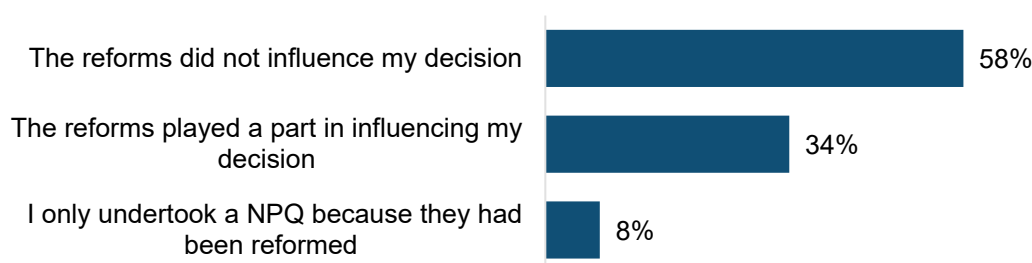
Source: SPA survey. Base=881.

Figure 3: Proportion of SNPQ respondents who would have undertaken an LNPQ in the absence of the SNPQs

Yes	31%
Maybe	37%
No	19%
I don't know	12%
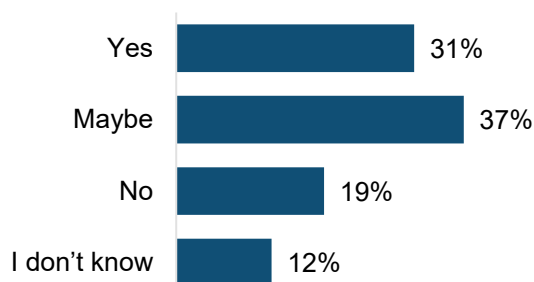
Source: SPA survey. Base=1,815.

A higher proportion of SNPQ respondents in SLT positions (36%) would *not* have undertaken an LNPQ in the absence of the SNPQs in comparison with middle leaders (17%) and teachers (19%), both of whom were less sure. This may be because these respondents were more certain that they wanted to specialise in the areas covered by the SNPQs, rather than following the more generic school leadership pathways covered by the LNPQs.

NPQ participants highlighted a variety of perspectives related to the impact that the reforms had upon them; for example, the reforms had a positive influence on participants' decision to undertake an NPQ, whilst others would have undertaken one anyway. The changes to the assessment method were, however, perceived to have made the NPQs 'feel more manageable' and a better fit alongside a participant's 'normal' job. Participants particularly valued the removal of the thesis-style project, which has resulted in an increased emphasis on learning rather than assessment:

> From the research I'd done, the changes were largely looking at teacher workload and trying to make the [NPQ] courses a bit more considerate of that. And having done the old-style NPQSL, I really enjoyed it, but the project at the end was very, very time-consuming and quite stressful. – *NPQH participant*

The introduction of the SNPQs strongly motivated participants to undertake an NPQ because it is more aligned with their professional interests and focuses on deepening knowledge and learning, rather than only focusing on leadership:

> I've kind of wanted to do [an NPQ] for a while and then it was actually really fortunate that they had changed into the different [SNPQ] […] if I'd have gone for the broad NPQML, I feel it would have been too broad, whereas this is quite specific. I can't believe the differences between how structured the [reformed NPQs] are and how much better it is. – *NPQLT participant*

> Behaviour and culture is what I am interested in for my future career. I was not interested in things like leadership as such, not at this point in my career. So, this is why I decided to choose behaviour and culture, and also because I really want to see students progress and I am interested in how they go about their daily life and what they do and what I can put into place to support them better. – *NPQLBC participant*

Chapter 3: NPQ recruitment

Key findings

- Whilst 29,425 funded NPQ participants have been recruited, providers have reported experiencing challenges relating to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, confusion surrounding the SNPQs, and the overlap with other qualifications/opportunities.

- A higher proportion of NPQ participants undertaking the SNPQs were already in the role that they were undertaking or had responsibilities linked to the qualifications.

- A higher proportion of NPQ participants undertaking the LNPQs were not yet in the role.

- The SNPQs appealed to a greater number of teachers with no leadership experience and there was a greater uptake of these qualifications amongst secondary schools (in comparison to the LNPQs).

The Department aims to deliver 150,000 NPQ participant places from autumn 2021 until the end of 2023/24. Providers reported that recruitment has gone reasonably well during the first year of delivery. As illustrated in Table 2, since autumn 2021, there have been 29,425 funded NPQ course starts (for six NPQs available over two cohorts), over half of which are SNPQs. This indicates that there is likely to be a significant demand for SNPQs from the sector in future years.

Table 2: Number of funded NPQ starts in 2021/22

Qualification name	Number of starts
NPQ for Executive Leadership	1,051
NPQ for Headship	3,920
NPQ for Senior Leadership	8,452
Total number of LNPQs	**13,423**
NPQ for Leading Teaching	7,400
NPQ for Leading Teacher Development	4,901
NPQ for Leading Behaviour and Culture	3,597
Total number of SNPQs	**15,898**
Early Headship Coaching Offer (previously known as the Additional Support Offer)	104
Total	**29,425**

Source: DfE management information[2].

Despite the high number of starts overall, providers highlighted that recruitment across the first two cohorts was lower than they had forecast. Providers described how they believed that multiple factors had contributed to this but that it was primarily due to COVID-19 and the significant strain that this continues to place upon an already-stretched sector. As one school leader highlighted:

> It's tough in schools at the moment and it's quite hard work, so people haven't got the headspace to think, 'I want to do a qualification'. – *School leader*

According to providers and NPQ participants, changes to how the NPQ is structured and delivered over the academic year have had a positive impact on participants' perceptions of the associated workload. Providers stated that some teachers (who are not undertaking an NPQ), particularly those who are not aware of the reforms, perceive the workload associated with the NPQ to be high. One provider suggested that expectations regarding workload amongst those not undertaking an NPQ are only likely to change once Cohort 1 have completed their qualification and once word of mouth has enabled the message to be spread.

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[2] Teacher and Leader Development: ECF and NPQs, Academic Year 2021/22: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/teacher-and-leader-development-ecf-and-npqs/2021-22

The lack of clarity surrounding whom each SNPQ is targeted at has created a challenge for some providers who believe that this has affected uptake. Providers are working closely with schools through their delivery partners to ensure that there is a greater understanding of how SNPQs fit into their organisation and how participants will be able to apply the knowledge and skills that they acquire:

> Some of the narrative from the department around the 'golden thread' was both really useful and could have been more in terms of really targeting how this fits together […]. I think discussions with delivery partners, particularly teaching schools, [help]. They've come a long way in the last year and they are very confident now in the benefits of NPQs and they can link it to the golden thread. – *Provider*

Providers described how the overlap between some SNPQs and the LNPQs or other opportunities had affected recruitment, for instance, senior leaders in primary schools in who assume responsibility for the behaviour and culture but have chosen to undertake the NPQSL rather than the NPQLBC:

> The one that's been harder [to understand and recruit for] is Leading Behaviour and Culture. In a secondary school context, it would be really clear [whom the SNPQ is for] — it's your head of year, your head of house. [Meanwhile] in a small primary school, it's not super-clear [whom] — we found a lot of our primary colleagues have chosen the SL programme instead. – *Provider*

In addition, providers also described how the overlap with the ECF has impacted on recruitment into the NPQLTD because the mentors in the ECF are the same people who may be undertaking this NPQ and do not have time to do both.

Who is undertaking the NPQs?

Over four in 10 (44%) survey respondents were undertaking an NPQ associated with their current role or the area for which they were already responsible (e.g. a headteacher undertaking the NPQH or a staff member with responsibility for leading teacher development undertaking the NPQLTD).

As illustrated in Figure 4, a higher proportion of SNPQ respondents had responsibilities linked to the qualification that they were undertaking in comparison with LNPQ respondents. The proportion of respondents undertaking the NPQSL and the NPQEL who are not in the role has increased since the previous evaluation of the 2017 suite of NPQs[3]. In the first cohorts being delivered 46% of the NPQEL, 47% of the NPQSL, and 81% of the NPQH were not in the role.

Figure 4: Proportion of respondents undertaking the NPQs, broken down by those who are already in the role and those who are not
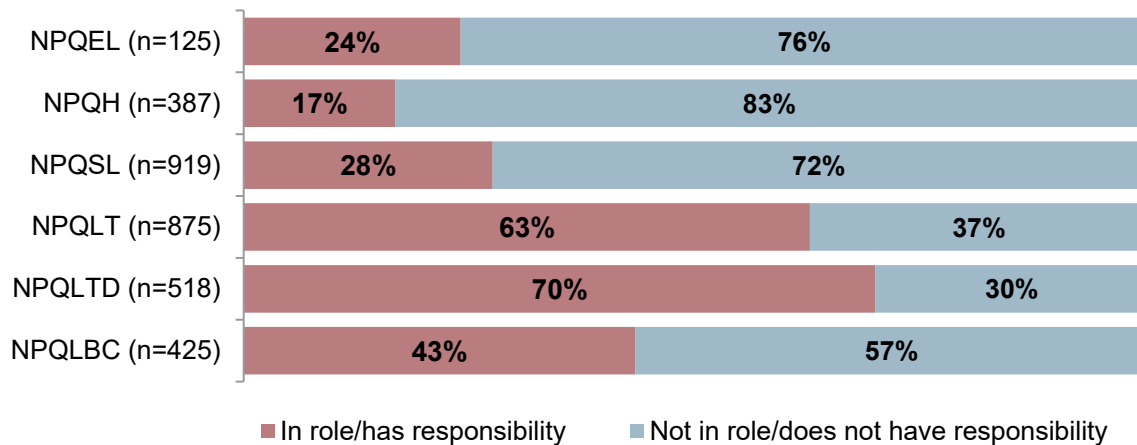
Source: SPA survey. Bases variable.

The majority of SNPQ respondents who were not already in the role had plans or aspirations to assume responsibilities linked to their qualification (82% of NPQLT, 80% of NPQLTD, and 77% of NPQLBC). This indicates that participants are using the SNPQs to support their career progression — a key objective of the programme. In addition, there is a small proportion of respondents who are undertaking SNPQs who have no current plans or aspirations to assume roles or responsibilities in these areas (18% of NPQLT, 20% of NPQLTD, and 23% of NPQLBC).

As might be expected, a higher proportion of respondents who were undertaking the LNPQs were in SLT positions. Conversely, a higher proportion of those undertaking the SNPQs were classroom teachers or in middle leadership positions (Figure 5). However, as highlighted previously by providers, the composition of SNPQs is varied and ranges from teachers to senior leaders. The respondents undertaking the NPQLTD were

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[3] Evaluation of the 2017 National Professional Qualifications: Final evaluation report for the 2017-18 cohort (CFE Research):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1035430/Evaluation_of_the_2017_National_Professional_Qualifications.pdf

especially varied, with 17% in SLT positions reflecting the level at which this responsibility is sometimes held.

Figure 5: Proportion of respondents undertaking the NPQs, broken down by role
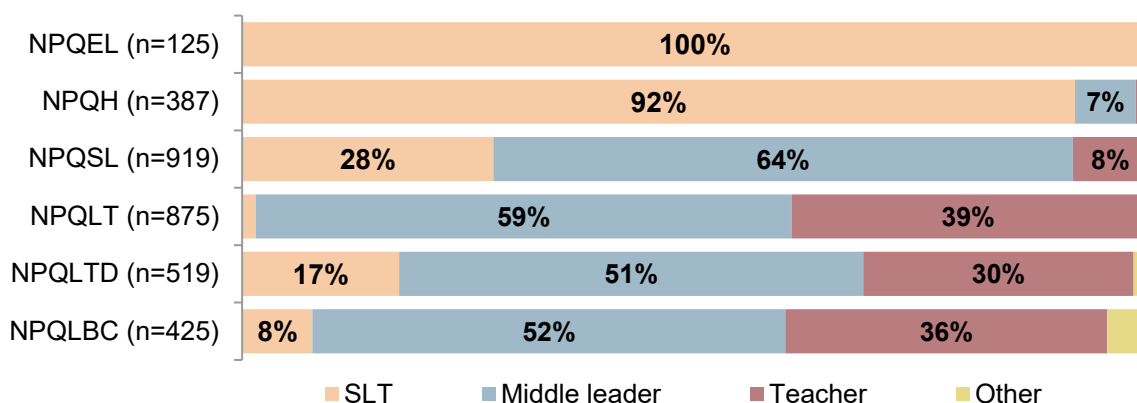
Source: SPA survey. Bases variable.

Over half (51%) of SNPQ SPA survey respondents were from secondary schools, with only 38% from the primary sector and a small proportion from the other phases (e.g. nursery, 16–19 provision, and all-through). By comparison, only 33% of LNPQ respondents were from secondary schools and 55% from primary schools.

How participants first heard about the NPQs

Respondents most commonly heard about their NPQ for the first time from their line manager or another senior colleague (55%) or from other colleagues in their school (12%) (Figure 6). A minority of respondents heard about their NPQ via the DfE website (6%) or through direct marketing from their provider (4%).

Figure 6: How participants first heard about their NPQ

Category	Percentage
Line manager or senior colleagues in my school	55%
Other colleagues in my school	12%
Multi-Academy Trust	7%
DfE website	6%
Direct marketing from the provider	4%
Colleagues from another school	4%
Teaching School Hubs	4%
Teaching School Alliance	2%
Delivery provider website	1%
Local authority or regional support	1%
Other	3%
I don't know	1%
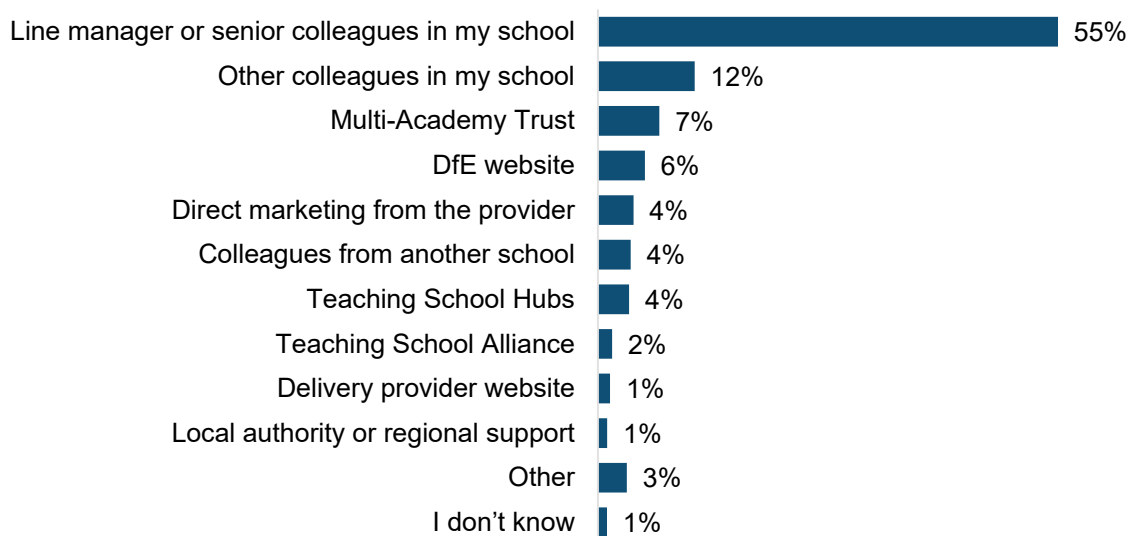
Source: SPA survey. Base=3,248.

A higher proportion of respondents (20%[4]) undertaking the NPQEL heard about the qualification for the first time via the DfE website, suggesting that these participants are more likely to seek out a leadership qualification themselves. Over a quarter of this group (26%[5]) heard about the NPQEL via direct marketing from their provider. This is perhaps unsurprising when considering that headteachers and executive headteachers typically receive more direct marketing because of their position in the school.

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[4] Compared with 5% for NPQH, 6% for NPQSL, 4% for NPQLT, and 5% for NPQLTD and NPQLBC.
[5] Compared with 6% for NPQH, 4% for NPQSL, 1% for NPQLT, 5% for NPQLTD, and 3% for NPQLBC.

Chapter 4: Applying for the NPQs

Key findings

- NPQ participants were motivated to undertake the NPQs for a range of reasons. The most common motivator was to enhance opportunities for career progression, which was more important for those aspiring to be in a specific role.

- The primary reasons for selecting an NPQ over other qualifications were the funding available and the national recognition associated with the NPQs within the sector.

- Eighty-eight per cent of NPQ participants were happy about the application process, but improved communication and reducing the amount of information required within the application forms would further enhance their experience.

- The funding allowed a greater number of participants to access the NPQs, which was particularly important for schools with multiple participants. In the absence of funding, these schools would have had to make difficult decisions as to which candidates they could fund themselves, and may not have sent as many teachers to undertake the NPQs.

- The most common barrier that NPQ participants experienced in the application phase related to their concern surrounding finding the time to complete the NPQ outside of their working hours, which was more prevalent amongst primary school teachers and those working part-time.

- Provider choice was more common amongst those in senior positions. A provider's reputation and colleague recommendations were the most important factors considered amongst participants who chose their provider. The standardisation of NPQ content can make it difficult for schools to differentiate providers' offers.

- During the 2021/22 academic year, uptake of the EHCO was limited. Participants stated that this was due to not knowing about it, already having a coach or mentor, or because participants did not have the time to access it alongside their NPQH.

Participant motivations

Survey respondents were motivated to apply to undertake a leadership or specialist qualification for a range of different reasons. Respondents were commonly motivated by

a need to develop the skills for a new or existing role, a desire to improve pupil outcomes, an ambition to progress in their career, and to increase their knowledge of the latest evidence (Figure 7). Although some factors were not rated as being important overall, they still influenced a significant minority. On average, for example, respondents did not rate 'It has been identified as an area of development for me' as being an important factor in their decision to study an NPQ (mean score of 3.4 on a seven-point scale); however, 30% of respondents individually rated this as being important (providing a score of 5, 6 or 7).

Figure 7: Importance of various factors when deciding to study a leadership or specialist qualification

Factor	Score	% scoring a 5, 6 or 7
To ensure I have the leadership skills required for a future role**	6.4	**92%**
To learn new knowledge and skills	6.3	**94%**
To improve pupil outcomes in my school/s	6.2	**90%**
To enhance opportunities for career progression	6.1	**89%**
To increase my knowledge about the latest evidence in schools	6.1	**90%**
To ensure I have the specialist skills required for a future role*	6.1	**88%**
To build my confidence in the areas my NPQ covers	5.9	**85%**
To improve leadership in my school	5.9	**85%**
To validate my current knowledge, skills and experience	5.8	**85%**
To ensure I have the specialist skills required for my current role*	5.6	**77%**
I have identified this as an area of development for myself	5.5	**77%**
To ensure I have the leadership skills required for my current role**	5.4	**73%**
To gain additional responsibilities as part of my current role	5.0	**66%**
It had been identified as an area for development for me	3.4	**30%**
My line manager/SLT requested I undertake it	3.2	**28%**
I had undertaken a previous NPQ and wish to continue my development	2.7	**25%**
Other colleagues in my school are undertaking it	2.5	**16%**

Source: SPA survey. Bases variable (1,350–3,133).
Scale of 1–7 (where 1=very unimportant and 7=very important).
* Statements only shown to those undertaking SNPQs.
** Statements only shown to those undertaking LNPQs.

Respondents who were already 'in the role' were more strongly motivated to undertake their NPQ to validate their current knowledge and ensure that they had the skills necessary to undertake their role effectively (Figure 8). Respondents who were not yet in the role were more likely to be motivated by a need to develop the skills needed for a role to which they aspired, in order to gain additional responsibilities, and to enhance their career progression (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Importance of various factors when deciding to study a leadership or specialist qualification, by those in the role and those not in the role (stronger motivators for those in the role)

Stronger motivators for those in the role

Factor	In role/has responsibility	Not in role/does not have responsibility
To improve pupil outcomes in my school/s	6.3	6.1
To increase my knowledge about the latest evidence in schools	6.2	6.0
To validate my current knowledge, skills and experience	6.0	5.7
To ensure I have the leadership skills required for my current role**	6.1	5.2
To ensure I have the specialist skills required for my current role*	5.9	5.1

■ In role/has responsibility   ■ Not in role/does not have responsibility
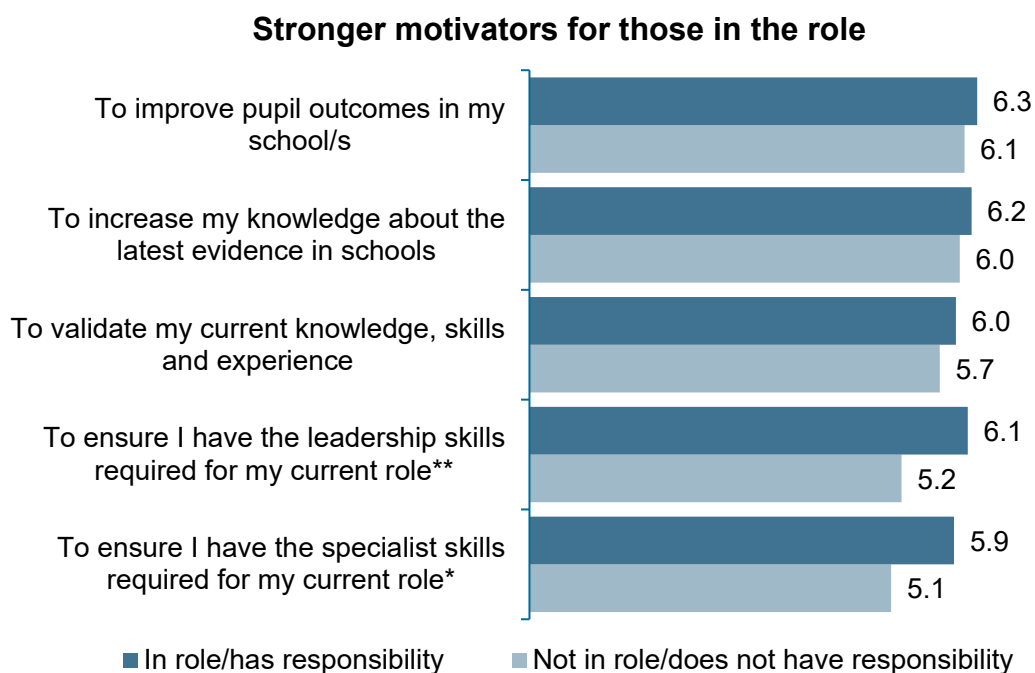
Source: SPA survey. Bases variable (n=329–1,389).
Scale of 1–7 (where 1=very unimportant and 7=very important).
* Statements only shown to those undertaking SNPQs.
** Statements only shown to those undertaking LNPQs.

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Figure 9: Importance of various factors when deciding to study a leadership or specialist qualification, by those in the role and those not in the role (stronger motivators for those <u>not</u> in the role)

Stronger motivators for those not in the role

	In role/has responsibility	Not in role/does not have responsibility
To ensure I have the leadership skills required for a future role**	5.9	6.5
To enhance opportunities for career progression	5.9	6.3
To ensure I have the specialist skills required for a future role*	6.0	6.2
I have identified this as an area of development for myself	5.4	5.6
To gain additional responsibilities as part of my current role	4.9	5.1
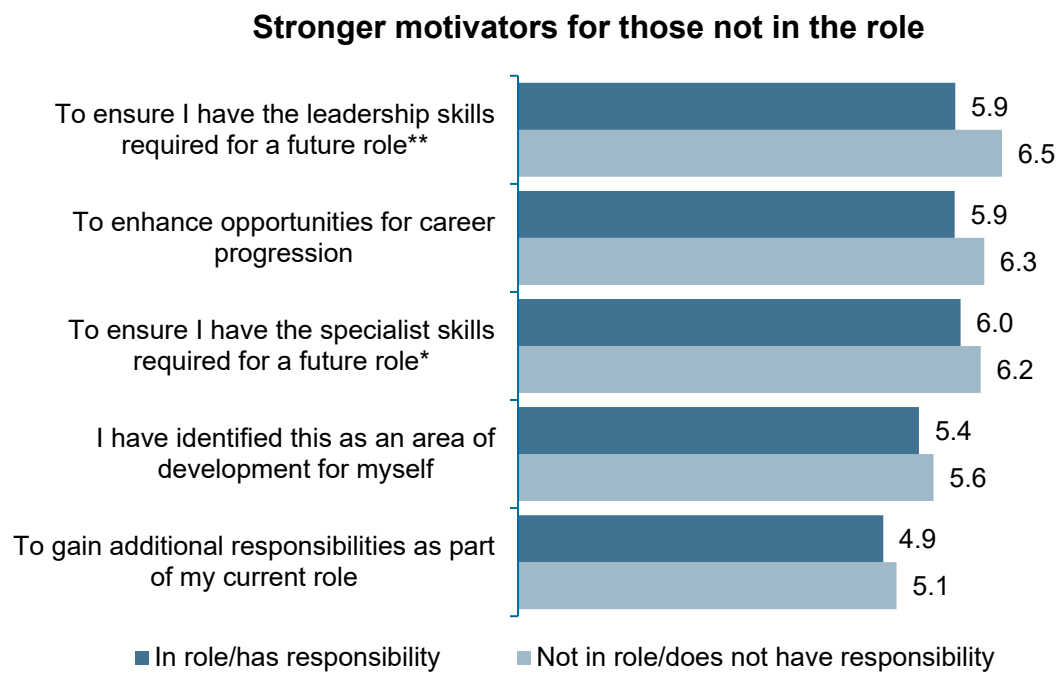
Source: SPA survey. Bases variable (n=689–1,742).
Scale of 1–7 (where 1=very unimportant and 7=very important).
* Statements only shown to those undertaking SNPQs.
** Statements only shown to those undertaking LNPQs.

When asked to select their *main* reason for applying, career progression was the most common (27%), followed by improving pupil outcomes (12%), increasing knowledge about the latest evidence in schools (9%), and learning new knowledge and skills (7%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Most important factor when deciding to study a leadership or specialist qualification

Factor	Percentage
To enhance opportunities for career progression	27%
To improve pupil outcomes in my school/s	12%
To increase my knowledge about the latest evidence in schools	9%
To learn new knowledge and skills	7%
To improve leadership in my school	6%
To ensure I have the specialist skills required for a future role*	6%
To ensure I have the specialist skills required for my current role*	6%
To build my confidence in the areas my NPQ covers	6%
I have identified this as an area of development for myself	4%
To validate my current knowledge, skills and experience	4%
To ensure I have the leadership skills required for my current role**	3%
My line manager/SLT requested I undertake it	2%
To gain additional responsibilities as part of my current role	2%
To ensure I have the leadership skills required for a future role**	2%
I had undertaken a previous NPQ and wish to continue my development	1%
It had been identified as an area for development for me	1%
Other colleagues in my school are undertaking it	0%
Another reason	2%

Source: SPA survey. Base=3,165.

Enhancing opportunities for career progression was the primary motivator for a higher proportion of respondents who were not yet in the role that was associated with the qualification that they were undertaking (35%) in comparison with those who were already in the role (16%).

Career progression

NPQ participants, irrespective of the qualification that they were undertaking, perceived that the NPQ would help them to develop the skills that they needed in order to undertake a new role (this included the role for which they were studying or a future role). Another common theme was that they perceived that the NPQ 'looks good externally' and, as such, would provide strong evidence of their capability to undertake a new role on a job application or in an interview:

Our SLT and the governors are keen on formal qualifications to prove you're capable of doing a role you have not done before. I think the headteacher is keen on qualifications and letters [after your name] and all that stuff to prove you're doing something and not just turning up. – *NPQLTD participant*

Obtaining an NPQ (particularly the NPQH) was commonly perceived by NPQ participants to be a prerequisite for promotion. The legacy of headteachers being required to possess the NPQH is still prevalent among current and aspiring headteachers, as described by one NPQH participant: "*all the headteachers I have spoken to have done it, so, yes, it seems that it would be unusual for me not to do it.*" One school leader emphasised that undertaking an NPQ is not an explicit criterion for promotion in their context but that the qualifications significantly assist staff in achieving career progression:

Some people have started to twig that it's not that you have to do [an NPQ] to get a promotion, but [that] it really helps you […] it just gave them an advantage in terms of knowing how to talk about things. Even if they hadn't encountered [challenges], they'd had a preview of 'this is how you might approach these sorts of issues'. – *School leader*

Specialist knowledge

NPQ participants commonly reported that the key reason as to why they chose to undertake their SNPQ was that they were interested in and passionate about the subject (rather than the development of leadership skills) and, subsequently, wanted to support the school in improving in that area:

Behaviour and culture is what I am interested in for my future career. I'm not interested in things like leadership as such, not at this point. So, I chose behaviour and culture because I really want to see students' progress. – *NPQLBC participant*

This clearly reflects the overarching aims of the NPQ reforms, which now distinguish between leadership and specialist content. NPQs were described by participants as being more appealing than other similar qualifications to some because they allowed them to specialise. For them, this was a key advantage of the programme.

Learning new skills

NPQ participants were commonly motivated to apply to undertake an NPQ by a desire to learn new skills and develop the confidence to lead others and enact change in their

school. They described having a personal responsibility to engage in professional development to ensure that their skills were up to date.

NPQH participants in particular wanted to learn more about the areas of headship with which they were less familiar so as to give them a more rounded understanding of the role. These included topics such as governance, statutory requirements, safeguarding, curriculum, and finance:

> The culture module was useful. In fact, that was very useful to me because [...] I was doing that particular unit of the course while actually applying for a headteacher job, and that module was quite relevant in terms of the application process and what you need to do as part of that process. Also, SEN and safeguarding are other examples of what's been useful, and governance and accountability, health and safety — I was probably pretty clueless about health and safety, to be honest. – *NPQH participant*

School motivations

School leaders identified two motivations for encouraging and selecting staff to participate in an NPQ. One set of schools selected staff to undertake an NPQ based on their development needs as well as the needs of the school. Others left it open to staff to self-select and choose the NPQ in which they were most interested. Letting staff have agency over their choices was perceived to increase their engagement and drive to complete the qualification.

School leaders were also motivated to support their staff in undertaking an NPQ by a belief that the knowledge and skills gained within the NPQs would enhance the teaching practice of the staff concerned and be cascaded down through the school to achieve a wider impact.

Participants' experience of the application process

Overall, survey respondents were satisfied with the application process as well as the clarity and timeliness of communication from their provider (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Participants' perceptions of the application process

% scoring 5, 6 or 7

Overall satisfaction with the application (n=3,247)	6.0	88%
Clarity of communication from provider (n=3,207)	5.8	83%
Timeliness of communication from provider (n=3,221)	5.8	83%

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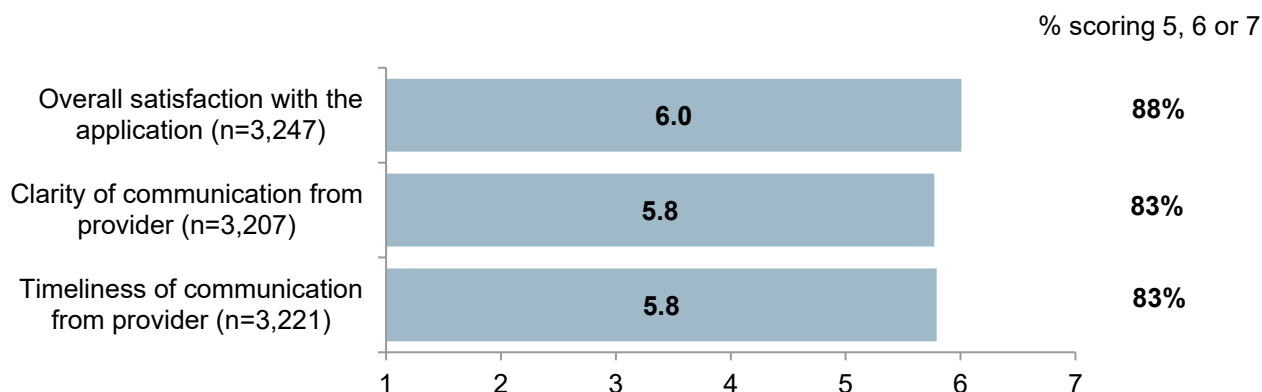
Source: SPA survey. Bases variable.
Scale of 1–7 (where 1=very dissatisfied and 7=very satisfied for overall satisfaction, 1=not at all clear and 7=very clear for clarity, and 1=not at all timely and 7=very timely for timeliness).

Those survey respondents undertaking the LNPQs were slightly more satisfied than those undertaking the SNPQs with the application process (6.1 compared with 5.9), and with the clarity and timeliness of communication with their provider (5.9 compared with 5.7 for both measures).

NPQ participants commonly described the application process as being *"straightforward"* and *"easy"*:

> It was very, very straightforward — very quick and very clear. Just a very brief commentary on why you wanted to do it, but it wasn't too laborious or anything. – *NPQLT participant*

In some limited instances, however, participants described it as being long and onerous, likening it to a job application in terms of its complexity and length. On occasion, participants reported frustration at having to chase their providers for information on their application when they did not receive it. Others stated that the timeline between applying, finding out that they had been successful, and then starting the course was tight and did not give them sufficient time to prepare:

> I sent [the application] off and then I waited quite a long time for them to even acknowledge that they had received my application. And then after a few telephone calls, literally two weeks before the course's advertised start date, they told me, 'Oh yes, you've got a place. We'll be in contact.' – *NPQLBC participant*

Survey respondents who were not satisfied with the application process or the clarity or timeliness of the communication with their provider were asked how things could be improved (n=378). Approximately three quarters of these respondents suggested ways to

improve communication. These included more clarity and guidance regarding the level of detail required in the application forms, as well as a detailed timeline outlining application deadlines, when applicants would be notified if they had been accepted for an NPQ, and when the qualification would start:

> Greater clarity from the outset about the different steps that need to be taken, and a clear guide about when these have to be completed by and then the timeframe for responses. – *NPQH survey respondent*

Some respondents would also appreciate notifications and updates at key points throughout the application process, for example, a confirmation email notifying them that their application had been successfully submitted and a notification that they had been accepted into the NPQ:

> I was unsure if I had a space. I assumed I did when I received an email about the first sessions and how to log on, but did not get an email saying I was successful first. – *NPQSL survey respondent*

However, better communication does not necessarily mean more communication; respondents explained that the number of emails that they received from their provider was overwhelming at times. NPQ respondents reported that information came from various sources (rather than being in one place). This group recommended that providers streamline the process through collating the information in one place and assigning a single point of contact to distribute this via email. Respondents also questioned whether the number of forms that applicants need to complete could be reduced to reduce duplication.

Impact of national funding

Most (86%) survey respondents knew that their NPQ would be funded by the DfE before they applied for the qualification[6]. Most respondents were unsure as to whether their school would have supported them in undertaking the qualification in the absence of DfE funding, and 19% reported that their school *would not* have paid for it. As such, the availability of funding is likely to be a key driver of uptake (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Participants' views on whether the school would have paid for the NPQ in the absence of funding
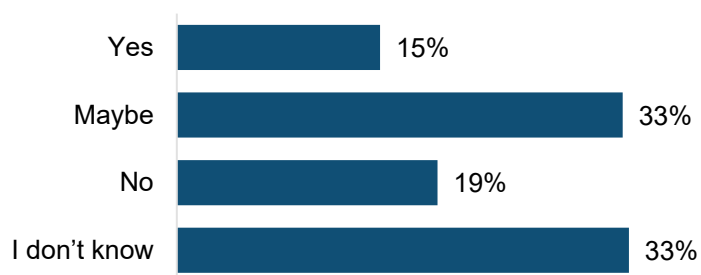
Source: SPA survey. Base=3,082.

A higher proportion of SLT respondents (21%) (who are typically budget holders) reported that their school would have paid for their NPQ in the absence of the funding in comparison with middle leaders (13%) and teachers (11%). Conversely, a higher proportion of teachers (43%) and middle leaders (37%) indicated that their school would *not* have paid for their NPQ in comparison with SLT respondents (17%).

NPQ participants and school leaders were acutely aware that the funding from the DfE had enabled them to engage with the NPQ programme. In the absence of this funding, participants thought that they would have had to convince their headteachers or governors of the benefits of NPQs and their own worth to obtain the necessary financial support. During the interviews a common theme was that without the funding, schools would not be able to support as many staff in undertaking the qualifications. Some suggested that they would have to implement an internal application process to decide who participated in and what proportion of the CPD budget was spent on this programme. This could become divisive:

> There was no encouragement. There was some discouragement in the fact that the funding needed to be managed, but there were two of us that wanted to do the leading behaviour and culture and there was a back and forth about 'Well, you'll have to interview for it because we can only afford to put one of you through', which wasn't

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[6] Nine per cent found out after they applied, and a minority (5%) did not know that their NPQ was funded by DfE.

ideal. But we both did it in the end and there was no need to interview, which was nice, but there was a bit of stress at the beginning about [whether I would] be allowed to do it through [the] school or not. – *NPQLBC participant*

Without funding, one provider suggested that there is a risk that only the wealthier or bigger schools would be able to fund participants, thus increasing the gap in leadership and specialist skills within the sector. This goes against many of the providers' aim to target schools in deprived and disadvantaged areas and would potentially have long-term consequences for the quality of education. A few NPQ participants chose to undertake an NPQ because it was free, rather than because it was needed at the time or particularly relevant to the needs of the school/participant, but this was not common.

Support and encouragement

Almost one third (31%) of survey respondents were encouraged to apply for an NPQ by their line manager, nearly two thirds (60%) were encouraged by another member of the SLT, and 18% were encouraged by other colleagues. Only 14% of respondents had not received encouragement from anyone else (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Individuals who encouraged respondents to apply for an NPQ

Category	Percentage
Other SLT member	60%
Line manager	31%
Other colleagues (at current or other school)	18%
School governor/trustee/member	3%
School Improvement Partner	2%
A Specialist Leader of Education	2%
A National Leader of Education	1%
Local Authority Adviser	1%
A delivery provider I was already studying with	1%
Other	1%
No one else encouraged me to apply	14%
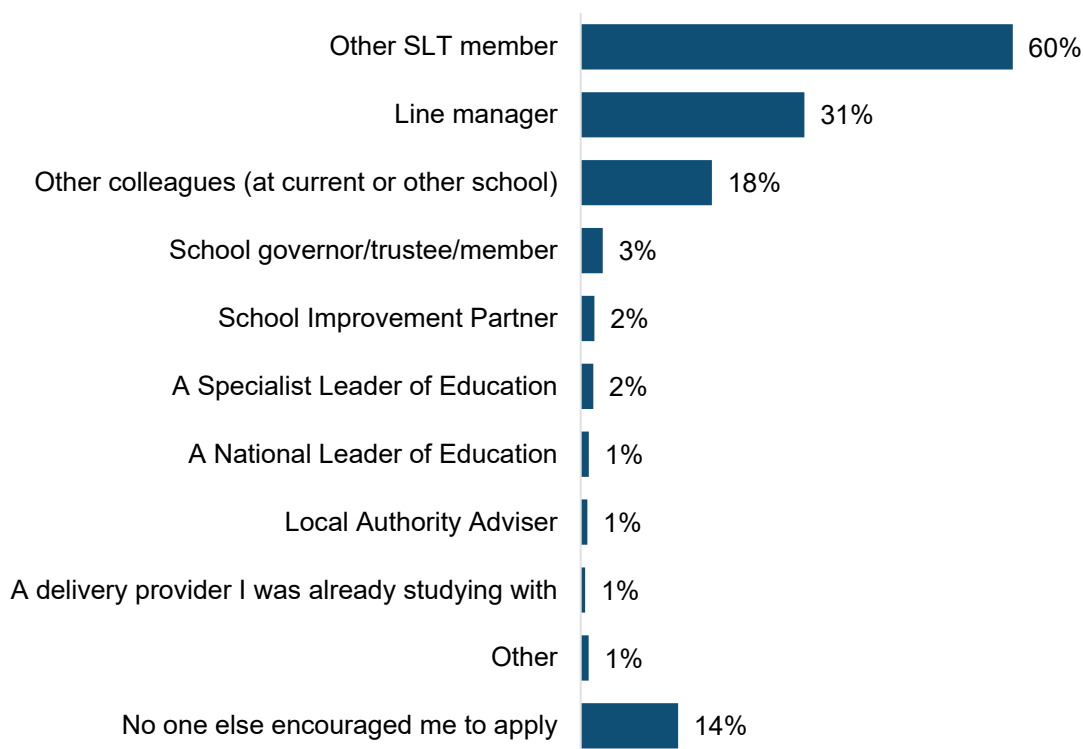
Source: SPA survey. Base=3,250.

Encouragement from the SLT and line managers was frequently reported by all LNPQ and SNPQ respondents with the exception of those undertaking the NPQEL (see Table 3). Thirty-eight per cent of NPQEL participants stated that no one else encouraged them to apply. A higher proportion of those undertaking the NPQEL reported receiving encouragement from a school governor/trustee/member (22%), a School Improvement Partner (10%), a local authority adviser (6%) or a National Leader of Education (6%). Those undertaking the NPQH also received more encouragement from these sources. This suggests that respondents in the most senior positions are more self-motivated, require less encouragement from others, and/or are empowered to make the decision themselves.

Table 3: Individuals who encouraged respondents to apply for an NPQ, broken down by qualification

Role	NPQEL (n=125)	NPQH (n=387)	NPQSL (n=919)	NPQLT (n=875)	NPQLTD (n=519)	NPQLBC (n=425)
Line manager	11%	29%*	31%*	37%*	28%*	31%*
Other SLT member	18%	59%*	66%*	62%*	58%*	61%*
Local authority adviser	6%*	4%*	1%	0%	0%	0%
School Improvement Partner	10%*	6%*	2%	1%	1%	1%
School governor/trustee/member	22%*	10%*	2%	1%	1%	1%
National Leader of Education	6%*	3%*	1%	0%	1%	0%
No one else encouraged me to apply	38%*	11%	11%	10%	18%	15%

Source: SPA survey. Bases variable.

Cells which are shaded in red and have an asterisk (*) indicate where a higher proportion of respondents undertaking specific NPQs selected an option relative to respondents undertaking other NPQs.

NPQ participants described how their school had supported and encouraged them to apply. A common theme was that participants were directly encouraged to take part by their line manager during their appraisals, as well as by headteachers/other members of the SLT who emphasised the benefits of the NPQ to both the individual and the school. Although reported less frequently, others described how their school had been supportive once they themselves had proactively expressed an interest:
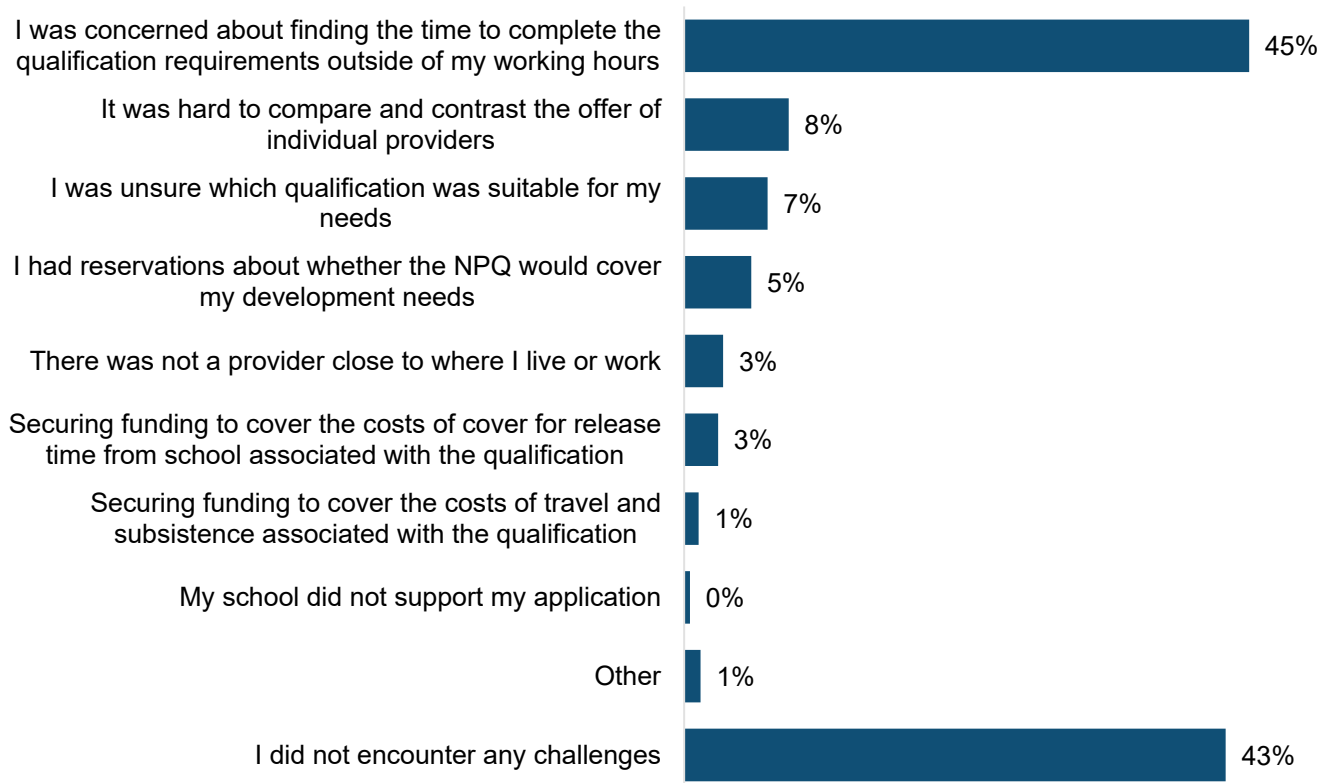
I mentioned it to the headteacher. Within two minutes of speaking to her, she said: 'I think you should go for it — absolutely.' She also encouraged one of my colleagues to do it as well. – *NPQH participant*

Barriers to applying

Over four in 10 (43%) survey respondents did not encounter any challenges or barriers when applying for their NPQ (Figure 14). Among those who did, however, the most common concern was finding the time to complete the qualification outside of working hours (45%). This was more commonly reported by part-time respondents (51%) in comparison with those working full-time (44%), and by primary school respondents (49%) in comparison with secondary school respondents (42%). During interviews, NPQ participants who commonly reflected that they had initially been concerned about the workload associated with the NPQs reported that these concerns were alleviated once the course structure and assessment were outlined by providers during the induction process.

Other issues reported by a minority of respondents included difficulties in comparing providers' individual offers (8%) and being unsure as to which qualification would be suitable for them (7%). The latter was more problematic for those undertaking the SNPQs (9%) in comparison with the LNPQs. Although the qualification itself is funded, a small proportion of participants experienced challenges in securing funding to cover their time to undertake their studies or to cover the travel and subsistence associated with the qualification.

Figure 14: Challenges experienced when applying for the NPQs

Challenge	Percentage
I was concerned about finding the time to complete the qualification requirements outside of my working hours	45%
It was hard to compare and contrast the offer of individual providers	8%
I was unsure which qualification was suitable for my needs	7%
I had reservations about whether the NPQ would cover my development needs	5%
There was not a provider close to where I live or work	3%
Securing funding to cover the costs of cover for release time from school associated with the qualification	3%
Securing funding to cover the costs of travel and subsistence associated with the qualification	1%
My school did not support my application	0%
Other	1%
I did not encounter any challenges	43%

Source: SPA survey. Base=3,250.

Selecting an NPQ

Just over one fifth of respondents (22%) compared their NPQ to other qualifications or training when deciding what to study.

The primary reason as to why respondents chose to undertake an NPQ instead of another qualification was the availability of DfE funding to cover the cost (53%). This was the *only* reason selected by 19% of respondents. Four in 10 (39%) respondents chose an NPQ because it is a nationally recognised qualification. Almost one in three (28%) respondents reported that they had chosen to undertake an NPQ upon the recommendation of someone else. A smaller proportion chose the NPQ over another qualification because of the content (22%) or delivery methods (16%).

Figure 15: Reasons why an NPQ was chosen over another qualification

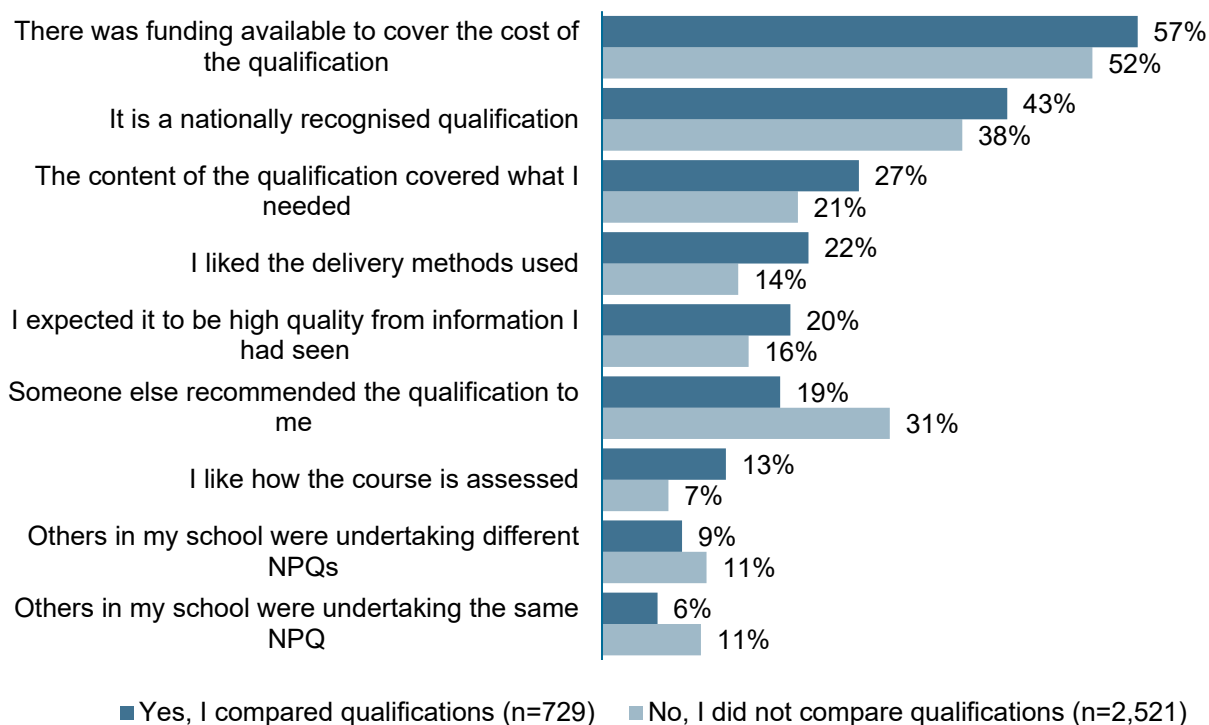| Reason	Percentage
There was funding available to cover the cost of the qualification	53%
It is a nationally recognised qualification	39%
Someone else recommended the qualification to me	28%
The content of the qualification covered what I needed	22%
I expected it to be high quality from information I had seen	17%
I liked the delivery methods used	16%
Others in my school were undertaking different NPQs	11%
Others in my school were undertaking the same NPQ	9%
I like how the course is assessed	8%
I expected it to be high quality from feedback from colleagues	7%
The opportunity to access the Additional Support Offer for Headteachers/Early Headship Coaching Offer*	6%
Other	5%

Source: SPA survey. Base=3,250.

* This option was only asked to NPQH respondents who were eligible for the ASO/EHCO (base=387).

Respondents who directly compared their NPQ to other qualifications were slightly more likely to choose an NPQ because of the funding available and the national recognition attributed to the qualification (Figure 16). The content, delivery and/or assessment methods and the perceptions of the quality of the programme also influenced their decision. Choosing an NPQ because it had been recommended to them was higher (31%) for those who had not compared the NPQs to another qualification. It was also more likely that this group would choose an NPQ because others in their school were undertaking one (11%). This highlights the importance of the availability of information on the qualifications for those who do their research, as well as the power of recommendations and word of mouth, particularly amongst those who do not actively make comparisons.

Figure 16: Reasons why an NPQ was chosen over another qualification, by whether comparisons to other qualifications were made

There was funding available to cover the cost of the qualification — 57% / 52%
It is a nationally recognised qualification — 43% / 38%
The content of the qualification covered what I needed — 27% / 21%
I liked the delivery methods used — 22% / 14%
I expected it to be high quality from information I had seen — 20% / 16%
Someone else recommended the qualification to me — 19% / 31%
I like how the course is assessed — 13% / 7%
Others in my school were undertaking different NPQs — 9% / 11%
Others in my school were undertaking the same NPQ — 6% / 11%

■ Yes, I compared qualifications (n=729)   ■ No, I did not compare qualifications (n=2,521)

Most NPQ participants perceived the workload to be about 'right' and could balance it with their other work. In contrast, other qualifications, such as a Master's in Education, were perceived to be 'too removed from their daily practice' and likely to require more work which may be unmanageable for some participants:

> I looked at a master's and then ran away crying [...] I know [NPQs] are not less academic at all, but to me they felt less academic. I think master's [degrees] look a bit scary, whereas [an] NPQ doesn't seem scary because it's so teaching-focused, and whilst [they are] research-based […] [NPQs] didn't feel like that — they felt different. – *NPQLT participant*

The national reputation, awareness, and transferability associated with the NPQs were key factors in NPQ participants' decision to undertake this qualification (amongst those who were interviewed). One school leader indicated that some of their staff were undertaking leadership qualifications being run by another organisation; however, the school cautions staff that these qualifications are not as well understood across the sector and may not be as transferable as an NPQ:

I've said to him, 'Remember, one of the strengths of the NPQ is that it ports across to other organisations, whereas [with regard to] anything you get out of [organisation name] qualifications, some school leaders will have no idea what you're talking about. If you're applying for another job somewhere else, if you just put NPQ, that's a common currency [...] which I think helps [funnel] people towards NPQs. – *School leader*

Provider choice

One third of survey respondents (31%) chose their provider themselves, and a further 16% had some influence over the choice. The decision was made by someone else for over half of all respondents (53%).

Several factors were associated with whether respondents chose their provider themselves, including the following:

- **Respondent role and qualification:** Nearly half (47%) of senior leaders chose their provider in comparison with only 25% of middle leaders and 27% of teachers. This trend was more pronounced for the most senior leaders, with 82% of NPQEL and 51% of NPQH respondents choosing their provider[7].

- **Phase:** Respondents in primary settings had more autonomy, with 37% choosing their provider in comparison with 25% of those from secondary settings.

- **School size:** Those in schools with more than 1,000 pupils had the lowest amount of autonomy, with only 23% of these respondents choosing their provider[8].

SNPQ participants regularly described having no choice over their provider, and were often not aware that there was more than one provider that could deliver their NPQ. In contrast, senior leaders in the LNPQs were more aware. It was commonly reported that where schools/trusts had pre-existing connections to one of the lead providers, the school had elected to go with them on that basis. Participants commonly reported that having no choice over their provider was not problematic, but one participant described how they would have liked to have made the choice:

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[7] Compared with 31% of those undertaking the NPQSL, 23% undertaking the NPQLT, and 25% undertaking the NPQLTD and NPQLBC.
[8] Compared with 30% of those in schools with 501–1,000 pupils, 35% in schools with 251–500 pupils, 40% in schools with 101–250 pupils, and 44% in schools with up to 100 pupils.

I would have liked to have had a choice because I remember [that] when I knew that I was going onto the NPQ Leading Teaching, I looked at what other providers there were and the way they teach it. And I was quite interested in how they teach it, but I didn't have a choice in mine. It was [the decision of the trust that] I work for, so it's done through [provider name]. – *NPQLT participant*

Reputation and recommendations were important

Of the survey respondents who had some level of choice over their provider, half (51%) compared different providers' offerings in reaching their decision. This was more common amongst school leaders, with 56% of senior leaders and 51% of middle leaders doing so, in comparison with 39% of teachers.

The provider's reputation (31%) was the most common reason as to why respondents chose their provider, followed by recommendations from colleagues (27%). Qualification delivery methods (24%) were also a key influencing factor alongside the geographical location of face-to-face sessions (22%). Interestingly, a quarter (25%) of respondents chose their provider because they were a member of their school alliance.

Figure 17: Why respondents chose their provider

Reason	%
They have a good reputation	31%
Colleagues recommended the provider/educational organisation	27%
My school is part of a school alliance with that provider/educational organisation	25%
The delivery methods of the qualification met my preferences	24%
Face to face sessions are geographically close to where I live/work	22%
The overall offer available at that provider/educational organisation	18%
The timing (time or dates) of sessions	10%
I have studied with the provider/educational organisation before and had a good experience	8%
It is the only provider/educational organisation I was aware of	7%
I chose them for another reason	5%
I did not have the final choice	1%

Source: SPA survey. Base=1,525.

A higher proportion of respondents who stated that they compared providers' offers in making a decision (compared to those who did not) reported that they chose their provider because they had a good overall reputation (40% compared with 23%), the delivery methods met their preferences (31% compared with 18%), face-to-face sessions were geographically close (25% compared with 19%), and because of the overall provider offer (24% compared with 13%).

Senior leaders were more likely to select a provider based on their reputation (37%) in comparison with 28% of middle leaders and 27% of teachers. This trend continues, with 50% of those undertaking the NPQEL and 39% of those undertaking the NPQH indicating that they chose their provider as a result of their reputation[9].

NPQ participants who were able to choose their provider offered some additional reasons as to why their provider was selected. These included choosing a provider that offered national networking opportunities so that they could learn from other teachers outside of their area and gain a different perspective. In contrast, others identified choosing a provider with more local provision to reduce the time spent on travelling to face-to-face sessions in the hope that more in-person teaching would be provided.

Providers described how they spent a considerable amount of time and effort on aligning their NPQ offer with their underpinning ethos and principles. However, the providers' underpinning principles do not appear to influence participants' decisions. The standardisation of NPQ content makes differentiating providers' offers difficult, which was described by some school leaders:

> So, that's the weirdest part of the whole thing. How on earth a school can make a judgement between the different providers I don't know. For me, one of the criticisms of this [is] that there's been a marketplace created, and I get that. But there's literally no information about how to make an informed choice in that marketplace. – *School leader*

Uptake of the Early Headship Coaching Offer

Recruitment into the Early Headship Coaching Offer (previously called the Additional Support Offer) has been challenging. Providers emphasised that the connotations associated with 'additional support' (within the original name) were problematic for enticing heads to engage with the offer because it suggests that the support is remedial. Alongside this, the strict eligibility criterion of only being in headship for two years reduced the pool of candidates. The support offer has now been rebranded as the Early

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[9] Compared with 28% of those undertaking the NPQSL, 27% undertaking the NPQLT, 30% undertaking the NPQLTD, and 21% undertaking the NPQLBC.

Headship Coaching Offer and the eligibility criterion has been increased to up to five years in a headship position. Providers thought that the increased eligibility would help because this would increase the pool of headteachers from which to draw. However, some providers stated that the new name incorrectly summarises the content on offer because it focuses on coaching (rather than on the full suite of support that many providers plan to deliver).

Only a small proportion of the NPQH participants surveyed were currently eligible to take up the Early Headship Coaching Offer, whereby reflecting providers' observations. Amongst the 40 eligible survey respondents, eight were currently accessing the support and five were planning to do so soon. Seventeen had not yet accessed it (with no current plans to do so) and 10 had not heard of it.

Respondents who accessed the support or planned to do so soon (n=13) did so to gain practical advice (7), gain confidence when making decisions as a new headteacher (7), receive one-to-one coaching (6), have the opportunity to talk to an experienced headteacher (6), and network with peers (3).

Already having a coach or mentor (7), not having enough time to access the support alongside their NPQH (7), and not understanding what it is (2) were reasons as to why 17 respondents had not accessed the support but had heard of it. A further three respondents indicated that they planned to access the support after completing their NPQH. No one reported that they had not taken it up because they did not need additional support or that it was not relevant to their needs, suggesting that it is not a lack of demand which is affecting uptake.

Of the four headteacher interviews, one had taken up the Additional Support Offer (as named then) but soon dropped out because they described the support as being similar to what they were receiving from the NPQ itself. Of the remaining interviewees, one was unaware of the offer but planned to take it up now they knew about it, and two planned to take up the offer when in a headship position. As one NPQH participant emphasised:

> If you're sensible, you want to take advantage of any support that you can get. So, yes, it seems like it would be something I would want to do. – *NPQH participant*

These findings should be interpreted with caution due to the low number of respondents.

Chapter 5: Early experiences of delivery

Key findings

- Overall, most NPQ participants were satisfied and stated that the NPQs were meeting their expectations.

- The NPQ content was described as being comprehensive; however, it is challenging to deliver, with little time left to provide opportunities for reflection or interaction between participants.

- NPQ participants liked the flexibility of online delivery but particularly valued the face-to-face sessions, which allowed them to network with their peers.

- The mix of NPQ participants who are already in the role that they are undertaking and those who are not yet in the role has not always worked well for those undertaking the LNPQs, with those in the role describing already knowing some of the content as well as discussions not being challenging enough.

- NPQ participants deemed the learning materials to be of high quality, and although not offered by all providers, participants highly valued coaching.

- Contextualisation of learning is important, and participants thought that the case studies used by their providers helped them to do this. For teachers earlier in their career and non-mainstream schools, they would like more examples which reflect their experiences and their schools.

- Applying learning was more problematic for SNPQ participants who did not hold specialist roles in their school, preventing them from embedding their learning fully.

- Whilst many NPQ participants were satisfied with the communication with their provider, some thought that this could be improved.

Overall feedback on the NPQs

Although NPQ participants are only in the first few months of their NPQ, a strong theme which emerged was that participants were satisfied with their qualification. It is meeting their needs and expectations, and almost all would recommend the qualification to others. SNPQ participants were motivated by their interest in the topic and have a passion for the content, whereby leading to higher levels of course satisfaction in comparison to LNPQ participants. SNPQ participants also believe that the qualifications are a good CPD (continuing professional development) opportunity:

It's been interesting and useful and you want to do it. So, it doesn't feel like a chore to get on with [it]. It's actually something that's enjoyable and something you want to do. – *NPQLTD participant*

NPQs are advertised as being suitable for participants who are either in the role or aspiring towards a role in the future. For the SNPQs, the combination of participants with different levels of experience does not seem to be problematic to their experiences of the qualification. However, NPQEL and NPQH participants who were in the role described how the content of the qualification was not pitched at the correct level. These concerns were also shared by providers:

Because the NPQH is aimed at people that are aspiring heads, I found some of the material a little-bit lower-level than I would hope for, especially some of the online clinics that we have — some of the scenarios have been about really obvious things. – *NPQH participant*

Differentiating content for aspiring and in-role headteachers and executive headteachers may help to alleviate these issues.

NPQ content

The standardisation of the NPQ frameworks is designed to ensure that there is consistent delivery to participants. Providers and NPQ participants regularly emphasised that the NPQ content is comprehensive and covers most elements of leadership or the specialism being taught:

Sometimes you go on courses where a lot of it is just waffle […] whereas I think [that on the NPQ], even though it is a lot, I feel like it has been condensed to just focus on the important stuff. So, I think [that] to have the course content, it's definitely for me — it's hitting the nail on the head. – *NPQLBC participant*

The executive leadership NPQ is quite well designed. Because it's a proper zoom-out, it's like, 'Okay, right, we are going to look at implementation and how you make sure things are being implemented across a number of sites or a number [of] schools. We're going to look at teaching and learning and behaviour and how you ensure consistency across a number of schools. We'll look [at] CPD and we'll look [at] how you ensure you're delivering that the best way you can across a number of schools.' – *NPQEL participant*

A few NPQ participants described additional topics that they would like to see covered; however, they knew that these were due to personal interest (rather than seeing them as a gap in provision). Whilst providers overall thought that there were no significant gaps in content, a couple described how 'softer' leadership skills were missing from the NPQs, such as leadership behaviours and attitudes which they tried to incorporate into their own delivery.

From a provider's perspective, the comprehensive framework can lead to challenges in covering all of the content and ensuring that delivery includes time for interaction and reflection in sessions. Although not reported commonly, this was noticed by NPQ participants who described how facilitators had too much content on their presentation slides and, therefore, were restricted during sessions. In addition, although not a common theme, there being too much content to cover during the whole qualification was reported by participants, which they felt to be overwhelming. This led to not being able to complete all of the activities (such as reading or watching videos). These participants did not expect there to be such a high workload associated with the NPQs, and would have appreciated clearer communication regarding this upfront from their provider.

Providers described feeling stuck while knowing that there is too much content but feeling unable to change this. As a result, both providers and participants expressed that the delivery could be more interactive, better paced, and incorporate more flexibility if the amount of content were reduced:

> We definitely did not have these problems before. In fact, what was celebrated about the NPQs before was the fact that, alongside covering a core content framework, there were ample opportunities for significant contextualisation […] we've sought to retain as much of that as possible, but the content framework that we are required to deliver is very full. – *Provider*

Delivery

NPQ participants reported being happy so far with the delivery of their NPQs. Participants described how many of the elements of delivery were strengths and enabled their learning, whilst also describing some small areas for improvement.

Induction processes

All providers described how they offer an induction process that is designed to ensure that participants are fully aware of the NPQ aims, the structure of the course, and the expectations of participants. Some providers also offer one-to-one discussions with mentors for SNPQs or coaches for LNPQs as part of the induction process, adding

personalised content and support at an early stage. Induction sessions are usually delivered online, although a small number of providers have offered these sessions face-to-face where geography and group characteristics (e.g. size of cohort) permit doing so.

NPQ participants frequently reported that the induction process met their expectations and succeeded in sharing important knowledge on their NPQ with them. Participants noted that being able to meet (either virtually or online) with other participants and hear everything about their course was useful and increased their level of motivation towards their upcoming qualification. Having all of the course documentation written down in the form of a handbook shared through the induction process was important so that participants could refer back to it as they progressed through their NPQ. Although not commonly reported, SNPQ participants also noted that the induction session helped to provide reassurance that they had made the right choice in applying to undertake an NPQ and that the qualification was the right one for them.

Where NPQ participants were not satisfied with their induction, this tended to be when they were told that the session was going to be face-to-face but ended up being delivered online, with which they were disappointed. Other participants noted that there was a large amount of information within the induction process, and reported feeling that this could be somewhat overwhelming at times.

One provider reflected that their induction process could be improved in the future by having more quotes or case studies from existing NPQ participants. This was not possible during the first cohort, because they were new qualifications, but is for the future. They hope that utilising past participants' experience in the induction process will make it more meaningful for participants. A couple of participants also suggested that having the opportunity to speak to someone who has previously undertaken the same SNPQ would be useful.

Online and face-to-face learning

Online delivery

NPQ participants recognise that online learning has its place, and are happy with this as a main part of the delivery model. Participants described the wide range of advantages that it offers, such as no travel time (which leads to less time away from school). What is more, activities that are not 'live' can be undertaken at a time which suits them, and when 'live' events are recorded, it enables them to revisit the learning.

NPQ participants and schools described how there is greater flexibility for participants and schools when content is delivered online, allowing the qualification to fit more readily around the school day. When sessions are held outside of school hours, this also reduces the potential challenges with regard to teaching cover:

> In terms of the ease of delivery, it's worked really quite well. With being on Teams, and with finishing school, the sessions are at 4 o'clock. So, if we had to get somewhere, it would be very difficult to get somewhere for that time, and, actually, during the day you'd have staff taking time out of school, which isn't ideal. – *NPQLBC participant*

Another advantage of online delivery described by participants was the ability for them to share experiences with colleagues from across the country, extending the potential to learn from others' experiences:

> You can do [the session] without having to travel […] which is very useful when you can actually talk to colleagues about their experience from up and down the country. – *NPQEL participant*

Despite there being numerous benefits, in limited instances NPQ participants reported that online delivery had limited their learning. Participants described how they found it difficult to concentrate, particularly when the sessions were over extended periods of time. In addition, it was challenging where there were external distractions such as emails or school events that required attention. The actual delivery of the online sessions was also described as being *"stilted and less engaging"* (NPQH participant)*.*

Breakout rooms are often used by providers to encourage discussion and interaction between participants. Whilst these strategies are appreciated by NPQ participants, they described how building connections with peers online is much more difficult (than face-to-face), even when breakout rooms are provided. As one participant outlined:

> Occasionally there's a nugget [of interesting insight] from another school leader […] and you think, 'That's fascinating', but because it's online, I can't pursue it with that person because the Zoom call is going to end, and I don't have their contact details because they're not shared. And that's frustrating — the loss of the networking element. – *NPQH participant*

Face-to-face delivery

For those NPQ participants who have experienced face-to-face delivery, the overwhelming feedback was positive. Participants valued the protected space to concentrate solely on their NPQ and engage with the content, as well as being able to fully capitalise on networking opportunities:

The face-to-face sessions have been the best in terms of development. You get more out of that interaction because they're longer — you get time to really engage with the research, catch up with where you are, think about what your next steps are going to be, and how you're going to develop over time. – *NPQLT participant*

Although not commonly reported, those NPQ participants who reported that they had received no face-to-face delivery yet as part of their NPQ were disappointed with this. Participants commonly reported preferring more face-to-face delivery because they believe that it produces the best learning environment and enables them to develop meaningful relationships and networks with peers. Participants also described how it also allows a wider variety of pedagogical teaching methods to be used. Participants did, however, emphasise the need for providers to make face-to-face sessions worthwhile. As they are less convenient and require time outside of school, they want to see different teaching methods used. For example, rather than using methods which could be replicated online (such as 'lectures'), they could use those which maximise the opportunities presented through face-to-face interactions, such as discussions:

The conferences have been okay. I think the breakout rooms are probably the most useful part because you get to talk to other people about how the course is going and the case studies. – *NPQLTD participant*

Peer networking

A common theme highlighted by NPQ participants was the importance of peer networking opportunities. By sharing experiences with other teachers and leaders, participants reported that this enabled them to learn from others and gain a wide range of new ideas to inform their own practice. They described how it allows them to expand their own teaching and leadership *"toolkits"*, by broadening the range of strategies that they can use, and then apply them in their own settings. By talking to others on the course, participants described how it allowed them to consider other approaches by using a *"get out of your school mindset"* (NPQLT participant).

Providers expressed that one of the intended impacts is for participants to develop support networks that will continue beyond the end of their NPQ. Underpinning this aim is the realisation that leadership in schools can be challenging, and support networks can assist in solving problems and enhancing school performance. The establishment of these networks is in the early stages, but there is evidence that participants are beginning to make connections with their peers, and value the added support that this can give them:

> There's three of us and it's ended up being more of a support group
> […] so it's been nice to meet people and be in a group, and I've got
> to know them really well […] it's nice because there's more of that
> professional dialogue with somebody who's already an existing,
> experienced teacher, a headteacher. – *NPQH participant*

There are numerous examples of where NPQ participants have already started to expand these networks beyond supporting one another through the NPQ to other topics, and one example of a participant visiting another school:

> It's just me doing the NPQH from my particular school, but there are
> some colleagues, one in particular from a local school down the road
> […] we've touched base a few times about a few things and
> exchanged emails. And it's actually helped, I think, outside of the
> course, us [working] a little bit more collaboratively at school. –
> *NPQH participant*

Where schools have multiple members of staff enrolled in an NPQ, participants valued having an internal network to share experiences, discuss their learning, and check in on their progress. Participants appreciate not feeling alone and being able to informally reinforce their learning.

As mentioned previously, providers and NPQ participants described how online delivery allows colleagues to convene across a large geographical area, whereby increasing the diversity of those involved. Participants often enjoyed the wide variety of experiences gained from having a mix of people from other phases or school types in their groups:

> It's good because we're working with people from councils, primary
> schools, secondary schools, country schools, inner-city schools. So,
> [there are] a wide range of people with a wide range of experiences
> coming together, and it opens your eyes and mind to different ways
> of thinking about things. – *NPQLBC participant*

Participants in SNPQs described how they particularly valued others on their courses, and for those with less experience, listening to and learning from more senior colleagues were insightful. However, more experienced leaders, in NPQH and NPQEL, who were already in the role for which they were studying described obtaining less from these experiences. They described how they were developing other NPQ participants more than any benefit that they were obtaining themselves:

I wonder whether there should be an NPQH that is specifically for people that are currently serving headteachers […]. I would say to improve it for me would be being matched with people that were actually headteachers […] you feel as the headteacher that you're giving all your ideas, which is fine, except that the quality of conversation would be better if I was with other heads. – *NPQH participant*

The variation of experience across the NPQs in group discussions has also had a negative effect on intimidating a couple of junior teachers in the SNPQs. These participants described themselves as *"still a teacher"* (NPQLBC participant) without extra responsibilities, and how they questioned their legitimacy on the course and what they could contribute to discussions.

Learning materials

NPQ participants were positive about the learning materials and reading provided: "*The quality of the material is absolutely first-rate and that's an exceptional part of the course*" (NPQH participant). The materials were identified as being of high quality, relevant, and succinct in covering the key points. Participants appreciate the effort from providers to signpost and provide relevant reading, as many would not know where to start looking themselves.

NPQ participants occasionally reported that they would like the learning materials provided to them further in advance of sessions to allow them to fully engage ahead of time. Furthermore, they would like more structure to the provided reading and information. Another theme which emerged was that, alongside the teaching materials, participants expressed that they would appreciate interactive tests or quizzes (rather than only reading) to reflect that learning does not always happen in the same way for each learner, and varying methods to aid the retention of knowledge would be useful.

All providers reported that they have online virtual learning environments (VLEs) that house the learning materials and activities through which participants can work. VLEs require NPQ participants to learn how to use these and it can take time for them to feel comfortable with this. Participants commonly reported that their VLE is well organised and has all of the necessary information pertaining to their qualification. Participants who have experienced technical issues surrounding their VLE have experienced difficulties such as accessing the correct modules, finding the correct links to log in, and content disappearing; however, they now frequently reflect that these have now improved.

Specific teaching methods

Each provider has its own delivery model and uses different methods to teach the NPQs.

Coaching

An element of delivery which is highly valued but not consistently offered across providers is coaching. Providers and NPQ participants who had a coach described how coaching enables participants to take their learning, apply it to their own context, and encourage reflection. Providers noted that coaching is an expensive part of their offer, but those that use it emphasised the importance of the method in ensuring a high-quality experience for participants:

> [Coaching] means that we can do some contextualisation of the knowledge […]. When we were doing the budget, one of my team said, 'Look, can we not get rid of the coaching, because that's costing a lot in the model? You don't need it.' And I said: 'No, that's absolutely integral to our delivery and we need to find a way to make that work.' – *Provider*

> The best thing about it has been that you get a one-to-one with a leadership coach and that's been by far the most effective thing about the whole course. – *NPQH participant*

Reflection and interaction

Another popular method of delivery that NPQ participants highlighted that they value is reflection through group discussions. Each provider has a different name for these sessions (e.g. clinics, seminars, and 'activate' and 'apply' sessions), but they commonly involve participants discussing a key topic, linking it to their experience, and providing strategies or ideas regarding how to improve or overcome the issue. Although not reported frequently, participants cautioned that these discussion sessions can quickly lose focus and become a generic discussion about school life, rather than specifically addressing the content of the module, if not facilitated.

NPQ participants described how activities that encourage them to reflect on their practice help them to embed their learning and contribute to a positive and enjoyable experience in their NPQ: *"Giving people the time and space to reflect on their own practice and wider practices in the school is so valuable"* (NPQLT participant). Participants noted that the busy schedules of 'normal' school life can limit their opportunity to reflect on what they are doing; thus, having this protected space that encourages reflection helps them to improve their own practice. Providers reported that they are equally aware of the need for reflection, and where possible, this is embedded in their delivery model:

> What is working well is ensuring there is plenty of space for […] deeper reflection for our participants. They really value that time to stop and pause, and the combination of those conversations being

informed by the independent learning means that people have the
time to really digest the material. – *Provider*

Providers described how they appreciate the need for a standardised framework to ensure that content is delivered consistently across the NPQs; as highlighted previously, however, this rigidity can stifle creativity in delivery and they believe that it prevents them from offering opportunities to reflect as often as they would like. NPQEL and NPQH participants also commonly described that the rigidity of the curriculum stopped them from developing their leadership skills fully, as it stifled reflexivity, higher-level thinking, and intellectual curiosity. These participants felt *"straight-jacketed"*, and without the space to reflect, they reported that the NPQ was not meeting their expectations.

As teachers, NPQ participants are highly attuned to the quality of teaching that they are receiving. Participants across both SNPQ and LNPQ programmes identified that at times the teaching methods used in their NPQ lacked creativity, imagination, and were not as engaging as they could be. These participants reflected on the creativity and innovation that they themselves use to teach new content to pupils, and thought that the same practices could be used to ensure that engagement is high and learning is maximised. Participants thought that at times there was too much lecturing and talking:

> I'd love to have more videos and podcast material, just to break it up […] that's the design of the course. Some of it could be made more pleasant. As teachers, we're really creative in our sessions, and I think whoever's putting the courses together could access some of that creativity that's out there, just to make use of different media to help us get the learning. – *NPQLT participant*

Contextualisation

Irrespective of the type of method used in delivery, NPQ participants reported that they value contextualisation. Providers and participants described how a key method through which contextualisation occurs is that of case studies, which allow participants to *"relate it back to your school and you can see what goes well and what doesn't"* (NPQLTD participant). Participants described how having practical examples, through either case studies or listening to the experiences of others, encourages them to make connections, reflect, and apply learning to their own school. They stated that these examples help to balance the theoretical knowledge with the practical and make the NPQ more meaningful for them:

> They're very scenario-driven and you can say for some of those scenarios, 'Oh, that could happen at my school'. For others you might think, 'No, that's not going to happen', but I like that nature of it — it's not all about theory. – *NPQH participant*

The importance of contextualisation was more frequently referred to by SNPQ participants who wanted to apply the specialist knowledge to their own school. Although not reported frequently, SNPQ participants in particular wanted to see more of 'them' in the examples provided, especially teachers at the beginning of their teaching career who stated that some of the case studies and examples did not include a reference to *"little old me"* (NPQLBC participant) as often as there were examples of senior leaders. NPQ participants in non-mainstream schools, such as those supporting pupils with special needs, or in Pupil Referral Units also highlighted that the resources used to encourage contextualisation and reflexivity were more often aimed towards mainstream primary and secondary schools, whereby limiting their application and use.

Communication and feedback

NPQ participants commonly reported that they were satisfied with communication with their provider, whilst others suggested areas for improvement. The suggestions for improvement varied from participant to participant, with no consistent feedback.

One area, though not common, that NPQ participants identified as needing improvement related to delivery times. Participants identified not knowing the deadlines for their work or when their next sessions were scheduled, which had a knock-on effect on their ability to fully engage with the content:

> So, we've been emailed slides and readings, and one time they never even sent us the readings. The next time they sent us the readings the evening before the next day when our session was. I couldn't read that much information in that time […] dates and times are all over the place. I can't ask for cover a week before a session — that's ridiculous. I need half a term's notice. – *NPQLBC participant*

Other suggestions included clarity surrounding essential and non-essential activities, clearer instructions regarding the order in which to complete modules/activities, and consistent approaches to calendar invites for events. There is some appreciation amongst NPQ participants that the organisation and communication from providers have improved over time, which may reflect providers' perceptions that the timeline to implement and get the NPQ running was short.

There is often the opportunity for participants to submit formative pieces of work through their VLE. There were, however, examples in which participants stated that they had not received any feedback on the formative work:

> It would be nice to know if people actually look at what we've written, because I get the feeling that you put it into the internet, press 'done', and then it's done. It feels like there's no regular monitoring of what

we're producing. And as teachers, we're regularly monitored. It feels strange that we produce a piece of work, click 'send', and think, 'That's it'. – *NPQLTD participant*

This is a further example in which, as teachers themselves, the NPQ participants are experiencing a disparity between what they do as educators and what they are receiving as participants. Managing expectations regarding this element of delivery might help to alleviate these issues.

Additional support and opportunities to embed learning

NPQ participants and school leaders described how schools have been largely supportive of teachers/leaders in the application stages, as well as commonly providing cover for staff to attend NPQ sessions where there are clashes with their teaching. However, a common theme is that participants and schools have stated that beyond this, there is little additional support provided. There often appears to be a hands-off approach by schools once the teacher is enrolled, although this is not problematic for most participants. Although it is not commonly reported, where NPQ participants have a coach or mentor in their school, they are providing support with their NPQ and can help with their learning and assignments if needed.

When participants apply for the SNPQs, providers highlight that they need to have a level of leadership or influence in their school to implement some of the 'learn how to' statements in the NPQ. Without this, they believe that they are unable to fully embed their learning:

> There's a bit more education to be done for participants about what course most suits them. It may be that the course suits them in terms of their interests and it suits them in terms of their professional development, but it might not be that they've got the scope within their own role to be able to do it. – *Provider*

A less prevalent theme amongst SNPQ participants was that opportunities to implement their learning in school were limited. One NPQ participant described how the 2017 reformed NPQs provided an opportunity for them to undertake a project in their school. Now that this is not a specified part of their course, the school does not have a responsibility to provide that opportunity:

> I'd listen to some of the other NPQ people when we get together, and they've been allowed to run little projects in their school, etc., which may change my opinion of the qualification. And I'm not in a position where I'm able to do that. I'm not really able to do things outside of

my role […] whereas I felt maybe that the NPQML […] may have forced the hand of the school to allow me that experience because what I actually would benefit from is to have experience of running a project. – *NPQLBC participant*

Another NPQ participant described that they did not currently have the opportunities in their school and was concerned that if they asked, the school would deny them such opportunities. Participants described how if the school expectations were clearly laid out before they started their NPQ, the school may be more supportive and more likely to provide these opportunities.

Possible additional NPQs

Many NPQ participants, schools and providers identified that an area missing from the current suite of qualifications is the provision and leadership of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in schools. Other qualification gaps included a need for a qualification like the NPQML for those who do not want to specialise in an area and want to develop middle leadership skills. Some participants identified that they intended to apply for the NPQML but were disappointed that it was no longer available. However, participants did not want the NPQML at the expense of losing SNPQs.

Providers and participants welcomed the two new NPQs to be introduced in October 2022. Of these, Leading Literacy has led to questions as to why there is not an NPQ for numeracy. Other suggestions include an NPQ for subject specialisms (e.g. leading science or arts and humanities), as well as leadership for non-teaching staff in schools (e.g. teaching assistants).

Chapter 6: Early self-reported outcomes and impacts

Key findings

- Though early in delivery, NPQ participants self-reported that the NPQs have had a positive impact on them. This has included increased skills and knowledge amongst NPQ participants, which have been transformative for some; increased levels of confidence; and assuming more responsibilities.

- Self-reported impacts were most commonly reported by SNPQ participants. This suggests that the specific and specialist nature of the knowledge taught in the SNPQs may influence practice more quickly than the leadership skills taught in the LNPQs.

- There is early evidence of a wider school impact, wherein learning has filtered down throughout the school. Impacts are particularly notable when multiple members of staff are undertaking an NPQ.

Although NPQ participants had only been undertaking their NPQ for a few months when they were interviewed, many reported that there had been some early outcomes and impacts as a result of their participation.

Increased skills and knowledge

NPQ participants described how their qualification has led to an increase in skills and knowledge which many have been able to apply directly to their teaching and ways of working, whereby enabling them to make changes in their role:

> [The NPQ] has definitely impacted my practice because there are little things that I've taken away and straight away I've just implemented into my day-to-day teaching. – *NPQLBC participant*

Whilst participants across both the SNPQs and the LNPQs reported learning new skills, the subsequent impact on practice was described more frequently by SNPQ participants. This may be because more SNPQ participants have the responsibilities for which they are studying, or it may be that the specific nature of the knowledge within those qualifications may have a quicker impact on influencing practice. In contrast, the leadership skills taught in the LNPQs may require greater levels of reflexivity and time in order to embed into school practices and cultures before the impact can be realised.

An example of an impact is one department that has changed its curriculum as a direct result of the NPQ:

After going on [the NPQLT], we've redesigned our history curriculum, and that's come from thinking about how pupils learn. So, instead of trying to teach them everything, it's identifying the core knowledge that children need and the key vocabulary, and thinking about how they learn, thinking about their working memories and retrieval tactics, and these things all come from just doing the reading. – *NPQLT participant*

A key element of knowledge that NPQ participants spoke about is the new language that they have learnt as well as 'buzzwords' that are included in the content. Participants described that they had learnt that concepts such as cognitive load and metacognition were important ideas that they have subsequently applied to their teaching. This has focused participants' thinking and developed a critical level of research-informed practice which, participants believe, will have a positive impact on pupils.

Increased confidence

NPQ participants described how the increased knowledge gained through the NPQs has had a positive impact on their confidence. Participants identified feeling more confident in their own classrooms; in interactions with other staff; and in using evidence to underpin suggestions for change, feeling more confident that their ideas are evidence-based and, therefore, workable:

I feel like my opinions are more valued because I feel I can give my opinion, but also I can back up my opinion with what I think about the process behind it. Whereas before, I would just say, 'Oh, I think we should do that', but now it's like, 'We should do that because […]'. – *NPQLTD participant*

As a result of improved confidence, one participant has assumed more responsibilities in their school. Another participant could see the benefit of their improved confidence for their pupils:

I don't think, until speaking to you, that I'd quite crystallised how much confidence and how me working as a confident teacher has had an impact on the children. Because I'm taking more joy, because I'm much more confident, I can relax more and I can focus on [the pupils] more. – *NPQLT participant*

Transformative in changing practice

The new knowledge that has been taught has been "*transformative*" for some NPQ participants, who described completely changing the way they approach their own practice:

> I will never deliver CPD in the same way again since I've done this NPQ. It really has been that transformative. – *NPQLTD participant*

Other participants identified that the knowledge has helped to transform their general knowledge into practical strategies that they can use to move their teaching and leadership to *"that extra level"* (NPQLT participant). Participants appreciate the space whilst undertaking their NPQ to reflect on and step back from the day-to-day activities of teaching, which has allowed them to prioritise what is important, make changes, and transform how they think about problems.

For participants in the LNPQs, the transformative element of the NPQ also relates to understanding their own leadership characteristics. For instance, one NPQH participant identified that their knowledge on the distributive styles of leadership has allowed them to be *"brave enough to actually empower people to make decisions, rather than being the decision maker at a single point"*. This shows a transformation in how decision making and leadership are enacted in practice.

Increased aspiration and career progression

Though not a common theme, there are early examples of participants describing that completing an NPQ has had a positive impact on their perceptions of their own career progression and the steps that they need to take in order to achieve this. For instance, one school leader highlighted that one of their NPQ participants has been promoted to the head of year, with the NPQ playing a significant role in their interview. Linked to an increase in confidence, the NPQ has given some participants the freedom to 'aim high' and try new things:

> The course keeps teaching me all these things, so I've got all of this knowledge now and I think, 'Why can't I just do that?'. The course has given me permission that I can go for whatever opportunities I can see that I can contribute to, to just go for it. It's made me more proactive. – *NPQLT participant*

Wider impacts across the school

Though not a common theme, there are examples of NPQ participants describing that the knowledge learnt via the NPQs has begun to be shared and filtered throughout their school. Participants reported that this has been leading to the wider workforce being upskilled as well as transforming the culture of development and learning. In turn, they described how more teachers are thinking in the same way about learning and teaching as well as using the same language, which is creating a more consistent approach. Participants in schools with multiple members of staff completing an NPQ identified greater benefits of the NPQs with respect to cascading knowledge throughout the school:

> I'm using the language [I've learned in my NPQ] really confidently, and then I think that's rubbing off on other people, so they're starting to use the language. So, it's actually having a knock-on effect right across the school. – *NPQLT participant*

Particularly for SNPQ participants in the Leading Teaching and Leading Teacher Development programmes, they reported how their qualification has enabled them to better understand how to communicate key messages to other staff in such ways that the learning can then be implemented. For instance, one teacher in the NPQLT has a better understanding of the need to present colleagues with *"applicable strategies that they can pick up and use immediately".* This then has a positive benefit on those across the school.

One school example illuminates the impact that NPQs can have upon their schools and the functioning of departments through better leadership and research-informed practice. In this school, due to restructuring and staffing changes, the science department has new leaders in place. Two of the deputy heads of the department are enrolled in an NPQ:

> Those two people are doing [the] NPQ in Leading Teaching. For both, that's had a demonstrable, really positive impact on their practice and that of their department […]. Even though it's been a relatively short period of time, I can already see a science department that was fundamentally non-functioning — it was a collection of good individuals but with literally no team ethos at all — and in the space of one year, [it has] become one of our [...] strongest, most coherent departments. There's a lot of factors, but part of it has been [their NPQs] — the people who are helping lead the teaching within the department have had access to the NPQs, so they have got insight and that is filtering down to the rest of the team. – *School leader*

Impact on pupils

Both NPQ participants and schools reported seeing the ultimate beneficiaries of the NPQs as the pupils, who they believed will receive higher-quality teaching that results in better outcomes for pupils. One school in particular described how they hoped that participation in the NPQ would lead to leaders being upskilled to allow them to create a more positive environment, subsequently leading to happier staff who are more informed, enjoy their jobs, and engage pupils better, whereby creating a better experience for pupils.

Most NPQ participants and school leaders identified that it is too early to demonstrate an impact on pupils. However, some SNPQ participants described a positive impact on the behaviour and engagement of pupils in lessons. Strategies learnt in the SNPQs appear to be having an immediate impact on teachers, who described feeling more confident when implementing new strategies to improve pupils' engagement in lessons. NPQLBC participants especially provided examples in which their learning has created more positive learning environments, whereby pupils clearly know the lesson expectations and are more motivated to achieve positive praise and rewards in lessons:

> So, instead of saying, 'Can you put your pens down now, please, because I'm talking?', I'll give the instruction, 'I'd like you to put your pens down in two minutes' […]. [As for] anyone who's not doing it, I don't call them out and say, 'You've not got your pen down', because that is negative and that could then create a response from them that I don't like or that I don't want. Instead of doing that, I'm going to say, 'Thank you, [student name], for putting your pen down. Amazing, [student name], you've got your pen down. Brilliant.' The students who don't have their pens down can hear me saying that. They're going to put their pen down. – *NPQLBC participant*

This has been described as being particularly important for schools post-COVID-19, during which participants and school leaders suggested that pupil disengagement has been more prevalent.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Awareness of the reformed NPQs

There have been nearly 30,000 funded NPQ starts in the 2021/22 academic year. Over half of these are in the new SNPQs, highlighting the clear demand for these new qualifications. Whilst many teachers and leaders are undertaking NPQs, comprehensive awareness of the 2021 NPQ reforms is mixed across the sector.

The LNPQs are widely known across the sector. Although the findings indicate that the reforms to the LNPQs are less widely understood, awareness of their existence, to whom they are targeted, and their intended impact is good. Conversely, awareness of the SNPQs is lower and there are some misconceptions. These include a lack of understanding regarding where they 'fit' within schools' leadership structure, particularly in small and/or primary schools. As such, providers described how it was much easier to recruit SNPQ participants from secondary schools. Linked to this, there was a much higher uptake of SNPQs by participants completing the baseline survey in secondary schools in comparison with the LNPQs. In reality, the makeup of SNPQ participants is varied, ranging from teachers at the beginning of their teaching career to senior leaders and deputy heads who want specific and specialist knowledge of an aspect of their role.

Both providers and NPQ participants emphasised a lack of communication regarding the reforms as being the key reason as to why there is not better awareness within the sector. There was agreement that more central communication from the DfE to teachers and schools would help to improve awareness, which providers are happy to support. This could include a mapping document which suggests suitable applicants for each SNPQ to ensure that there is clarity surrounding this, especially within smaller schools. Improved communication may have a positive impact on future recruitment.

Although a comprehensive awareness of the reforms is low, early findings indicate that they are still having a positive impact on the sector. Whilst some NPQ participants would have undertaken an NPQ anyway, others would not have undertaken an NPQ in the absence of the reforms. The changes to the assessment method make the NPQs feel more manageable, and the SNPQs have offered participants a course that is more aligned with their interests and passions within school.

Why are NPQ participants taking part?

Most LNPQ participants are not yet in the role for which they are studying, which is a change from the previous 2017 NPQs. In contrast, over half of all SNPQ participants already have some level of responsibility in their school for the area in which they are specialising, and if not are aspiring towards this in the future.

NPQ participants reported a range of motivations for undertaking the qualification. Career progression and learning new skills were commonly reported. Career progression was especially important for those undertaking the NPQH, where the qualification used to be mandatory in order to become a headteacher. Skill development was also a motivation for those wanting to improve in their current role. For the SNPQs, a key reason as to why participants chose to undertake their NPQ was that they were interested in and passionate about the subject and, subsequently, wanted to support the school in improving in that area. This clearly reflects the overarching aim of the NPQs in distinguishing between leadership and specialist content.

The scholarship funding for NPQ participants working in state-funded settings, available through the Education Recovery Package, has been crucial to many schools and participants, with very few being certain that their school would have funded their NPQ in the absence of this. Nearly one fifth of respondents only chose an NPQ (over other qualifications) because of the scholarship funding available. Schools reiterated that without this funding, they would have had to reduce the number of teachers/leaders undertaking a qualification in their school. Whilst the funding was an important factor, other reasons, such as it being a nationally recognised qualification, being recommended, and the content covering what participants needed were important when choosing a qualification.

Satisfaction with application, content and delivery

Application

Overall, most NPQ participants were satisfied with the application process. There were some areas for improvement identified which centred primarily on communication regarding the progress of their application and the qualification start dates. Providers described that delays in awarding the contracts to deliver had reduced their preparation time, which may have contributed to this.

When applying, the most common concern amongst NPQ participants was finding the time to complete the qualification outside of working hours. However, amongst those who initially had been worried about this, they reported that these concerns had been alleviated once the course structure and assessment were outlined by providers during the induction process.

Content

As a result of the new NPQ content framework, both providers and NPQ participants agreed that the content is comprehensive and covers most elements of leadership or the specialism being taught. The only gaps that have been identified relate to 'softer' leadership skills, attitudes and behaviours. However, due to the comprehensive nature of the framework and the amount of content that providers need to cover, providers described being left with limited time to incorporate additional elements. In addition, providers and participants expressed that NPQ delivery could be more interactive, better paced, encourage more reflection, and incorporate more flexibility if the amount of content were reduced. This was especially true for NPQH and NPQEL participants, who described this lack of flexibility as being detrimental to them fully developing their leadership skills.

The NPQs are advertised as being suitable for participants who are either in the role or aspiring towards a role in the future. However, NPQEL and NPQH participants who were in the role described how they did not feel that the content of the qualification was pitched at the correct level. This was also problematic in peer networking groups (which included a mixture of those in the role and those not in the role). Differentiating content, activities or groups for aspiring versus headteachers and executive leaders who are already in these roles may help to alleviate these issues.

Delivery

Whilst still in the early phases of delivery, most participants reported that the NPQs are meeting their expectations. They are learning new skills and almost all would recommend them to others. There were higher levels of satisfaction amongst most SNPQ participants, who were particularly motivated by their interest in the topic.

Participants recognise and appreciate that online learning has its place, and are happy with this as a main part of the delivery model. They described the wide range of advantages that it offers, though sometimes thought that it had limited their learning. For those participants who have experienced face-to-face delivery, the overwhelming feedback was positive. A small number of participants had not yet received any face-to-face delivery as part of their NPQ and were disappointed with this, and most other participants would like more. Participants described how peer networking allowed them to share experiences with other teachers and leaders, whereby enabling them to learn from others. Variations in experience within groups can be beneficial; however, these need to be carefully managed to ensure that the peer learning is reciprocal and all participants benefit fully.

Irrespective of the delivery methods, participants value contextualisation. Having practical examples encourages participants to make connections, reflect, and apply learning to

their own school. Some SNPQ participants wanted to 'see more of them' in the examples provided to reflect their more junior roles in the school. This was also reflected by those who are in non-mainstream schools.

Schools have been largely supportive of participants in the application stages, and most have provided cover for staff to attend NPQ sessions. However, some NPQ participants stated that additional support would be beneficial. Providers highlighted that SNPQ participants need to have a level of leadership or influence in their school to implement some of the 'learn how to' statements detailed in the NPQ framework and maximise their learning. This was reiterated by some SNPQ participants who described not having these opportunities available in their school.

Outcomes and impacts

Although participants had only been undertaking their NPQ for a few months when they were interviewed, many believed that there had already been some early outcomes and impacts from their participation. They described how their qualification had led to an increase in skills and knowledge which many have been able to apply directly to their teaching and ways of working. This was more prevalent amongst SNPQ participants, suggesting that the specialist nature of those qualifications may have a quicker and more transferable impact on influencing practice.

The new knowledge that has been taught has been *"transformative"* for some teachers, completely changing the way they approach their own practice. Participants reported appreciating the space within the NPQs to reflect on and step back from the day-to-day activities of teaching, which has allowed them to prioritise what is important, make changes, and transform how they think about problems in their school or department. Despite this, they would like more opportunities to do this to further their learning. There are also examples of NPQ participants describing how the knowledge learnt through the NPQs has been disseminated throughout the school. As a result of changes to practice, participants reported some early impacts on pupil behaviour and engagement in lessons. This suggests that the NPQs may already be starting to have the intended impact on participants and schools.

Appendix 1: Methodology

This evaluation focuses solely on participants who receive full scholarship funding, which is available for teachers and leaders who work in state-funded settings in England. The approach consists of interrelated stages which span both the process and impact evaluation. It is underpinned by the theory of change and the associated indicator bank which has been informed by a review of programme documentation and a series of scoping interviews with key stakeholders.

Process learning

The process evaluation involves a series of interviews with NPQ participants and wider stakeholders. Over the course of the evaluation, in-depth interviews will be conducted with a total of 176 participants in Cohorts 1, 3 and 5. These interviews will take place across two rounds for each cohort: in the first few months of participants starting their NPQ in order to focus on their motivations for pursuing an NPQ, the application process, and any early experiences; and upon completing their NPQ in order to focus on their experiences of the qualification and the assessment process. Interviews will also take place with 32 school representatives. Ofsted, along with the nine lead providers and the DfE, will also be consulted at several points as the programme evolves so as to ensure that learning and insight are captured.

Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation is based on self-reported and objective measures of impacts. Primary data on the self-reported impacts of the programme will be captured via a longitudinal participant survey, a survey of NPQ participants' line managers and colleagues, and a series of in-depth interviews. Objective measures of impacts will be calculated through secondary data analysis.

NPQ participant survey

The impacts of the NPQs will be assessed at the qualification level, as well as in aggregate, to understand differences in the content and outcomes achieved. To enable change to be measured, NPQ participants will be surveyed at the baseline (Sampling Point A (SPA)), when participants first start their NPQ, and at two subsequent sampling points: SPB (when participants successfully complete their NPQ) and SPC (12 months after completing their NPQ). The surveys will also collect formative information on their motivations for participating and their experience of delivery.

The Cohort 2 and 3 surveys will be conducted with participants across all six NPQs that have been rolled out. The Cohort 4 survey will be conducted with participants

undertaking the specialist NPQs and two further NPQs launched in the 2022/23 academic year. The surveys will be administered online to *all* NPQ participants at the baseline, in the aforementioned cohorts, to maximise the sample for subsequent waves.

Line manager/colleague survey

An online survey of indirect beneficiaries of the programme, including line managers and wider staff who regularly work directly with NPQ participants, will be administered via participants at SPB (following successful completion of their NPQ). Line managers will be asked to reflect on changes in the knowledge, skills and competencies of the participants who report to them, alongside motivations for engaging in the programme at the school level. Wider staff will be asked a subset of questions focusing on how they have indirectly benefitted from the NPQs.

Impact in-depth interviews

Targeted interviews with a subsample of survey respondents will be conducted at SPB and SPC. These interviews will add qualitative depth to the survey data by exploring the outcomes and impacts perceived to be achieved as a result of the NPQs, and how participants have applied their learning in practice. A total of 56 NPQ participants, 30 line managers/colleagues, and 10 ASO/EHCO coaches will be consulted across the two sampling points.

Comparator survey

To assess the impact of the NPQs, we plan to undertake a comparator study by surveying teachers and school leaders who are not undertaking an NPQ. However, undertaking a primary comparator with non-NPQ participants presents a number of practical and methodological challenges. As such, the first step will be to conduct a feasibility study to ensure that it is viable and delivers value for the DfE. If the approach is deemed to be feasible, an online survey will be disseminated to those who meet the criteria for the comparison group, which will be designed to measure the same outcomes and impacts as those explored through the SPA and SPB participant surveys.

Secondary data analysis

Analysis of administrative data will provide an objective measure of the impact of the 2021 reformed NPQs. The analysis will draw on the School Workforce Census (SWC) to understand the impact of the programme upon career progression and staff retention, as well as the National Pupil Dataset (NPD) to assess its impact on pupil attainment at the school level.