



**NFER impact review 2024**

# Foreword from NFER CEO, Carole Willis



Our efforts this year have been focused on making education a central part of national conversations, especially in the context of general election debates and the party manifestos. We highlighted the importance of education, the challenges it faces, and potential solutions available to decision makers.

A key achievement was our contribution to debates around teacher supply, an issue critical to the future of education in the UK. We are pleased this is now a priority for the Government, and remain committed to supporting the delivery of effective policies to address this urgent issue. We have also been leading a significant new initiative, the Youth Transitions Community Catalyst, aimed at improving understanding of young people's transitions from education to employment. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, identifying research gaps, and promoting the use of data in this area, we are helping to create a much-needed evidence base to better support young people as they make these critical transitions.

The cost-of-living crisis has had far-reaching effects on families and schools. Our research continues to shine a light on these challenges, providing actionable insights that help policymakers and practitioners address these issues head-on. We also launched a new e-assessment platform and suite of digital assessments for primary schools, designed to help teachers identify gaps in children's learning and tailor their teaching approaches accordingly.

In the coming year we are looking forward to continuing working with the new UK Government, as well as our international partners, to provide high-quality evidence and insights to help build a better future for all learners. We thank you for your continued support and engagement with NFER's work.



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# Our impact

At NFER, we use our influence as a leading independent provider of education research and insights to improve outcomes for children and young people.

We do this by creating and sharing evidence and insights into education policy and practice, informing decisions and debates, and strengthening practice in the classroom and within education systems.

We focus our work where it can make the greatest difference, using the breadth and depth of our expertise to inform and influence policymakers and educators on key issues, strategies, initiatives, and challenges facing education.



## Research priorities

This year, we have continued to monitor the ongoing impact of Covid-19, exploring what it has meant for education and for children and young people, and informing debates on where the pandemic has exacerbated disadvantage. A particular focus of our research has been exploring issues and solutions linked to teacher supply, teacher pay models, and racial diversity in the teaching workforce.

We have explored key issues in the education to employment arena, with a focus on future skills requirements, the role education plays in creating progression opportunities for all, and further education workforce pay. We have also been looking into issues linked to SEND in mainstream schools and the impact of declining pupil numbers in schools.

We have continued to find new ways to answer key education questions in international contexts through our portfolio of research, evaluation and assessment projects in collaboration with international partners. This has included work to support and strengthen the use of assessment-generated data in decision-making.



Within the ITT sector we have really valued NFER, and NFER staff have been really informative and useful for our sector in terms of teacher recruitment trends and helping us make appropriate strategies. The regular tweets from key staff are also really informative.

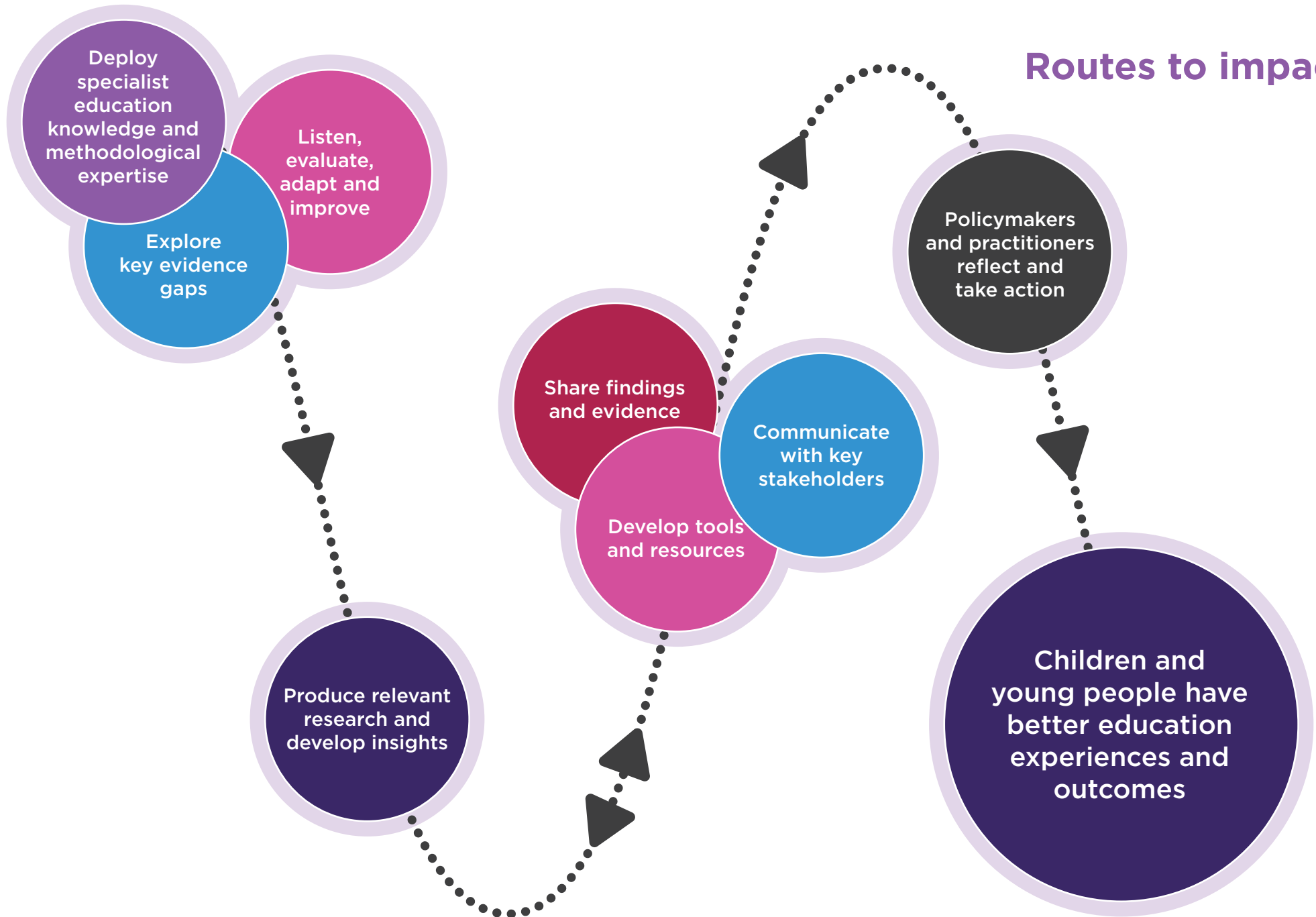
**Comment from the 2023 UK stakeholder survey**

## Importance of stakeholders

We drive change and improvement by working with and through others. We have made sure the evidence and insights we generate have been fed into live policy discussions, into classrooms, and into ongoing debates. Our international work also informs international strategies and education initiatives. As well as engaging decision-makers and the wider sector with our insights, working with stakeholders enables us to ensure our research is topical and relevant.

We engage with multiple groups, institutions and bodies working to improve education outcomes for children and young people. These include Government, UK and international non-Governmental organisations and public bodies, membership organisations, international partners, schools, colleges, training providers, professional bodies, research organisations, think tanks, parent bodies and many, many more.

# Routes to impact



# Influence and engagement

Ensuring that key decision-makers and influencers across policy and practice are aware of and engage with our research is a vital part of what we do.

## Engagement with policymakers

NFER develops insights and policy recommendations with the aim of improving the lives of children and young people. We provide our insights to policymakers through a variety of means, including submitting evidence to Government consultations and select committee inquiries, meeting politicians in-person, and attending meetings of All-Party Parliamentary Groups and other events. For details about our political engagement this year, see pg.7.

## Engagement with stakeholders

Our Chief Executive Carole Willis sits on Ofsted's Insights & evidence (education) external reference group. NFER colleagues were appointed to the Executive Council of the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), and Katarzyna Kubacka was elected to join the Executive Committee of The Education and Development Forum (UKFIET). She will support the organisation to advance its commitment to promoting and strengthening international education and development for all.



The NFER provides essential research for our audience and is an organisation we consistently rely on for high-quality, trust-worthy and valuable analysis.

**Cerys Turner - Reporter - TES**

We have also shared expertise through a wide range of expert panels, steering groups and advisory groups, and through regular strategic meetings with leaders in the education, teaching and skills sectors. This has included hosting a round table of experts as part of NFER's Skills Imperative 2035 programme of research, to explore and address the skills needs of the future. Our education workforce experts meet regularly with civil service and Government officials to provide evidence and insights to inform thinking on workforce planning, teacher pay and recruitment and retention. We have also shared findings from our suite of research on tutoring as part of DfE's Strategic Advisory Group.

We spoke at and chaired over 40 events on education policy and related topics. In July, we held sessions and participated in panels at the Festival of Education to discuss teacher workload and workforce diversity, Covid-19 recovery in schools, supporting students with SEND, the Skills Imperative 2035 and using AI in the classroom.

We held sessions at The Schools and Academies Show in London and Birmingham on the teacher workforce and hosted a stall highlighting NFER's range of resources for schools including NFER Assessments and research bites. Throughout the year, we spoke at multiple Westminster Education Forum online events for policymakers addressing a range of education topics including career guidance in schools, initial teacher training, T-levels, teacher recruitment and retention and SEND.

In September, we held our Annual Reception at Church House in Westminster. We were joined by Sam Freedman from the Institute for Government, who delivered a keynote speech on the direction of the education system under the new Government. Guests from across the education sector attended.



## Media and social media

NFER's research gets significant traction in sector and national press, enabling us to raise awareness and increase the reach of our evidence and insights. We were mentioned more than 4,500 times by national, regional, international and sector media outlets. Our research experts also participated in over 10 broadcast media interviews with outlets including Sky News and the BBC, which were syndicated over 1,400 times. NFER also keeps stakeholders informed about our research through its social media channels.

# 87%

of stakeholders who had read our reports said that NFER research had an impact on their organisation\*

\*NFER Annual Stakeholder Survey 2023



NFER research shines a light on often under-reported challenges, and we rely on its findings practically on a weekly basis.

**Freddie Whittaker, Deputy Editor, Schools Week**

## The year in numbers

**129,471**

unique visitors  
to NFER website



**54,730**

teachers/senior leaders in England took part  
in research, assessment trials and products  
in 2024



NFER's research cuts straight to the heart of critical issues in education and skills. Their analysis of pay disparities between School Teachers and dual professional FE Educators in high-demand sectors exposes a challenge that affects learners, employers and national skills development. By shining an independent light on these overlooked issues, NFER's insights are crucial for driving policy change.

**Gavin O'Meara, CEO and Founder, FE News**

**44,583**

downloads of NFER  
reports and resources



**1,369,560**

pupils in England  
took part in research,  
assessment trials and  
products in 2024



**17,555**

(79%) of publicly-funded schools in  
England took part  
in our research and  
assessment trials in  
2024



**62,467**

total followers  
on social media



# Election

Expecting a General Election would take place in 2024, NFER planned a series of activities to engage with policymakers before, during and after the vote, and to prompt discussion on education policy among stakeholders and the public.

## Manifesto Influencing

In 2023 we launched a Manifesto Appeals document setting out what we believed should be education priorities for party manifestos. These included teacher workforce, school funding, skills, and the disadvantage gap. We then hosted a series of webinars in 2024 featuring expert guests from organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Centre for Social Justice, The Institute For Public Policy Research (IPPR), Centre for Policy Studies, Fabian Society and more. The issues and recommendations discussed in these sessions laid the foundations for four articles in the House Magazine and on the PoliticsHome website. Both are regularly read by Members of Parliament and the House of Lords. During the election campaign, we engaged with the debates on education issues, publishing a chapter in a Full Fact/UKICE Manifesto Analysis report on the election, and issuing media statements and social media posts when education was discussed.

## Post-election

Following the election, we attended the Labour and Conservative party conferences; meeting existing and new Members of Parliament, as well as wider education sector stakeholders. Carole Willis spoke on a panel about education priorities for the new Government while Jack Worth joined a panel on the teacher workforce.

Later we published an infographic for each of the constituencies in England, designed as a means to engage MPs with NFER's work and support the work of all parliamentarians in the House of Commons. It featured published education statistics for each constituency including Free School Meal (FSM) rates, attainment rates and persistent absence rates. This will help us achieve our aim of ensuring education becomes a bigger focus for Government and for all politicians.

We also continued with our ordinary parliamentary engagement activities, such as responding to Government consultations and select committee inquiries, sending briefings to MPs ahead of questions and debates in parliament, and meeting directly with parliamentarians to discuss our work.



The National Foundation for Educational Research suggests that teacher pay would need to increase by almost 10% over three years in order for the Government targets to be reached, which is recruiting 6,500 teachers

**Education Select Committee (2025),  
Sureena Brackenridge MP**

tes

Three years of 10 per cent pay rises needed to hit 6,500 teacher target  
*Tes Magazine, December 2024*





# Education systems

NFER is committed to increasing knowledge around the key characteristics of effective education systems, and what influences system and school performance.

Over the past year, we continued to play a leading role in developing understanding about the ongoing impact of higher costs on schools and families. We also considered the impact of a projected decline in pupil numbers across schools in England.

## Cost-of-living pressures

Despite a fall in inflation, cost-of-living pressures continue to have a significant impact across society, with those in disadvantaged communities disproportionately affected.

Our latest research found that the share of pupils coming into schools hungry, without adequate clothing or equipment for lessons continues to increase. We repeated our calls for the current eligibility for free school meals to be extended and for schools to receive targeted financial support to help address pupils' wellbeing needs.



Millions of UK Primary school kids are 'arriving for school hungry'  
*Mirror, June 2024*



Fall in pupil numbers not leading to smaller class sizes, report suggests  
*Independent, September 2024*



Our findings were covered more than 550 times in the media, including BBC News and The Mirror. The research was also cited in a House of Lords report focused on whether the current system effectively equips 11 to 16 year olds to progress to the next phase of their education and to flourish in the future.

## Declining pupil numbers

Government projections indicate that pupil numbers in state schools are expected to decline over the next three years. This will have significant implications for school funding, school capacity and the education workforce.

NFER analysis revealed substantial regional variations in changes to primary pupil numbers over the past five years. This led to a recommendation for the Department for Education to include regional and local-level breakdowns in its 2025 projections.

Our researchers also explored various options for schools and policymakers to respond to the decline. This included the possible introduction of mixed-age classes and a revision of the financial support model currently available to schools facing reduced enrolment.

The insights prompted debate across the sector and attracted high-profile media coverage, including ITV News.

## School accountability

NFER evidence was cited on three occasions in the final report of the House of Commons Education Select Committee's inquiry into Ofsted's work with schools. We have also been sharing evidence and expertise in a range of groups informing thinking about OFSTED's work going forward.

## Research partners

- ASK Research
- Nuffield Foundation



Thank you to NFER for all the work you've done over the past year. From the National Reference Test, to your work on the impact of cost-of-living pressures and your research on the recruitment and retention of teachers, I have come across your work.

**Sam Freedman, Senior Fellow, Institute for Government**

# Covid-19 recovery

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent partial school closures resulted in significant disruption to children's learning, with disadvantaged pupils most severely affected. NFER has been at the forefront of understanding the long-term impact on pupils and the most effective ways to support recovery.

Over the past year, we completed our longitudinal study on the impact of Covid-19 related disruption to schools on pupils' attainment and social skills. We also evaluated the final year of the Government's flagship National Tutoring Programme (NTP).

## Pupil recovery

NFER has followed the progress of over 4,700 pupils, aged four to six, at the start of the pandemic. Our fourth year of reporting suggests that school strategies to support recovery are reducing the impact of the disruption to pupils' learning. However, the disadvantage gap remains wide.

Our findings were covered in a range of national and sector media outlets, including *The Telegraph*. We also produced practical summaries and guidance for schools to support their pupils' recovery, which we presented at the *Festival of Education*.

This year's insights also highlighted emerging issues that schools are facing which are disrupting children's learning. This includes challenges around pupil wellbeing and pupil attendance. Our research on the latter was referenced by the Minister for Early Education in a Westminster Hall debate on holidays in school term time.

## Effectiveness of tutoring

Since launching in 2020, NFER has been lead evaluator for the NTP. This year we published evaluations for the third and fourth years of the programme. Our analysis found that school-led tutoring was associated with small improvements in English and maths outcomes for pupils at key stage 2.

Our research featured in a report on improving education outcomes for disadvantaged children from the National Audit Office, which examined whether value for money has been achieved from Government expenditure. The findings were also referenced in two Westminster Hall debates and a House of Commons briefing paper on tutoring provision.



We've worked closely with NFER for many years. Their team is trusted to design and deliver innovative research that helps us answer the most pressing questions in the sector.

**Emily Yeomans, co-CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation**

Alongside the programme, NFER was a member of the Government's *Strategic Tutoring Advisory Group*. We also published a series of guides for schools and teachers on delivering effective tutoring.

## Research partners

- Department for Education
- Education Endowment Foundation
- Nuffield Foundation

## SCHOOLS WEEK

Just 1 in 6 schools to offer tutoring after NTP, research suggests  
*Schools Week, September 2024*



# Education workforce

NFER is considered one of the UK's leading experts on teacher recruitment and retention. We continue to provide policymakers and system leaders with an accurate picture of the education workforce to guide effective and well-targeted action.

Over the past year, we published regular insights and commentary on the evolving teacher workforce.

## Teacher shortages

Our ongoing analysis of the teacher labour market highlighted that teacher supply in England is in a critical state. Our recommendations on the need for ambitious, radical and cost-effective policy actions attracted extensive media and political attention, including coverage in *BBC News* and *The Guardian*. This coincided with bold commitments from political parties in their general election manifestos, including a pledge from Labour to recruit an additional 6,500 teachers by 2027/28.

Our written and oral evidence to the Education Select Committee's enquiry into teacher recruitment, training and retention, resulted in 13 citations within their final report. Our research on teacher supply was also cited in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology's (POST) annual horizon scan report, which identifies emerging areas of interest to Parliament using the best available research and evidence.

## MailOnline

'Name-blind' applications for teacher training could boost diversity  
*Mail Online, January 2024*



NFER Workforce lead Jack Worth discussed teacher recruitment and retention challenges in England

## Financial incentives

NFER research was cited on nine occasions by the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), which makes independent recommendations on teacher pay to Parliament. This included reference to new research on the impact of different pay and financial incentives, including bursaries and student loan reimbursements.

## Removing barriers

We continued to explore the representation and career progression of people from ethnic minority backgrounds within the teaching profession in England. This strengthened understanding about the barriers that teachers of colour experience from entry to senior leadership level. Our recommendations to build a more inclusive education system attracted widespread national media exposure, including an extended feature on *Sky News* examining racial disparities in teaching.

## Further education

Our research found that teachers in further education colleges earn nearly a quarter less than teachers in schools. Following the publication of our report a series of written questions were tabled by members of parliament in relation to this subject and the Association of Colleges, Government and unions have announced that working towards equality in pay should be a policy goal. Our contribution to this evidence base is timely ahead of decisions on further education funding within the Government's forthcoming multi-year spending review.

## Research partners

- Gatsby Charitable Foundation
- Mission 44
- National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers
- Nuffield Foundation
- Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers



It's a great piece of research – we can all hope it leads to actions, leading to improvements. Soul searching by the many not just a few.

**Evelyn Ford, Former President of ASCL, on the evidence review of racial equality in the teaching workforce**



We've valued collaborating with such a dedicated team...to help build a more inclusive education system for all young people.

**Cara Cinnamon, Chief Impact Officer at Mission 44**



# Classroom and assessment

Teaching strategies based on robust evidence, coupled with the careful use of assessment, can improve teacher effectiveness and children's outcomes. NFER is respected globally as a leader in the development of tests and assessments, and classroom-focused research and trials.

Over the past year, we continued to develop and deliver robust assessments, as well as conducting pioneering trials of education interventions.

## Artificial intelligence (AI)

We undertook research to help understand the impact of the use of Generative AI on teaching practice. Our findings highlighted the potential for AI tools to address teachers' high workloads whilst maintaining lesson quality. This prompted a statement from the Minister for Early Education outlining how AI represents an "exciting opportunity" to support school leaders and teachers. Earlier this year the Government announced a £4 million investment to enhance the ability of AI generative tools to learn from a new bank of lesson plans and curriculums. Our research was covered in a range of sector media, including *TES* and *Schools Week*.

## Early career teaching

Since its introduction in 2021, NFER has been at the forefront of evaluating the Early Career Framework. The programme provides a two-year package of structured training and support for early career teachers.

Our real-time insights on the pilot year were shared with senior civil servants to inform adjustments ahead of the national roll-out. In 2024, our analysis of schools who participated in the early roll-out identified the need for more tailored support for different teaching contexts and solutions to ensure that mentors have sufficient

time to offer meaningful guidance. These findings have important implications for policymakers ahead of the implementation of the new combined initial teacher training and early career framework in September 2025.

## Special education needs and disabilities (SEND)

NFER undertook research to understand the challenges multi-academy trusts and schools are facing, and the approaches being used by MATs to support pupils with SEND in mainstream classrooms. Our findings were presented at a range of sector events and policy forums, including *Westminster Education Forum*.

## National assessments

For the fourth consecutive year NFER delivered the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment to more than 600,000 pupils. This provides a baseline for measuring pupil progress across their time in primary education, recognising the work schools do with their pupils across this period.

We also continued to administer the National Reference Test (NRT), which is used to inform awarding decisions in English and maths GCSEs in England. This year, more than 13,000 students from over 300 schools completed the NRT. Our results digest included a long-term analysis of changes in outcomes over time since the introduction of the test in 2017.



The literature reviews produced for the Education and Outcomes Panel Study (EOPS-B and C) have been instrumental in providing a coherent synthesis of an extensive and complex evidence base. NFER's efforts to ensure they are accessible and thorough make them essential resources for researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

**Michael Dale, Head of Longitudinal Studies, Department for Education**

## School community

NFER is continually exploring ways to support schools, including through the creation and sharing of practical guides and other tools for educators. This year, we launched a new range of online standardised tests with automatic marking, helping to save teachers' valuable time and support pupil progress through greater insights.

## Research partners

- Department for Education
- Education Endowment Foundation
- Ofqual
- Standards and Testing Agency

**tes**

6 ways MATs can tackle  
SEND challenges  
*Tes Magazine, April 2024*

# Education to employment

To ensure young people make successful transitions from education to employment, we need to understand the outcomes achieved through different choices and pathways. NFER continues to build this evidence base so Government, providers and young people can make informed decisions.

Over the past year, we continued to investigate how the demand and supply of essential employment skills is likely to change over the next decade, and how these skills can be developed. We also provided expert analysis and commentary on post-16 subject choices, apprenticeships and T Levels.

## Post-16 subject choices

Our research identified that students are taking an increasingly narrow range of subjects at AS/A-level. This includes a considerable decline in take-up of humanities and arts subjects. Our findings prompted national debate and were covered in a range of media outlets, including *The Times* and *The Mail*. They were also cited in several organisational responses to the Curriculum and Assessment Review call for evidence.

## Skills of the future

NFER is leading a five-year strategic research partnership to identify the essential employment skills people will need for work by 2035. This year, we published two further working papers which focused on the supply of the essential employment skills identified during the first phase of the project. We also convened a roundtable of influential stakeholders across the skills systems to explore how groups most at risk of being displaced from the labour market can make transitions into growing occupations.



NFER delivers leading research on policy priorities in education and has a long track record of being funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Currently, NFER is working on Skills Imperative 2035, one of our largest grants, and investigating the challenges affecting teacher recruitment and retention. These initiatives are achieving significant impact on education policy and practice.

**Dr Emily Tanner, Education Programme Head at the Nuffield Foundation**

Emerging findings and recommendations were discussed on a regular basis with senior civil servants. We also held briefings with Government and shadow ministers.

Overall, our researchers presented findings at over 30 events, roundtables and policy forums. This included the *All Party Parliamentary Group on the Future of Employability and Industry Parliament Trust*. Further contributions were made through Government consultations, including Invest 2035 which aims to tackle barriers to growth in the UK's highest potential growth-driving sectors.

## T Levels

Our research featured in a Government report evaluating the impact of ongoing technical education reforms in England. This highlighted the views and experiences of the second cohort of T Level learners in relation to the final year of their programmes. NFER findings were also included in this year's T Level Action Plan, which contained information on the progress of the T Level Foundation Year rollout and next steps.

## Apprenticeships

We continued to provide expert commentary and analysis on several high-profile announcements throughout the year.

## Research partners

- British Academy
- Cambridge Econometrics
- Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick
- Learning and Work Institute
- National Centre for Social Research
- Nuffield Foundation
- University of Roehampton
- University of Sheffield

## THE TIMES

NFER research suggests roles could fall out of labour market without upskilling  
*The Times, December 2024*



They (NFER) produced high quality, reliable and in-depth research and analysis, which has been instrumental in helping us understand the realities and consequences of curriculum-narrowing at post-16.

**Sarah Cowen, Head of Higher Education and Research Policy at The British Academy**

# International

NFER is committed to identifying and sharing new ways to answer key education questions to create better opportunities for learners worldwide.

Over the past year, we continued to grow our global influence and portfolio of research, evaluation and assessment projects in collaboration with international partners.

## Driving change globally

NFER was selected as one of four new global learning partners to support *Education Out Loud*, the world's largest education advocacy fund, working in more than 60 countries worldwide. Over the next two years, we will collaborate with partners to ensure that research-based findings contribute to the sharing of learning as a global public good.

We were also proud to gain representation on the executive committee of *The Education and Development Forum*. The body serves as a resource to policymakers in multi-lateral, Government and non-Government organisations.

## Promoting gender equality

NFER is a key contributor to shaping inclusive and equitable global education policies. This year we evaluated UNESCO's strategy for gender equality in and through education. Our analysis has been used to refine their learning framework and ensure a stronger focus on monitoring educational disparities.

We also developed a classroom observation tool for an education programme being delivered in primary schools in Burundi. This will provide important insights on aspects of gender equality and socio-emotional skills in classroom practice.

## Strengthening systems

This year we completed a learning study in Rwanda examining the integration of inclusive play methodologies in education and their impact on student outcomes. The findings directly influenced programme strategies to improve educational opportunities for vulnerable children.

We also continued to work closely with national assessment bodies in Iraq and Kenya to develop their assessment systems. This has resulted in better use of assessment data to inform wider policy development and classroom practice.

fe news

OECD (PIAAC) survey: England's youth skills show dramatic improvement since 2012  
*FE News, December 2024*

FEWEEK

The latest OECD data isn't as positive as it appears  
*FE Week, December 2024*



### International comparisons

NFER has a long history of contributing to the development and delivery of international large scale assessments.

This year we produced the national report for England for the Survey of Adult Skills, which forms part of the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. This measures the literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills needed for adults to participate in society and for economies to prosper.

Our findings showed that adults in England scored above the OECD average in numeracy, literacy and problem solving, with a significant increase in numeracy scores since 2012. The outcomes will provide an effective basis for informed policymaking.

### Long-term partnerships

NFER has a long-standing association with Australia at a national and state level. This year we continued to deliver items for the country's national assessment programme in literacy and numeracy. We also started development of a new test that will be taken by over 90,000 students in Victoria next summer. This will assess their skills and general knowledge in English, mathematics, science, technology, the arts, and humanities.

### Training and capacity building

Our in-house psychometricians provided in-person and online training to more than 350 item writers in Kazakhstan. This helped strengthen the quality and consistency of items used for the country's university entrance exams.

### Research Partners

- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
- Global Partnership for Education
- Iraqi Ministry of Education
- National Testing Centre in Kazakhstan
- Kenya National Examinations Council
- Oxfam Denmark
- Right To Play
- UNESCO
- Verian
- Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority
- World Bank





National Foundation for  
Educational Research

## Learn more about NFER

If you would like to know more about our research, our resources and our services, or about partnering with us in our work, please get in touch:

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In a world of unprecedented change and technological innovation, it is more important than ever that education policy and practice is informed by high-quality evidence.

NFER exists to create this evidence and get it into the hands of those who can use it to make a difference.

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