



Department
for Education

National Professional Qualifications framework review: call for insights and evidence

Government response

September 2026

Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of responses received (both insights and evidence)	6
NPQ insights	10
NPQ target audience insights	10
NPQ content insights	12
NPQ delivery insights	16
NPQ assessment insights	18
NPQ impact insights	19
Other NPQ insights	21
Study list	23
Next steps	29

Introduction

National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) are a national suite of leadership qualifications designed to support the professional development of teachers and leaders. They are based on the best available evidence and best practice of teaching and leadership in education. The [NPQ frameworks are available online](#).

In 2021, the NPQ frameworks were reformed in collaboration with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), who independently reviewed the frameworks to ensure they were underpinned by robust research and that this evidence was interpreted accurately.

However, evidence is not static and insights evolve. The Department for Education (DfE) is reviewing the frameworks to ensure they remain underpinned by robust, up-to date evidence and best-practice to meet the professional development needs of teachers and leaders. Further information on the [NPQ Review can be found online](#).

As part of the process, DfE launched a first call for evidence on 27 March 2025, seeking recent, relevant, and high-quality research that may inform updates to the following leadership NPQ frameworks: Headship (NPQH), Senior Leadership (NPQSL) and Executive Leadership (NPQEL). This call for evidence closed on 16 May 2025. DfE published a [government response](#) to this call for evidence in July 2025.

The DfE since launched a second and final call for insights and evidence on 10 December 2025 as part of the NPQ Review process. This survey closed on 20 February 2026. This exercise invited insights or opinions on the full suite of NPQs, and research evidence which may inform updates to the evidence base underpinning the following NPQ frameworks:

- NPQ Leading Teacher Development (NPQLTD)
- NPQ Leading Teaching (NPQLT)
- NPQ Leading Behaviour and Culture (NPQLBC)
- NPQ Leading Literacy (NPQLL)
- NPQ Leading Primary Mathematics (NPQLPM)
- NPQ Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL)
- NPQ Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (NPQSENCOs)

Alongside the call for insights and evidence survey, the DfE published guidance for respondents (10 December 2025) outlining instructions for submitting responses. The DfE shared the call for evidence survey with a wide range of stakeholders, such as schools and unions. The DfE publicised this survey through a range of communication channels and hosted a [webinar](#) for education professionals on 28 January 2025, which focused how to engage with the call for insights and evidence process.

The insights summarised in this document do not reflect the total feedback received from all stakeholders through the NPQ Review process; they focus only on submissions received via the survey. The DfE is engaging with stakeholders through a range of forums to ensure that a wide range of views are considered as part of the wider NPQ Review process. Examples of ongoing engagement include but are not limited to forums, focus groups and roundtables with individuals and organisations such as unions, NPQ Lead Providers, Teaching School Hubs and NPQ participants.

Breakdown of respondents

The survey firstly asked respondents to optionally share what type of organisation they are from. When reviewing the insights and research evidence we have considered the contents of the response only rather than applying weighting from one type of organisation over another. The breakdown of self-reported organisation types is set out below:

Option	Total	Percent
Primary School	5	3.91%
Secondary school	6	4.69%
Multi-academy trust	16	12.50%
Maintained nursery school	0	0.00%
Private, voluntary or independent nursery	1	0.78%
Childminder	0	0.00%
Further Education Statutory: GFE Specialist and Designated Colleges	0	0.00%
Further Education Statutory: Sixth Form colleges	0	0.00%
Further Education: Non-Statutory (e.g. Independent Training Providers, Independent Specialist Colleges, Community Learning Provider, Employer Providers)	0	0.00%
Training Provider	4	3.12%
Local Authority	2	1.56%
Research organisation (e.g. universities and consultancies)	26	20.31%
Pedagogy and education experts	1	0.78%
What Works Centres and Think Tanks	1	0.78%
Education charity	14	10.94%
Education charities, private organisations, and public bodies that commission and/or review education research	4	3.12%
SEND charities, private organisations, and public bodies that commission and/or review education research	0	0.00%
Other	26	20.31%
Not Answered	22	17.19%

Source: Call for insights and evidence survey responses

Summary of responses received (both insights and evidence)

The survey asked respondents to consider whether they were submitting an insight or research evidence. The DfE received 128 individual submission responses:

- 54 respondents selected that they were submitting insights or opinions (42%).
- 49 respondents selected that they were submitting research evidence (38%).
- 25 respondents selected that they were submitting both insights or opinions and research evidence (20%).

Insight submissions

Through this survey respondents had the option of either submitting what they think is working well or could be improved about either specific NPQ(s) they selected, or NPQs in general. Respondents also had the alternative option of sharing insights or opinions through the next question, which included specific prompts on the following aspects of NPQs: content, delivery, assessment, target audience and impact.

Responses to the insight related questions

Question 8: Please indicate which NPQ(s) the insights or opinions that you are submitting best relates to. Please select either one NPQ or multiple from the list below. which NPQ or NPQs does the insight or opinion best relate to:

Option	Total	Percent
NPQ Leading Teacher Development (NPQLTD)	15	11.72%
NPQ Leading Teaching (NPQLT)	17	13.28%
NPQ Leading Behaviour and Culture (NPQLBC)	22	17.19%
NPQ Leading Literacy (NPQLL)	11	8.59%
NPQ Leading Primary Mathematics (NPQLPM)	8	6.25%
NPQ Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL)	8	6.25%
NPQ Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (NPQSENCO)	23	17.97%
NPQ Senior Leadership (NPQSL)	13	10.16%
NPQ Headship (NPQH)	22	17.19%
NPQ Executive Leadership (NPQEL)	13	10.16%
Early Headship Coaching Offer (EHCO)	3	2.34%
NPQs in general or all of the above	26	20.31%
Not Answered	46	35.94%

Source: Call for insights and evidence survey responses

Question 9: Based on the NPQ(s) that you selected in the previous question, please submit your insight(s) based on what you think is either working well or could be improved

- **What is working well.** There were 55 responses to this part of the question.
- **What could be improved about the NPQ(s) selected.** There were 65 responses to this part of the question.

Question 10: If your insights or opinions are about a particular aspect of the NPQ(s) selected in question 8, please share them through completion of the free text box (or boxes) below.

- **The existing content covered in the NPQ(s) selected.** There were 51 responses to this part of the question.
- **How the NPQ(s) selected are delivered.** For example, how you found the different forms of delivery for the course(s) such as face-to-face and asynchronous, and how accessible you found the course. There were 44 responses to this part of the question.

- **The end of course assessment for the NPQ(s) selected.** There were 40 responses to this part of the question.
- **The target audience for the NPQ(s) selected.** For example, is it clear who the NPQ(s) selected are pitched at and who should be taking them. There were 42 responses to this part of the question.
- **How impactful the NPQ(s) selected are.** There were 44 responses to this part of the question.

DfE coding of the insights received

Whilst 60 of the submission responses included insights, a significant proportion of the individual submission responses included multiple, distinct, insights per submission. This meant that the combined number of separate insights received was far larger - approximately 600+ insights in total. It was also common that insights received referred to multiple NPQs at the same time (more so across the NPQH, NPQSL and NPQEL frameworks), and after review insights that respondents assigned to specific NPQs can be better applied to NPQs in a more general sense. Following DfE coding, the approximate breakdown of the 600+ responses is:

- 253 NPQ in general insights (39%)
- 139 NPQSENCO insights (22%)
- 73 NPQH insights (11%)
- 35 NPQEL insights (5%)
- 28 NPQLBC insights (4%)
- 28 NPQSL insights (4%)
- 26 NPQEYL insights (4%)
- 24 NPQLL insights (4%)
- 16 NPQLT insights (3%)
- 12 NPQLPM insights (2%)
- 10 NPQLTD insights (2%)

The per NPQ insight breakdown above is based on manual coding of the qualitative survey findings across all answer fields and does not claim to be 100% accurate. A significant proportion of the responses received did not specify which NPQ they relate to, were often open to interpretation, and often insights overlapped across multiple NPQs. The rationale for including this breakdown is to provide the reader of this government response with a general understanding on scale so that findings within this document are interpreted accordingly and are not misleading.

This government response summarises the insights received throughout all the combined answer fields in the survey by both NPQ in general and then where relevant NPQ specific

insights against the prompted themes (content, delivery, assessment, target audience and impact).

Research evidence submissions

Respondents also had the opportunity to submit research evidence for consideration. Respondents were asked to select which NPQ the evidence relates to and explain in the free text box how the evidence source relates to the framework and statements. 75 research sources were submitted after removing duplicates; a list of the 55 studies retained after initial screening is included within this response. A small number of references were excluded for factors such as sample size, accessibility and age.

NPQ insights

NPQ target audience insights

Through the survey respondents were invited to share insights or opinions about the target audience for specific NPQs or NPQs in general. For example, whether it is clear who the NPQ(s) selected are pitched at and who should be taking them.

Whilst respondents generally viewed the intended target audience of NPQs as being clear and recognised, feedback suggested clearer articulation of intended target audiences for some programmes would support better alignment and leader progression.

General NPQ insights

Respondents raised that generally the intended target audience of the NPQs are clear and recognised, that they provide coherent development pathways for teachers and leaders, and that the differentiation between programmes supports progression into leadership and specialist roles. Similar feedback suggested that the purpose and intended audience for specific NPQs are clearly defined and aligned to the professional development needs across the workforce. Respondents highlighted how the NPQ Lead Providers help to define the programmes and ensure that they are pitched appropriately to participants.

There was some mixed feedback about whether NPQs should be for individuals who are in role or aspiring to be in the role (or both), and that the DfE should consider the extent to which the NPQs meet the needs of both aspiring and current leaders taking them.

Feedback suggests that whilst the intended target audience of specific NPQs are defined and communicated, the DfE could seek to clarify this further to help individuals understand this and enrol on the NPQ which is right for them. This is especially important for NPQs which have similar content. Greater clarity would ensure that participants can implement their learning in role so that the professional development is meaningful.

Respondents noted that there can be a tendency for individuals to self-select NPQs that they think will enhance their career progression. This means that some NPQs are not selected by the individuals who may benefit the most from them. Similar insights have suggested that some experienced leaders complete NPQs as a credential rather than for meaningful professional development as intended. Further feedback has suggested that the target audience of NPQs has improved in recent years because of the cost implication, meaning that only individuals who are seriously considering leadership enrol as participants.

Specific NPQ insights

NPQH – consistent with the feedback about NPQs in general, respondents said that whilst the intended target audience for the NPQ is well communicated, in practice the range of participants can be too broad in cohorts which makes it difficult for facilitators to pitch sessions at an appropriate level.

NPQSENCOs – respondents were broadly positive about this NPQ as a specialist leadership route, particularly because it is seen as more accessible and practice-focused than the previous National Award in SEN Coordination (NASENCO) pathway. However, some insights did report inconsistent perceptions about who the programme is for, whilst it is often viewed as intended for SENCOs and aspiring SENCOs, cohorts can include a wide range of participants (for example, senior leaders, classroom teachers and support staff) and many may be seeking general inclusion knowledge rather than intending to take on the SENCO role. Respondents suggested that this breadth can create challenges in pitching and accessibility, with some content feeling overly demanding for participants who are not in leadership roles, and with aspiring SENCOs sometimes lacking sufficient in role experience to implement learning.

NPQLL – respondents raised concerns that it is not consistently clear who the NPQ is intended for – whether it is primarily a leadership qualification for literacy leads or a programme to strengthen literacy practice more broadly among teachers. Several noted that positioning NPQLL as a cross-phase NPQ is challenging, with a perception (particularly in secondary) that it is aimed mainly at primary colleagues; respondents suggested either explicitly positioning it as primary-focused or strengthening and clearly signalling its relevance to secondary literacy leadership. Some respondents also reported that recruitment and uptake may be affected by perceived relevance and time commitments, reinforcing the importance of clearer messaging about audience and expected benefits. Respondents additionally queried suitability for certain roles and contexts (for example, sixth form teachers where literacy content may be less applicable), while noting that a broader audience can benefit where the programme is accessible and well-pitched.

NPQLPM – respondents suggested that this NPQ can be difficult to position within the wider maths professional development landscape, particularly given the established offer and support available through Maths Hubs. Several noted that this perceived overlap or competition may limit uptake and raise questions about the distinct role NPQLPM is intended to play across the system. Respondents therefore emphasised the value of clearer messaging on how NPQLPM complements existing provision and which roles and practitioners it is specifically designed to support.

NPQEYL – some respondents raised concerns about the purpose and target audience across the breadth of the early years sector. They reported difficulties delivering a single programme effectively to a mixed cohort (for example, teachers, nursery managers and

childminders) and noted that content can feel overly school oriented, with insufficient emphasis on early years-specific contexts and challenges. Some respondents also questioned whether the programme has a clear purpose and sufficient depth of leadership learning compared with some other leadership NPQs and suggested it is not always well-aligned with the qualifications and skills profile of the early year's workforce. Respondents therefore recommended reviewing NPQEYL's intended audience, content balance and distinct contribution alongside the wider early years CPD landscape, including ensuring it is genuinely relevant for leaders in Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) settings as well as school-based provision.

NPQ content insights

Through the survey respondents were invited to share insights or opinions about the existing content of specific NPQs or NPQs in general.

Respondents were positive about the evidence-informed design and shared structure of NPQ frameworks. Feedback also identified opportunities to strengthen the content further, with gaps and opportunities identified.

General NPQ insights

Respondents frequently commented positively on the design and structure of the NPQ frameworks, particularly their strong emphasis on being evidence informed. Many highlighted that the use of up-to-date research is a clear strength of the NPQs, providing a clear and credible knowledge base for professional learning. Feedback consistently recognised that the structured, research-led nature of the frameworks creates coherence across the NPQ suite and supports a shared professional language, helping participants to understand how different NPQs relate to one another.

Respondents consistently welcomed the clarity provided by the “learn that” and “learn how to” statement structure. Feedback suggested that this structure makes expectations explicit, reduces cognitive load, and supports more consistent interpretation of the frameworks. Respondents valued the shared structure across NPQs because it creates coherence and a clear learning journey. Some respondents commented that the frameworks are strongest when they focus on a small number of well evidenced principles that clearly connect theory with leadership practice.

Alongside these strengths, respondents identified opportunities to refine and strengthen the content frameworks further. While the shared structure and language were valued, some feedback suggested that there is currently too much overlap and repetition across NPQs. Respondents noted that similarities between frameworks can help establish coherence, but it was felt there is insufficient differentiation in how evidence is explored for different roles and levels of responsibility.

Respondents also raised consistent feedback about the balance of content within the frameworks. While the strong emphasis on evidence and implementation was welcomed, many felt that the frameworks had content gaps that could be addressed, most notably around developing people leadership skills and organisational culture. Feedback highlighted gaps relating to people management, leading adults, holding others to account, developing leadership agency, supporting the professional learning of others, building school culture, and enabling sustained change over time. Several respondents noted that a clearer and more consistent articulation of these areas would better reflect the realities of leadership practice at all levels, and greater emphasis on how adults change practice and support professional learning would better align the frameworks with their stated aim of building long-term workforce capacity.

Further feedback suggested that the frameworks would benefit from placing greater emphasis on adaptive leadership, critical engagement with evidence and contextual decision-making, recognising that effective practice depends on professional judgement and that no single approach is universally applicable across all settings.

Respondents also identified that the NPQ frameworks do not always sufficiently account for the diversity of leadership contexts across the education system. Feedback highlighted that the language and assumptions within the frameworks are predominantly school centric and do not consistently reflect variation across phases, sectors or organisational structures, including trusts, early years and further education. There were calls for greater contextual exemplification and flexibility within the frameworks, to support leaders working in different governance, accountability and organisational arrangements to interpret and apply content meaningfully.

Across responses, several recurring content gaps were identified. Respondents frequently raised the need for stronger and more consistent emphasis on inclusive leadership, equity, diversity and inclusion, and safeguarding across the NPQ frameworks. Feedback suggested that these themes should be woven throughout the content rather than treated as discrete topics. Additional gaps highlighted less frequently included pastoral leadership, careers education, supporting pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), and addressing pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Respondents also identified the importance of content relating to emerging and future challenges, including artificial intelligence, education technology and sustainability.

Finally, respondents highlighted the importance of preserving the credibility and rigour of the NPQ frameworks while continuing to evolve their content. Feedback suggested that maintaining a strong evidence base, while updating content as professional knowledge develops, will be essential to ensuring NPQs remain trusted qualifications. Respondents emphasised that future refinement should consider reducing unnecessary overlap and improve contextual relevance, whilst retaining the shared language and coherence that are widely viewed as defining strengths of the NPQ suite.

Specific NPQ insights

NPQH – feedback suggests NPQH helps participants think like headteachers and the framework supports the development of evidence-led practice in school leadership. Some respondents said the content is too heavily weighted towards implementation and change processes, and not enough on the day-to-day realities of the headship role. A prevalent ask was for clearer, more practical coverage of core headteacher responsibilities, notably finance and budget management, HR and employment law, exclusions and safeguarding-related decisions, managing difficult conversations with staff and parents, public speaking, risk management and organisational resilience.

NPQH, NPQSL and NPQEL (overlapping insights) – respondents noted gaps in relevance for Special schools and Alternative Provision and a lack of clear progression from NPQSL and towards NPQEL, with some repetition and too much similarity between NPQH and NPQEL. Some responses called for the leadership frameworks to strengthen leader development beyond technical knowledge, including professional judgement, ethical decision-making, reflective practice, and the skills needed to lead across partnerships and local systems. For NPQEL, feedback suggested that greater weighting should be given to governance and similar topics that the cohort have less experience with. Feedback also suggested that the content was useful in preparing participants to lead several schools.

NPQLTD – feedback on the NPQLTD content was limited, and findings should be interpreted accordingly. Some feedback said the NPQLTD content overlaps with the NPQLT, and that it assumes schools have a dedicated school improvement lead, which is not always the case. Some feedback noted that the framework focuses too much on designing and delivering professional development, when the role is more often about coordinating, planning and evaluating professional learning. Finally, respondents suggested that core principles of effective professional development should be shared across all NPQs, with NPQLTD clearly positioned as the specialist programme for leading and improving professional development.

NPQLT – feedback on the NPQLT content was limited, and findings should be interpreted accordingly. Respondents said that while the overall structure of the framework is sound, the content does not always draw strongly enough on real classroom and leadership experience or the most relevant research.

NPQLBC – feedback has said that the NPQLBC framework provides a strong foundation, particularly around high expectations, consistency, emotional safety and whole school approaches to behaviour, and is valued for giving a shared language for positive school culture. Some feedback welcomed the emphasis on restorative approaches, recognising the role of relationships, reflection and emotional literacy in supporting behaviour. However, feedback suggested the framework could be strengthened by drawing more clearly on recent research into child development, trauma and emotional regulation, and by addressing inclusion more explicitly, including the disproportionate impact of behaviour

systems on some groups of pupils. Respondents also noted gaps around understanding behaviour as communication, linking behaviour to speech and language needs, and ensuring restorative approaches are accessible to all pupils. Some suggested the framework should better integrate PSHE and RSHE, place more emphasis on pupils practising skills such as conflict resolution, and provide clearer guidance on the links between behaviour, mental health and wellbeing.

NPQLL – respondents recognised that the framework is grounded in strong evidence and gives appropriate emphasis to the core areas of speaking, reading and writing, with particular strengths in its treatment of oracy and the links between language and literacy. Some feedback has suggested the framework content is more heavily weighted towards early literacy and primary practice, and that secondary leaders may struggle to see how some material applies without clearer subject specific examples and stronger focus on disciplinary literacy. Less frequently, responses also highlighted gaps around sentence level writing, extended writing, speech and language needs, SEND and EAL, and felt some assumptions, particularly around readiness for phonics, were not sufficiently inclusive. Overall, while the framework's evidence base and structure were valued, feedback suggested it would benefit from clearer positioning, updated research and stronger differentiation to better reflect the different literacy leadership roles it seeks to serve.

NPQEYL – feedback suggests the NPQEYL content provides a useful foundation in early years pedagogy and leadership. Some respondents said that the framework does not fully reflect the realities facing early years leaders, with the content being seen as too school focused and overly technical, with insufficient attention to the people centred and relational aspects of leadership in early years settings. Gaps raised include limited coverage of speech and language delay, children who are not 'school ready', and the practical challenges around care, safeguarding and staffing. There were also concerns that the framework could be better aligned with the skills, roles and qualifications of the wider early years workforce, particularly in the PVI sector.

NPQSENCOs – feedback on NPQSENCO content was largely positive, with strong support for the high quality, research informed framework and its clear focus on SEN leadership as a whole school responsibility. Respondents valued the emphasis on identification of need, the graduated approach, and the way the framework elevates the status and strategic importance of the SENCO role. However, prevalent feedback highlighted that the content does not sufficiently prepare participants for the day-to-day reality and complexity of the role. Key gaps include limited practical guidance, particularly around SEND law, Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) processes, working with parents and local authorities, managing conflict, and leading in highly pressurised contexts. Insights said that the framework under acknowledges the growing complexity of need, provides insufficient focus on specialist provision and pupils with complex needs, and places too much emphasis on generic or already familiar content at the expense of SEN specific expertise.

NPQ delivery insights

Through the survey respondents were invited to share insights or opinions about how specific NPQs or NPQs in general are delivered. For example, how they find the different forms of delivery for the course(s) such as face-to-face and asynchronous, and how accessible you found the course.

Whilst NPQ delivery approaches are generally well received, respondents have identified opportunities to overcome some delivery challenges identified

General NPQ insights

Respondents consistently highlighted the merits of face-to-face NPQ delivery, valuing the opportunity to engage in professional discussion and build networks with colleagues from other schools and settings. In person sessions were seen as particularly important for high-quality discussions and the development of professional learning communities, many of which continue beyond the programme. Blended delivery models were widely welcomed too, where they combined face-to-face sessions with online learning, improving accessibility and flexibility for busy leaders.

Some respondents praised the quality of programme delivery, particularly where programmes were well facilitated, supportive and engaging. Some respondents reported positive experiences of coaching and mentoring within NPQ delivery, and some noted it would be beneficial for coaching and mentoring to be strengthened or embedded more consistently within NPQs.

Feedback reported that the programmes are delivered in a way that strengthens the connections between the theory and practice, for example, case studies, implementation projects and school-based application tasks and inquiry cycles encourage participants to test ideas in real contexts, giving them the opportunity to reflect on impact and adapt their practice. Some responses commented that when theory is informed by practitioner insight and grounded in real-life contexts, participants are better supported to translate research into meaningful change. Similarly, feedback said that where delivery includes well-facilitated sessions and structured opportunities for sense-making, NPQs can provide high-quality professional dialogue that helps participants translate evidence into decisions about practice.

Responses highlighted the importance of Delivery Partners having the ability to adapt examples and discussion to reflect local priorities and challenges, particularly for schools that serve communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Feedback was raised that where sessions are highly structured and restrict context-specific exploration, there is a risk that discussion reinforces predetermined conclusions rather than generating new professional insight.

Some feedback suggested there may be further opportunities for NPQ delivery models to support collaboration and knowledge-sharing between participants, helping to strengthen connections between professional learning and school improvement activity, which in turn could contribute towards improved staff retention.

There were some recurring delivery challenges raised. Some feedback highlighted concerns that the quality of provision varies between Lead Providers which can undermine confidence in the NPQ qualifications and the participant experience. It was frequently raised that course accessibility should be considered alongside workload and staffing pressures. Whilst some feedback noted that the NPQs are delivered in a way that is sensitive to workload, other feedback highlighted that workload pressures remain a barrier to participants engaging in professional development, particularly when delivery models are overly intensive, inflexible or poorly structured.

Respondents also frequently called for greater contextual relevance and practical application of NPQ delivery. Across several NPQs, stakeholders reported that learning does not always reflect the realities of their settings, leadership roles or current challenges.

It was suggested that greater flexibility in pacing could help participants manage workload peaks across the school year. This could include more modular completion options and more intentional links between asynchronous content and live sessions. Further suggestions were raised that when participant numbers are low, it is important to consider merging cohorts at either a national or regional scale, or to offer more flexible online options. This approach would help ensure that access to these programmes is maintained for all, preventing closures due to limited uptake and avoiding additional disadvantage for small, rural and coastal schools in particular.

Feedback indicated that more modular and flexible course design should be considered. Similar feedback reported that programmes currently risk assuming either too much or too little prior knowledge. Diagnostic checks at entry (or early in the programme) would allow participants to complete targeted 'core content' modules they actually need, whilst avoiding unnecessary repetition for experienced leaders and filling genuine gaps for newer leaders.

Feedback emphasised the importance of NPQs being designed and delivered in a way that is inclusive of neuro-diverse adult learners. Feedback also emphasised concerns that inflexible programmes can disproportionately impact teachers and leaders with childcare responsibilities, who are more likely to be women.

Specific NPQ insights

When respondents commented on how specific NPQ are delivered, their observations often overlapped with more general feedback on the NPQ suite, which has been reflected in the section above.

NPQEYL – feedback on the NPQEYL delivery was limited, and findings should be interpreted accordingly. Feedback stated that consideration should be given to shortening the programme to the length of the other specialist NPQs which could improve access whilst retaining leadership level rigour. Some feedback highlighted that the course length can be problematic with EYL (and the other 18-month NPQs) for momentum and sustained engagement given there is often movement between schools and changes in roles.

NPQSENCOs – several respondents compared this with the previous NASENCO qualification, which some felt encouraged deeper reflection and clearer links between research and leadership practice. As the NPQ for SENCOs is now mandatory, respondents emphasised the need for more contact time focused on statutory knowledge essential to the role. Differing views were shared on mixed cohorts, with some valuing opportunities to learn alongside similar specialist settings and others benefiting from learning from others, e.g., mainstream settings.

NPQ assessment insights

Through the survey respondents were invited to share insights or opinions about the end of course assessment for specific NPQs or NPQs in general.

Whilst respondents overall valued the current end of course assessment model, some responses suggest changes to better reflect the complexity of leadership practices.

General NPQ insights

Overall, respondents felt that the current end of course assessment model has clear strengths. The case study approach is generally supported and seen as manageable, inclusive and fair, and helps ensure consistency. Many commented that when assessment is linked to real school activity, this improves relevance and ensures schools benefit as well as participants. The standardised end of programme assessment is also seen as important for credibility and comparability across providers.

There were some concerns and suggestions for improvement made. A common concern is that assessment relies too heavily on a single, high-stakes end point task, which may not always reflect participants' learning or leadership capability. Many felt the end of course assessment tests theoretical knowledge more than the reality and complexity of leadership practice, and that minimum thresholds can still allow a pass without demonstrating strong evidence of application in schools. There is also a perceived mismatch between assessment outcomes and readiness for leadership.

Some respondents called for assessment to better reflect learning over time. Suggestions included introducing more formative or staged assessment, embedding smaller tasks linked to participants' actual roles, and placing greater emphasis on implementation

projects that align with school improvement priorities. Some argued that assessment should focus more clearly on applied leadership skills, behaviours and impact in schools, rather than written responses alone.

Some concerns were raised about inconsistency across NPQs and providers, including variation in assessment methods, use of comparative judgement, and the limited or impersonal nature of feedback. Respondents highlighted the need for clearer assessment purpose, more meaningful individual feedback (especially for those who do not pass), and greater transparency about what assessment is intended to measure. Practical issues were also raised, including limited assessment windows, drawn out resits, workload pressures, and the lack of flexibility for participants juggling demanding roles.

NPQ impact insights

Through the survey respondents were invited to share insights or opinions about whether a specific NPQ or NPQs in general achieve their intended impact. For example, to what extent an NPQ improves the specialist knowledge for teachers and leaders taking them. Or to what extent an NPQ makes a positive contribution to the career progression for teachers and leaders taking them.

Respondents reported positive impacts on knowledge and confidence, but noted that impact varies depending on context, role alignment and opportunities to apply learning.

General NPQ insights

Respondents consistently reported that NPQs have had a positive impact on professional knowledge, confidence and the overall quality and credibility of leadership development. Feedback suggests that NPQ participation increases professional knowledge and confidence, with participants reporting improved understanding of leadership and greater confidence in discussing strategy and practice within their roles.

One of the most cited benefits is the way NPQs have created a common national language for evidence, implementation and leadership, supporting a more coherent professional dialogue within and between schools and trusts. NPQs are seen as delivering professionalised leadership development, with the national framework and evidence base lending legitimacy and consistency to CPD.

NPQs are increasingly recognised as a valued credential, often referenced positively in recruitment, retention and role progression, particularly where employers understand the qualifications well. DfE funding is frequently cited as crucial in enabling participation, especially for schools serving disadvantaged communities, helping to ensure more equitable access to high-quality leadership development.

Some feedback has suggested that NPQs have the greatest benefit for schools with less established CPD capacity, where NPQs help to build leadership capacity and introduce

evidence informed approaches at scale. Many respondents emphasise that NPQs are working in principle and provide a solid starting point, with impact strongest where programmes are embedded within a supportive professional development culture.

However, respondents questioned the extent to which increased knowledge leads to sustained changes in leadership practice or school improvement. Some feedback has suggested NPQs help participants to understand effective practice, but they are constrained by workload, lack of authority, or an unsupportive school or system conditions. Impact is seen as uneven and highly dependent on context and strongest where NPQs sit within a coherent professional school development culture and are supported by school leaders.

Several respondents also noted that NPQs can function more as a credential than as a driver of real impact, particularly where there is no requirement or support to apply learning in practice. There were some calls for stronger links between NPQs and real leadership responsibility, clearer progression across career stages, and better recognition of the challenges system and trust level leaders face. Many emphasised that qualifications alone cannot deliver impact without protected time, manageable workload, opportunities to apply learning, mentoring or coaching, and space for professional judgement and adaptation to context.

Specific NPQ insights

NPQH, NPQSL and NPQEL (overlapping insights) – feedback indicates that the three leadership NPQs can make a strong positive contribution to professional development, particularly by building confidence and helping leaders better understand how schools operate and why decisions are made. Respondents value the strong evidence base of the programmes and the opportunity they provide for leaders to engage with academic research, supporting more evidence informed thinking and practice. The nationally consistent frameworks are seen as a clear strength, helping to establish a shared language for leadership. Some respondents felt NPQs encourage leaders to think like leaders, but do not always provide sufficient knowledge or depth to fully support the role in practice. Others noted limited impact on career progression, describing NPQs as something required for progression rather than a catalyst for development. Concerns were also raised that, in efforts to retain funding, entry standards may have weakened, reducing the perceived value of the qualification.

NPQLL – feedback relating to impact of NPQLL is limited and findings should be interpreted accordingly. Some feedback supports that the programme achieves its intended impact. Respondents highlighted clear moral and strategic alignment with the priority of closing the disadvantage gap, recognising literacy as a powerful lever for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

NPQLPM – feedback relating to impact of NPQLPM is limited and findings should be interpreted accordingly. Participants have reported that the NPQ has had a positive

impact. Participants reported finishing the programme feeling confident, well prepared and clear about the key levers for improving mathematics teaching and outcomes, leaving them feeling role ready.

Other NPQ insights

In addition, respondents provided insights that did not fall neatly within the thematic areas outlined in the sections above (target audience, content, delivery, assessment, impact).

Gaps in the current NPQ offer – some insights have suggested that NPQs remain overly school centric in language and design. Respondents called for clearer alignment with the Further Education and skills sector, including sector specific leadership pathways and closer alignment with existing professional standards, to improve relevance and uptake. There were also calls for the NPQs to have a greater focus on non-teaching leaders at trust or senior operational level, reflecting the growing importance of these roles.

Funding, access and equity – funding was repeatedly raised by respondents. Some responses said that when NPQs were fully funded, participation increased, but many schools struggled to release staff time. Reduced funded places, late funding announcements and uncertainty about eligibility were seen as undermining access, equity and system wide impact. Several respondents argued that current eligibility rules exclude some schools working in challenging contexts and risk deepening regional and sector inequalities.

Independent schools and use of the levy – respondents from independent schools reported low uptake, largely due to cost. Where NPQs could be funded through the apprenticeship levy (as with NPQH and NPQSL), access and take up improved significantly. Extending levy funding to specialist NPQs was seen as a key lever for widening participation and strengthening system impact across sectors.

Awareness and positioning of specialist NPQs – awareness of specialist NPQs was reported to be lower than for the leadership NPQs. Several respondents noted that limited visibility, alongside competition with other funded or established routes (such as apprenticeships or hubs), reduces uptake and limits impact.

Workload and release time – workload pressures and lack of protected time were commonly cited as barriers to participation and impact. Even where NPQs are valued, schools often struggle to create the conditions needed for participants to study effectively or apply learning in practice.

Impact not fully realised at system level – some respondents felt that the intended system wide impact of NPQs is not always realised because schools are not required or supported to make use of the expertise gained. This can be demotivating for participants and limits the return on investment at school and system level.

Stability, timing and oversight – late funding decisions, frequent changes to funded places, and reliance on prioritisation models were seen as destabilising recruitment and delivery. Some respondents also highlighted the need for stronger national oversight and quality assurance to ensure consistency and public confidence in NPQs over time.

Study list

1. Ainsworth, S., Adamson, C., Agius, C. & Oldfield, J. (2026). What are the possibilities for promoting teacher resilience at the school level? Insights from the co-development of a participatory approach in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 00, 1–28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.70198>
2. Aubrey-Smith, F., et al., (2026) Defining Contemporary Adaptive Teaching. Woodland Academy Trust. London. Available at: https://www.woodlandacademytrust.co.uk/assets/Documents/Attachments/Contemporary-Adaptive-Teaching_White-paper.pdf
3. Bamsey, V., Barker, M., Paliokosta, P. and Tyler-Merrick, G. (2025) The SENCo Blueprint: Leading Change for SEND and Inclusion. Plymouth: National SENCo Advocacy Network. Available at: <https://researchportal.plymouth.ac.uk/en/projects/the-senco-blueprint-leading-change-for-send-and-inclusion/>
4. Banks, B., Sims, S., Curran, J., Meliss, S., Chowdhury, N., Altunbas, H. G., ... & Instone, I. (2025). Decomposition and recomposition: effects on early-career teachers' enactment and adaptive transfer of behaviour management practices. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 1-24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2025.2511867>
5. Bates, G. (2025). 'What's in a name?' Retrieval practice in the primary classroom: a case study. *Education 3-13*, 1–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2025.2504492>
6. Blake, H., Kashefpakdel, E., Hooley, T. (2023) Evaluation of The Careers & Enterprise Company's Teacher Encounters Programme. University of Derby. Available at: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/ndoi24o4/cec-teacher-encounters-final-report.pdf>
7. Boylan, M., Coldwell, M., Maxwell, B., & Jordan, J. (2018). Rethinking models of professional learning as tools: a conceptual analysis to inform research and practice. *Professional Development in Education*, 44(1), 120–139. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2017.1306789>
8. Careers & Enterprise Company (2025) Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through careers provision – Executive Summary. Available at: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/sxxbelyo/national-system-review-2.pdf>
9. Careers & Enterprise Company. (2025). Start Small; Dream Big: Final evaluation report. Available at: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/4bzflocr/start-small-dream-big-final-evaluation-report.pdf>

10. Centre for Early Mathematics Learning (2025) Evidence Briefing – Is there a phonics for maths? Loughborough University. Available at: <https://ceml.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/CEML-Evidence-Briefing-1-Phonics.pdf>
11. Chedzey, K., Cunningham, M., and Perry, E. (2021). Quality assurance of teachers' continuing professional development: design, development and pilot of a CPD quality assurance system. Project Report. Wellcome. Available at: <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/32122/>
12. Cipriano, C., Strambler, M. J., Naples, L. H., Ha, C., Kirk, M., Wood, M., Sehgal, K., Zieher, A. K., Eveleigh, A., McCarthy, M., Funaro, M., Ponnock, A., Chow, J. C., & Durlak, J. (2023). The state of evidence for social and emotional learning: A contemporary meta-analysis of universal school-based SEL interventions. *Child Development*, 94(5), 1181–1204. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13968>
13. City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (2025). Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Mossbourne Victoria Park Academy. Available at: <https://chscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/MVPA-LCSPR-Report-Published-.pdf>
14. Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2024) Essential Skills Tracker 2024. London: Skills Builder Partnership. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.uk/file/essential-skills-tracker-2024>
15. Department for Education (2025) Technology in schools survey report: 2024 to 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technology-in-schools-survey-report-2024-to-2025>
16. Dorukbaşı, E. and Cansoy, R. (2024) Examining leadership's role in teacher development. *European Journal of Education* 59(3) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12672>
17. Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>
18. Engineering UK (2025) A call to action: Gender and Pathways into Engineering and Technology. Available at: <https://www.engineeringuk.com/media/uxbpv0nh/context-setting-gender-and-pathways-into-engineering-and-technology-engineeringuk-nov-2025.pdf>
19. Gilmore, C. (2023). Understanding the complexities of mathematical cognition: A multi-level framework. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, Vol. 76(9) 1953 –1972. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/17470218231175325>
20. Gilmore, C., Keeble, S., Richardson, S., & Cragg, L. (2017). The Interaction of Procedural Skill, Conceptual Understanding and Working Memory in Early

- Mathematics Achievement. *Journal of Numerical Cognition*, 3, 400-416. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5964/jnc.v3i2.51>
21. Henn, M., Nunes, A. & Sloam, J. (2025). Young people and citizenship education: the impact of studying GCSE Citizenship Studies on young people's democratic engagement and participation. ACT/Nottingham Trent University & Royal Holloway, University of London. Available at: <https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Young-people-and-citizenship-education-Henn-Sloam-Nunes-June-2025-1.pdf>
 22. Heyes, J. and Kanakam, P. (2025). Mapping Relationships, Sex and Health Education Initial Teacher Training in England: Teacher Educators' Perspectives. University of Lincoln Available at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ni3Tn2WgQJZfV7ak6BGWMXn8aUA_Hi1X/edit
 23. Hotham, E., & Perry, E. (2025). Leading teacher learning: the networked middle leader of professional development model. *Professional Development in Education*, 1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2025.2552302>
 24. Ijaz, S., Nobles, J., Mamluk, L., Dawson, S., Curran, B., Pryor, R., Redwood, S., and Savović, L. (2024) Disciplinary behaviour management strategies in schools and their impact on student psychosocial outcomes: A systematic review. *NIHR Open Research* 2024, 4:13 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3310/nihropenres.13563.2>
 25. Lei, H., Cui, Y. and Zhou, W. (2018) Relationships between student engagement and academic achievement: a meta-analysis. *Social behaviour and personality* 46(3) 517-528. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.7054>
 26. Lortie-Forgues, Hugues and Inglis (2026) 'CEML Evidence Briefing 4- How should research evidence be communicated to teachers?' Loughborough University DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17028/rd.lboro.31306630>
 27. Mahak, S., Malone, S., Elsherif, M., Hand, C. J., & Morsanyi, K. (2025). Academic anxiety and cognitive reflection in neurodivergence based on evidence from a large international sample. *Scientific Reports*, 15(1), 37522. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-21504-6>
 28. McGlade, H. and Kelly, J. (2025) Building towards the Curriculum & Assessment Review's Final Report. EPI and AQA. Available at: <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/CAR-Report-FINAL-VERSION>
 29. Mind (2021) Not Making the Grade: why our approach to mental health at secondary schools is failing young people. London: Mind. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/8852/not-making-the-grade.pdf>
 30. Mulholland, K., Gray, W., Counihan, C. & Nichol, D. (2025) Stepping Stones: Adopting a Fading Programme Design to Promote Teachers' Use of Metacognitive

- Strategies for Mathematical Problem Solving. *Education Sciences*, 15(7), 892. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15070892>
31. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Artificial intelligence enabled professional learning. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/artificial-intelligence-enabled-professional-learning/>
 32. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Coaching. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/coaching/>
 33. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Data-informed professional learning. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/professional-learning-to-inform-teachers-use-of-data/>
 34. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Inclusive professional learning. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/inclusive-professional-learning/>
 35. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Leading professional learning in schools. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/leading-professional-learning-in-schools/>
 36. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Lesson study. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/teacher-collaboration/lesson-study/>
 37. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Professional learning communities. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/teacher-collaboration/professional-learning-communities/>
 38. National Institute of Teaching (2026) NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Teacher collaboration. Available at: <https://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit/teacher-collaboration/>
 39. Nīmante, D., Kokare, M., Baranova, S. and Surikova, S. (2025) Transferring results of professional development into practice: A scoping review. *Education Sciences*, 15(1), 95. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15010095>
 40. O'Regan, C. and Latham, K. (2025) Double Disadvantage? Socio-economic inequalities in the SEND system. The Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/double-disadvantage/>
 41. Pandey, A., Hale, D., Das, S., Goddings, A.-L., Blakemore, S.-J., & Viner, R. M. (2018) Effectiveness of universal self-regulation-based interventions in children and adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172(6), 566–575. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.0232>
 42. Perry, E., Bevins, S., Booth, J., Boylan, M., Rutgers, D., Stiell, B. and Coldwell, M. (2024). Understanding mechanisms for change in policy and school environments

- which lead to embedded teacher professional development. Project Report. Wellcome Trust. Available at: <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/34402/>
43. Perry, E., Halliday, J., Higginson, J. and Patel, S. (2022). Meeting the challenge of providing high-quality continuing professional development for teachers: The Wellcome CPD Challenge Pilot Delivery Report. Project Report. Wellcome. Available at: <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/29804/>
 44. Pickering, J., Attridge, N., Inglis, M., & Morsanyi, K. (2025). Numeracy, logical reasoning and real-world decision making. *Research in Mathematics Education*, 1-17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794802.2025.2472675>
 45. Quakers in Britain (2022) *Peace at the Heart: A relational approach to education in British Schools*. Available at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/peace-at-the-heart>
 46. Rainer, C. Ke, H. and Abdinasir, K. (2023) *Behaviour and Mental Health in Schools Full Report*. London: Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition. Available at: <https://cypmhc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Behaviour-and-Mental-Health-in-Schools-Full-Report.pdf>
 47. Roulstone, A., Morsanyi, K. , LÊ M.-L., Tomasetto, C. , Erasmus, P. , Tsabedze, W. & Bahnmueller, J. (2026). What do educators know about dyscalculia in the UK, Italy, Vietnam and South Africa? *Neurodiversity*, 4: 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/27546330251413328>
 48. Rushton E, Walshe N, Kitson A, Sharp S (2025), "Leading whole school spaces of agency for climate change and sustainability education. A case study of four schools from England". *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, Vol. 10 No. 1 pp. 79–92, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCCC-06-2024-0093>
 49. Setty, E. & Hunt, J. (2025). Safe uncertainty: Rethinking consent and relational intimacies in adolescent post-digital cultures. *Pastoral Care in Education* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2025.2576567>
 50. Sims, S., Fletcher-Wood, H., Godfrey-Faussett, T., Mccrea, P., & Meliss, S. (2023). Modelling evidence-based practice in initial teacher training: causal effects on teachers' skills, knowledge and self-efficacy. *Ambition Institute*. Available at: https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/ambition-institute/documents/Modelling_practice_full_report.pdf
 51. Stoll, L. & Robinson, L. (2025) *Transforming Leadership Learning: Designing for Sustainable, Systemic Change: A Research Paper*. Available at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10215546/>
 52. The Bell Foundation (2024) *EAL and SEND: A Framework for Integrated Provision in Schools*. Available at:(2024) https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/02/The-Bell-Foundation_EAL-SEND.pdf

53. Thornton, E., Cheng, Q., Demkowicz, O. & Humphrey, N. (2025). Lost learning: Prevalence, inequalities and outcomes of internal exclusion in mainstream secondary schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 00, 1–26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.70049>
54. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change Generation Ready: Building the Foundations for AI-Proficient Education in England's Schools. Available at: https://institute.global/insights/public-services/generation-ready-building-the-foundations-for-ai-proficient-education-in-englands-schools#footnote_list_item_5
55. Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, 331(6023), 1447–1451. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1198364>

Next steps

The DfE is appreciative and thankful to all individuals and organisations who took the time to formally respond and submit research studies for consideration. The DfE is now working closely with the EEF and other external experts to review the responses which will inform decision making when updating the frameworks.

Insights or opinions submitted are being considered by the DfE, will inform decision-making on the wider process of reviewing the NPQ suite, and may be shared with the appointed external experts who are supporting the NPQ Review. Evidence submitted will be considered by the DfE, the EEF and the appointed external experts.

A fuller response summarising the DfE's use of the feedback will be published towards the end of the NPQ Review.

If you have any additional insights to share or would like to request further information about potential opportunities for engagement, please get in touch with us through our mailbox: npq.insights@education.gov.uk.



Department
for Education

© Crown copyright 2026

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

About this publication:

enquiries www.gov.uk/contact-dfe

download www.gov.uk/government/publications

Follow us on X: [@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)

Connect with us on Facebook: facebook.com/educationgovuk