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Evaluation of the 2017 National Professional Qualifications

Final evaluation report for the 2017-18
cohort

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Executive Summary

CFE Research was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake a formative and summative evaluation of the 2017 Reformed National Professional Qualifications (NPQs).

The 2017 Reformed NPQs

DfE wants to achieve a highly-educated society in which opportunity is equal for children and young people, no matter what their background or family circumstances. In 2016, DfE convened leading experts to reform the NPQs to prepare leaders more effectively for the range of leadership roles in the school system. There were four NPQ qualifications launched in 2017 which formed a leadership pathway:

- National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML);
- National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL);
- National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH); and
- National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership (NPQEL).

The aim of the 2017 Reformed NPQs was to increase the supply of quality leaders, particularly in areas of greatest need.

The reforms included an expanded range of qualifications with the launch of NPQEL, scholarship provision for participants in Category 5 and 6 areas (including Opportunity Areas¹) and an updated approach to:

- Content development, giving providers flexibility to develop their own content against a Content and Assessment framework;
- Final assessment, whereby final assessment was devolved to providers;
- Quality assurance, run by a Quality Assurance Agent; and
- Delivery via accreditation model, giving providers the flexibility to choose which NPQs they delivered, where they delivered these, the mode of delivery and their own recruitment targets.

¹ The DfE published 'Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential' in December 2017 outlining their approach to improve social mobility through education including opportunity areas and the Teaching Leadership and Innovation Fund <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-social-mobility-through-education>.

About the evaluation

The evaluation of the 2017 Reformed NPQ model was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the NPQs through a summative evaluation of the 2017/18 (academic year) cohort of participants (based on their start date). It also included a formative element whereby evidence was shared regularly with DfE and providers to support the continuous improvement of the qualifications throughout the first year of delivery.

The research objectives were to:

- Provide emerging learning to maximise the reach of recruitment, to support social mobility and school improvement;
- Capture and share insights about ‘what works’ and how best to tailor NPQs to context and need;
- Identify any gaps/opportunities for continuous improvement in NPQ content development [and where possible future leadership programme development], delivery and approach; and
- Understand, and measure, outcomes and impacts of the NPQs for participants, schools, and pupils (through self-reporting by participants and the impact analysis).

Methodology

Online surveys

Two online participant surveys were shared via NPQ providers to the 2017/18 cohort:

- **Sampling Point A (SPA) online survey:** This was shared when participants began their qualification. This survey launched in March 2018 and closed in October 2019, achieving **a total of 2,415 survey responses**.
- **Sampling Point B (SPB) online survey:** This was shared when participants were awarded their NPQ. This survey launched in January 2019 and closed in April 2020, achieving **a total of 837 survey responses**.

An online survey was designed for participants’ line managers and wider staff shared via participants:

- The survey launched in March 2019 and closed in April 2020, achieving a total of **83 responses**.

Depth interviews

Telephone interviews were undertaken across each of the qualification levels. The following interviews were undertaken:

- **SPA:** 10 interviews with participants;
- **SPB and 6-9 months following SPB:** 16 interviews with participants;
- 1 interview with a participant who withdrew from the qualification; and
- 1 interview with an NPQ participant's senior colleague.

Provider learning labs and focus groups

Researchers **attended four learning labs** with NPQ providers to understand providers' experiences of delivering the 2017 Reformed NPQs. As part of these learning labs, CFE led **five focus groups** with providers to further explore themes emerging from the plenary sessions.

Key findings

Recruitment

- 11,802 participants were successfully recruited onto the NPQs against a provider-set target of 8,792. This included successfully attracting nearly 500 leaders to the new NPQEL.
- The qualifications attracted a mix of participants, with 51% already in the role they were studying for and the remaining 49% aspiring to move into that role. The exception to this was for NPQH with most (81%) aspiring to be a headteacher.
- Scholarship funding ensured participants working in schools in Opportunity Areas and Category 5/6 areas could access leadership training.
- Where participants were not working in schools that met the eligibility criteria for a scholarship, the cost of the qualification prevented some leaders from studying an NPQ.

Although the majority of participants received scholarship funding or their school covered the cost of the NPQ, two-thirds (66%) had to cover all/some of the costs associated with travel and subsistence. Participants recognised the value of the NPQ to their development, so did not report having to cover their travel and subsistence costs as a challenge; however, they also explained that the cost and time associated with travel led to them selecting a local provider.

Motivations for undertaking the qualification

- Participants were motivated to undertake an NPQ for a range of different reasons. While some reasons were common across many (e.g. enabling career progression or developing new skills), others influenced a significant minority (e.g. identified as an area for development or because other colleagues were undertaking it). Therefore, what motivates one participant might not influence another.
- Participants found out about the NPQs from various sources, with the most common being their line manager or a senior colleague at their school (46%) or other colleagues (21%). This was influenced by a participant's level of seniority within a school, with a high proportion of NPQEL participants stating direct marketing from the provider (32%) or other external sources.
- The level of choice an individual had over which provider to study with, varied by role with NPQEL participants having the most choice and NPQML participants having the least.
- When leaders did have a choice, a number of factors were found to influence their decision such as reputation, location, and the delivery method. These factors varied according to individual needs and highlighted the importance of having multiple providers delivering NPQs in different ways.

Experience of the NPQs

Content

- Providers valued being able to develop their own NPQ content, and the ongoing revision of this was vital to ensure the qualifications remained current and relevant. This involved the input of experts in the sector and feedback from those undertaking the qualifications.
- Satisfaction with NPQ content was fairly high, with a mean score of 5.7 out of 7² given by participants, although some thought more tailoring to their particular school context was required. Those whose qualification was delivered via face-to-face methods only provided slightly higher satisfaction scores (6.3 out of 7) than those who worked through a blended delivery approach (5.7 out of 7). Content that included examples which 'brought things to life' was frequently praised.
- While contextualised NPQs were valued by participants to ensure content was relevant to their current situation (e.g. to a school or participant's characteristics), ensuring breadth of content was still critical to enable leaders to understand the leadership skills that are needed across the sector.

² On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

- School finance continues to be the key content area that participants would like to learn more about and which they believe was not adequately covered through the NPQs. Participants would like more opportunities to work with examples of real-life budgets in a face-to-face training environment.

Delivery

- As with content development, gaining participant feedback and continually revising delivery methods contributed to a positive experience for participants.
- To ensure participants gained the most from the experience, providers highlighted they had to convey to participants the importance of them needing to drive their own learning and them understanding that it was not all about them being 'taught'.
- As the 2017 Reformed NPQs were rolled out, participants had variable experiences. They were aware that aspects of delivery had not yet been designed or refined which affected their satisfaction. However, as delivery progressed, this was mentioned less and by the time participants had completed their qualification, most were satisfied with the delivery, providing a mean score of 5.7 out of 7³. Again, those who experienced all NPQ delivery face-to-face reported higher satisfaction levels (6.2 compared with 5.5 for participants undertaking qualifications with a blended-learning approach). They valued being able to learn among other leaders and the 'opportunity to discuss with other participants' and 'compare notes' to help embed their learning.
- There were differing levels of experience within NPQ cohorts which benefited those aspiring for the role they were studying for, as they could learn from others; although more experienced leaders sometimes felt they were covering topics they already knew.
- Gaining experience in other schools (for NPQH and NPQEL participants) allowed participants to develop a range of different skills and confidence and they would have liked the chance to undertake more of this.
- In addition to their satisfaction with the NPQ content and delivery methods, participants were also satisfied that the overall qualification (including the content, delivery, projects, and opportunities to network with other leaders) and the content alone had met their leadership development needs (providing a mean score of 5.6 to both out of 7⁴).
- Those who were aspiring for the role they were studying were slightly more satisfied that the content (5.7) had met their leadership development needs than those already in the role (5.5).

³ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

⁴ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

Completing the NPQs

- Most participants were satisfied with the support their school and provider gave them while undertaking their NPQ (providing scores of 5.4 or more out of 7⁵).
- Participants in primary schools and those undertaking higher levels of the qualification felt more supported by their school, alongside those who reported that their school created a positive ethos towards CPD.
- Those undertaking an NPQ that was solely delivered via face-to-face sessions were more satisfied with the support from their provider (providing a mean score of 6.3 out of 7 compared with 5.4 for those who undertook qualifications using a blended-learning approach).
- Challenges related to finding time to complete the qualification were most frequently reported, these included participants balancing the time required for the qualification and their day-to-day role (65%), lack of time due to family responsibilities (23%) and obtaining release time (19%).
- Although challenges related to the circumstances of the participant were most commonly faced when completing the qualification, understanding how to complete assessment tasks was the most common challenge (43%) that related to the qualification itself.
- Participants thought the assessment process needed to be improved. Providers agreed and had plans to adapt this for subsequent cohorts of participants.

Self-reported short-term impact

- While undertaking the qualifications, participants reported having developed across all of the competencies outlined in the NPQ frameworks, with the vast majority scoring a 5 or higher out of 7.
- Finance was the competency that consistently received one of the lowest scores on completion of the NPQs, reflecting participants' views on gaps in the qualification, although most reported developing financial skills to some extent.
- On average, participants attributed half (51%) of their development while on the qualification to the NPQ qualification itself, with wider training and other experiences also contributing to their development. This was slightly lower for those already in the role they were studying for (49%), and for secondary school participants (48%) and male participants (48%).

⁵ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

- The NPQs enabled participants to learn new skills and then put these into practice which influenced both their readiness and confidence for the role; with most (87%) reporting an increase in their rating of these during the qualification.
- Undertaking the NPQs supported participants to make changes in their school. Alongside developing their own leadership skills, the leadership skills of participants' colleagues had also been developed.
- One-third (33%) of NPQ participants were already in a new role by the time they had completed their qualification and over two-thirds (68%) of these participants agreed that their NPQ qualification contributed to them securing this new role.
- One-third (33%) of participants who had not secured a new role upon completing their NPQ reported that they had taken on additional responsibilities within their current role as a direct result of completing the qualification.
- NPQs not only increased participants' aspirations to move into the leadership role they were studying for (where they were studying an NPQ but were not yet in that role, e.g. an aspiring headteacher undertaking NPQH) but they also increased participants aspirations to move into the next level of school leadership (where participants were in the role they had studied for by the time they completed the survey).
- The projects that participants undertook through their NPQ were influential in creating a variety of sustainable and varied impacts on their school (as reported by participants themselves). Examples included improving teaching and learning, improving school leadership, and improving pupil attainment.

Initial impact on participants and their schools

- For participants completing the NPQs, the following differences in outcomes were observed when compared to the control groups not undertaking the 2017 qualifications:
 - Average salary was higher by £947 for NPQML participants and £2,191 for NPQH participants than those not completing these qualifications during this time.
 - NPQSL and NPQH participants were more likely to move into a more senior position than those not completing these qualifications.
 - Participants at all levels were less likely to leave the public teaching profession than those not completing the 2017 NPQs.
 - NPQML participants were less likely to change schools (with a difference of 5.6 percentage points) than those not completing the 2017 NPQs.

- NPQH participants were more likely to change schools (with a difference of 6.9 percentage points) than those not completing the 2017 NPQs.
- However, it is not possible to establish a clear causal link between completion of the 2017 NPQs and the observed participant outcomes outlined above. This is because those who completed these qualifications already appeared to be on a different career trajectory to those in the control groups who did not complete these qualifications in the period before the inception of the 2017 NPQs.
- No statistically significant impacts were identified for pupil attainment.

Chapter 1: Introduction

CFE Research was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake a formative and summative evaluation of the 2017 Reformed National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). The evaluation focused on those participants who started their qualification in the 2017/18 academic year, to ensure there was time for participants to complete the qualification and impacts to be measured during the course of the evaluation period.

The 2017 Reformed NPQs

DfE wants to achieve a highly-educated society in which opportunity is equal for children and young people, no matter what their background or family circumstances. In 2016, DfE convened leading experts to reform the school leadership NPQs to prepare leaders more effectively for the range of leadership roles in the school system. There were four NPQ qualifications launched in 2017, which formed a leadership pathway:

- National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML);
- National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL);
- National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH); and
- National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership (NPQEL).

The aim of the 2017 Reformed NPQs was to increase the supply of quality leaders, particularly in areas of greatest need, as outlined in the final bullet point below. Forty-one accredited providers, of varying sizes, commenced delivery of the 2017 Reformed NPQs in the 2017/18 academic year. The key elements of the reforms to the NPQs were:

- **An expanded range of qualifications:** An updated Levels and Qualification Framework, which (a) extended the current suite of NPQs to four different levels, by establishing a new NPQEL, and (b) targeted both aspiring and serving school leaders at each level.
- **Updated approach to content development:** A Content and Assessment Framework that (a) set out the knowledge, skills, and behaviours that providers of NPQs must cover, (b) allowed space for bespoke, context-based content in and around these requirements, and (c) devolved content development to providers. Previously, the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) led content development, which was delivered by providers.
- **Updated approach to final assessment and its delivery:** A Content and Assessment Framework which (a) set out revised assessment tasks and criteria

through which all participants must be assessed, and (b) devolved the delivery of final assessment to providers. Previously, the final assessment for all NPQs was managed by the NCTL through a single provider who did not themselves deliver the NPQ content.

- **Updated approach to quality assurance and its delivery:** A Quality Framework that (a) set out strengthened quality requirements and metrics within which providers were required to operate, including recruitment targets for Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) candidates and candidates working in schools with a high proportion of Free School Meals (FSM) pupils, which reflected the workforce demographics of a provider's local area, and (b) established a Quality Assurance (QA) Agent to quality assure the delivery and assessment of the NPQs.
- **Updated approach to delivery:** An accreditation-based model that (a) gave providers the freedom to specify, when tendering to become an accredited provider, which qualifications they wanted to deliver, where they delivered them, the mode of delivery, and their minimum recruitment targets; (b) allowed new providers to enter the market; and (c) introduced greater competition between providers.
- **Targeted funding:** £10 million from the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (TLIF) was targeted to support participation in NPQs in Opportunity Areas and Category 5 and 6 areas⁶ covering the 2017/18 cohort of participants. Following high demand, further funding with wider eligibility criteria was made available for future NPQ cohorts.

About the evaluation

The evaluation of the 2017 Reformed NPQ model was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the NPQs through a summative evaluation of the 2017/18 academic cohort of participants. It also included a formative element whereby evidence was shared regularly with DfE and providers to support the continuous improvement of the qualifications throughout the first year of delivery.

The research objectives were to:

- Provide emerging learning to maximise the reach of recruitment, to support social mobility and school improvement;

⁶ The DfE published 'Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential' in December 2017 outlining their approach to improve social mobility through education including opportunity areas and TLIF funding <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-social-mobility-through-education>.

- Capture and share insights about ‘what works’ and how best to tailor NPQs to context and need;
- Identify any gaps/opportunities for continuous improvement in NPQ content development (and where possible future leadership programme development), delivery and approach; and
- Understand, and measure, outcomes and impacts of the NPQs for participants, schools, and pupils (through self-reporting by participants and the impact analysis).

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach designed to ensure both breadth and depth of data capture while avoiding duplication with other data collection methods.

Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, fieldwork for this evaluation was stopped early. Therefore, the evaluation did not achieve the number of interviews and surveys, at the second sampling point, as originally planned.

The methodology is outlined in further detail below, but comprised of:

- Online participant surveys;
- An online colleague survey;
- Depth interviews with participants and their colleagues;
- Observing provider learning labs;
- Focus groups with providers; and
- Impact analysis on participants and schools using secondary data.

Online participant surveys

We designed two online participant surveys, which were shared via NPQ providers to the 2017/18 academic cohort.

- **Sampling Point A (SPA) online participant survey:** This was sent to participants when they began their qualification. The survey was designed to understand participants’ leadership capabilities prior to undertaking the qualification, their motivations for undertaking the qualification, how they found out about the qualification, and their level of satisfaction with the application process. This survey

launched in March 2018 and closed in October 2019⁷, achieving **a total of 2,415 survey responses**. Broken down by qualification level, it was completed by 898 NPQML, 917 NPQSL, 488 NPQH and 112 NPQEL participants.

- **Sampling Point B (SPB) online participant survey:** This was sent to participants when they completed their NPQ award. The survey was designed to explore how participants' leadership capabilities had progressed, their experience of the qualification, changes in their career aspirations and any early impacts on schools and pupils. This survey launched in January 2019 and closed in April 2020⁸. The aim of the NPQs was for participants to complete their qualifications over a minimum of two academic terms and within 18 months, so the survey provided time for participants from the 2017/18 year to complete their qualifications. In total the survey achieved **a total of 837 survey responses**. Broken down by qualification level, it was completed by 310 NPQML, 324 NPQSL, 170 NPQH and 33 NPQEL participants.

Prior to data analysis, survey data was fully checked, cleaned, and validated against DfE management information to ensure only participants commencing their qualification in the 2017/18 academic year and those currently working in England were included in our analysis.

Online colleague survey

An online survey was designed for participants' line managers and wider staff in their school. Line managers and senior colleagues responded to a more detailed set of questions reflecting their enhanced understanding of the knowledge, skills, and competencies of participants; their motivation for candidates to undertake the qualification; challenges associated with qualification completion; and impacts on participants, themselves, and the wider school. Wider staff were asked to comment on a narrower subset of questions. This group was comprised of individuals with whom participants worked on a regular basis to ensure they were in a position to provide informed responses. The participant SPB survey contained a question asking participants if they would be willing to circulate a survey to their colleagues and the colleague survey was administered via participants. The survey launched in March 2019 and closed in April 2020, achieving a total of **83 responses**. Broken down by qualification level, it was completed by 21 NPQML, 27 NPQSL, 24 NPQH and 11 NPQEL colleagues.

⁷ Initially, existing 2017/18 participants completed this survey retrospectively, and the survey was then disseminated to participants as they began their qualification for the remainder of the 2017/18 academic year. The survey remained open until October 2019 to capture the views of 2017/18 participants from one accredited provider who started delivery later than the other NPQ accredited providers.

⁸ All fieldwork was stopped in response to COVID-19 to reduce burden on participants and schools.

Depth interviews

Telephone interviews were undertaken with participants across each of the four qualifications. Interviewees were recruited via a recontact question within the online surveys and were sampled on the basis of their survey responses. Interviews were based on semi-structured topic guides, which were adapted dependent on survey responses. The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length, generating rich qualitative data.

Interviews with participants took place at three sampling points: 1) at SPA, 2) at SPB, and 3) 6-9 months following SPB to explore how participants had progressed. A particular emphasis was placed on obtaining feedback from NPQEL participants due to it being a new qualification and because the lower number of participants completing the NPQEL qualification meant that it was not possible to undertake the impact analysis on this group.

Table 1 below presents how many interviews were completed across the different qualification levels.

Table 1: Number of depth interviews for each sampling point by qualification level

Qualification	SPA interviews	SPB/6-9 month follow-up interviews
NPQEL	3	7
NPQH	3	3
NPQSL	1	3
NPQML	3	3

An interview was also conducted with a participant who withdrew from the qualification to understand their reasons for withdrawing. In addition, an interview was also completed with a participant's senior colleague to explore their experience of their colleague undertaking the qualification and the impacts on them, their colleague, and the wider school. Further interviews with these two groups were planned, but unfortunately did not take place as a result of COVID-19.

Provider learning labs and focus groups

During the course of the evaluation, researchers **attended four learning labs**⁹ with NPQ providers to understand providers' experiences of delivering the NPQs. As part of these

⁹ The learning labs were initially hosted by DfE and later by the QA Agent. They provided an opportunity to convene all NPQ accredited providers to provide key updates and allow providers to learn from each other.

learning labs, CFE led **five focus groups** with providers to further explore themes emerging from the plenary sessions. The focus groups were undertaken across an 8-month period spanning the first and second years of delivery in order to capture learning from providers as their delivery experience progressed. Two focus groups took place in March in 2018, a third in July 2018 and the final two focus groups were completed in November 2018. Findings from the learning labs and focus groups were synthesised into a series of documents to share good practice among providers to inform the ongoing development of the qualifications.

Impact analysis on participants and schools

Counterfactual analysis using a difference-in-difference method with matching was undertaken to explore the short-term impact of the NPQs on teacher and school outcomes.

The teacher level analysis makes use of data from the School Workforce Census for a group of teachers awarded an NPQ as part of the 2017-18 cohort (the treatment group) and a matched group of teachers who did not undertake a NPQ as part of the same cohort (the control group). As NPQ uptake is voluntary the teachers who undertook a qualification are systematically different to those who did not; matching was therefore undertaken on a wide range of characteristics to account for this.¹⁰ Analysis was undertaken separately for NPQML, NPQSL and NPQH (NPQEL was excluded from this analysis due to the low sample size) to examine different impacts by qualification.

The school level analysis makes use of attainment data from the publicly available National Pupil Database for a cohort of schools who had one or more NPQ participants from the 2017-18 cohort (the treatment group) and a matched group of schools who did not employ anyone who was part of the 2017-18 cohort (the control group). Again matching was undertaken on a wide range of characteristics to account for any bias.¹¹ Separate analysis was undertaken for primary and secondary due to them having different outcome measures. In each case the treatment group of schools includes those who had one or more teachers who had successfully completed an NPQ by July 2019. This was a simple dichotomous treatment group and does not take into account the different number of teachers in each school who had acquired the qualification. This was due to the vast majority of 'treated' schools only having one teacher who had completed an NPQ.¹²

The baseline (academic) year (pre-NPQ) was 2017-18 and the follow-up period was 2019-20. It is important to note that that individual teachers in the treatment group started their NPQs at different points from October 2017 to August 2018, and completed between November 2018 and December 2019. This means that the follow-up period was

¹⁰ A full description of the analysis and matching techniques undertaken can be found in Appendix 2

¹¹ A full description of the analysis and matching techniques undertaken can be found in Appendix 2.

¹² Of the 2,687 treated schools, 1,738 had only one teacher with an NPQ, and a further 553 schools had two teachers. The numbers with more than 2 teachers who had an NPQ are very small.

relatively short and varied by teacher and, for some, whilst they were still completing their qualification. This analysis therefore can only provide information about the short-term effects of undertaking an NPQ.

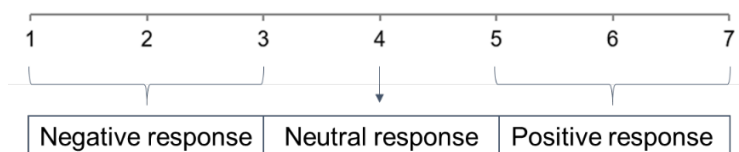
This report

This report summarises the key findings from both the formative and summative aspects of the evaluation.

Following this introduction, the report is structured in five main chapters: **Chapter 2** looks at recruitment onto the NPQs; **Chapter 3** explores providers' and participants' experiences of the delivery of the qualifications; **Chapter 4** examines short-term self-reported impacts; and **Chapter 5** looks at the longer-term impact of the qualifications in comparison to a counterfactual group. **Chapter 6** summarises the key conclusions.

The number of participants who responded to each question varied. This was either due to a question only being asked of a sub-group of participants (either based on their response to a previous question or the level of NPQ they were studying) or because respondents chose not to answer a question. As a result, the base sizes for questions, and specific options within questions, differ. Bases are noted in each of the figures. Differences in the findings by school and respondent characteristics are explored. All differences have been tested for statistical significance and only those that are statistically significant at the 5% level are reported in the commentary of the report.¹³ Where figure proportions do not equal 100%, this is due to rounding.

The surveys contained scale questions to measure respondents' thoughts, attitudes, and experiences of the NPQs. All scales ranged from 1-7, where 1 was the lowest score (e.g. strongly disagree, not at all confident) and 7 was the most positive score (e.g. strongly agree, very confident). Therefore, scores of 1-3 represented a negative response, 4 was a neutral response and 5-7 represented a positive response.



The report also contains key findings from the QA Agent's participant survey (administered every six months) to supplement findings from this evaluation. The questions within the QA Agent's survey used a scale of 1-10, where 1-2=serious underperformance, 3-5=underperformance, 6-8=expected performance, 9-

¹³ Please note that some graphs contain statistically insignificant findings. Please refer to the text for statistically significant differences.

10=exceptional performance. Therefore, the analysis of this data can be interpreted by how well participants' expectations were met by providers. Please note that this analysis was undertaken using data up to June 2019 due to the QA Agent being unable to provide the data for the 2017/18 cohort only; therefore, this will include participants who commenced their NPQ in the 2018/19 academic year, in addition to those who commenced in 2017/18. Whilst the cohort is different, all participants took part in the reformed NPQs and therefore the findings are still applicable.

Interviews produce a significant volume of qualitative data. For this study, interviews were thematically coded. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, no inference can be drawn about the scale or frequency of attitudes or opinions. To aid the reader, where possible, we provide an assessment of the proportion of interviewees who commented under a given theme. However, please note that other interviewees may also have held this opinion or undertaken these activities, but did not describe them during the interview. Throughout the report, findings from interviews are presented alongside survey findings.

Chapter 2: Recruitment of participants

Introduction

This chapter describes how providers met recruitment targets for the NPQs and the successful ways in which they marketed the qualifications. It summarises the use of scholarship funding and the impact this had on schools. It then considers which factors were important to participants when deciding to undertake an NPQ, how they chose their provider and their experience of the application process.

Key findings for recruitment of participants

- Recruitment targets set by providers were exceeded for all NPQs, including the new NPQ for executive leaders (NPQEL).
- The new delivery model for the qualifications created more competition between NPQ providers; therefore, marketing activity became increasingly important to providers to enable them to recruit participants
- Scholarship funding supported those in Opportunity Areas and Category 5/6 areas to access leadership training by removing qualification cost as a barrier. In some cases, funding also enabled multiple leaders within individual schools to undertake the qualification. However, providers found it challenging to manage the demand for the NPQs in the early months of delivery due to their own delivery capacity.
- Where scholarships were not available, the cost of the qualification did prevent access to the NPQs for some leaders.
- Participants undertook NPQs for a range of different reasons. While some reasons were common for many participants (e.g. enabling career progression or developing new skills), others influenced a significant minority (e.g. it was identified as an area for development or the fact that other colleagues were undertaking it). Therefore, what is important for one participant may not influence another.
- Participants found out about the NPQs from various sources, which was influenced by their role within school. Comparison of the NPQ to other leadership qualifications and comparison between different NPQ providers also varied by a participants' role in school. The NPQ's reputation often led to participants choosing to study an NPQ instead of another qualification.
- When leaders did choose their NPQ provider, different factors influenced their decisions, such as reputation, location, and the delivery method, which reflects the importance of having providers who deliver the NPQs in different ways.

Recruitment of participants for the 2017/18 academic year

Recruitment targets were exceeded for all qualifications, including the new NPQ for executive leaders (NPQEL).

Targets

During the 2017/18 academic year, 11,802 participants were successfully recruited onto the NPQs against an overall target of 8,792 (Table 2). Providers set their own targets based on their capacity (providers ranged in size, from those delivering to less than 100 participants to those delivering to around 5,000). The NPQEL was a new qualification level developed during the reforms, and it attracted nearly 500 participants during the first year of delivery, indicating there was demand for this among school leaders.

Table 2: Recruitment of target number of participants in 2017/18

Qualification	Target	Actual
NPQML	3,784	4,702
NPQSL	3,204	4,495
NPQH	1,338	2,106
NPQEL	436	499
Total	8,762	11,802

Source: DfE and QA Agent analysis

Further analysis of the school workforce data shows that the uptake of the different NPQs in the 2017/18 academic year reflects the breakdown of the teacher workforce. For example, more participants undertook the NPQML than the NPQH, which is reflective of the number of middle leadership and headship positions in the workforce, respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3: number of teachers in classroom teacher and other leadership positions within the school workforce

Type of Teacher	Number of teachers
Classroom teacher	249,000
Middle leader	135,000
Senior leader	47,000
Headteacher	22,000

Source: DfE analysis

Providers were set individual targets to recruit participants from BAME backgrounds, and those from schools with high proportions of pupils accessing FSM. These targets were reflective of the teacher and leader populations in their local area. Providers found these targets challenging, with some voicing unease about the sensitivities of recruiting on the basis of personal characteristics. During 2017/18 across all providers, the BAME targets were met. However, individual providers themselves found this difficult and thought they might not meet their targets for BAME and other characteristics. Others described how they would meet their targets in the first year of delivery, but expressed concern about meeting future targets as they felt they had 'exhausted' the potential pool of candidates or schools that met the target criteria. Some providers experienced success by enlisting champions who shared the characteristics of participants they needed to recruit and asked them to help promote the NPQs.

DfE analysis shows that 9% of the 2017/18 cohort of NPQ participants were BAME. This was broadly reflective of the school workforce, where 8% were BAME. This indicates a slight over-representation of participants from BAME groups, overall. However, there was a slight under-representation of NPQ participants from Black groups (1%), compared with the school workforce (2%).

Provider marketing and communications

One of the key changes to the delivery of the NPQs introduced in 2017 was the move from licensed providers delivering all NPQ levels within specific regions, to accredited providers being able to choose which qualifications they delivered, how they tailored the qualifications and where they delivered them. **This new delivery model created more competition between providers and marketing activity became increasingly important.** Providers reported a variety of challenges and developed a range of approaches to successfully to market and communicate the 2017 Reformed NPQs in the early stages of delivery. More detail on these can be found in the learning lab reports included in Appendix 4, but they are summarised as:

- **Promoting the 2017 Reformed NPQs** to ensure schools and key stakeholders were aware of how the NPQs had been reformed to ensure that the NPQs were at the forefront of their leadership training agendas;
- **Identifying and engaging key decision-makers in schools** through supporting them with school improvement plans and encouraging the use of NPQs to upskill staff;
- **Using the right communication method to engage different audiences** through social media, creating marketing materials to send through the post, and hosting taster events or attending existing events to market the NPQs;

- **Ensuring key content was covered** when communicating, such as promoting the quality of the NPQs, highlighting the outcomes of participation, referencing the fact that they are national DfE qualifications and highlighting the flexibility within the content and/or delivery; and
- **Word-of-mouth and reputation** both of which proved to be critically important.

The most success for us...has been repeat customers...establish your credibility as a high-quality provider...those people going back to their establishments recommend [the provider] and then growth comes from that. – *NPQ provider*

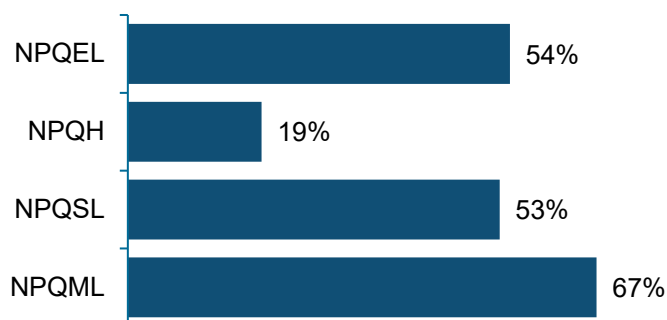
Aspirational versus those already in role

Most NPQH participants were aspiring to the headteacher role rather than already being in post. The other qualifications attracted a more equal split of aspiring and current leaders.

Approximately half of all survey respondents (51%) were already in the leadership role they were studying for (e.g. were a headteacher studying NPQH), while the remaining participants (49%) had another role in a school (e.g. a senior leader studying NPQH) or did not currently work in a school and were, therefore, aspiring to the role for which they were studying. There were key differences by:

- **Phase:** A higher proportion of primary school participants (55%) were already in the leadership role they were studying for compared with those in secondary schools (45%);
- **Opportunity Area:** A higher proportion of participants from Opportunity Areas (58%) were already in role compared with those not from Opportunity Areas (50%); and
- **Qualification level:** A lower proportion of NPQH respondents (19%) were already in the role they were studying for (headship) compared with those undertaking the other qualifications (see Figure 1). This may reflect the historical need to have a NPQH prior to being appointed into headship.

Figure 1: Proportion of participants already in the role they are studying for



Source: SPA survey. Bases vary: NPQEL=112, NPQH=488, NPQSL=917 and NPQML=898

Nearly two-thirds of NPQEL respondents who were already in an executive leadership position on starting the qualification were leading three or fewer schools, and therefore not leading large Multi Academy Trusts (MATs).

Funding

Scholarship funding supported those in Opportunity Areas and Category 5/6 areas to access leadership training by removing the cost barrier. In some cases this also enabled more leaders within a school to take part, although this was challenging for providers to manage in the early months of delivery due to their own capacity to deliver. Where participants were not eligible for scholarships, the cost of the qualification did prevent access to the NPQs for some leaders.

Take up of scholarship funding

DfE analysis shows that just under two-thirds (63%) of the 2017/18 cohort of NPQ participants accessed scholarship funding for their qualification. Of these participants, 77% were eligible for a scholarship because their school was in a Category 5-6 area, and 22% were eligible because their MAT or Diocese had a footprint that crossed into a Category 5-6 area.

Providers reported that scholarship funding had created an influx of applicants for the NPQs; while they appreciated the demand, such volumes had been difficult to manage during the early months of delivery and, at times, had resulted in waiting lists. Entry criteria for the NPQs was at the discretion of accredited providers and providers introduced selection processes to help them manage the high demand. These explored applicants' readiness for the qualification and their motivations for undertaking it to ensure participants were undertaking the correct qualifications and they understood the time commitment they were making to help reduce drop out later down the line. This process was also used to gather information to enable providers to tailor the NPQ

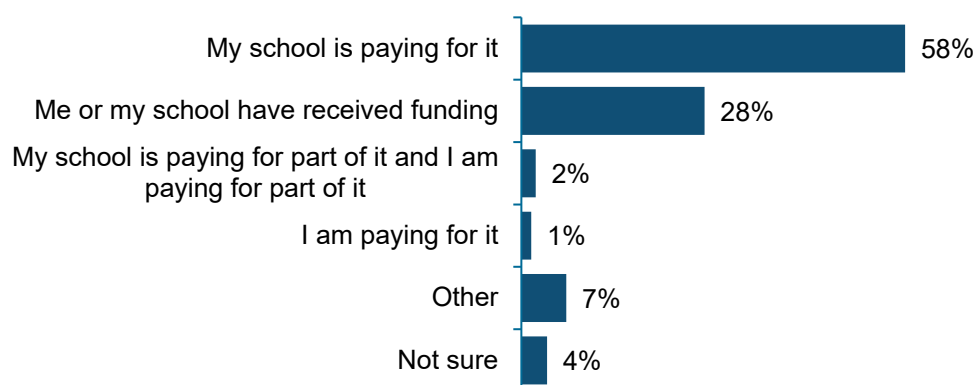
content to participants and, where relevant, their schools, which generated additional benefits.

Providers explained that some schools in Opportunity Areas or Category 5/6 areas were not aware they were eligible for scholarships. They undertook a range of activities to raise the awareness of this, including liaising with local authorities and school networks to improve communication. Providers also needed to ensure stakeholders understood what Opportunity Areas and Category 5/6 areas meant in any communications, as they were not terms that everyone understood. While the availability of funding worked as an incentive, some providers questioned the parity for other schools.

Perceptions of funding

Over half (58%) of respondents to the SPA survey thought their school was paying for their qualification, while over one-quarter (28%) reported that they themselves or their school had received funding to pay for the qualification (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Participants' perceptions of how their NPQ was being funded



Source: SPA participant survey. Base=2,413

Only two-fifths (39%) of respondents who received a scholarship correctly identified this¹⁴ with nearly half (46%) thinking their school was paying for the qualification. During a depth interview, a senior leader's line manager explained that their staff did not always know how training was funded as it was a decision made at a more senior level.

The scholarships for the 2017/18 cohort were initially funded by TLIF; of the participants who were aware they had been funded through TLIF¹⁵, half (50%) stated they would not

¹⁴ An individual's survey response was linked to management information by held on each person on the NPQs by CFE. Only records which were matched were included within this analysis. ¹⁵ Awareness of TLIF funding was explored through the SPA survey. Only those who were aware of the source were asked about the influence of this on whether or not they could have taken part in the NPQ without it.

¹⁵ Awareness of TLIF funding was explored through the SPA survey. Only those who were aware of the source were asked about the influence of this on whether or not they could have taken part in the NPQ without it.

have been able to access the qualification without this scholarship. Only 23% stated this would have still been possible without scholarship funding and the remaining respondents (27%) were not sure. The majority of depth interviewees who were funded explained the importance of the scholarship. They highlighted that school budgets were tight and that their school would not have been able to cover the cost of the qualification without scholarship funding. One interviewee also stated that the cost of the qualification was particularly challenging for small schools.

When I saw the NPQEL was coming out, I looked into it, I briefly flirted with the idea and then abandoned it. It was only when I saw there was the possibility of funding that I brought it back onto the agenda at all... for a small school, I would not have taken that amount out of the CPD budget just for me... I wouldn't have applied without it, so it was absolutely fundamental. – *SPA NPQEL participant*

One interviewee also reported that their school was making redundancies and, therefore, they did not feel comfortable approaching the headteacher to ask for such an investment in their own development. Even though almost a quarter of survey respondents (23%) reported that they would have undertaken the qualification without the funding, a few depth interviewees explained that the scholarship meant that additional colleagues could also undertake an NPQ alongside them, which would not have happened without the scholarship.

She [the headteacher] had already signed the budget for the full fee... then we found out, because of the area, that it would be funded fully...we decided another colleague should do the course. – *SPA NPQML participant*

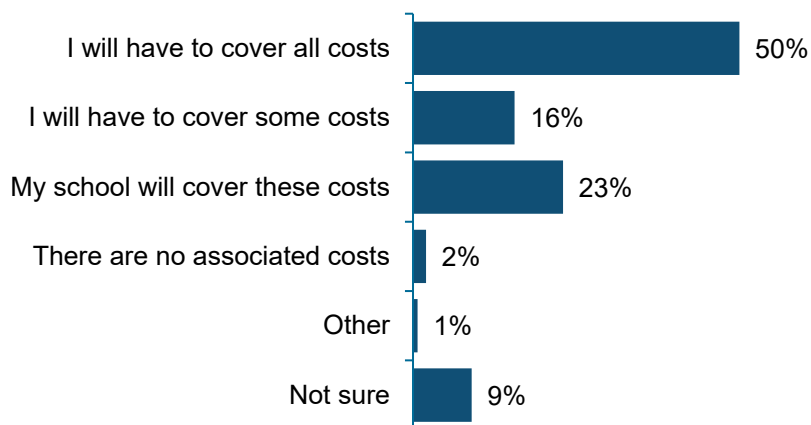
Where scholarship funding was not available, providers reported that the cost of the NPQs was a challenge for schools and prevented some from accessing the qualifications. This was reported as particularly difficult for small schools, schools not part of a MAT or alliance, special schools, and Pupil Referral Units. Providers tried to overcome this by:

- Allowing schools to spread the cost of the qualification over two or more years;
- Offering discounts to schools with limited CPD budgets who signed up more than one participant at a time; and
- Offering discounts to NPQ graduates and MATs who were likely to sign up multiple participants.

Travel and subsistence

While participants rarely had to pay for the qualification, they often had to cover costs associated with travel and subsistence; however, the scale of these costs is unknown. Half (50%) of all survey respondents had to cover all of the travel, subsistence and other costs associated with undertaking their NPQ themselves (although the scale of these costs is unknown) and a further one-fifth (16%) had to cover some of those costs (Figure 3). Only one-quarter (23%) reported that their school covered those costs (see Appendix 3 for how this differed by participant characteristics).

Figure 3: How participants are covering travel and subsistence costs associated with their NPQ



Source: SPA participant survey. Base=2,410

A few interviewees highlighted that they were happy to cover travel and subsistence costs as they recognised the value of the NPQ to their own professional development. However, interviewees also explained that the cost and time associated with travel led to them selecting a local provider.

It's fine because it's something I feel I'm personally gaining from... feel the cost of getting to university is not too bad because it's only twenty minutes or so and the placement school that I've been at is even closer to home. – SPA NPQH participant.

Motivations for undertaking the qualifications

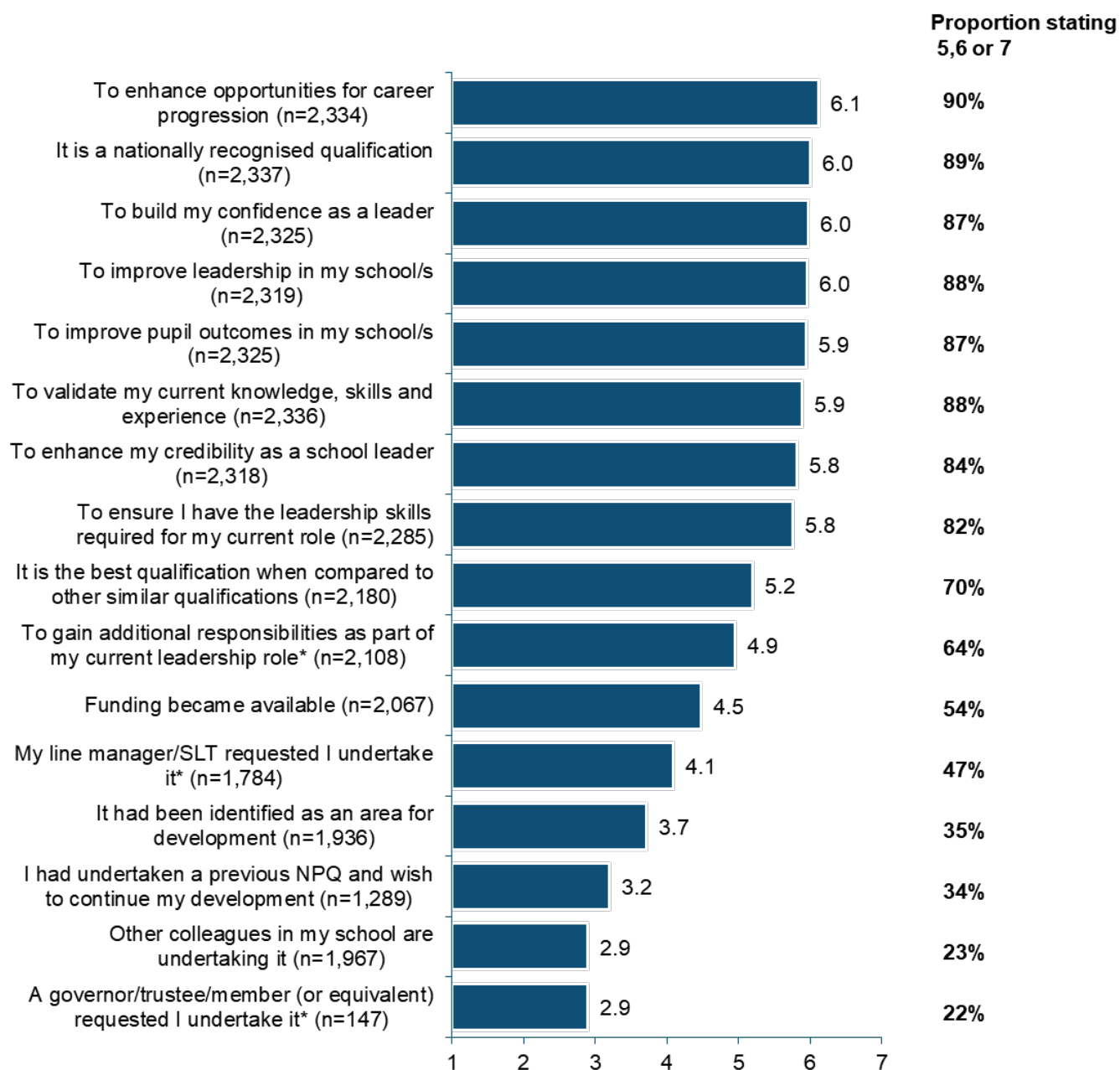
Participants undertook an NPQ for a range of different reasons (described in the next section). While some reasons were common for many participants (e.g. enabling career progression or developing new skills), others influenced a significant minority (e.g. identified as an area for development or the fact that other colleagues were undertaking it). Therefore, what is important for one participant may not influence another.

Career progression and building confidence were important factors when participants decided to undertake an NPQ (Figure 4), with both receiving high average scores on an importance scale (6.1 and 6.0 out of 7)¹⁶. The qualification being nationally recognised was also scored highly receiving a score of 6.0 out of 7. However, a wide range of other factors were also important to participants representing a mix of outcomes for both the school (e.g. improving pupils' outcomes) and the participants themselves (e.g. validating their current knowledge).

Although some factors were not rated as important overall, they still influenced a significant minority of participants. For example, *on average*, respondents did not rate 'other colleagues in their school undertaking an NPQ' as an important factor when choosing to study an NPQ, providing a mean score of 2.9; however, 23% of respondents individually rated this as important – providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 out of 7.

¹⁶ On a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1=very unimportant and 7=very important).

Figure 4: Importance of various factors when deciding to undertake an NPQ



Source: SPA survey. Bases variable. *Not all respondents were asked these options¹⁷
Scale of 1 to 7 (where 1=very unimportant and 7=very important).

¹⁷ Certain options were not relevant to all participants based on which qualification they were undertaking. For example, only those undertaking NPQEL and existing headteachers undertaking NPQH were asked how important 'a governor/trustee/member (or equivalent) requested I undertake it' was when choosing to undertake their qualification.

The importance of these motivating factors differed across participants:

- **Participants aspiring for the role they were studying for vs those already in role:** Those who were already in the role they were studying for placed a higher level of importance on ensuring that they had the leadership skills required for their current role (6.0) compared with those aspiring for the role they were studying (5.5). Aspiring leaders placed a higher level of importance on enhancing opportunities for career progression (6.3 compared with 5.9) and gaining additional responsibilities as part of their current role (5.1 compared with 4.8).
- **Gender:** Females rated numerous factors as more important than males (see Appendix 3 for a detailed breakdown).

Ethnicity: There were fewer differences by ethnicity, and the differences were smaller than those observed by gender (see Appendix 3 for a detailed breakdown). Depth interviewees' reasons for wanting to undertake an NPQ were varied but reflected the survey findings, as they most commonly related to developing their leadership skills, experiencing other educational settings, and mixing with other leaders to gain insight into the role and improve their own practice.

To get a better understanding of what the executive head role looked like. Particularly in other settings and learn where it's been successful, where it's been less successful, to help me with the clarity of the communication to staff and governors and a full understanding of what that role is. – *SPA existing executive headteacher NPQEL participant*

Furthering their own career was also a key motivating factor for interviewees, as several explained how they hoped undertaking an NPQ would help them to secure a promotion.

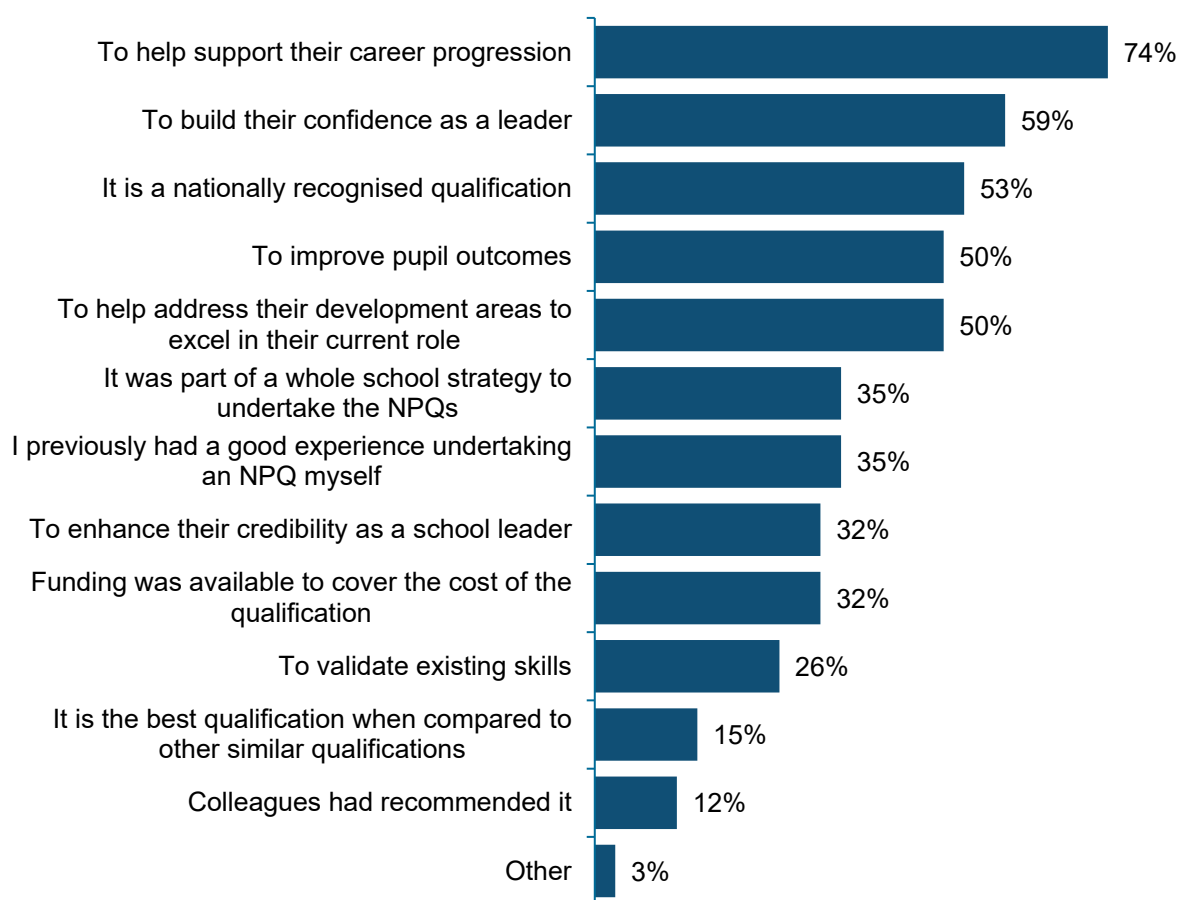
I really want to be a senior leader and it hasn't quite happened yet... I felt that by having the NPQSL it would help me hone my skills and would also be really good on applications and try and set me aside a little bit possibly from other candidates. – *SPB aspiring NPQSL participant*

School support and encouragement

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of line managers and senior staff who responded to the colleague survey had actively encouraged participants to apply for the qualification and over one-quarter (29%) had supported their request to apply for the qualification.

Their reasons for encouraging participants to apply for an NPQ reflected those given by participants themselves (Figure 5) with career progression and confidence being critical. Over half (53%) also did so, because it was a nationally-recognised qualification.

Figure 5: Reasons line managers encouraged participants to undertake an NPQ



Source: Colleague survey. Base=34

During depth interviews, the majority of NPQ participants highlighted how important it was to have their school's support when deciding to undertake an NPQ. Examples of support provided by schools included funding the qualification where scholarships were not available; and committing to supporting participants' development during the qualification by giving them opportunities to apply their learning, undertake projects in the school, and access to release time to complete the qualification.

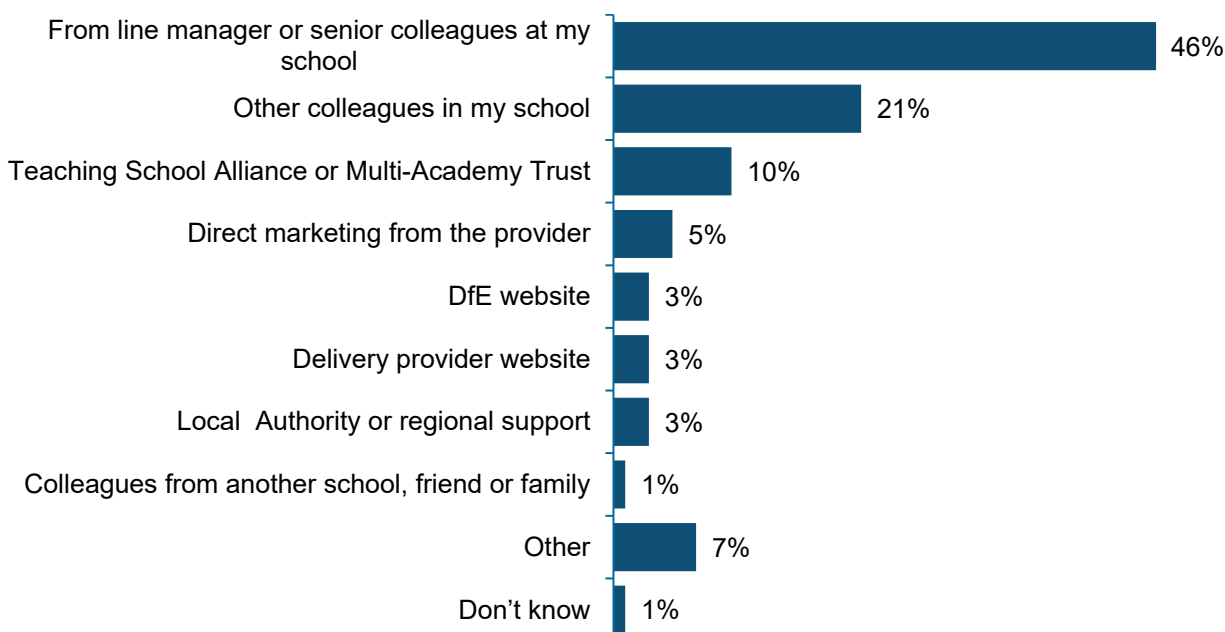
Applying for the NPQs

Providers marketed the qualifications through various methods. Most commonly, participants first found out about the NPQs from their line manager or another colleague. However, those undertaking NPQEL most commonly found out about the qualification via direct provider marketing. The amount of choice an individual had over whether to study an NPQ (compared with other leadership qualifications) or who to study with varied again by seniority. When leaders did have a choice, different factors influenced their decision such as reputation, location, and the delivery method, which reflects the importance of having providers who deliver the NPQs in different ways. It was often the reputation of the qualification that led to participants choosing to study an NPQ instead of another qualification.

How participants found out about the NPQs

Nearly half (46%) of all survey respondents found out about the NPQs directly from their line manager or senior colleagues, and one-fifth (21%) did so from other colleagues in their school (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: How respondents first found out about the NPQs

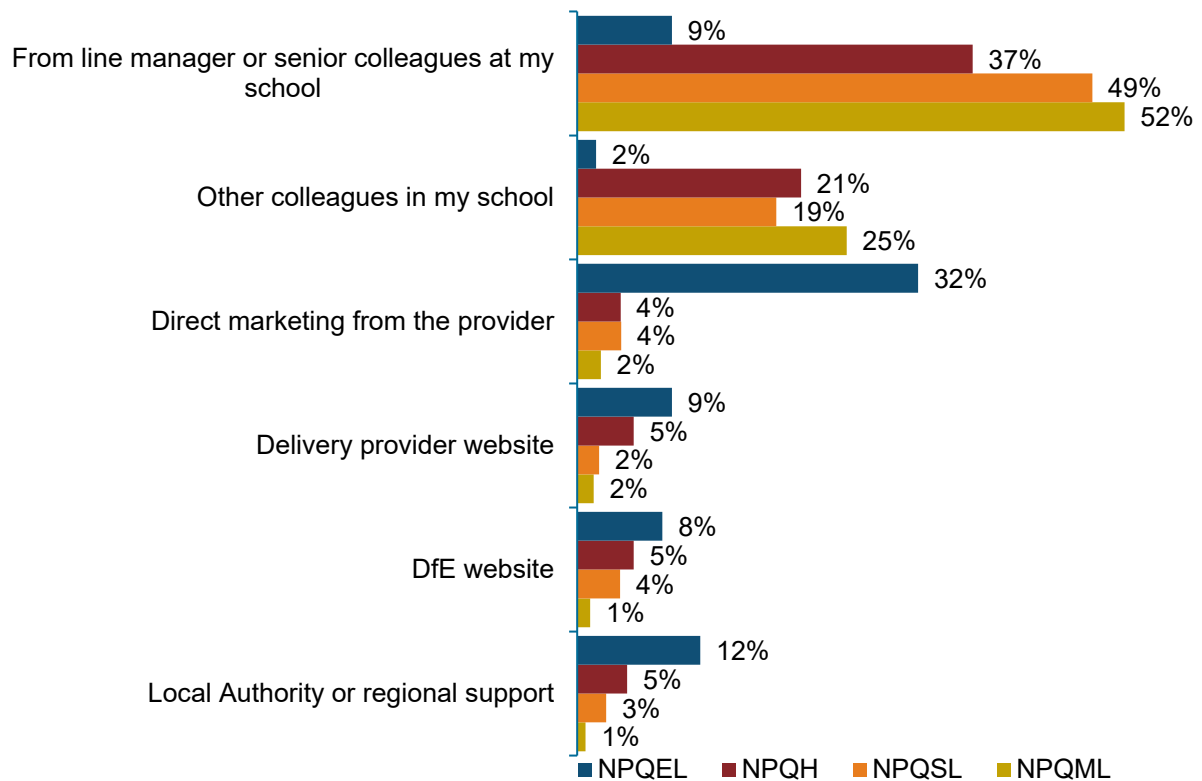


Source: SPA survey. Base=2,413

How participants found out about the NPQs was influenced by the qualification they wanted to study and reflected the level of autonomy and influence they had in the school based on their seniority (Figure 7). For example, a much lower proportion of respondents undertaking an NPQEL found out about the qualification from their line manager (9%) or from other colleagues (2%) compared with respondents undertaking the other NPQ

levels. Conversely, a higher proportion of those undertaking NPQEL found out about the qualification through direct marketing from the provider (32%), from the provider's website (9%), DfE's website (8%), or via local authority or regional support (12%). This reflects the findings from providers, who explained the importance of marketing the NPQs directly to decision-makers in the school rather than participants (especially for NPQSL and NPQML). *This is important to consider when developing future leadership programmes and encouraging take-up amongst school staff.*

Figure 7: How participants found out about the qualifications by qualification level

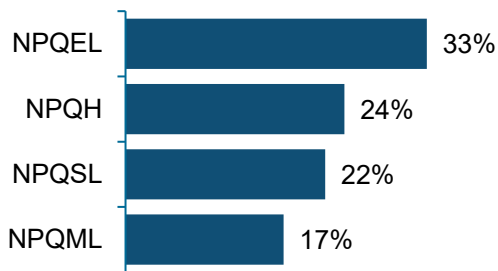


Source: SPA survey. Bases variable (NPQEL=112, NPQH=488, NPQSL=916, NPQML=897)

Comparison with other qualifications

Overall, one-fifth (21%) of respondents compared the NPQ to other leadership development qualifications when deciding what course to study. A higher proportion of NPQEL participants (33%) had done so compared with participants undertaking all other levels of the qualification (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Proportion of participants who compared the NPQ to other leadership qualifications when deciding what to study by qualification level



Source: SPA survey. Bases variable (NPQEL=112, NPQH=488, NPQSL=916, NPQML=896)

A few interviewees stated that the qualification had been recommended to them by colleagues, while others highlighted that the NPQ best met their development needs.

I've already got a post-grad diploma, I could have upped to an MA with a dissertation, but actually it was less specific, and it would have only focused on one area and the NPQH gave me more specific learning around leadership really. – *SPB NPQH participant*

However, interviewees most frequently explained that it was the reputation of the qualifications that had led to them choosing to study an NPQ instead of another qualification. This reflects the earlier findings of NPQs being nationally recognised as one reason they were selected by both participants and senior colleagues. Interviewees reported that they were widely recognised within the sector and would, therefore, help them to achieve their future career aspirations.

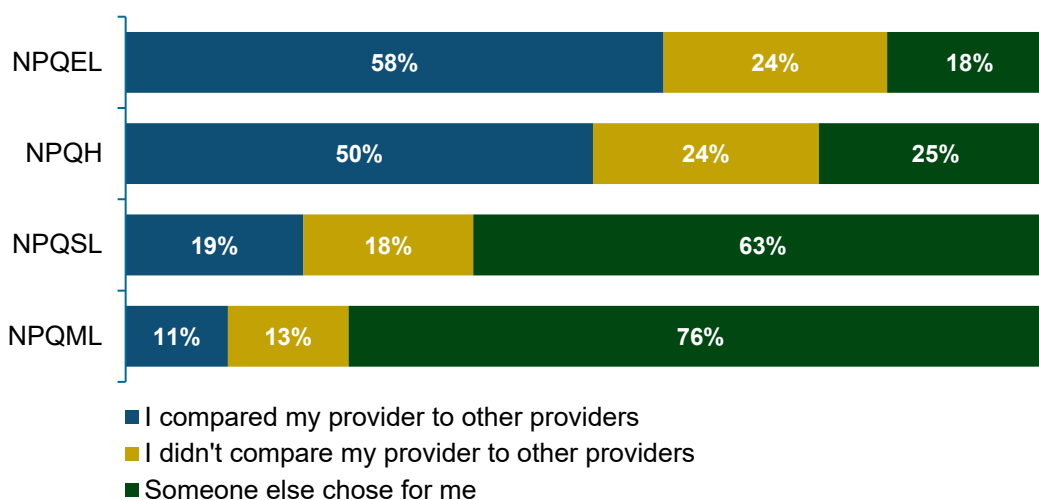
The NPQ has got the kudos, I suppose. There are lots of private companies that are putting on training courses, but this is the one that's almost rubber-stamped by the DfE... And I think a DfE-endorsed qualification is a good measure... There are lots of other things you need to bring to that role other than that knowledge, but for trustees in organisations who will be looking to appoint these people in the next three, four, five years, there's a standard associated with it. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

Choosing a provider

Nearly one-quarter of respondents (24%) made comparisons with other providers before making their decision about who to study with, while just under one-fifth (18%) chose their provider without making any comparisons. The remaining three-fifths (58%) reported that someone else chose for them.

The level of qualification a participant undertook again affected this, with a higher proportion of NPQML participants (76%) and NPQSL participants (63%) reporting that someone else chose their provider compared with those undertaking NPQH (25%) and NPQEL (18%) (Figure 9). *This reiterates the importance of who to target when developing future leadership programmes and encouraging take-up amongst school staff.*

Figure 9: Proportion of participants who compared their provider to other providers when applying for their NPQ'



Source: SPA survey. Bases variable (NPQEL=112, NPQH=488, NPQSL=912, NPQML=898)

Survey respondents who selected their own provider were asked to describe the main reasons they had chosen that NPQ provider¹⁸. One-third of respondents stated that they selected their provider because of their location – meaning that they would not need to travel far to undertake face-to-face sessions. Approximately one-fifth of respondents explained that it was because of a previous positive experience with the provider, one-sixth due to their reputation, and one-sixth reported that the provider had been recommended to them.

Survey respondents were asked how important certain factors were when choosing their provider, or how important these factors would have been if they had been given the opportunity to choose. Provider reputation was most commonly reported as an important factor (Figure 10)

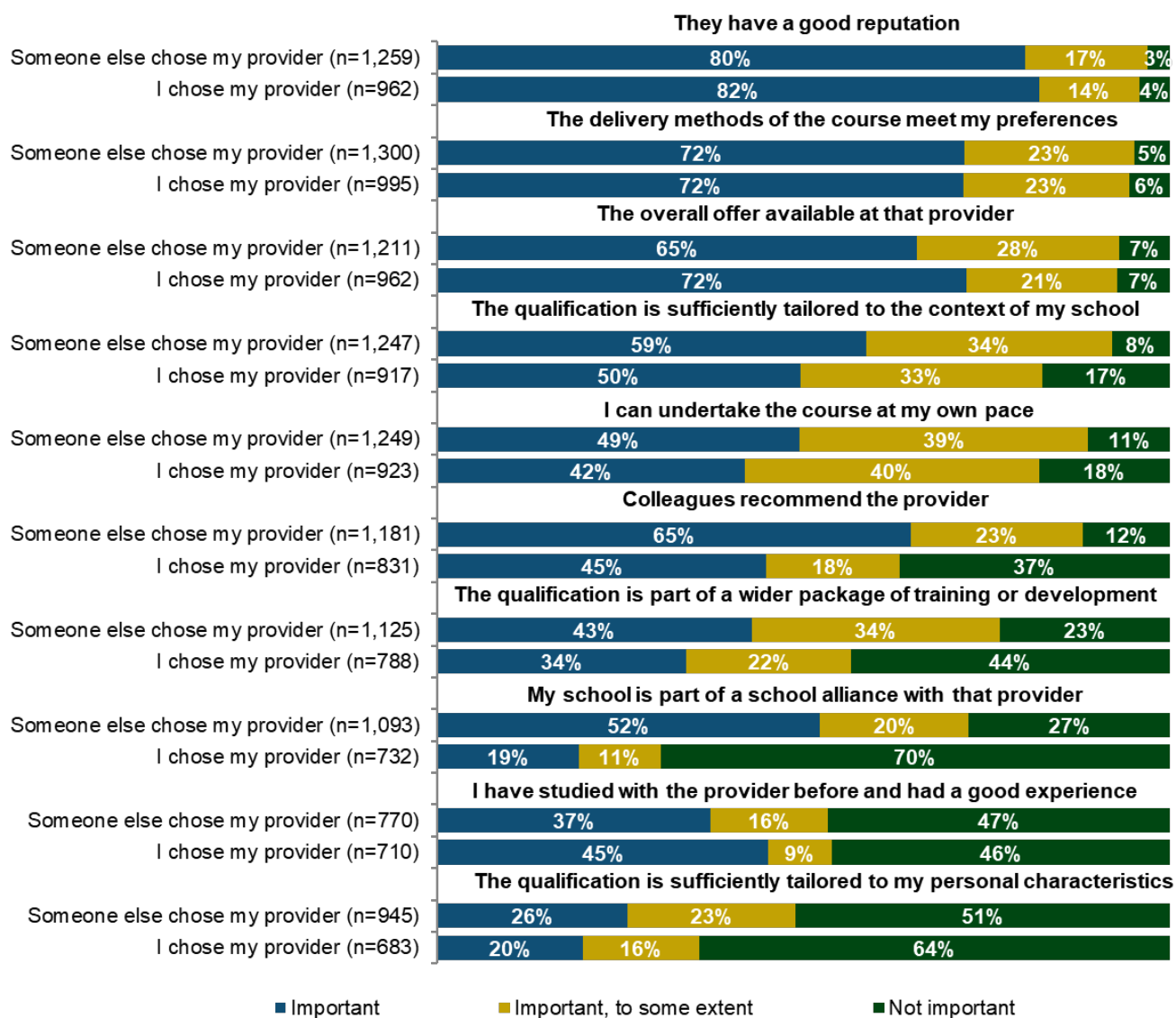
The NPQs afforded providers flexibility on how to design the content of the qualifications and delivery methods used. Figure 10 also shows that the overall offer, and the tailoring of the qualification to the school context, were frequently selected as reasons for participants selecting their provider. Amongst those who chose their provider 64% of respondents deemed that the qualification being tailored to their personal characteristics

¹⁸ This was an open-response question in which responses were grouped for analysis.

(e.g. gender) was **not** important – making it the least important factor; however, this reason was still influential for one-fifth of respondents.

When comparing the views of those who chose their provider with those who did not, factors which participants believed would be important if they were making a decision were less important when the participant had to make the decision themselves.

Figure 10: Importance of factors when choosing an NPQ provider by decision maker status



Source: SPA survey. Bases variable

While tailoring the qualification to a specific context was identified as important, only a minority (6%) of survey respondents reported undertaking an NPQ that had been specifically tailored to their school context at the design stage (e.g. Church of England NPQH). Others described how the NPQ had been adapted by providers once more about the school context was known (e.g. within a MAT).

While a context-specific NPQ was not an important draw for all school leaders, it was for some. One interviewee explained how the context-specific nature of the qualification was one of the primary motivating factors when deciding to apply.

One NPQEL interviewee also reported that the reason they had chosen their provider differed to the reason they had chosen providers for their colleagues. They explained that they had chosen to undertake their NPQEL through a national provider so that they could liaise with leaders from across a wide geographical area, to share learning and ideas, whereas they chose local providers for their more junior colleagues (undertaking NPQML and NPQSL) so that they could establish local networks to facilitate future collaborative school working.

I would have been less keen to pursue the NPQEL through a teaching school or through what I would have felt would have been another MAT. I'm sure they would have been just as professional, but I liked the fact that [provider] had that national breadth... [Regarding other colleagues undertaking ML and SL] we actually went with a local teaching alliance for that one, because I just felt it was valuable for them to make contact with people in the area. – *SPA NPQEL participant*

Participants' experience of the application process

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the application process for their NPQ, providing a mean satisfaction score of 6.0 out of 7¹⁹. The majority (87%) provided a score of 5, 6 or 7 indicating their satisfaction, and only 4% provided a score of 1, 2 or 3, suggesting that they were not satisfied.

¹⁹ On a scale 1-7 (where 1=very dissatisfied and 7=very satisfied).

Chapter 3: Experience of the NPQs

Introduction

The NPQs gave accredited providers the freedom to develop their own qualification content in addition to structuring and delivering them flexibly (within the specified framework). The core content had to be based on the NPQ Content and Assessment Framework developed by DFE to ensure some level of standardisation, and certain elements of delivery had to take place for participants, such as a 9-day placement for the NPQH. Providers also had the flexibility to decide how they managed qualification assessment, which had been managed by a single organisation in prior versions of the qualifications. This chapter describes both the providers' and participants' experience of the NPQs and the challenges that were faced.

Key findings: Experience of the NPQs

- The ongoing revision of NPQ content and delivery methods was vital to ensure the qualifications remained current and relevant. Providers did this by obtaining input from experts in the sector and feedback from those undertaking the qualifications.
- Satisfaction with NPQ content was fairly high among participants, although some thought that further tailoring to their school context was required. While contextualised NPQs were valued, breadth of content was still critical to ensure leaders understood what leadership skills were needed across the sector.
- School finance was the key area that participants believed was not adequately covered.
- The first cohort of participants undertaking the 2017 Reformed NPQs had variable experiences of qualification delivery; however, as they progressed through their NPQ, this was mentioned less and by the time participants had completed their qualification, most were satisfied. A number of interviewees still thought the assessment process needed to be improved, especially when not introduced during face-to-face sessions.
- Gaining experience in their own and other schools supported participants to develop a range of skills and improved their confidence in their leadership ability.
- There were differing levels of leadership experience amongst participants. This benefited those aspiring for the role they were studying for as they could learn from others, but those already in role sometimes felt they were covering topics they were already familiar with.

- Participants' experiences of coaching were variable, with success being linked to having a coach who had knowledge of the education sector and NPQ content.
- Participants were satisfied that the qualification and its content had met their leadership development needs. Those who were aspiring for the role they were studying for were more satisfied that the qualification content had met their leadership development needs than those already in the role.

Content

Designing the content

The ongoing revision of NPQ content was vital to ensure qualifications remained current and relevant. This involved the input of experts in the sector and feedback from those undertaking the qualifications.

Providers valued being able to develop their own NPQ content. Different approaches were used to map the qualification content to the assessment framework, with no consensus amongst providers as to which worked better. Some used the same author (or team) to develop content across all qualification levels to ensure a clear leadership pathway with progression. Others tackled each qualification level separately with different content developers, using the content and assessment framework as the common ground.

Whatever approach was used, the input of experts in the sector was vital to ensure content was relevant, current, and fit for purpose. This also gained buy-in from schools.

The benefit of us using current leaders is that everything is current. You're tackling real problems as they exist today, in a changing environment, and it's very different now to what it was four years ago.
– *NPQ provider*

Despite the increased element of competition that now exists, providers still exhibited an appetite to learn from each other as they acknowledged they had a shared goal in developing leaders in education. Outside of the Learning Labs, providers worked together to develop their offer through sharing ideas, participant handbooks and guidance documents.

A number of providers described how they also included content from organisations outside the education sector, where examples were good and learning was transferable. While some participants at first questioned this approach, providers described how it helped to embed learning and allowed participants to view the school from a business perspective.

Providers saw the ongoing revision of content as vital to ensure the NPQs remained current. Providers reported how they iteratively adapted content following consultation with participants to ensure the qualification better met their needs. Feedback from facilitators or partners delivering the content supplemented this.

We are pretty much rewriting... over the summer to go into a second year of delivery based on the feedback... So that's really good, instead of it just being, 'That's what it is,' shrug your shoulders and get on with it. – NPQ provider

The use of experts alongside drawing on examples from other sectors can ensure content is relevant, up to date and meets the needs of participants. This is important to consider when developing future leadership programmes. Once content is developed continual renewal and updating is also important.

Participant feedback proved important, but gaining feedback through traditional routes was sometimes difficult (e.g. feedback surveys after the session). Providers built feedback into delivery, either by asking at the end of face-to-face sessions/webinars or making completion of feedback mandatory before participants started a new element of the qualification. They described how this 'feedback loop' was essential to show where actions were taken.

Approximately half of providers sub-contracted part of their delivery to partners. Working with delivery partners presented a challenge for providers in ensuring that the qualifications were run consistently. Providers needed to ensure partners were clear about how the qualifications should be delivered. To mitigate for detrimental variation, providers gave partners flexibility to tailor content by advising that they could add content but must not take any away.

Participants' experience of the qualification content

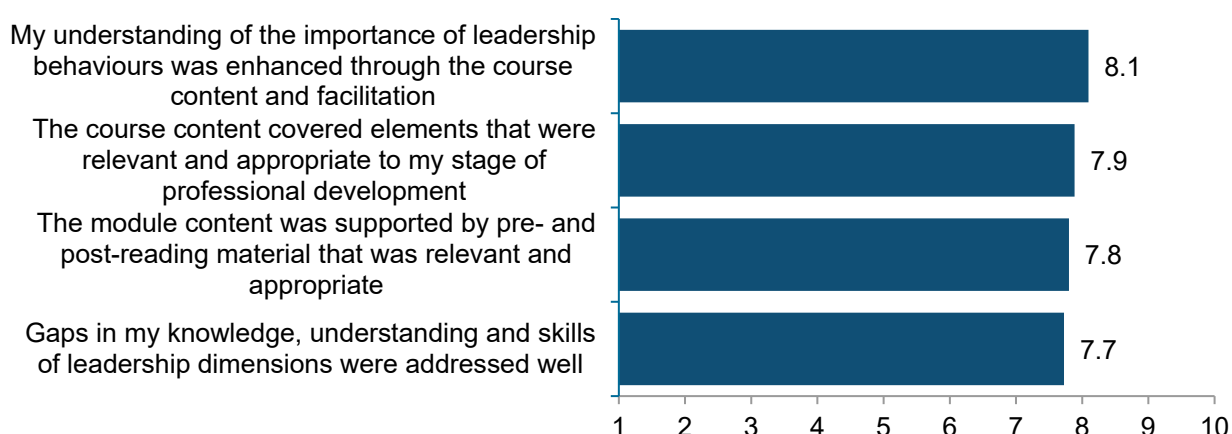
Satisfaction with NPQ content was fairly high among participants, although some thought that more tailoring to their school context was required. While contextualised NPQs were valued, ensuring breadth of content was still critical to enable leaders to understand what leadership skills were needed across the sector. NPQ content which included examples that 'bring things to life' were frequently praised.

Overall, participants were satisfied with the content of the qualification, providing a mean score of 5.7 out of 7²⁰ (Figure 11). Satisfaction levels for the extent to which qualification content was sufficiently tailored to their school context was slightly lower at 5.2 out of 7. The majority of respondents provided a score of 5, 6, or 7 in relation to satisfaction with the content (87%), with just under three-quarters (72%) scoring this for tailored content.

Satisfaction with qualification content was influenced by the method of delivery: respondents who undertook an NPQ that was solely delivered via face-to-face sessions had higher satisfaction levels (6.3 out of 7) compared with those who took an NPQ that used a blended-learning (a mixture of face-to-face and online delivery) approach (5.7).

Specific elements were explored further through the QA Agent's survey. On a scale of 1 to 10 participants provided mean scores of between 7 and 8 for all statements²¹ highlighting that they 'met' their expectations. The factor 'course content covered elements that were relevant and appropriate' scored the highest. All providers received a mean score of 6 or above to these statements.

Figure 11: QA Agent survey respondent feedback on NPQ content



²⁰ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

²¹ On a scale of 1-10 (where 1-2=serious underperformance, 3-5=underperformance, 6-8=expected performance, 9-10=exceptional performance) – as measured through the QA Agent survey.

Source: QA Agent survey. Base=6,211

Scale of 1-10 (where 1-2=serious underperformance, 3-5=underperformance, 6-8=expected performance, 9-10=exceptional performance) – as measured through the QA Agent survey.

A key element of content delivery was the provision of examples to ‘bring things to life’ and, where these were available, interviewees praised them. Interviewees reported that they would have liked more examples to help consolidate their learning.

I think the only thing I would have liked more of was examples of the business models, and that kind of paperwork side would have been really useful. – *SPB NPQSL participant*

Contextualised content

Some providers created entire NPQs which were relevant to specific school contexts or individuals, such as those from faith schools or women only. Other providers used alternative approaches to tailor their provision to take advantage of the flexibility afforded through the 2017 Reformed NPQs:

- Creating a range of elective modules for participants to choose from. These modules were based on schools in particular geographical areas (such as rural schools or those with a high proportion of pupil premium funding) or different contexts.
- Adapting provision for each cohort of participants by reviewing their applications, development areas or school contexts (e.g. schools in a MAT).

We won't predetermine all the content until we know the cohort...
You've got to be quite flexible. – *NPQ provider*

A few interviewees valued undertaking a contextualised qualification and it was a key motivating factor in them choosing their provider. However, other participants thought they may have missed out on a more diverse experience. One participant explained that they had undertaken an NPQH that was tailored and delivered by their MAT, which had enabled them to learn how to be a headteacher within that setting. However, they were disappointed about not being able to network with leaders outside of their MAT and thought their breadth of learning was, therefore, constrained.

I don't know whether it fully covered the challenges of a headship outside of the multi-academy trust... just getting that wider experience... more of an understanding of the variance in school budgeting and the experience that managing school budgets in a local authority as opposed to within a multi-academy trust... the people delivering those face-to-face sessions are senior members

within the academy trust... it can stifle maybe truly honest discussion and feedback or reflection... I've not seen anybody from [provider] as part of the NPQH. – *SPA NPQH participant*

A few participants undertaking generic qualifications reported that while they would have liked the qualification to be more tailored to their own needs, they valued the breadth of learning from the broader qualification and the ability to mix with leaders from other settings. One participant from a primary school explained how undertaking the qualification alongside secondary school participants was a valuable experience.

I wouldn't have wanted to have lost the secondary teachers... because actually I got a lot out of working with secondary colleagues... there is such a primary-secondary divide that I think there needs to be more things like this to break down those barriers. – *SPB NPQSL participant*

Gaps in content

School finance is the key area that participants believed was not adequately covered through the NPQs.

During interviews, most participants were satisfied with the qualification content and described that it had met their leadership development needs. Throughout the previous two versions of the NPQs²², finance was an area, which participants frequently reported was not covered sufficiently. In this redesigned version of the qualification, it continued to be the 'gap' which participants did not think was adequately covered.

Finance

Participants explained that while finance was covered during their NPQ, they would have liked more examples to support learning, more opportunities of working with real-life budgets in a training environment, to better understand how to work with a deficit budget and a better understanding of VAT.

Finance is a big one that you have to deal with and you're responsible for as a headteacher. It would have been really helpful, thinking about how to get out of a deficit budget or being creative with

²² As reported in: Leonardi et al. (2017) Leadership Curriculum Evaluation: Final Report. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629942/RR639_Leadership_Curriculum_Evaluation.pdf and Diamond et al. (2013) Transition to Headship: Evaluation and Impact Study Research Report. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transition-to-headship-evaluation-and-impact-study>.

one, having somebody from the finance team come in to talk to you about things, playing out real-life scenarios. – *SPA NPQH participant*

While some participants reported covering finance through online learning modules, which had limited examples, they also highlighted that this did not allow them to ask questions to help them apply learning to their own contexts.

I'm quite sure this one was the online unit and I wouldn't say it was covered very well. Quite a few of us didn't know how to answer the questions and didn't know what a budget plan looked like. The examples given weren't really much use to us. I think if it was covered face-to-face and actually having to go through one with people to guide us and say, 'actually, you need to look at this', or 'have you thought about this', that would've been a little more effective. – *SPB NPQML participant*

Other interviewees explained that they did not have the opportunity to work with their own school finance systems to apply and consolidate their learning, which was more problematic for those studying the lower-level qualifications with no budget responsibilities. One participant reflected, however, that they themselves could have pushed for these opportunities within their own school.

NPQEL content

NPQEL interviewees recognised that they were the first cohort of participants undertaking this new qualification and were positive about its content. They did, however, flag a couple of gaps in the content, which primarily centred on larger MATs. One existing executive headteacher thought that the qualification did not capture the reality of working across multiple organisations and sites.

I've had quite good grounding in working across more than one school... the NPQEL doesn't provide the reality of working across multiple organisation and sites. – *SPB existing executive headteacher NPQEL participant*

Linked to this, participants described how they would have liked more examples of finance across a large MAT. Two participants (one an existing executive headteacher and an aspiring executive leader) also explained how, during the qualification, they had learnt how different the executive headship role was compared with that of a chief executive officer (CEO) and they would have liked to have learnt more about this. They described how the NPQEL was targeted more at those aspiring to, or new to, the executive headship role and that there was perhaps a need for a separate qualification covering the CEO role.

The CEO role is utterly different to an executive head role... I took that on board, and I can see that. So, I would expect there to be an NPQ CEO... When I signed up to that course I wasn't expecting it to gear me up to the CEO, I was expecting it to gear me up to be a better executive head, and I think it did that. – *SPB existing executive headteacher NPQEL participant*

Delivery

Approaches to delivery

As with content development, gaining participant feedback and continually revising delivery methods ensured a positive experience for participants. Providers highlighted two key messages they had to convey to participants to ensure they got the best out of their NPQ experience: The importance of participants needing to drive their own learning, and understanding that it was not all about them being 'taught'.

Delivery methods varied between providers. Most providers (34) used a blended approach, using a combination of face-to-face delivery alongside online learning; only five used face-to-face only, while two used an online-only approach.

As with content, providers all agreed that no single delivery approach was the best, with the focus being on what worked for each qualification level, cohort and/or participant. As participants across the NPQs were at different stages in their careers, their preferences also differed which providers needed to respond to. For example, while role-playing scenarios worked well for some levels of the qualifications, NPQEL participants were less receptive to this, due to their prior experience. Providers explained that they had adapted their delivery approaches across the qualification levels to account for this.

We have found that we need to structure the learning differently at NPQEL level so that they engage, so that they see it as being worth their time. – *NPQ provider*

During their first year of delivery, providers learnt which delivery approaches worked and which did not, with changes then made to implement their learning. Providers highlighted how it was easier to modify delivery than content once it had been developed.

Providers described how online learning, webinars, libraries, peer-learning, and tutor support were successful in allowing participants to access content and support flexibly. But to enable these to be used successfully, providers built in time to show participants how to use them and develop the confidence to contribute to any interactive sessions.

Where face-to-face activities were a key element of qualification delivery, including taught sessions and interactive workshops, consulting with participants regarding the timing of these improved attendance. While some participants preferred attending whole day sessions, others preferred twilights or weekend residentials. Providers flagged that preferences often differed between cohorts of participants, regardless of qualification level.

Communicating with participants

Providers explained that clear communication with participants about what was expected from them was an important element of creating a positive learning experience. Those providers who allocated participants a single, consistent key point of contact – such as a coach, mentor, or online tutor – ensured participants always knew how to contact them, which enhanced their experience.

A lot... have said 'the online tutor is really helpful, because if I'm worried about something and I email them on a Sunday when I'm researching it, I'll get a response back'. – *NPQ provider*

Providers also highlighted two key messages that they had to convey to participants to ensure they got the best out of their NPQ experience:

- *"The qualification is what you make it"* – providers explained the importance of participants needing to drive their own learning and them understanding that it was not all about them being *"taught"*.

We say that 'this is coming from you and it's about sharing your experiences and your personal learning journey as well, rather than just being talked at'. – *NPQ provider*

- *"The NPQs have been reformed"* – reminding participants who seek advice from colleagues that it is possible their colleagues undertook a previous version of the NPQs, which followed different assessment criteria.

Experience of delivery

Participants in the first cohort of NPQ delivery had variable experiences. They were aware that aspects of delivery had not yet been designed or refined which initially affected their satisfaction levels; however, as they progressed through their NPQ, this was mentioned less and by the time participants had completed their qualification, most were satisfied with the delivery.

Towards the beginning of the reformed NPQ roll-out, many interviewees reported feeling like “*guinea pigs*” as elements of provider delivery had not quite been finalised or aspects were being tested. Interviewees described that, at times, it felt like providers were “*finding their feet*” with the new arrangements.

We are the first cohort through, so I would imagine that next year’s cohort, there will be fewer things that say ‘TBC’, because they will have already happened and they’ll have worked out what’s worked. So, I do feel a little bit like we’re the guinea-pigs. – *SPA NPQSL participant*

While some participants were content with this, for others it fell short of their expectations and they found it quite challenging.

Because it’s all changed this year, information has not been forthcoming, shall I say? Things arrived in dribs and drabs... for example, the online library was only completed at the end of April, beginning of May... I began beginning of [the previous] November. – *SPA NPQH participant*

As delivery of the NPQs progressed and providers improved their delivery methods, interviewees mentioned this less. By the time participants had completed their qualification, their satisfaction with delivery was relatively high with a mean score of 5.7 out of 7²³; with the majority (83%) providing an above average score of 5, 6 or 7.

As with qualification content, respondents who undertook an NPQ that was solely delivered via face-to-face sessions were more satisfied (6.2 out of 7) compared with those who had undertaken an NPQ via a blended-learning delivery model (5.5). Interviewees also commonly expressed their high satisfaction with face-to-face delivery sessions. They valued being able to learn among other leaders and the ‘opportunity to discuss with other participants’ and ‘compare notes’ to help embed their learning.

The start of any new qualification can be challenging as new content is designed and delivered; however, this does affect participants’ satisfaction and experience. Future leadership programmes should consider how to reduce this so that it is less noticeable for participants.

²³ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

Facilitators and trainers

Interviewees valued the skilled trainers and facilitators running face-to-face sessions and also the input from expert speakers.

Participants completing the QA Agent's survey provided a mean score of 8.3 out of 10²⁴ when reflecting on the expertise of NPQ trainers and 8.1 out of 10 when reflecting on the quality of delivery from trainers, indicating that these elements of delivery met their expectations. Depth interviewees also valued the trainers and facilitators running face-to-face sessions. They explained that the collaborative nature of the sessions was effective and that facilitators were “*excellent*” at guiding all participants through the sessions, ensuring that participants’ needs were met. One interviewee was particularly impressed that their facilitator tailored the qualification content to their group as the sessions progressed, as they became more familiar with the make-up of the cohort.

The resources had been produced centrally and they weren't tailored to the group, but on each occasion the facilitators obviously prepared for their session and then, as any good teacher does, tailored the lesson plan appropriately. And I think that got better as we moved through. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

While most interviewees were impressed by the quality of the facilitation, a couple were less satisfied. These interviewees explained that they had experienced very little guidance from their providers and poor facilitation during face-to-face sessions, which had led to very little interaction between participants and facilitators.

There were days on the NPQEL face-to-face where I had very little conversation with the other participants, it was very much a transmission model... I think that [improvement] could have been done by some facilitated conversations actually. There was a lot of expertise in the room, and I just wondered whether that could have been utilised more. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

Expert speakers

While the use of current leaders or experts on a particular topic was seen as a key way to deliver content, providers had mixed success in doing so. Where this worked well, participants explained how this helped to bring their learning to life as speakers were able to apply their expert knowledge to a range of scenarios – particularly when speakers

²⁴ On a scale of 1-10 (where 1-2=serious underperformance, 3-5=underperformance, 6-8=expected performance, 9-10=exceptional performance) – as measured through the QA Agent survey.

were current school leaders. NPQEL interviewees highlighted that this was particularly valuable for them as the executive leader role is so broad.

Because the role is so broad and varied when you're looking at executive leadership – there's HR [human resources], there's governance, there's finance. It's just a very vast role... they sought out people who are experts in the individual elements and then they facilitated each session... they were able to put some practical examples and they really had a good knowledge base to help facilitate the discussions. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

One participant further expressed that they valued having positive role models leading the sessions. Providers highlighted how using current school leaders to talk about their experiences to contextualise learning was important, although this could narrow the focus of sessions. Providers reported that it often worked well to use a facilitator alongside an expert speaker to help prevent this. Using skilled facilitators to deliver sessions ensured core content was covered. Alongside this, being clear with expert speakers on the core topics to cover during the session helped maintain the focus.

While most interviewees highlighted the value of expert speakers, a couple of participants reported a negative experience. They described how their provider had partnered with an external company to deliver the specialist aspects of the qualification. Participants explained that the first session had been pitched at too low a level. Following participant feedback to the provider, content was revised and improved for the second session, which participants valued.

Self-guided learning

Participants provided a score of 7.6 out of 10²⁵ when reflecting on the relevance of resources made available to them (online and references to research and publications) to support them through their NPQ, indicating that overall this element of delivery met their expectations (mean scores across providers ranged from 6.3 to 9.8).

Providers described how providing participants with reading lists in advance was important and interviewees agreed, as it assisted their self-guided learning. While interviewees understood the importance of self-guided learning, they also highlighted that the volume of resources to get through could be overwhelming and that careful thought needed to be given to the timing, to ensure they had time to understand the information they were reading.

²⁵ On a scale of 1-10 (where 1-2=serious underperformance, 3-5=underperformance, 6-8=expected performance, 9-10=exceptional performance) – as measured through the QA Agent survey.

Just more time to absorb the information... if they're giving that amount of information, they have to understand that people are working, and there's only so much time you can spend on reading the materials. It's not just a matter of reading the materials. It's also about absorbing the relevant content. – *SPA NPQEL participant*

Providers also reflected on this and described how they needed to clearly state what was compulsory reading and what was supplementary to help guide participants who might be short of time. Providing reading ahead of face-to-face sessions freed up time for discussion on the day, when sufficient notice was given. Interviewees explained how this helped to prepare them for face-to-face delivery, although others liked to read material following the sessions to consolidate their learning. One interviewee explained how they appreciated that the provider had included resources using various mediums to support self-guided learning – an example given was videos – and explained how this supported different learning styles. Another interviewee expressed how they felt about the reading being disseminated to them through an app.

The reading was good. I liked the way it came through the NPQ app, I thought that was cool. I thought that was a good thing to do. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

Varying levels of experience within the cohort

There were differing levels of experience within NPQ cohorts, which benefited those aspiring for the role they were studying for as they could learn from others.

At times, interviewees reported that the varied make up of their cohort meant that their peers had differing levels of experience. Naturally, this presented a challenge for providers to pitch the sessions at the right level when delivering the content, but some participants – often those who were aspiring for the role they were studying for – found this useful, as they benefited from the experience of those who were already in the role they were studying for.

There are some people in the cohort who are already executive leaders and there are others, like me, who are not. So, there's a whole breadth of experience in the group, so I suppose that's a challenge on making sure it's relevant to everybody... I think that's a strength, because then both parties have got something to bring to that conversation. It didn't feel like a negative that we had vastly different experiences. – *SPA aspiring NPQEL participant*

While this arrangement was beneficial for some learners, it meant that others – often those who were already in the role they were studying for – were covering topics they

were experienced in, and a couple of participants expressed their frustration over this. One NPQML participant who was already in a middle leadership position completed their qualification (reluctantly as they felt it was not beneficial) before starting the next NPQ level which was more appropriate for them; while one NPQEL participant withdrew from the qualification altogether. This reinforces the need for assessment upon application to help ensure that participants are undertaking the level of qualification that will be most appropriate and beneficial to their development.

It is essential that participants have the right information to enable them to decide on the qualification that is right for them. When developing future leadership programmes consideration should be given to this to ensure it is beneficial to their development.

Coaching

Participants' experiences of coaching were variable, with success being linked to having a coach who had knowledge of the education sector and NPQ content.

Interviewees often valued the coach or mentor offered by their provider. They explained how the coach challenged their values and made them reflect on their own practice. One interviewee thought that this was particularly useful at the executive leadership level.

That person challenged me on my values and where my thinking was at, a bit of introspection... when you're getting into this upper echelon of strategic leadership, your personal attributes and your personal drives are the foundation that makes you make those decisions... So, that was quite influential in my practice. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

However, a minority of NPQEL interviewees reported that they had experienced poor coaching. They described how there was a “*real disconnect*” between the coaching and the NPQ provision and this was the only part of the qualification that they did not value.

It was just a company that did executive coaching... it just didn't seem to connect with what we were doing in any real way... It was the only thing that I thought was really a bit poor and a bit pointless... it just didn't seem that she understood the language of education. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

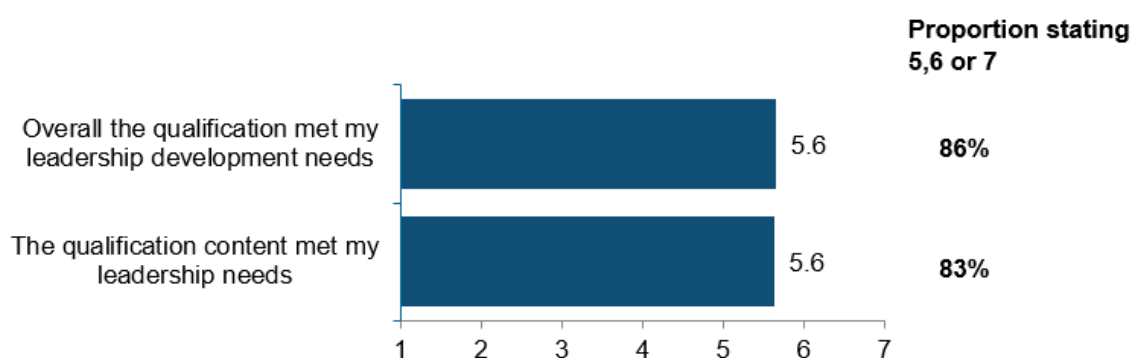
Where coaching is utilised in future leadership programmes consideration should be given to the coaches appointed and what sector knowledge they hold.

Meeting participants' leadership development needs

Participants were not only satisfied with NPQ content and delivery, but they also described how it had met their leadership development needs. Those who were aspiring for the role they were studying for were more satisfied than those already in the role.

Alongside being satisfied with the content and delivery, the majority of participants were also satisfied²⁶ that the overall qualification (86%) and qualification content (83%) met their leadership development needs, providing a mean score of 5.6 out of 7 for both statements (Figure 12). No differences were observed by NPQ level, highlighting that participants' needs were met equally across all qualifications, including the newly-designed NPQEL.

Figure 12: NPQs meeting participants' leadership development needs



Respondents who were aspiring for the role they were studying provided a slightly higher agreement score that the qualification content had met their leadership needs (5.7 out of 7) than those who were already in the role they were studying for (5.5). These findings reflect those described in the previous section and were supported by one interviewee, already in the role of study, who reflected that the content was not always relevant to them as it covered elements of the role they were already proficient in:

I did find for some of it I was sitting there going, 'Actually, this is stuff I already do, why am I having to learn about something I already do currently as part of my job and that I'm actually quite competent at doing?'... The other thing would be potentially doing the senior leader course, which I'm obviously now doing, and I did ask if I could swap,

²⁶ Providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

but they said I couldn't. – *SPB existing middle leader NPQML participant*

The vast majority (97%) of participants' line managers and senior colleagues also agreed²⁷ that the NPQs had met participants' leadership development needs, providing a mean score of 6.2 out of 7.

Participants indicated that the NPQ content and facilitation had met their expectations in terms of enhancing their understanding of the importance of leadership behaviours, providing a mean score of 8.1 out of 10²⁸ (all providers received a mean score of 7 or above for this statement by their participants).

Development of leadership skills

The various aspects of the qualifications all contributed to the development of participants' leadership skills. Gaining experience in other schools supported participants to develop a range of skills and confidence. Figure 13 shows that NPQH participants agreed that their placement in another school had enabled them to develop their leadership skills, providing a score of 5.8 out of 7²⁹; likewise, NPQEL participants agreed that their final assessment project in another school had enabled them to develop their leadership skills, providing a mean score of 5.8. For both qualifications, activities in another school were scored the highest when compared to other elements of the NPQ – reflecting their importance.

NPQEL and NPQH participants highlighted the value of going into other schools to undertake their projects (which was a requirement of their qualification). They described how useful it was to get involved in areas that you would not necessarily gain experience of in your own school, in addition to experiencing the workings of another school. This also helped to develop their confidence as leaders.

It forced me just out of my comfort zone slightly. To be slightly more hands on in an area of development of a school that I would not have had the opportunity to do otherwise... Every school has its different context, so that again gave me the confidence that, actually, leadership is leadership isn't it, and management is management. It doesn't matter what area of a school or an organisation you're leading on, the principles are the same. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

²⁷ Providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly disagree).

²⁸ On a scale of 1-10 (where 1-2=serious underperformance, 3-5=underperformance, 6-8=expected performance, 9-10=exceptional performance) – as measured through the QA Agent survey.

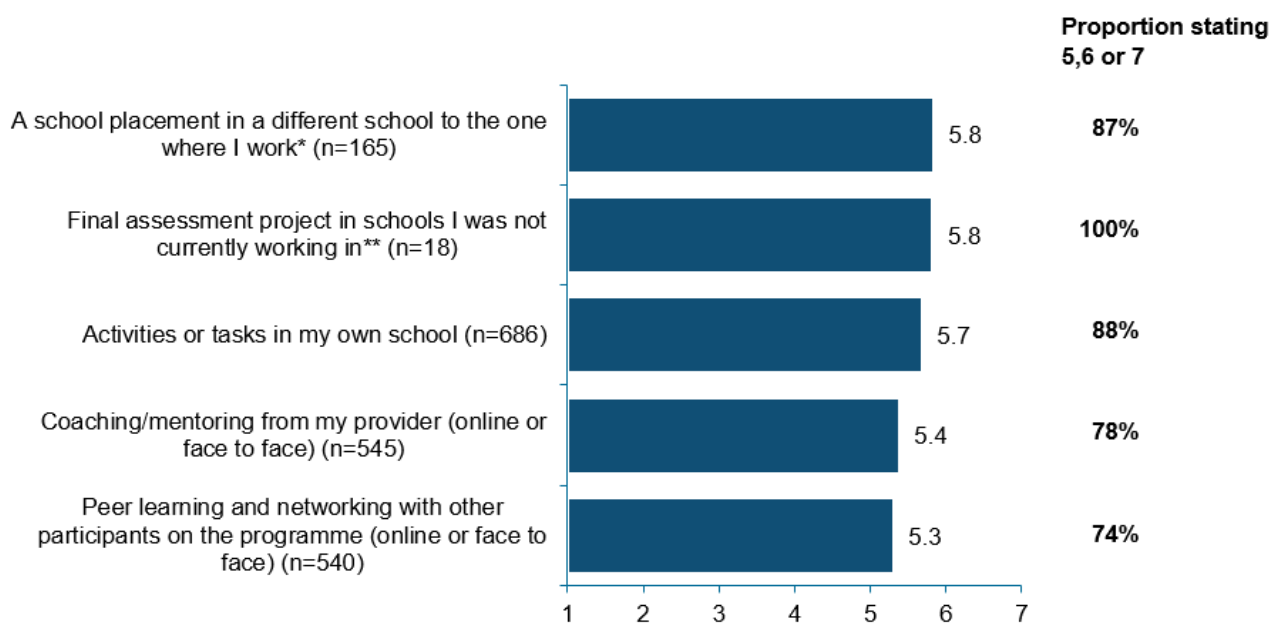
²⁹ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly disagree).

Other interviewees who were aspiring to their role of study, explained that they would have liked more opportunities to undertake placements in other schools where they could shadow individuals, to get a better sense of the role they were studying for and broaden their learning.

When developing future leadership programmes consideration should be given to whether this could be incorporated into the qualification or if participants can be encouraged to secure these opportunities if not part of the qualification.

Respondents across all qualifications agreed that activities in their own school had enabled them to develop (5.7), although they agreed to a lesser extent that coaching or mentoring from the provider (5.4) and peer learning and networking (5.3) had. Approximately three-quarters of respondents provided a score of 5, 6 or 7 to these aspects of the qualification, highlighting that they agreed it had enabled them to develop their leadership skills.

Figure 13: Aspects of delivery impacting on leadership development



30&31

Scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly disagree).

Further analysis shows differences by participant characteristics:

- **Aspiring for role vs in role:** Respondents aspiring to the role they were studying for were more likely to agree that coaching and mentoring from their provider had enabled them to develop their leadership skills compared with those who were

³⁰ *Only asked to those undertaking NPQH.

³¹ **Only asked to those undertaking NPQEL.

already in the role they were studying for (5.6 compared with 5.2), and also that peer learning and networking with other participants had more of an impact on their development (5.4 compared with 5.2).

- Qualification level:** Respondents undertaking NPQEL (5.7) and NPQH (5.6) more strongly agreed that peer learning and networking with other participants had enabled them to develop their leadership skills compared with those undertaking NPQSL (5.2) and NPQML (5.2). One existing executive headteacher explained that they valued the opportunities the NPQ provided them to meet with other executive leaders to *“share practice... discuss ideas... and consider other people’s experiences”*. This is often more difficult in their role as they do not have peers working alongside them within the same school (unlike senior and middle leaders).

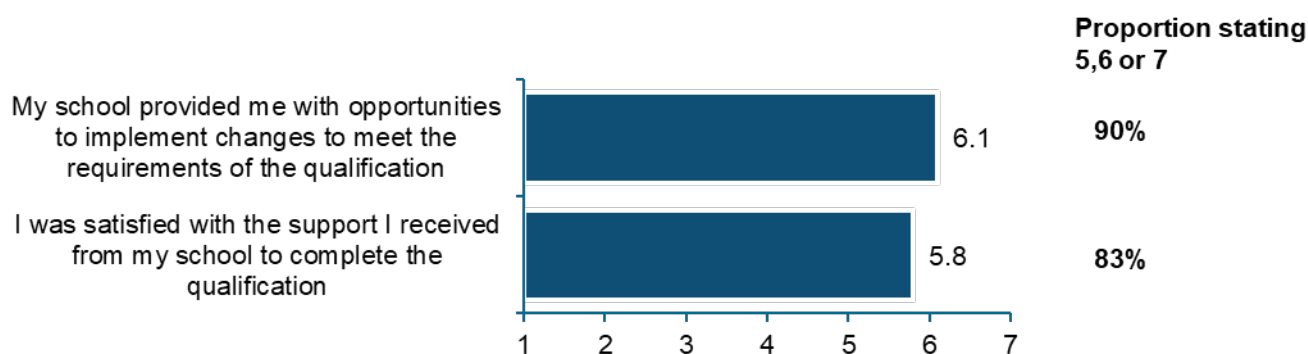
Support to complete the NPQs

Support from a participant’s school

Most participants felt supported by their school while undertaking their NPQ. Participants in primary schools and those undertaking higher levels of the qualification felt more supported by their school alongside those who reported that their school created a positive ethos towards CPD.

Overall, respondents agreed that their school provided them with opportunities to implement changes to meet the qualification requirements, with an average score of 6.1 out of 7³² (Figure 14). To a lesser extent, they also agreed that they were satisfied with the general support they received from their school (5.8).

Figure 14: Respondents’ reflections on support received to complete their NPQ



³² On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

Several factors influenced respondents' agreement with these statements as shown in Table 4. Those who agreed that their school created a positive CPD ethos³³ provided higher scores, in addition to those who undertook NPQEL and NPQH and those from primary schools.

Table 4: Respondents' reflections on support received to complete their NPQ broken down by whether their school has a positive CPD ethos, qualification, and phase

CPD Ethos	School providing opportunities to implement changes to meet the requirements of the qualifications	Satisfaction with support from school to complete the qualification
Those who agreed that their school had a positive CPD ethos	6.3	6.1
Those who neither agreed nor disagreed	5.7	5.1
Those who disagreed that their school had a positive CPD ethos	4.5	3.8

Qualification studied	School providing opportunities to implement changes to meet the requirements of the qualifications	Satisfaction with support from school to complete the qualification
NPQEL	6.6	6.4
NPQH	6.4	6.1
NPQSL	6.0	5.6
NPQML	5.9	5.6

Phase	School providing opportunities to implement changes to meet the requirements of the qualifications	Satisfaction with support from school to complete the qualification
Primary	6.2	5.9
Secondary	5.9	5.6

Source: SPB survey. Bases variable Scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

³³ Within the survey (and reported in the next chapter), respondents rated the extent to which they agreed that their school created an ethos within which all staff were motivated and supported to develop their own skills and subject knowledge. These respondents were split into three groups: 1) those who agreed; 2) those who neither agreed nor disagreed; and 3) those who disagreed.

Most interviewees described how their sponsor (a colleague who supported their application and guided them through the qualification) or line manager had supported them when they had questions, gave them opportunities to implement learning, provided them with release time, and allowed them to work flexibly so that they could focus on project tasks away from school.

I'm very fortunate, I mean my headteacher gave me days to work from home, which I did... to work on my assignments, but I do have to say, they do take a lot of your time. It's really difficult to try and look at it during the working day. – *SPB NPQH participant*

Previous iterations of the NPQs required participants' sponsors (e.g. their line manager) to contribute to their final assessment; however, this was not required for the 2017 Reformed NPQs. As a result, providers reported that this sometimes led to sponsors incorrectly thinking they no longer needed to provide as much support to participants. To mitigate against this, providers devised strategies to ensure that sponsors were still invested in supporting their participants. These included creating guidance documents about a sponsor's role and inviting them to attend initial face-to-face sessions alongside participants so that they could be briefed on their role.

We're... thinking about how we can improve the quality of sponsor support, because I think it's the make or break of an outstanding experience, so we're really going to invest in how we can engage, train, even QA the sponsorship that our participants get. – *NPQ provider*

Linked to this, one participant confirmed that their sponsor had not understood their role when they had agreed they could undertake the qualification. They also felt the need for more communication about the sponsor's role during the delivery of the qualification.

Having a supportive school is essential to enable participants to complete their qualification. When developing future leadership programmes consideration should be given to how to encourage 'all' schools to do this.

Support from the provider

Most participants felt supported by their provider while undertaking their NPQ. Those undertaking an NPQ that was solely delivered via face-to-face sessions were more satisfied with the support from their provider.

Overall, respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the support they received from their provider, with an average score of 5.4 out of 7³⁴. Those respondents who undertook an NPQ that was solely delivered via face-to-face sessions provided higher satisfaction scores (mean of 6.3 out of 7) compared with those who had undertaken an NPQ via a blended-learning delivery model (5.4).

Findings from the QA Agent's survey further support the evaluation's findings regarding participants' overall satisfaction with provider support. Participants provided mean scores of 7.9 out of 10³⁵ when they reflected on the opportunities they had to ask questions and seek support (scores across providers ranged from 7.1 to 9.6) and 7.5 out of 10 when they reflected on the opportunities they were provided with for personal reflection and planning, including planning for projects and final assessment (scores across providers ranged from 5.4 to 9.7³⁶).

Overall, interviewees were happy with the support they received from their providers. They felt that the qualifications had been run well and they valued having a contact who could answer questions via email or on the phone.

When I reached the halfway point and thought, 'Oh, I don't know this,' I just emailed one of the people on the course, one of the leaders of the course. She got back to me straight away and she put me in touch with this other headteacher who helped. – *SPA NPQH participant*

However, a few interviewees did express frustration that it was sometimes difficult to contact their provider and that communication could have been improved – for example, sometimes information was sent to them in intermittently in the first few months of delivery. This impacted on their perception of how well they thought they were being supported.

Preparation for assessment

While for most aspects participants' satisfaction with delivery improved, a number of interviewees still thought the assessment process needed to be improved, especially when not introduced during face-to-face sessions.

Under the previous NPQ model, final assessment was managed by the National College for Teaching and Leadership through a single provider. For the 2017 Reformed NPQs, final assessment was devolved to providers to assess their participants' projects. The QA

³⁴ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

³⁵ On a scale of 1-10 (where 1-2=serious underperformance, 3-5=underperformance, 6-8=expected performance, 9-10=exceptional performance) – as measured through the QA Agent survey.

³⁶ Only two providers achieved a score below 7 and only 1 provider achieved a score of above 9.

Agent moderated these assessments to ensure that they were being conducted consistently.

During the initial roll-out of the 2017 Reformed NPQs, providers were still developing their assessment process. They explained how the autonomy given to them to devise their own methods of assessment needed to be carefully balanced with the requirement to deliver each assessment to the same standard, which would be moderated by the QA Agent. Providers were nervous about getting this wrong, because of the ramifications this had on their participants' qualification outcomes, so it took some time for them to build their confidence in this area. Over half of all providers used a sub-contractor to manage the final assessment for them.

As we develop a further understanding of final assessment, I've been fairly honest with our participants that I'm on the same learning journey as they are. As we've developed our understanding of it, I intend to develop how well built in it is to the program. We've written a final assessment workshop that we've been delivering, but you can see on their faces that they wish I'd told them that six months ago. –
NPQ provider

By the end of the qualification, most survey respondents were satisfied with how their provider had prepared them for the assessment process, providing a mean score of 5.2 out of 7³⁷. Just under three-quarters (72%) of respondents provided a score of 5, 6 or 7, indicating satisfaction, and one-sixth (16%) provided a score of 1, 2 or 3, indicating dissatisfaction.

Participants' satisfaction with how well they had been prepared for assessment was influenced by the method of qualification delivery. Respondents who undertook an NPQ that was solely delivered via face-to-face sessions were more satisfied compared with those who had undertaken an NPQ via a blended-learning delivery model (giving a satisfaction rating of 6.1 compared with 5.1).

Interviewees reflected feeling like "*guinea pigs*" during the initial roll-out of the NPQs. While this feeling subsided through most areas of delivery, interviewees still thought the assessment process needed to be improved. Interviewees expressed frustration with the number of changes throughout their qualification journey.

We started off with a free write assignment, with a particular deadline, and then six months in, shortly before the first assignment was due, I think they changed assessor... Then there were hiccups about expectation, about how it would be delivered and then the

³⁷ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=very dissatisfied and 7=very satisfied).

format of the assessment changed. Then once we'd finally done both assignments and got them all in, there was a two-month delay before there was any feedback. It was a bit of a mess. – *SPB NPQH participant*

To improve the process, participants explained that they would have liked more examples of what a 'good' assessment looked like from their provider and guidance about how to complete assessment documents. NPQ providers also recognised that this was something they needed to do and planned to improve the examples that were available.

We were hampered by the fact that nobody knew what the tasks would look like, because we were sort of the first cohort... So, there were no examples of what the tasks looked like, how the write up of the task looked and I think that is better now, because obviously people have gone through that. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

Participants interviewed also thought introducing assessment earlier in the qualification and during face-to-face sessions – when they could ask questions – would help. They thought that it would enable them to consider it throughout their NPQ journey. This also may explain why those who experienced face-to-face delivery provided higher levels of satisfaction with how their provider prepared them for assessment (as outlined above), as they were given the opportunity to ask questions face-to-face. NPQ providers echoed this and reported that assessment should be considered when designing the delivery structure and included during initial face-to-face sessions.

A couple of NPQEL participants who were not currently working in MATs also explained that it was difficult to evidence delivering changes across multiple schools, because they did not have any existing relationships with other schools.

As a single academy trust, it was a bit harder for me to get properly into some of the things and meet some of the criteria because I've had to go out and, sort of, foster relationships with other schools to meet the criteria. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

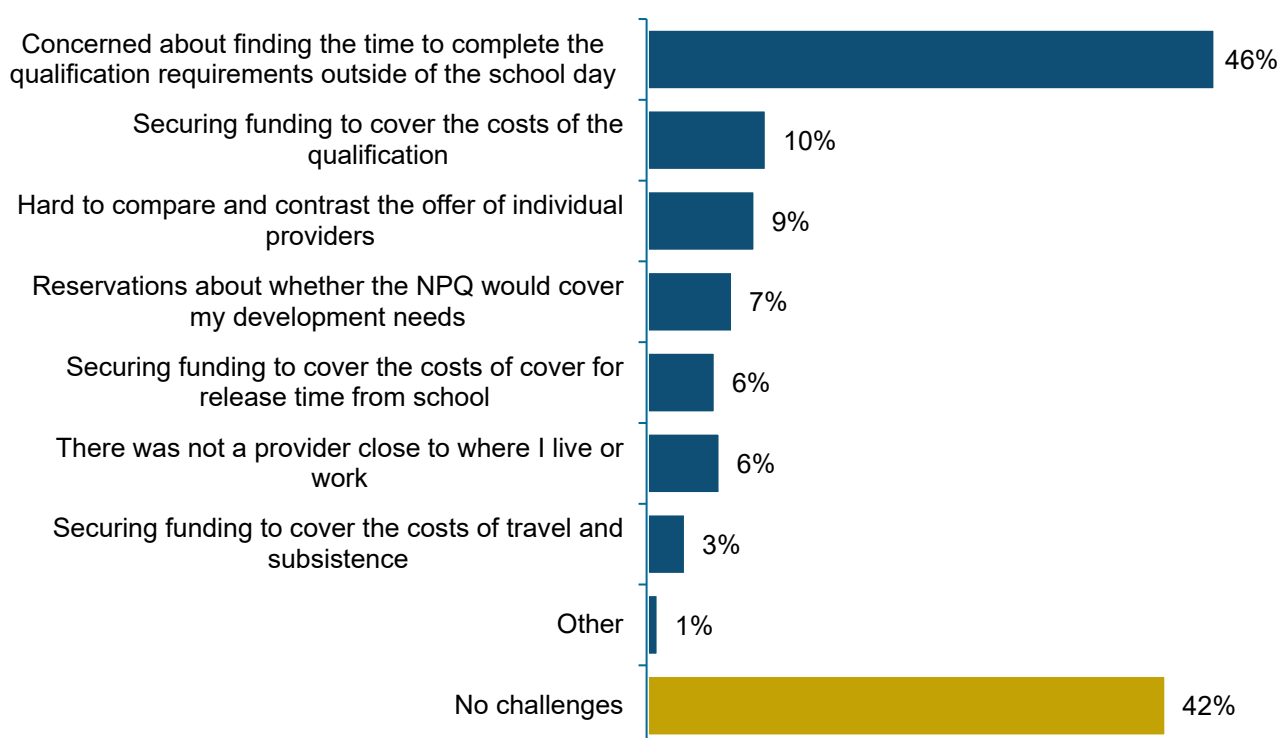
When developing future leadership programmes consideration should be given to assessment from the start of delivery. It is an area which participants require detailed information on and will want clarity including examples, as this is how they are being assessed.

Challenges

Most participants experienced one or more challenges when completing their NPQ – often related to their individual circumstances. Finding time to complete the qualification was frequently reported alongside understanding how to complete assessment tasks.

Participants were apprehensive about finding the time to complete the qualification requirements outside of the school day (46%) when applying for the qualification. One-tenth (10%) reported that securing funding to cover the costs of the qualification was a challenge – which was also highlighted earlier in the chapter by providers – and a further 3% said it was a challenge to secure funding to cover the costs of travel and subsistence. Encouragingly, just over two-fifths (42%) experienced no challenges when applying for their NPQ and only 7% were unsure if the NPQ would meet their development needs. A full breakdown of responses to this question can be seen in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Anticipated challenges reported at the application stage



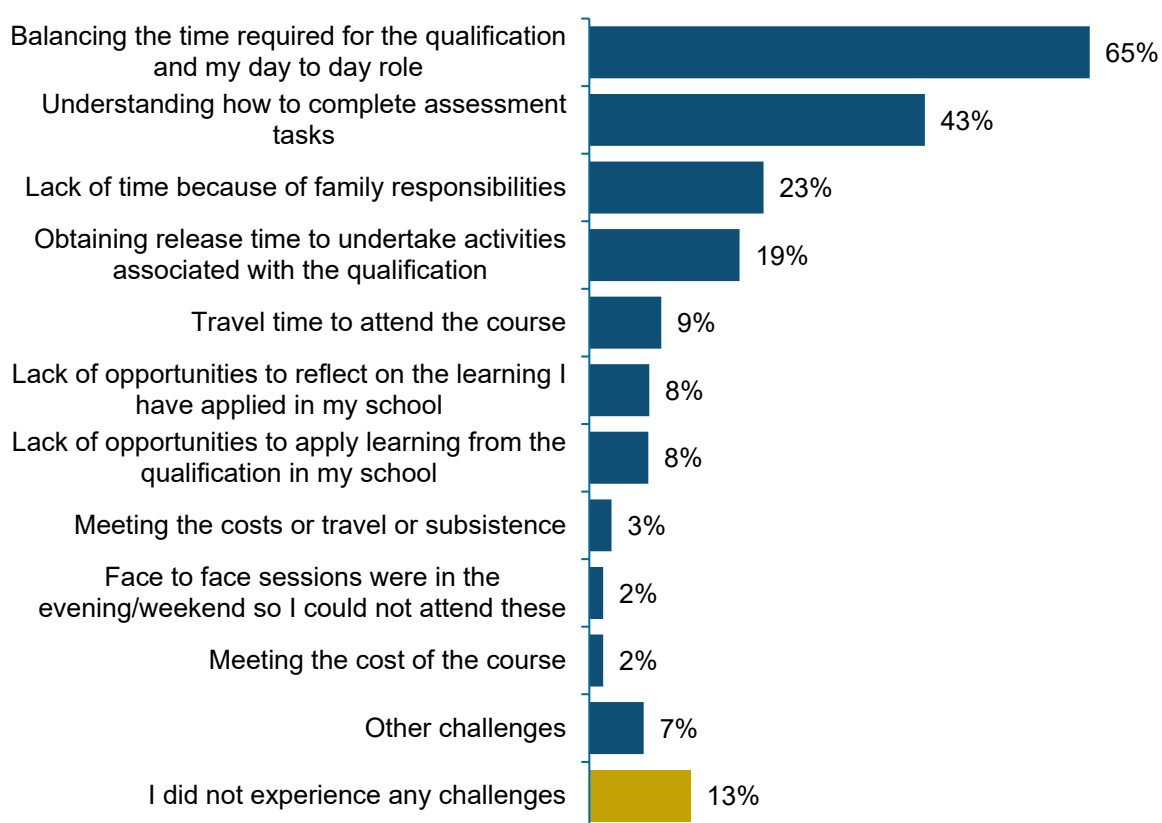
Source: SPA survey. Base=2,415

Finding time to complete the qualification was reported more frequently than anticipated with two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents finding balancing the time required to complete the qualification alongside their day-to-day role a challenge. Nearly one-quarter (23%) reported a lack of time because of family responsibilities, and one-fifth (19%) stated obtaining release time from their school was difficult (Figure 16). Interviewees

explained that getting through reading materials was sometimes a struggle, alongside finding the time to complete assessment tasks. Obtaining release time to attend face-to-face sessions was also mentioned and was compounded by participants reporting that senior colleagues were concerned with them being out of school.

Challenges relating to the qualification itself were less prevalent with the only common challenge being understanding how to complete assessment tasks as reported by 43% of participants. Just over one-tenth of respondents (13%) experienced no challenges.

Figure 16: Challenges experienced whilst undertaking the NPQs



Source: SPB survey. Base=837

Three-fifths (59%) of NPQ participants' line managers and senior colleagues reported that their colleague's participation in the NPQ presented no challenges to them or their school. Just under one-fifth (18%) of line managers and senior colleagues reported that their own workload had increased, and one-sixth (15%) reported that other staff in the school had to cover lessons or activities, which increased their workload.

Recommending the qualification

Most participants would recommend the qualifications to others, especially where a leader was aspiring to the role they were studying.

The vast majority of interviewees would recommend the NPQs to their colleagues. They based this on their positive experience and the value they took from the qualification. Interviewees also explained that they would recommend it on the basis of the positive impact it had had on their school.

I would definitely recommend it. It's been really, really helpful to me and not just for me personally, but it's had a really good impact on my leadership in this school setting. – *SPB NPQH participant*

One NPQEL participant described how they thought that the qualification should be made mandatory to ensure that executive leaders have a shared understanding of what the role entails.

I think it's absolutely essential... it's a difficult one, because the NPQH used to be statutory, and then that was removed. But because it had a period of being a statutory requirement, the vast majority of people do it and I think that's a good thing. For me, you could even argue that it should be statutory for an executive head or a CEO post, whether that's a permanent thing or whether it's just to ensure that the people that are going to be recruited to these posts in the next five years have that level of understanding. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

A couple of participants who were already in the role they were studying for (e.g. an executive headteacher undertaking NPQEL) would only recommend the qualifications to colleagues who were aspiring to a role (e.g. a headteacher undertaking the NPQEL) and not those who were already in the role. This largely related to them feeling the qualification was tailored to those not already in post and, therefore, did not benefit from them as much as they had expected.

Those who are coming up to executive leadership, I would definitely recommend it to. Those who are in executive leadership, I wouldn't recommend it to... it is the CEO element [that is missing]. – *SPB existing executive headteacher NPQEL participant*

I'd recommend it to someone who is going into middle leadership or new to middle leadership, but maybe not necessarily to someone who is already in middle leadership. – *SPB existing middle leader NPQML participant*

The colleague survey explored how likely participants' colleagues were to recommend the NPQs prior to their colleagues' engagement in the qualification and afterwards. While colleagues and line managers were fairly positive about the qualification prior to participants' involvement with a mean score of 4.9 out of 7³⁸ (based on them providing a retrospective score to this measure), this increased to 6.0 once the participant had completed the qualification, indicating that it had positively influenced their perception.

Pathways to leadership

In addition to recommending the qualification to colleagues, the majority of interviewees agreed that the suite of NPQs provided a clear pathway to school leadership. They explained that the qualifications were well respected within schools; that they demonstrated a participant's commitment to school leadership; that there was coherence between the qualifications; that they offered a staged approach to leadership development; and that they gave participants a taste of what those leadership roles entailed to help them make informed decisions about their career progression.

I think the thing it does is it makes you think about the job above you... It gives you a taster of what that's like, and makes you see what that's like, so it's quite good and it opens your eyes and makes you think, 'yes I do want to do that', or 'no I don't'. – *SPB aspiring NPQH participant*

While agreeing that the qualifications do offer a pathway to school leadership, a couple of interviewees questioned the differentiation between qualification levels due to similar content being delivered. However, one interviewee was able to clarify that the differentiation came down to the depth in which particular concepts are explored under each level of the qualification.

I can see the connections and the coherence between them... it's difficult, sometimes, to differentiate having facilitated ML and SL... there's not necessarily a huge amount of difference, it's how far you push that thinking... I think it's just a question of the people on the course and their experiences that will determine how far you go in your exploration of a particular concept or principle. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

³⁸ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=not at all likely and 7=extremely likely).

Chapter 4: Self-reported short-term impact

Introduction

This chapter examines the short-term outcomes highlighted by participants on: the development of their leadership skills, their readiness and confidence to undertake the role they were studying for and their career aspirations and progression. It also summarises the wider impacts they report it has had on other staff in their school and pupils.

Key findings: Self-reported short-term impact

- Across all NPQs, participants reported improvements across all of the competencies outlined in the NPQ frameworks. School finance was the competency that consistently received one of the lowest scores on completion of the NPQs, however, most participants reported developing this to some extent.
- The development of participants' leadership skills influenced both their readiness and confidence for the role they were studying for. The NPQs re-affirmed participants' existing skills, enabled them to learn new skills and then put these into practice to consolidate their learning.
- One-third of survey respondents had already secured a new role by the time they had completed their qualification. Most considered this to be a promotion and thought the NPQ had supported them to achieve this, especially aspiring leaders.
- The NPQs also supported participants to secure additional responsibilities within their schools, where participants had not secured a new role.
- The NPQs have increased leaders' aspirations to move into the level of leadership they were studying for, for example, a senior leader studying NPQH aspired for the headship role more after completing the qualification than they did at the start.
- For those already in the role they were studying for at the start of the qualification and those who had already secured the position they studied for upon completing their qualification, the NPQs increased participants' aspirations to progress further and aspire to the next level of leadership. This highlights how the NPQs can not only inspire leaders to move into the roles they intended when starting the qualification, but can also inspire them to consider future leadership positions.
- Undertaking an NPQ has supported participants to make changes in their school. Alongside developing their own leadership skills, participants' colleagues have also developed their own leadership skills. In addition, the projects participants undertook through their NPQ helped to create a variety of sustainable impacts on their schools as reported by the participant.

Impact on leadership competencies

While on the qualifications, participants reported developing across all of the competencies outlined in the NPQ frameworks. On completion of the NPQs, school finance remained the competency that participants consistently perceived to be their weakest skill; however, most reported developing this to some extent.

On average, across all NPQ qualifications, participants reported higher self-assessment scores for their leadership skills related to the NPQ competencies³⁹ upon completing their qualification, compared with when they started, indicating that they perceived they had significantly improved while undertaking their NPQ. This was measured through the SPB survey, where participants were asked to what extent they agreed⁴⁰ that they were fully competent against the leadership competencies required for the role they were studying – as specified within the NPQ frameworks – both before undertaking the qualification and upon completing it.

On completion of all the qualifications, most competencies received a score of 5.0 (out of 7) or above, highlighting that participants agreed, at least to some extent, that they now met this competency. Across most competencies where improvements between scores were lower, this was primarily due to participants rating themselves higher at the start of the qualification, leaving less scope for them to progress.

NPQML development of competencies

Figure 17 shows that NPQML participants experienced the biggest improvement in the following areas:

- **Tailoring their leadership skills to meet the needs of their team**, increasing from 3.7 out of 7 to 5.9 upon completion of the qualification (an increase of 2.3) and, overall, 90% of participants reported an improvement in this competency.
- **Implementing sustainable changes to improve school performance**, increasing from 3.8 to 5.8 (an increase of 2.0) and, overall, 92% of participants reported an increase in this competency.
- **Supporting their team to identify their own CPD needs**, increasing from 3.7 to 5.6 (an increase of 1.9), with 88% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency overall.

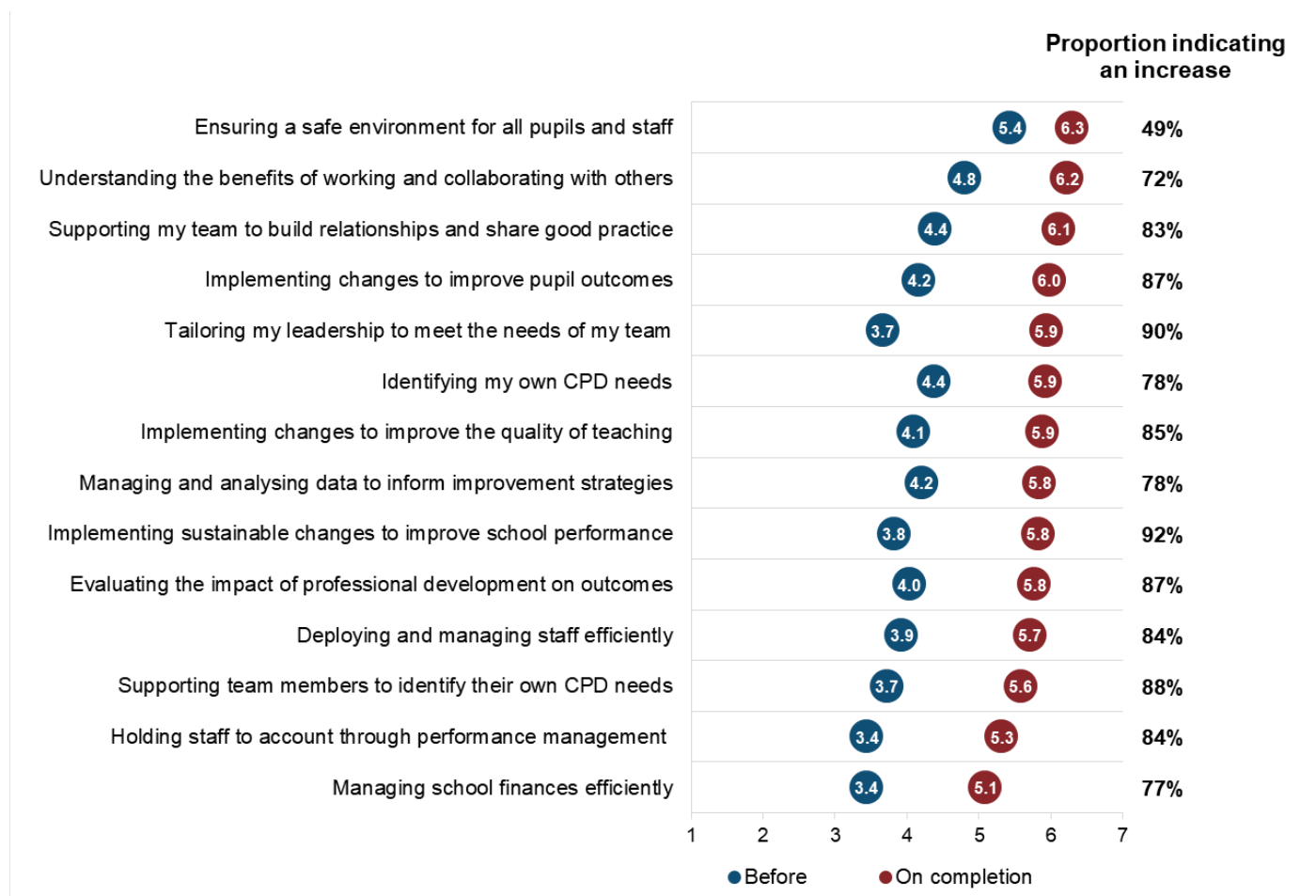
³⁹ The full list of competencies with exact wording as used in the SPB survey can be found in Appendix 1. Throughout this section the wording of each competency has been shortened.

⁴⁰ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

- **Holding staff to account through performance management**, increasing from 3.4 to 5.3 (an increase of 1.9) and, overall, 84% of participants reported an improvement in this competency.

On completion of the qualification, all competencies received a score of 5.1 or above, highlighting that participants agreed, at least to some extent, they now met the competencies required for middle leadership.

Figure 17: NPQML participants’ perceived competence in a range of leadership skills prior to starting the qualification and upon completion



Source: SPB survey. Base=299-308

Scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

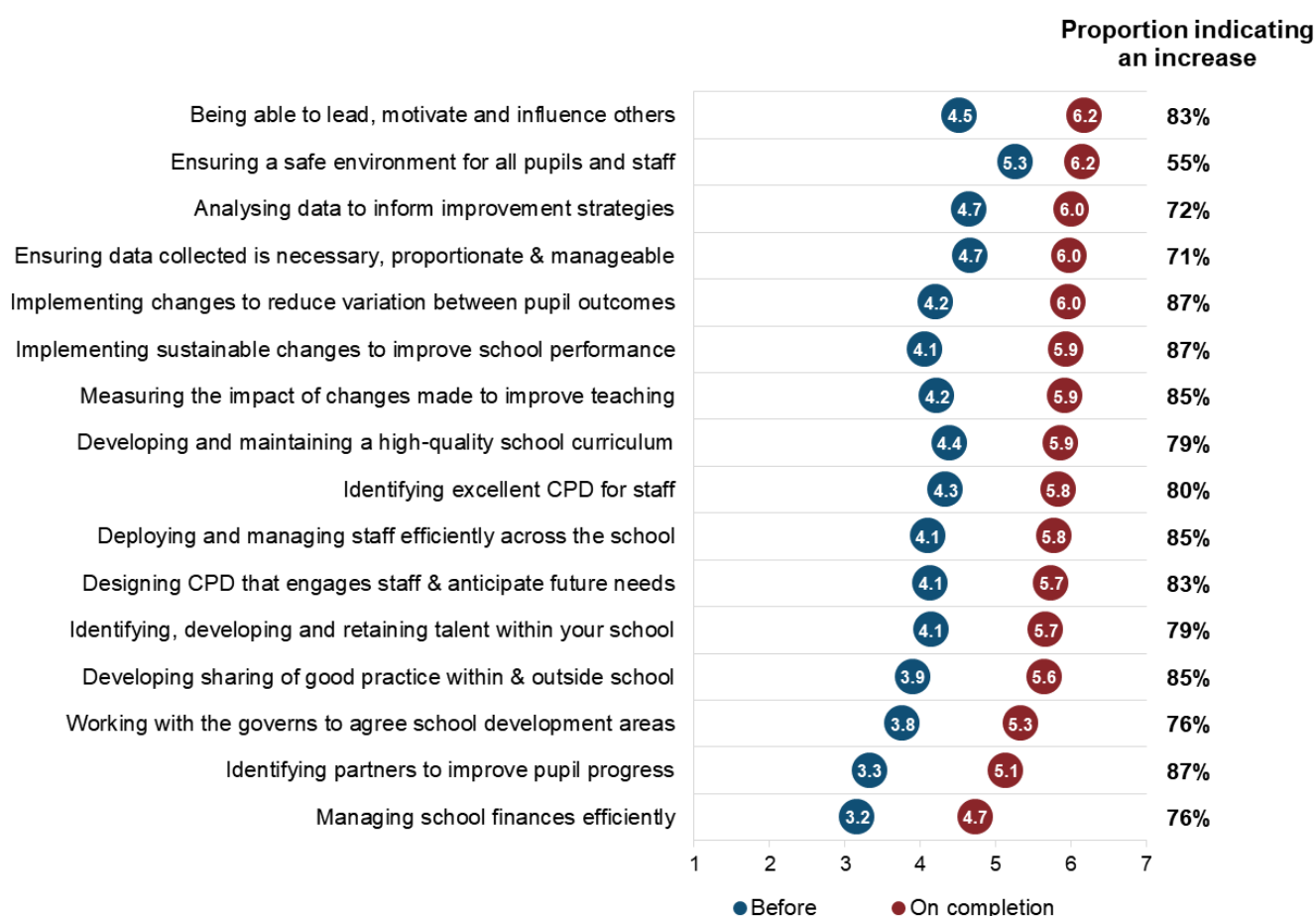
NPQSL development of competencies

Figure 18 shows that NPQSL participants experienced the biggest improvement in the following areas, all focused on improving pupil performance:

- **Implementing sustainable changes to improve school performance**, increasing from 4.1 to 5.9 (an increase of 1.9), with 87% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.
- **Implementing changes to reduce variation between pupil outcomes**, increasing from 4.2 to 6.0 (an increase of 1.8), with 87% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.
- **Identifying partners to improve pupil progress**, increasing from 3.3 to 5.1 (an increase of 1.8), with 87% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.

On completion of the qualification, all competencies, but one, received a score of 5.1 or above. Only ‘managing school finances efficiently’ received a mean score below 5 – although 76% of participants did report an improvement in this competency.

Figure 18: NPQSL participants’ perceived competence in a range of leadership skills prior to starting the qualification and upon completion



Source: SPB survey. Base=309-322
Scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

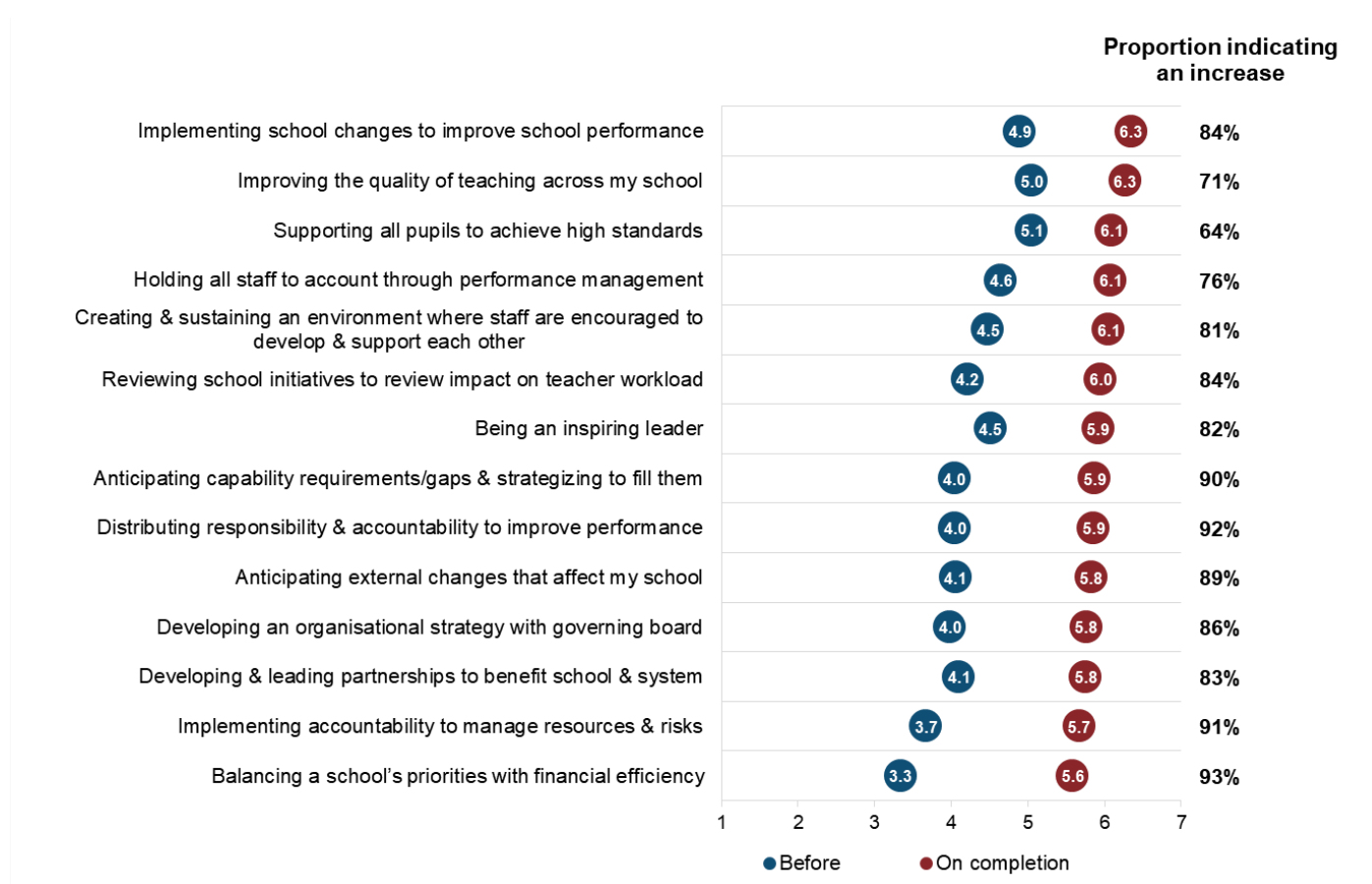
NPQH development of competencies

Figure 19 shows that NPQH participants experienced the biggest improvement in their scores against the competencies 'managing finances and resources' and 'distributed leadership':

- **Balancing a school's priorities with financial efficiency**, increasing from 3.3 to 5.6 (an increase of 2.2), with 93% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.
- **Implementing accountability to manage resources and risks**, increasing from 3.7 to 5.7 (an increase of 2.0), with 91% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.
- **Distributing responsibility and accountability to improve performance**, increasing from 4.0 to 5.9 (an increase of 1.8). Overall, 92% of participants reported an improvement in this competency.
- **Anticipating capability requirements or skills gaps and strategizing to fill them**, increasing from 4.0 to 5.9 (an increase of 1.8), with 90% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.

On completion of the qualification, all competencies received a score of 5.6 or above, highlighting that participants agreed they now met the competencies necessary for headship. This consistency across competency scores on completion of the NPQH is higher than for NPQML and NPQSL.

Figure 19: NPQH participants' perceived competence in a range of leadership skills prior to starting the qualification and upon completion



Source: SPB survey. Base=165-168

Scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

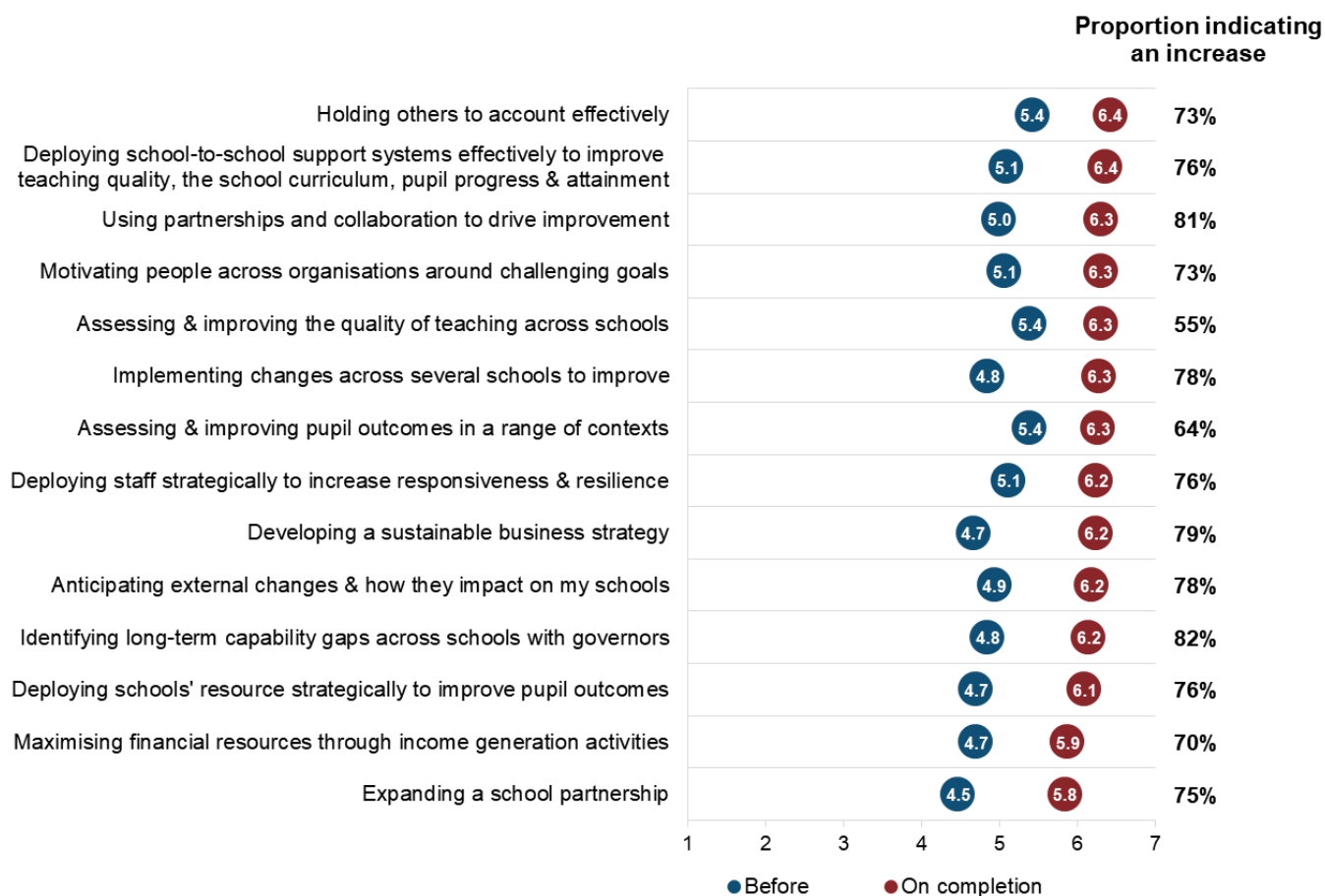
NPQEL development of competencies

NPQEL participants provided significantly higher initial scores across all leadership competencies, meaning that although their assessment of their competencies improved, generally the degree of improvement was less when compared with the other qualifications. Figure 20 shows that NPQEL participants experienced the biggest improvement in the following areas:

- **Developing a sustainable business strategy**, increasing from 4.7 to 6.2 (an increase of 1.6), with 79% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.
- **Implementing changes across several schools to improve**, increasing from 4.8 to 6.3 (an increase of 1.4). Overall, 78% of participants reported an improvement in this competency.

- **Deploying multiple schools' resources strategically to improve pupil outcomes**, increasing from 4.7 to 6.1 qualification (an increase of 1.4), with 76% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.
- **Expanding a school partnership**, increasing from 4.5 to 5.8 (an increase of 1.4), with 75% of participants reporting an improvement in this competency.

Figure 20: NPQEL participants' perceived competence in a range of leadership skills prior to starting the qualification and upon completion



Source: SPB survey. Base=32-33
Scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

Further insight into skills developed from depth interviewees

Across all NPQs, interviewees commonly reported that the qualifications had supported them to develop the leadership skills needed to manage people.

Tailoring leadership approaches to influence others

Interviewees described how their NPQ had helped them to understand the benefit of tailoring their leadership style to different people or situations. This supported them to understand the motivations of individual staff members and how to get the most from them.

From doing the days and talking about leadership styles, how to react with different people in certain ways in order to get the most from them, is something that I hadn't really thought about before. The more I get to know members of my department, the more I realise how they are motivated and how to get the best out of them. – *SPB NPQML participant*

Being able to tailor their leadership approach to different people and situations also helped to strengthen their working relationships with their colleagues.

Thinking of different ways to get people on board... when I think back, if I've introduced something, I've just told people in the past, but now I'll pull people in together. – *SPB NPQH participant*

NPQEL participants specifically referenced how the qualification had helped them to think about tailoring their approach to lead other heads and help them to *“think systemically rather than remaining focused on their own campus”*. This helped to achieve headteachers' buy-in to implement changes so that they, in turn, could influence their own staff. One participant explained that this was one of the key difficulties they had grappled with since taking on an executive headship, as they had not needed to influence senior staff from a remote position before with irregular face-to-face contact.

Distributed leadership

The NPQs also helped interviewees to understand the importance of delegating leadership responsibilities among leadership teams. Interviewees explained how this had sometimes been difficult for them, but that it was necessary to see colleagues *“flourish and grow”*. NPQEL participants discussed how the qualification had helped them to understand the need to take a step back from the operational running of the school(s) and give their leaders the freedom to lead projects and learn by their mistakes, even if this sometimes meant *“sitting on your hands”*. Interviewees highlighted how they now understood the shift in leadership focus needed to be an executive headteacher and the

necessity for an executive leader to provide both challenge and support to their headteacher(s) to ensure that school improvement is possible across all sites.

When you get to executive leadership, your job is to provide an environment for other people to do their job well. The headteacher at [school name], which is where I'm executive headteacher, that is her school. Perhaps that might not have been my view when I started the course, but I suppose it's that idea that I need to hold her to account, I need to challenge her, but I'm also responsible for making sure that the environment within which she works allows her to do her job well.
– *SPB NPQEL participant*

Difficult conversations and performance management

The NPQs supported interviewees to develop their ability to have challenging conversations and undertake performance management procedures. The qualifications provided them with useful tips to help ensure that these conversations were conducted effectively to achieve the best results.

I have developed my ability to have difficult conversations, it's something that I struggled quite a lot with, because I don't like confrontation, and the NPQ gave me lots of good strategies that I could use to help. – *SPB NPQSL participant*

One interviewee described how their increased confidence in approaching difficult conversations had enabled them to provide feedback on the way a teacher taught a specific subject; as a result, the teacher improved their practice, which had a positive impact on pupil attainment.

Working with governors/trustees

Typically, teachers and leaders have limited contact with governors or the board of trustees, so it can be an area they are less confident in. Interviewees referenced how the NPQs had helped them to improve the effectiveness of their governance model. The qualifications had given them the confidence and skills to approach their governors or board of trustees to tell them what they needed from them to ensure that they were providing them with the necessary challenge to support school improvement.

One of the things we did was train our governors in the art of challenge and being a critical friend. We've got a really supportive governing body so it's kind of just tightening up actually. You're being really supportive, but you need to challenge us as well. – *SPB NPQH participant*

Strategic vision

The NPQs helped interviewees to understand the importance of school leaders having a strategic vision, which clearly translates into school values. These values then needed to be shared by staff, governors, pupils, parents, and the wider school community to create an ethos that underpins all school activities. One participant explained how they have built this into their recruitment process to help ensure that new recruits are a good fit for the school. One NPQEL interviewee also highlighted that the qualification had helped them to think about staffing in a holistic, strategic way, which had helped them as their school went through a restructure.

That was one of the aspects of the NPQEL that I brought back to my organisation and talked through with the CEO, because we were in a position where we needed to do some sort of drastic restructuring. I used it as a framework for executive discussion around how we were going to manage that... It kept the discussion strategic rather than about people. It made us think about what leadership structures we want, what roles and responsibilities we want going forward. – *SPB NPQEL participant*

Participant attribution of impact on leadership competencies

Participants attributed half of their leadership development, whilst undertaking the qualification, to the NPQ itself and the rest to other development opportunities.

Upon completing their NPQ, participants attributed, on average, over half (51%) of their leadership skill development to learning that occurred while undertaking the NPQ itself, one-fifth (19%) to other training they took part in and just under one-third (29%) to other experiences. Other training included provision delivered by their school, external training, and coaching and mentoring. Other experiences included working with colleagues or other schools, networking, on-the-job experiences, research, and previous experience in teaching and other roles.

Figure 21: Mean attribution of leadership skill development



Source: SPB survey. Base=776

Respondent characteristics influenced what participants attributed their leadership skills development to:

- **Aspiring for role vs those already in role:** Those who were aspiring for the role they were studying attributed a higher proportion of their development to the NPQ (54%) compared with those who were already in the role they were studying (49%).
- **Qualification level:** Participants who undertook the NPQEL attributed a significantly higher proportion of their development to experiences other than the NPQ (45%) compared with participants undertaking the NPQH (30%), NPQSL (28%) and NPQML (29%).
- **Phase:** Primary school participants attributed a higher proportion of their development to their NPQ (54%) when compared with secondary school participants (48%).

In a similar vein to the survey findings, depth interviewees explained that their leadership development over the course of them completing the qualification could be attributed to both the NPQ and other opportunities. Key aspects of the NPQs which they felt had contributed included the NPQ content, materials and delivery; projects in other schools; and the networking opportunities with other participants through the qualification.

There was a really secure balance between pedagogy, theory, and practical opportunities to apply what you knew. And I also think the substance of the assignments, was incredibly useful in giving a chance to apply what we'd been learning about and then taking that out there and putting it in the real world. – *SPB NPQH participant*

Readiness and confidence for role

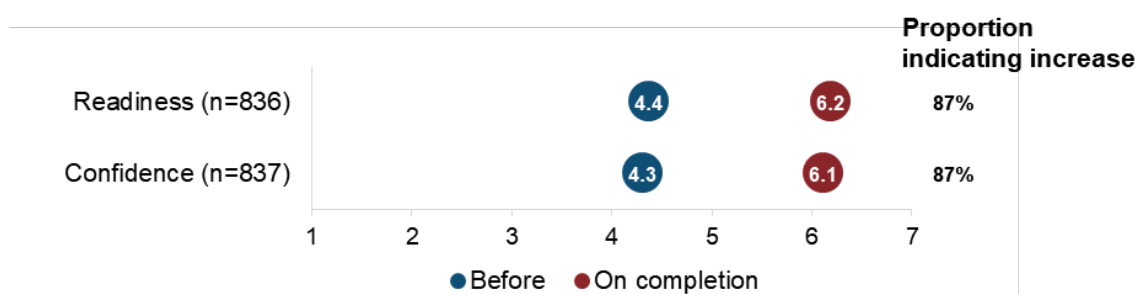
The development of participants' leadership skills influenced both their readiness and confidence for the role they studied for. It enabled them to learn new skills and then put these into practice.

The previous section highlighted the wide range of leadership skills that participants developed through the NPQs. As a result, participants experienced an increase in their readiness⁴¹ and confidence⁴² for the roles they studied across both those who were aspiring for their qualification and those who were already in post (Figure 22).

⁴¹ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=not at all ready and 7=very ready) – measured at completion and retrospectively at the start of the qualification. Readiness was measured based on participants' leadership knowledge, skills, and attributes.

⁴² On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=not at all confident and 7=very confident) – measured at completion and retrospectively at the start of the qualification.

Figure 22: Perceived readiness and confidence for role of study before and on completion of qualification



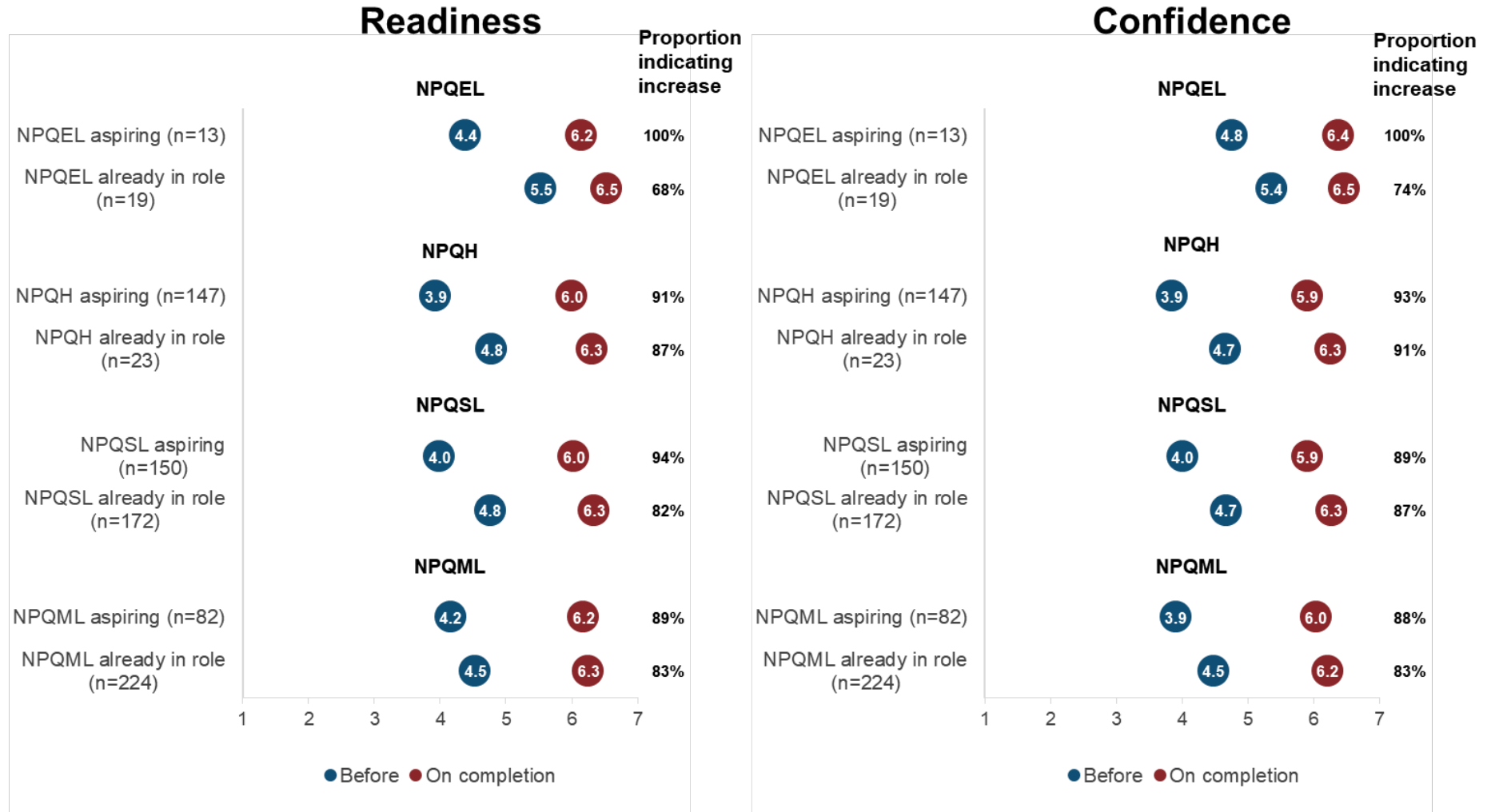
Source: SPB Survey. Bases variable
 Scale of 1-7 (where 1=not at all ready and 7=very ready).
 Scale of 1-7 (where 1=not at all confident and 7=very confident).

Respondent characteristics influenced the change in participants' readiness and confidence for the role they had studied for.

- Aspiring for role vs in role:** Overall, participants aspiring to the role they were studying for experienced a greater increase in their perceived readiness and confidence for the role compared with those who were already in the role they were studying (e.g. a current headteacher undertaking NPQH). Figure 23 shows a breakdown of these differences by qualification level. Those aspiring to the role reported lower levels of readiness and confidence for the role they were studying for before they started their qualification (4.0 and 4.0 respectively) than those who were already in the role (4.7, 4.6).
- Qualification level:** Figure 23 also highlights that NPQEL participants experienced less change in their perceived readiness and confidence for the role (reflecting the lower changes experienced across the individual competencies) compared with those studying at all other levels due to them rating themselves higher on starting the qualification, although the increases were still statistically significant.

Further differences were found by gender, ethnicity, and phase (see Appendix 3 for a detailed breakdown).

Figure 23: Perceived readiness and confidence for role of study before and on completion of qualification by respondent type and qualification level.



Source: SPB survey. Bases variable

Further to this, within the colleague survey, participants' line managers and senior colleagues reported that participants had the leadership knowledge, skills and attributes needed for the role they had studied for following the completion of their qualification, compared with when they started it. They provided an average retrospective score of 4.2 out of 7⁴³ prior to undertaking the NPQ compared with 6.3 out of 7 following participants' completion of the NPQ.

Interviewees talked about readiness and confidence for the role of study interchangeably with the two being intrinsically linked. The NPQs had increased the depth of their leadership knowledge, which helped to improve their existing skills as well as equip them with new ones. Bolstering their skills and knowledge helped to improve their confidence as school leaders.

First of all they've [the new skills] really developed my confidence... I can teach pupils, but I can also motivate and coach adults as well, just because of my own learning [through NPQML] and it's almost experiential learning for me. – *SPB NPQML participant*

It's given her an eye-opener into what senior leadership is all about and the desire and the confidence to go, 'I want that, I can do that'. – *NPQSL Line Manager*

Above all, the NPQs helped to reaffirm interviewees' leadership skills and increased their belief in their abilities. This boosted their confidence to do the job and helped them to have more confidence in the daily decisions they were making as leaders, allowing them to make changes more quickly. They also explained how their improved confidence helped them to be more assertive when communicating with colleagues.

Quite a few colleagues have said since doing it you can see a big confidence boost in myself. ...I feel more assertive and that I can address things straight away – *SPA NPQML participant*

The NPQs also gave participants the opportunity to put their new knowledge and skills into practice, which helped to consolidate their learning. Participants explained how undertaking the NPQs had provided them with a framework to think through all the necessary steps to manage change in a school, which gave them confidence in tackling the challenges they would face moving forward.

⁴³ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

I really do think it helped with how to design a project and how to structure changes that you want to make in school... The whole designing, implementing, analysing, evaluating process [the life cycle of a project]... I now go to it every time I'm about to start a project just so that it can really help, I think it gives you really clear ways that you can plan a project. – *SPB NPQSL participant*

Interviewees also valued the opportunity to share ideas with other participants working in a similar role, or across phase, and to give them the time to reflect. This helped them to learn about alternative approaches to situations and also provided them with an opportunity to realise they were at a similar level to their peers, allowing them to believe that they had what it takes to pursue their desired leadership role and boost their confidence.

Most of the people on my course were in executive roles and I didn't think they were particularly more capable than I was...actually you have a sense of well, you know, these are my peers and I feel that I'm operating at a similar level to them. – *SPB aspiring NPQEL participant*

Participants' career progression upon NPQ completion

Securing a new role

By the time participants had completed their qualification, one-third of survey respondents were already in a new role. Most considered this to be a promotion and thought the NPQ had supported them to gain this, especially in the case of aspiring leaders.

One-third (33%) of NPQ participants were already in a new role by the time they had completed their qualification (this was equally split between those who were aspiring for the next level of leadership and those who were already in the role they were studying for). The majority of these participants (90%) considered that it was a promotion and for over three-quarters (76%), their new role was in the same school. Overall, over two-thirds (68%) of participants agreed⁴⁴ that their NPQ qualification had contributed to them securing the new role. A higher proportion of aspiring leaders who had moved into a new role agreed that their NPQ had strongly contributed to them gaining this compared with participants who were already in their role of study (78% and 54% respectively⁴⁵). This

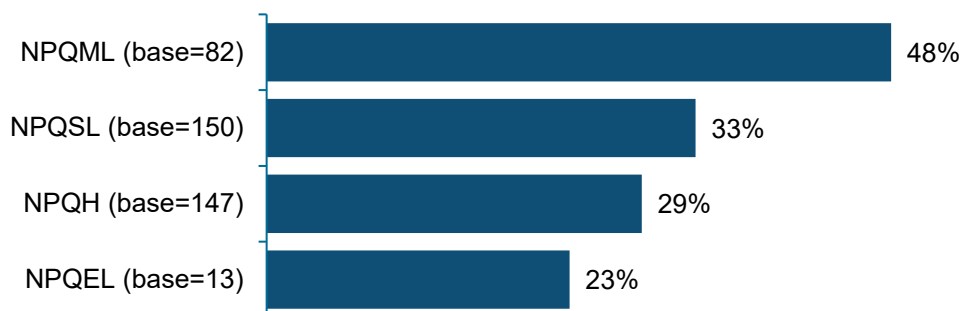
⁴⁴ Providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-7 (where 1=completely disagree and 7=completely agree).

⁴⁵ Some participants who were already in the role they were studying for had gained a new role. Some of these new roles were perceived as a promotion; whilst others were not. However, 54% of these participants still reported that the NPQ had helped them to secure their new role.

suggests that the qualifications have supported participants to achieve their career goals, as aspiring leaders were more motivated to undertake the qualification to support their career progression (as outlined earlier in this report).

Amongst those aspiring for the next level of leadership, a higher proportion of participants aspiring to become middle leaders were in a middle leadership position by the time they had completed their qualification compared with those undertaking other qualification levels (Figure 24).

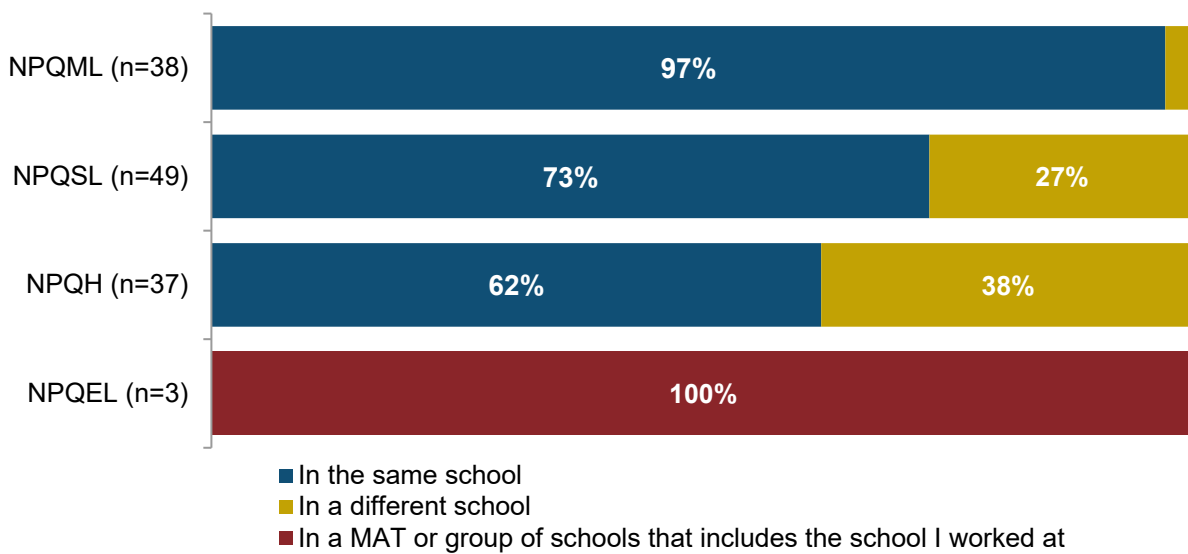
Figure 24: Proportion of aspiring leaders now in the role they studied for by qualification level



Source: SPB survey. Bases variable

Three-quarters (76%) of aspiring participants had secured the roles they had studied for in the same school as where they began their qualification. Figure 25 shows that a higher proportion of aspiring leaders who undertook NPQML were in middle leadership positions in the same school compared with aspiring leaders who had undertaken NPQSL and NPQH. This could be due to there being more middle leadership opportunities available within schools, but fewer senior leadership and headship opportunities. The exception involved the small number of NPQEL aspiring leaders, all of whom had secured executive leadership positions within a MAT, or group of schools, which included the school that they worked at when they began their qualification.

Figure 25: Where aspiring leaders secured their new roles by qualification level



Source: SPB survey. Bases variable

Of those aspiring leaders who were now in the roles they had studied for, the majority (84%) agreed⁴⁶ that their NPQ had positively impacted on their aspiration to pursue that leadership role, providing an average score of 5.8 out of 7. Depth interviewees who had secured the leadership positions that they aspired to at the beginning of their NPQ journey explained how the qualifications had given them the opportunity to fill skills gaps and to demonstrate their capability in job applications or when seeking promotion.

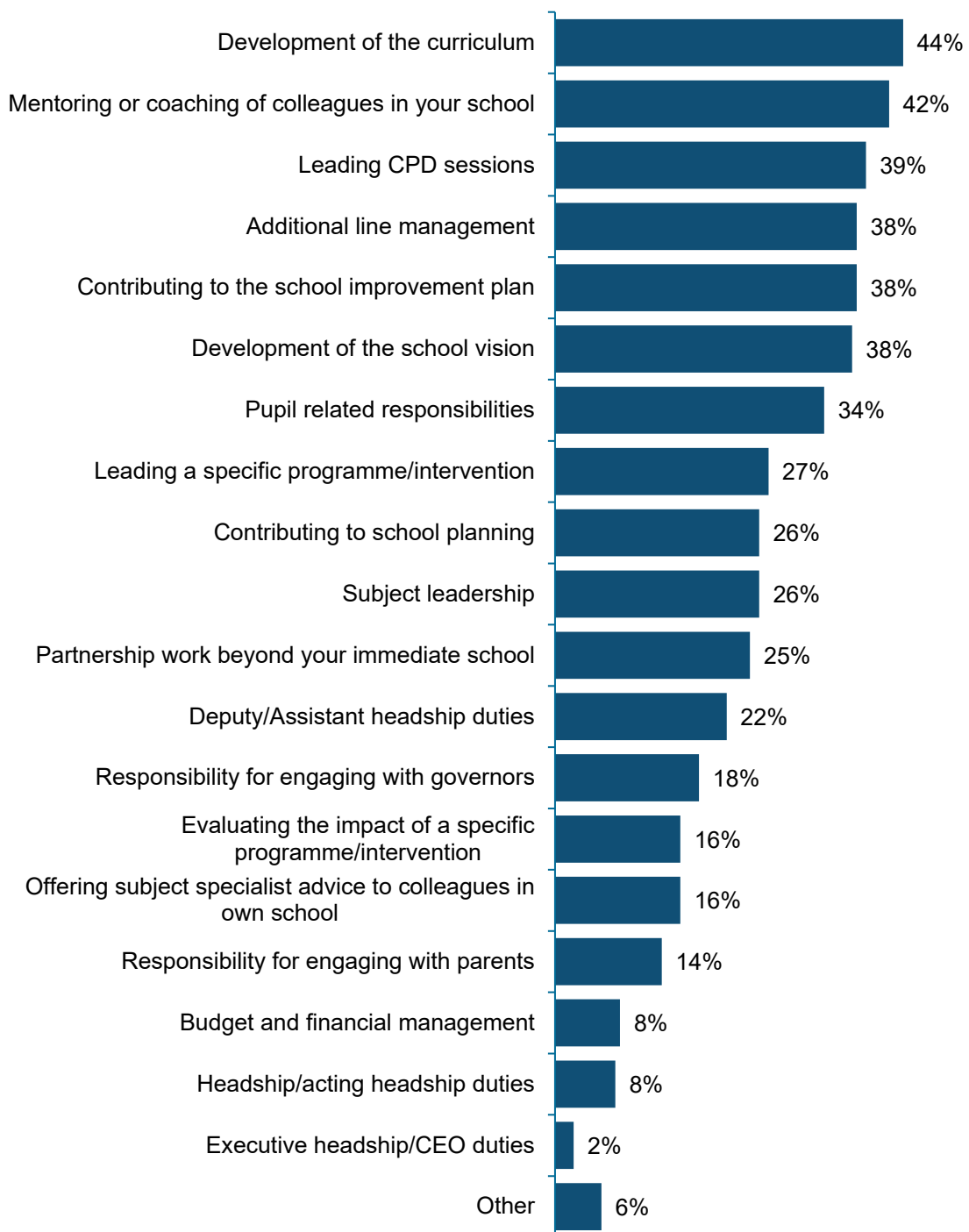
Additional responsibilities

NPQs also supported participants to secure additional responsibilities within their schools.

One-third (33%) of participants who had not secured a new role upon completing their NPQ had taken on additional responsibilities within their current role as a direct result of completing the qualification. As highlighted in Figure 26 these responsibilities were varied and included developing the curriculum (44%), mentoring or coaching colleagues (42%) and leading CPD sessions (39%).

⁴⁶ Providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

Figure 26: Participants' additional responsibilities in absence of promotion



Source: SPB survey. Base=170

Future aspirations

NPQs have increased participants' aspirations to move into the level of leadership they were studying for (e.g. a senior leader studying NPQH). For those who were already in the role they were studying for at the start of the qualification and those who had secured the position they studied for on completion of their qualification the NPQs have increased their aspirations to progress further and aspire to the next level of leadership.

Overall, participants' aspirations to pursue the next level of school leadership increased over the course of undertaking their NPQ. Participants were asked about the extent to which they aspired to the next level of school leadership based on the role they held on completion of the qualification. Figure 27 shows the different levels of leadership that participants were asked about by the qualification they undertook and whether they had already moved into that leadership position on completion of their qualification:

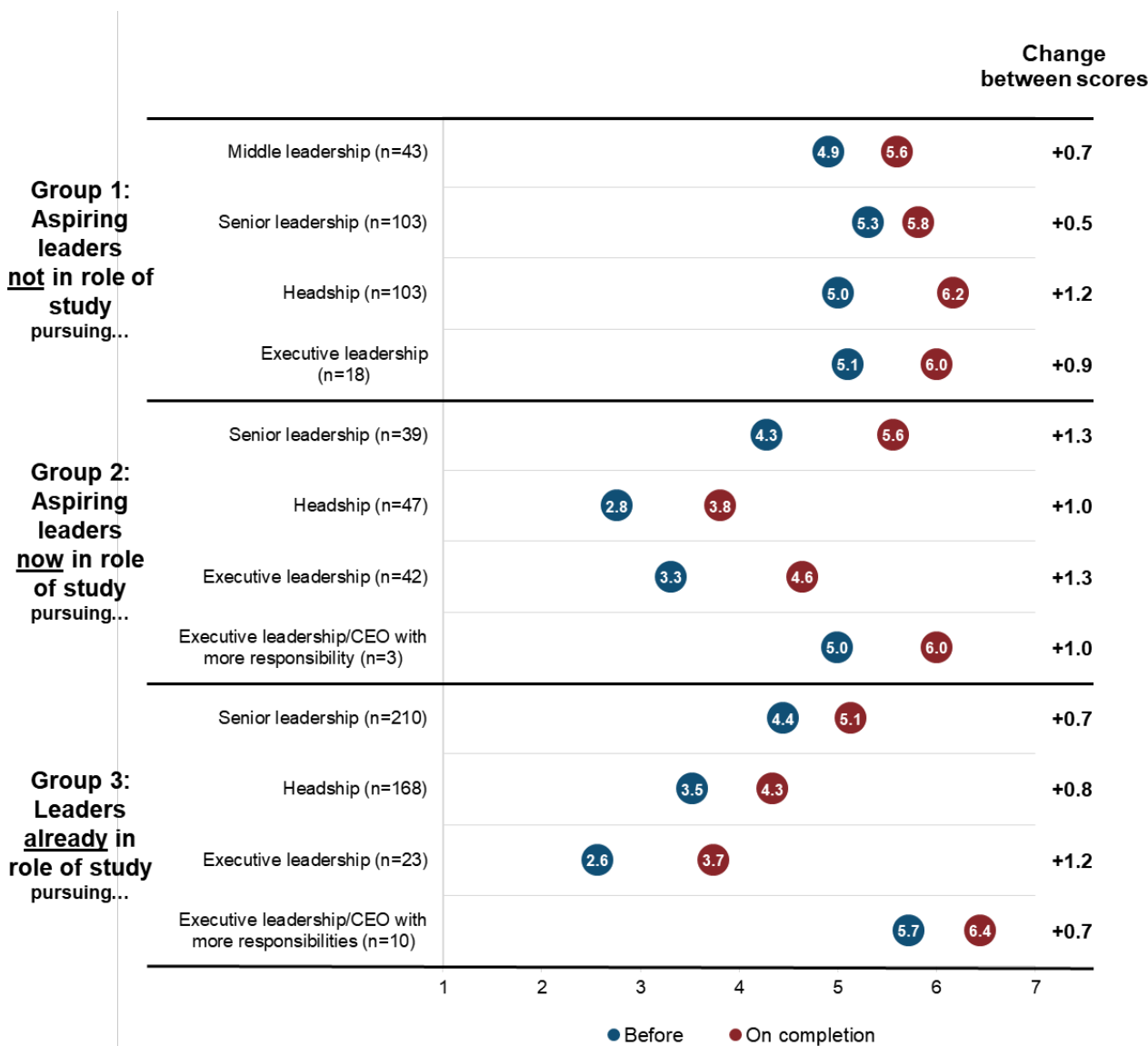
- **Group 1:** shows participants who, upon starting the qualification, were not in the role they were studying for, and who **had not** yet moved into the position for which they studied by the time they had completed their qualification: these participants were, therefore, asked about their aspirations for the role they studied for (e.g. a senior leader who undertook an NPQH as they were aspiring to become a headteacher, but had not secured a headship on completion of the qualification was asked about their aspiration to become a headteacher).
- **Group 2:** shows participants who when starting the qualification, were not in the role they were studying for, but who **had** moved into this position by the time they had completed their qualification: these participants were, therefore, asked about the next level of leadership (e.g. a senior leader who undertook an NPQH, who had since secured a headship post was, therefore, asked about their aspiration to become an executive leader).
- **Group 3:** shows participants who were **already in** the position they were studying for when starting the qualification and remained in this position throughout the programme: this group was, therefore, asked about the next level of leadership (e.g. a participant who undertook an NPQH who was already a headteacher upon starting their qualification and remained in a headship was asked about their aspiration to become an executive leader).

As expected, and in line with their motivations for taking part in the qualification, Figure 27 shows that participants who aspired to the role they studied for, but had not yet secured this role (Group 1) consistently provided the highest aspiration scores on completion of the qualification relating to the next level of school leadership. Participants in Group 2, who had already secured the role they had studied for, and those in Group 3, who had not necessarily undertaken the qualification because they aspired to the next

level of school leadership, understandably provided lower aspiration scores for the next level of school leadership; although, their aspirations did increase between beginning and completing their NPQs.

Figure 27 also shows that aspirational leaders (Group 2) who had already secured the role that they studied for, experienced the biggest change in their aspiration for the next leadership role (not the role they were studying for). While their scores upon completing their NPQ suggested that they did not always strongly aspire to the next level of school leadership, they experienced the biggest change since beginning their NPQ. The timescale within which participants planned to search for a new role is explored in Appendix 3.

Figure 27: Participants' aspirations to pursue the next leadership role by their role upon commencing and completing the qualification



Source: SPB survey. Bases variable

The majority (80%) of participants who experienced raised aspirations to pursue the next level of school leadership (across all three groups) agreed that their NPQ had a positive impact on this, providing an average score of 5.5 out of 7⁴⁷. This highlights how the NPQs both inspire leaders to move into the roles they intended when starting the qualification, and to consider future leadership positions.

Most interviewees had fairly clear motivations for signing up to undertake their NPQ. Some interviewees undertook the qualification to support them in their current role while others were motivated to complete an NPQ to help them secure a promotion. Among those who aspired to their role of study, the majority either had the same high aspirations for the next level of school leadership or they agreed that the NPQ had increased their aspirations to pursue this role.

I thought, 'Do you know, I'm more ready for this than I thought'. I think it accelerated that decision, made me feel more confident... By the third session I was like, 'Yes. I definitely want to do this kind of role'. So, it assisted me with confirming my idea, my desires. – *SPB aspiring NPQEL participant*

One existing senior leader who had undertaken an NPQSL to learn more about the senior leadership role also highlighted how the qualification had clarified their desire for a deputy headship which they had since secured.

I didn't realise at the time, I just thought it sounded like it'd be a good opportunity, and then, since then I've got a deputy position in another school... I think I had it in the back of my mind, but it only became clearer that that was what I wanted while I was doing the qualification and I was working with other deputy heads. – *SPB existing senior leader NPQSL participant*

⁴⁷ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

Self-reported impact on schools

Undertaking an NPQ has supported participants to make changes in their school. Alongside developing their own leadership skills, the leadership skills of participants' colleagues have also been developed. The projects that participants undertook through their NPQ were influential in creating a variety of sustainable impacts on their school.

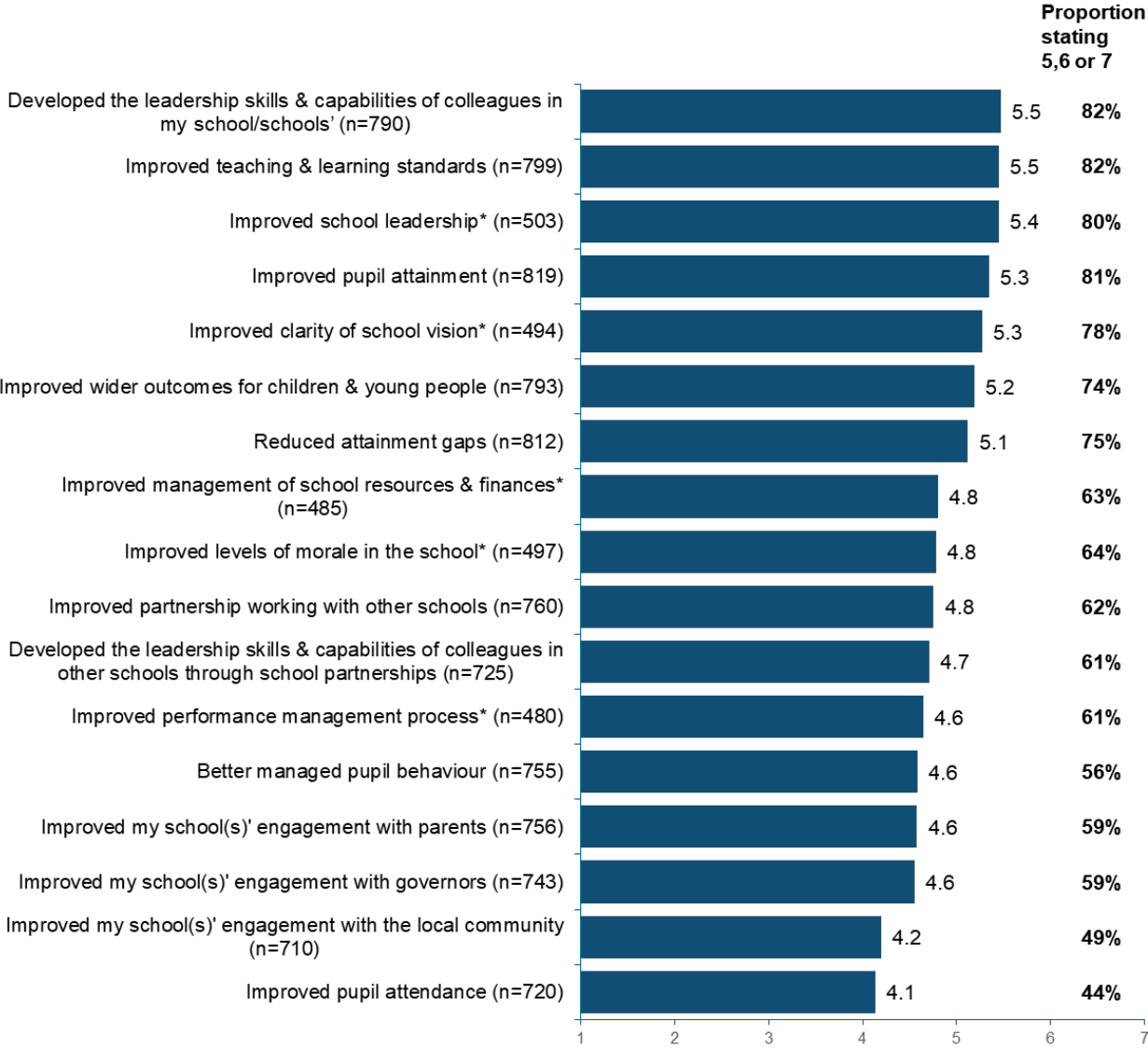
Although participants had only just completed their qualification, they already believed that undertaking their NPQ had enabled them to achieve a range of sustainable impacts on their school/s. Figure 28 shows that participants most strongly agreed that the qualification helped them to develop the leadership skills and capabilities of colleagues in their school, and improve teaching and learning standards, providing scores for both statements of 5.5 out of 7⁴⁸ and, in both instances, 82% of participants overall agreed⁴⁹. Participants also agreed that the qualification had helped them to improve school leadership (5.4 out of 7, with 80% agreeing); and improve pupil attainment (5.3 out of 7, with 81% agreeing), which was a focus of the projects that participants were tasked with for assessment. Participants were less likely to agree that the qualification had so far helped them to improve pupil attendance (4.1 out of 7, with 44% agreeing overall) or that it had improved their school's engagement with the local community (4.2 out of 7, with 49% agreeing overall). Respondents to the colleague survey reported similar impacts on the school (see Appendix 3 for further details).

Whilst these school impacts were not a specific aim of the NPQs, they are linked to the leadership competencies that the NPQs aimed to develop among participants.

⁴⁸ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree).

⁴⁹ Providing a score of 5, 6 or 7.

Figure 28: Extent to which NPQ has helped participants to achieve sustainable impacts in their own school



Depth interviewees discussed the variety of impacts that the NPQs had on their schools. These largely related to the projects they undertook at either their current or placement school as part of the qualification.

As a result of having a better grasp of leading others and delegating leadership responsibilities, interviewees explained how they had been able to successfully distribute leadership among staff. This resulted in staff having more autonomy and the freedom to use their own initiative, enabling them to develop their own leadership skills. One interviewee explained that by distributing leadership responsibilities, it had helped them develop their leadership team and that the school was benefiting as a result.

What we've done is build the leaders, which has made them recognise the role that they have in school leadership. Which, in turn, has enabled them to go out there and monitor and focus on what aspects of school improvement are within their responsibility. And we've begun now to see the long-term impact of those actions. – *SPB NPQH participant*

Several interviewees described how their projects had had a positive impact on pupil attainment. Interviewees explained how they had identified areas where teaching and learning could be improved to help achieve this goal. Projects were developed to improve the teaching within various subjects and had led to improved pupil attainment, which participants report has been measured by improved exam results. For example, one interviewee explained how they had identified that the quality of marking and feedback needed improvement, on which they decided to focus on for their assessment project. They also described how this led to positive impacts on pupil attainment in addition to reducing staff workload.

My project was improving the quality of marking and feedback to impact on pupil progress in lessons... So, we would tell them [pupils] what they needed to improve and then we would give them a task based on that skill. So, at the end of that task, they would see that they actually could do it and then they've achieved something, just to help make them that little bit more confident... Overall, across the whole school, we made 5% impact on progress when it was averaged out across every subject. – *SPB NPQML participant*

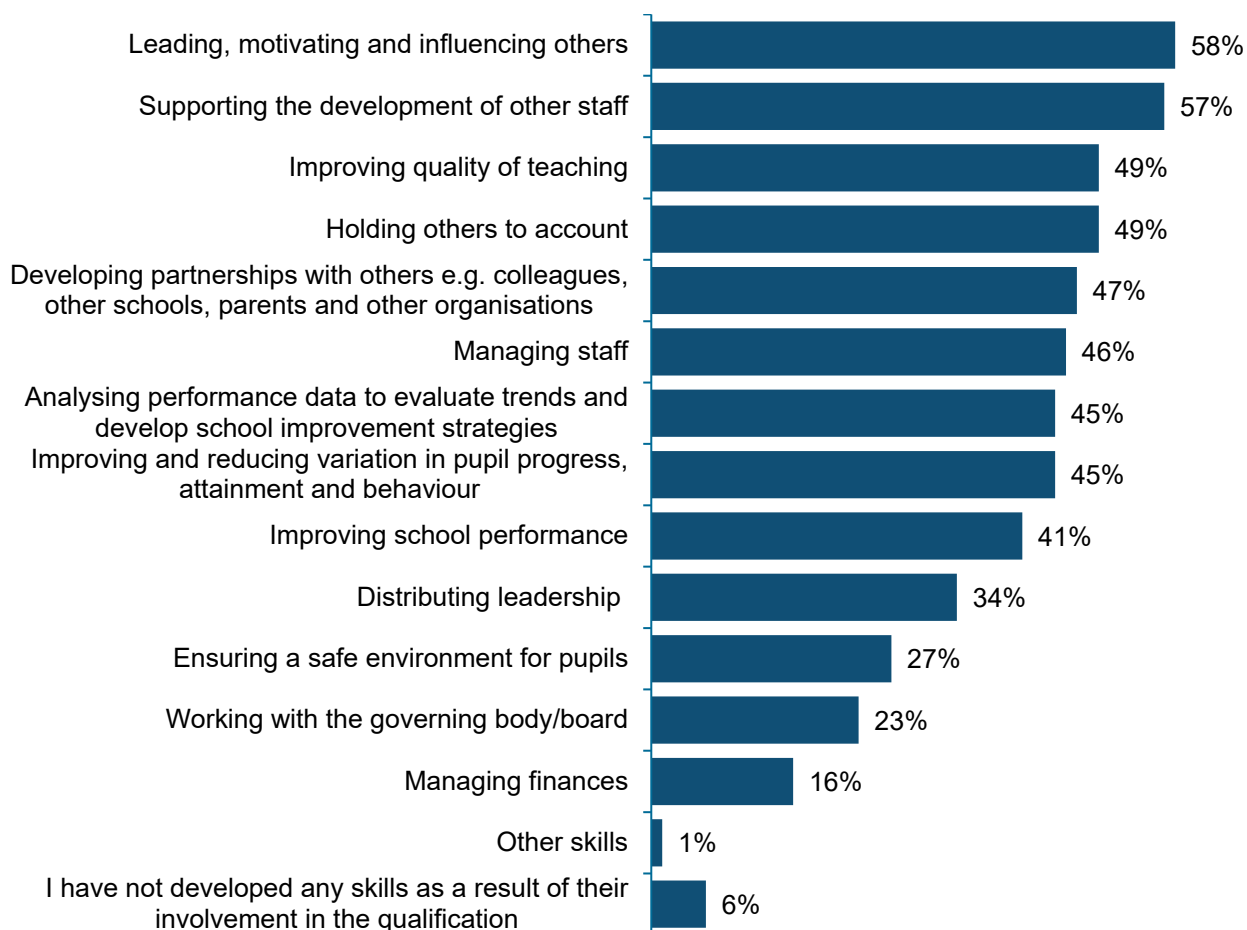
Other interviewees implemented projects to improve pupil behaviour. One interviewee described how their school's previous approach to managing pupil behaviour was inconsistent. To address this, they launched a new behaviour management policy and worked hard to promote its value to staff to ensure they implemented it. As a result, pupil behaviour improved.

It's just standing by your principles but making sure that you have made it explicitly clear to people why we're doing it... From the children's point of view, it has created a system of consistency and fairness. And for the members of staff, it's included consistency and fairness and that includes our lunchtime supervisors, it includes our sports coach, it includes supply teachers, so you know, the whole school community... we specifically monitor how many children lost their golden time on a Friday. It's been significantly less children. – *SPB NPQH participant*

The majority (86%) of participants who completed an NPQH or NPQEL qualification agreed⁵⁰ that the work they had undertaken as part of their placement had had a positive impact on their placement school/s, providing a mean score of 5.6 out of 7.

The vast majority (94%) of participants' colleagues reported that they themselves had developed or improved their own skills as a result of the opportunities presented for transferable learning while their colleague undertook the NPQ. They most commonly reported developing skills to lead, motivate or influence others (58%), support the development of other staff (57%); improve the quality of teaching (49%); and holding others to account (49%) (Figure 29). These areas reflect the skills which participants themselves reported developing (or not developing) highlighting how learning can be distributed within a school through the NPQ participant.

Figure 29: Impact on participants' colleagues



Source: Colleague survey. Base=83

⁵⁰ Providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-7 (where 1=completely disagree and 7=completely agree).

Participants' views of teaching and their future intentions

Alongside assessing experiences of undertaking the NPQs and the impact they had, the study also explored participants' views of teaching and their future intentions to remain in the profession upon completing the qualification. The next chapter explores the impact of undertaking an NPQ on participant retention in the sector which could be influenced by these scores.

Participants agreed that they would stay in the profession in the next three years, providing a mean score of 6.7 out of 7⁵¹. Overall, participants also agreed that they enjoyed working at their school (5.8), were satisfied in their job (5.5), and that their school created an ethos within which all staff were motivated and supported to develop their skills and subject knowledge (5.5). However, participants neither disagreed nor agreed that their workload was manageable (4.5).

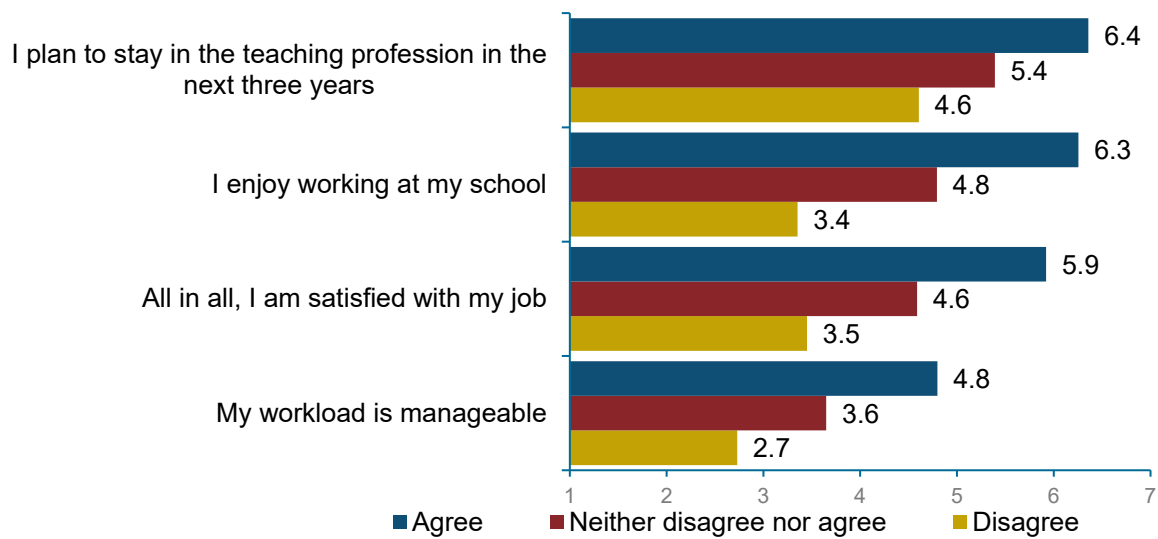
Further exploration of this data highlights how these factors are associated.

- **CPD ethos:** Participants were grouped according to the extent of their agreement that their school created an ethos in which staff were motivated and supported to develop their skills and subject knowledge⁵². Those who agreed with this statement were significantly more likely to say they planned to stay in the teaching profession for the next three years, that they enjoyed working in their school, that they were satisfied with their job and that their workload was manageable, compared with both those who disagreed with this statement or neither disagreed nor agreed with it (Figure 30).

⁵¹ On a scale of 1-7 (where 1=completely disagree and 7=completely agree).

⁵² Scores of 1, 2 or 3 were categorised as disagreeing; a score of 4 was categorised as neither disagreeing nor agreeing; and those providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 were categorised as agreeing.

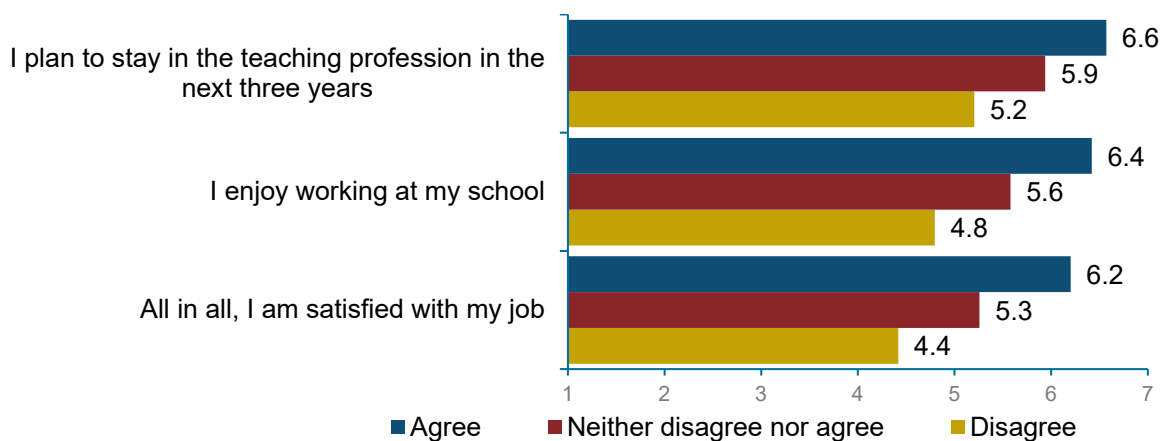
Figure 30: Participants' perceptions of teaching and future intentions by school CPD ethos



Source: SPB survey. Bases variable (Agree=648, Neither disagree nor agree=97, Disagree=70-71)

- Workload:** Those who agreed⁵³ that their workload was manageable were significantly more likely to plan to stay in the teaching profession for the next three years, that they enjoyed working in their school and that they were satisfied with their job (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Participants' perceptions of teaching and future intentions by workload manageability



Source: SPB survey. Bases variable (Agree=438, Neither disagree nor agree=178, Disagree=201)

⁵³ Scores of 1, 2 or 3 were categorised as disagreeing; a score of 4 was categorised as neither disagreeing nor agreeing; and those providing a score of 5, 6 or 7 were categorised as agreeing.

Chapter 5: Initial impact on participants and their schools

Introduction

To explore the short-term impact of the NPQs on participants and their school counterfactual analysis was undertaken. This chapter describes the key findings.

Key findings: Impact analysis

- For participants completing the NPQs, the following differences in outcomes were observed when compared to the control groups not undertaking the 2017 qualifications:
 - Average salary was higher by £947 for NPQML participants and £2,191 for NPQH participants than those not completing these qualifications during this time.
 - NPQSL and NPQH participants were more likely to move into a more senior position than those not completing these qualifications.
 - Participants at all levels were less likely to leave the public teaching profession than those not completing the 2017 NPQs. Teachers who did not take an NPQ had around a 6-7% chance of leaving the public teaching profession whereas for NPQ participants this was around 3-4%.
 - NPQML participants were less likely to change schools (with a difference of 5.6 percentage points) than those not completing the 2017 NPQs.
 - NPQH participants were more likely to change schools (with a difference of 6.9 percentage points) than those not completing the 2017 NPQs.
- To be able to attribute participant impacts to the NPQs we have to assume that the two groups (teachers completing the 2017 NPQs and those not undertaking the qualifications) were similar prior to taking the 2017 qualifications being available (e.g., their salary was increasing or decreasing at a similar rate between 2015 to 2017).
- Assumption testing suggests that 2017 NPQ participants were already on a different trajectory compared to the group that did not take these qualifications. This suggests that it is not possible to establish a clear causal link between completion of the NPQs and the estimated outcomes. This may be due to certain participant characteristics that could not be factored into the analysis.

- No statistically significant impacts were identified for pupil attainment; however, it should be noted that the parameters of the study meant there was little time for i) the changes to occur and ii) be measured in publicly available datasets. Alongside this, in most schools there was only one teacher completing the qualification therefore whole school changes in attainment levels are unlikely.

Impact on participants

Counterfactual analysis using a difference-in-difference method with matching was undertaken to explore the short-term impact of the NPQs on teacher outcomes. The follow-up period for the analysis was relatively short and varied by teacher and, for some, whilst they were still completing their qualification. This analysis therefore can only provide information about the short-term effects of undertaking an NPQ.

NPQ uptake is voluntary; this indicates that teachers that opt to and successfully complete an NPQ are likely to be systematically different to those who do not. Due to data limitations, it is not possible to fully account for these differences in the analysis described below and therefore the participant outcomes cannot be attributed to their completion of NPQs (see Appendix 2 for more details).

The analysis focused on the impact of the NPQs on four outcomes:

- Salary.
- Changing role (moving to a more senior position).
- Retaining teachers in the public sector teaching profession.
- Moving to a new school (reflecting the intention of the programme that teachers would eventually move to gain a senior position in another school or area with known gaps in leadership capability).

Salary progression

Table 5 reports the analysis by qualification where each treatment group is compared to a matched control group. It indicates the mean outcome score for each group at baseline (2017-18) and follow-up (2019-20), and the difference between the two groups at each time point. The final column is the key difference-in-difference estimate. This is the estimate of the average difference between those that did and did not complete the 2017 NPQs, with asterisks denoting statistical significance⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10 and no asterisk means the difference is not statistically significant.

Table 5: Difference-in-difference 2017-2019 – results for salary

Qualification	Year	Mean control group	Mean treatment group	Difference between control and treatment group	Difference-in-difference
NPQML	2017	£32,533	£33,523	£991	£947***
NPQML	2019	£37,798	£39,735	£1,938	£947***
NPQSL	2017	£37,049	£41,773	£4,724	£549
NPQSL	2019	£41,357	£46,630	£5,273	£549
NPQH	2017	£53,104	£52,052	-£1,052	£2,191**
NPQH	2019	£56,387	£57,526	£1,139	£2,191**

Using NPQML for explanation: The treatment group had an initial higher salary with a gap between the two groups salaries in 2017 of £991. It widened to £1,938 in 2019. The difference-in-difference estimation is therefore an increase of £947 (the difference between these two figures), and this is statistically significant. **This means that those who completed the NPQML had a salary £947 higher on average than those who did not and those who completed the NPQH had a salary £2,191 higher on average than those who did not.**

To be able to attribute the whole of this estimated salary increase to the NPQ we have to assume that the salary levels of the two groups shared ‘parallel trends’ in the absence of the NPQ (that is, increasing or decreasing at a similar rate between 2015 to 2017). Table 6 reports the results of ‘placebo tests’ carried out to explore this assumption. The table is identical in structure to Table 5 except that it compares outcomes in 2017 to those in 2015 (rather than the real treatment period 2017-2019).⁵⁵ Looking at the NPQML group we can see that the estimated effect on salary was a statistically significant increase of £1,139. This is a spurious effect since there was no treatment in 2016 to cause this outcome that we can account for with available data. This also happened for those undertaking an NPQH.

The most likely reason for this finding is that the matched control and treatment groups were already on different trajectories during this period. One possible explanation is that the NPQ group were taking, or had already taken, other leadership (or similar) qualifications or CPD in the pre-treatment period which was already having a positive impact on their career.

⁵⁵ Data presented for 2017 is not directly comparable between the two tables as different groups of teachers were used to maximise base sizes for each piece of analysis.

Table 6: Placebo tests 2015-2017 – results for salary

Qualification	Year	Mean control group	Mean treatment group	Difference between control and treatment group	Difference-in-difference
NPQML	2015	£30,333	£28,854	-£1,479	£1,139**
NPQML	2017	£34,201	£33,860	-£340	£1,139**
NPQSL	2015	£33,523	£37,049	£3,526	£450
NPQSL	2017	£37,798	£41,773	£3,975	£450
NPQH	2015	£47,572	£47,099	-£473	£2,514**
NPQH	2017	£50,011	£52,052	£2,041	£2,514**

It follows that **the effects in Table 5 should not be fully attributed to the NPQs because those who completed them appeared to be on different salary trajectories to those that did not prior to the inception of these qualifications.** The difference-in-difference estimates are likely to be biased upwards given the pre-treatment trends in the salaries for the two groups.

Changing role

Analysis was undertaken on ‘post’ within the School Workforce Census to determine whether participants gained a more senior position. It was coded as a scale variable from 1=classroom teacher to 5=headteacher⁵⁶:

The analysis shows there is no statistically significant difference for NPQML participants. **Both those undertaking a NPQSL and NPQH were more likely to have gained a senior post than the control group.** Those who completed the NPQSL qualification started with an average post level of 1 (classroom teacher), the same as the control group; but after completing the NPQSL they had an average level close to 2 (advisory teacher/leading practitioner) whereas the matched group stayed close to 1. For NPQH the result is similar, with the group who took this qualification moving from an average post level of 3 (assistant head) to 4 (deputy head), whereas the matched group who did not take the NPQH stayed closer to level 3.

⁵⁶ 1=classroom teacher, 2=advisory teacher/leading practitioner, 3=assistant head, 4=deputy head and 5=headteacher. It was then treated as a ‘continuous’ variable to allow us to undertake the difference-in-difference analysis. Therefore, for example if a mean score shown (in Table 3) below is close to ‘1’ on average individuals were classroom teachers. Alternatively if the mean score was close to ‘4’ on average they were a deputy head.

Table 7: Difference-in-difference 2017-2019 – results for post

Qualification	Year	Mean control group	Mean treatment group	Difference between control and treatment group	Difference-in-difference
NPQML	2017	0.991	1.004	0.013	0.013
NPQML	2019	1.084	1.106	0.022	0.013
NPQSL	2017	1.461	1.499	0.038	0.353***
NPQSL	2019	1.526	1.923	0.397	0.353***
NPQH	2017	3.721	3.557	-0.164	0.555***
NPQH	2019	3.646	4.018	0.372	0.555***

As with salary, the placebo tests⁵⁷ for role also failed and line graphs show that the NPQSL and NHPQ groups were already on a clear upward trajectory before they took the qualifications, hence this change should not be fully attributed to the NPQs. This may be due to the fact that the NPQ groups were taking, or had already taken, other leadership (or similar) qualifications or CPD in the pre-treatment period. Also it may reflect other unobserved differences between the two groups which are not flushed out by the differencing method.

Staying in the profession and changing schools

Analysis explored whether undertaking an NPQ encouraged participants to stay in the public sector teaching profession (as identified by them staying in the School Workforce Census) and whether it supported individuals to move into a leadership post in another school (and therefore had the potential to support schools who were struggling to recruit and retain leaders). Table 8 shows the results for this piece of analysis.

Across all qualifications, **those undertaking an NPQ were less likely to leave the public sector teaching profession by approximately 3 percentage points**⁵⁸.

Teachers from the control group had around a 6-7% chance of leaving the public teaching profession whereas for NPQ participants this was only around 3-4%. This finding should be treated with caution due to the short follow-up period between someone

⁵⁷ Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed breakdown of all the placebo tests undertaken.

⁵⁸ For both of these pieces of analysis the variables were coded as 'no they have not left their school/profession'=0 and 'yes they have left their school/profession'=1. Analysis during 2017 shows a mean score of '0' as they were all employed in a school identified in the School Workforce Census at the time of starting their qualification. A negative score therefore shows someone is less likely to leave their school or the profession.

completing their qualification and the analysis being undertaken. Participants may have been less likely to change schools as a direct result of undertaking the qualification and needing to be based in a school to complete this rather than as an outcome of the qualification itself.

The picture was more varied for teachers moving schools. **Those undertaking an NPQML were less likely to change schools when compared to the control group. The NPQML group had a 19% chance of changing schools whereas this was 24% for the control group. NPQH participants were more likely to change schools; they had a 25% chance of changing compared to 19% for the control group.** This difference for NPQH and NPQML may be due to those completing a NPQH needing to change schools to secure a position whereas it is likely that there are more opportunities available within the same school for those completing an NPQML.

Table 8: Difference-in-difference 2017-2019 – results for leaving their school and staying in the public sector teaching profession

Leaving the public sector teaching profession

Qualification	Year	Mean control group	Mean treatment group	Difference between control and treatment group	Difference-in-difference
NPQML	2017	0	0	0	-0.031***
NPQML	2019	0.061	0.030	-0.031	-0.031***
NPQSL	2017	0	0	0	-0.033***
NPQSL	2019	0.057	0.025	-0.033	-0.033***
NPQH	2017	0	0	0	-0.031**
NPQH	2019	0.067	0.036	-0.031	-0.031**

Left the school they were employed at whilst undertaking the qualification

Qualification	Year	Mean control group	Mean treatment group	Difference between control and treatment group	Difference-in-difference
NPQML	2017	0	0	0	-0.056***
NPQML	2019	0.243	0.187	-0.056	-0.056***
NPQSL	2017	0	0	0	-0.024

NPQSL	2019	0.228	0.204	-0.024	-0.024
NPQH	2017	0	0	0	0.069***
NPQH	2019	0.191	0.251	0.069	0.069***

For the chances of changing school the placebo tests are passed, and the pre-treatment trends are very similar for the NPQ and control groups. However, for the chances of leaving the public sector teaching profession the placebo tests are failed. The NPQSL and NPQH groups both display a fall in the chance of leaving the profession between 2016 and 2017, compared to an increase in the chance for the control groups. This is possibly an anticipatory effect, if they had already decided to start the qualification in 2017.

School level analysis

To explore the short-term impact of the NPQs on school outcomes we carried out similar analysis to that described for teachers. The follow-up period again for this piece of analysis is relatively short. This analysis therefore can only provide information about the short-term effects of undertaking an NPQ. Separate analysis was undertaken for primary and secondary due to them having different outcome measures.

The outcomes that were explored are:

- Percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at primary school
- Percentage of pupils achieving a high standard in reading, writing and maths at primary school
- Average attainment score in reading at primary school
- Average attainment score in maths at primary school
- The average Attainment 8 score (per pupil) at secondary school

Across all five measures no statistically significant difference-in-difference impacts were identified.

It should be noted, however, that this study was only able to consider very short-term impacts and in most schools there was only one teacher completing a qualification. There may be considerable time lags in the impact of improved school leadership on pupil attainment. The effect of leadership on attainment is indirect, operating through the creation of an effective school environment which in turn influences pupil outcomes, primarily through teacher behaviours. It therefore may be too early to identify changes in attainment. The analysis also assumes that the control group did not receive a 'treatment' – individuals in the control group may have previously

undertaken an NPQ and/or received CPD or other school improvement support which could not be taken into consideration through this analysis.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Below are the key conclusions from this evaluation:

- The NPQs are designed for both aspiring and current leaders. Most participants were satisfied with the qualification content and mix of leadership levels within their cohort. Those who were in the role they were studying for, and had been for some time, thought that some of the content was less relevant to them and suggested the qualifications were more suitable to aspiring leaders or those new to that role. Ensuring participants have the right information to enable them to decide on what qualification level is right for them is critical.
- The NPQEL was a new qualification and, overall, participants were positive about the content. However, some thought it might be less appropriate for those leading large MATs, as it was more tailored to an executive head rather than a CEO role.
- Scholarship funding was important in removing the cost barrier for some undertaking the NPQs. Providers outlined how some schools who were ineligible for the scholarship could not afford the cost of the qualification therefore this prevented staff from accessing the qualifications. Providers tried to be flexible and offer discounts, which helped some, but it highlights a key challenge facing schools.
- A key selling point for the NPQs continues to be their value as a national qualification accredited by DfE, which motivates individuals to take part, as well as them offering a clear pathway to leadership development.
- Participants have a range of motivators for undertaking an NPQ and what is an influential offering to one participant will not be as important to another. Therefore, having a qualification which can be delivered flexibly (within a set framework) ensures providers can respond to the needs of participants and participants can choose the provider and qualification that meets their needs.
- The start of any new qualification can be challenging and while the 2017/18 cohort of participants initially described feeling “*a little bit like we’re the guinea pigs*”, in most areas (excluding the assessment process) this feeling changed whilst they were on the qualification. Considering how to make these initial challenges less noticeable to participants would enhance their satisfaction.
- Providers designed the content of the qualification with experts in the education system, and also utilised their experience to deliver aspects of the qualifications, ensuring expert knowledge was shared and scenarios were ‘brought to life’, alongside experienced facilitators.
- School finance continues to be the one area that participants describe as not adequately covered during the qualifications. Participants would like more

opportunities to understand budgets and school finance through practical examples or hands-on experience in their own school.

- Support from participants' schools was important to enable successful completion and overall was rated highly, but was dependent upon the sponsor understanding their role. Consideration should be given as to how to ensure 'all' schools do this.
- Support given by providers for assessment was an area for improvement (which many providers had already started to change), as evidenced by participants' slightly lower satisfaction ratings in this area. Participants need to fully understand the requirements for assessment. Introducing the assessment early in the qualification, particularly during face-to-face sessions, and including examples of what a good assessment looks like, were suggested as ways to improve this.
- All NPQs enabled participants to significantly develop the leadership competencies pertinent to the role. Key areas in which participants developed across all levels of the qualifications related to people management, including tailoring leadership approaches to influence others; distributing leadership; having difficult conversations and performance management; and working with governors or trustees.
- Participants' leadership development, and reinforcement of their existing skills, led to an increase in their readiness and confidence for the leadership role they had studied for. Improved readiness and confidence was particularly notable for those participants who aspired to their role of study (e.g. a senior leader undertaking an NPQH with the aim of becoming a headteacher).
- Over two-thirds of the participants who had secured a new role upon completing their NPQ agreed that the qualification had contributed to them securing this role.
- The NPQs had a range of self-reported impacts on participants' own and placement schools; these impacts varied and often related to the specific project they undertook as part of their NPQ. Self-reported impacts most commonly related to improving leadership skills and capabilities of other staff; improving teaching and learning standards; improving school leadership; and improving pupil attainment.

Those undertaking 2017 NPQs were more likely to experience a range of positive impacts when compared to the control groups. However, NPQ participants were already increasing their salary or changing roles at a quicker rate prior to starting the qualification. Therefore, it is not possible to establish a clear causal link between completion of the 2017 qualifications and the observed participant outcomes.

Appendix 1: Leadership competencies in the SPB survey

Below, is the full list of competencies with exact wording as used in the SPB survey.

NPQML

- Managing and analysing performance data to inform improvement strategies in the areas I am responsible for.
- Implementing sustainable changes to improve school performance in the areas I am responsible for.
- Implementing changes to improve the quality of teaching in the areas I am responsible for.
- Implementing changes to improve progress, attainment, and behaviour of pupils in the areas I am responsible for.
- Tailoring my leadership style and approach to meet the needs of individuals in my team.
- Understanding the benefits of working and collaborating with others (e.g. teachers, other staff, parents/carers, and other organisations).
- Supporting my team to build relationships and share good practice to improve performance.
- Deploying and managing staff efficiently in the areas I am responsible for.
- Managing school finances efficiently in the areas I am responsible for.
- Ensuring a safe environment for all pupils and staff.
- Holding staff to account through performance management.
- Supporting team members to identify their own professional development needs.
- Identifying my own professional development needs.
- Evaluating the impact of professional development on teacher and pupil outcomes in the areas I am responsible for.

NPQSL

- Analysing performance data and identifying variation to inform improvement strategies.
- Ensuring data is collected which is necessary, proportionate, and manageable for staff.
- Working with the governing board to identify and agree school development areas.
- Implementing sustainable changes to improve school performance.
- Measuring the impact of changes made to improve the quality of teaching.
- Implementing changes to reduce variation between pupils for progress, attainment, and behaviour.
- Developing and maintaining a high-quality school curriculum.
- Being able to lead, motivate and influence others.
- Identifying local and national partners to help improve pupil progress.
- Developing processes across the school and with other schools to share good practice.
- Deploying and managing staff efficiently across the school.
- Managing school finances efficiently.
- Ensuring a safe environment for all pupils and staff.
- Identifying excellent professional development for staff.
- Identifying talent within your school and putting in place arrangements or tools to develop and retain them.
- Designing professional development strategies, which engage all staff and anticipate future professional development needs.

NPQH

- Anticipating changes in the external and strategic environment that affect my school.
- Developing an organisational strategy with my governing board.
- Implementing whole school changes to improve school performance.
- Improving the quality of teaching across my school.
- Supporting pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and particular needs to achieve high standards.

- Reviewing all school initiatives to review the impact on teacher workload.
- Being an inspiring leader.
- Distributing responsibility and accountability throughout my school to improve performance.
- Developing and leading effective partnerships which bring benefits to my school and wider education system.
- Balancing a school's strategic or educational priorities with financial efficiency.
- Implementing accountability arrangements to manage resources and risks effectively and in line with statutory requirements (where applicable).
- Holding all staff to account through performance management.
- Creating and sustaining an environment where all staff are encouraged to develop their own knowledge and skills, and support each other.
- Anticipating capability requirements or gaps in the school and designing strategies to fill them.

NPQEL

- Being able to anticipate changes in the external and strategic environment and the ways it could impact on the schools I am responsible for.
- Developing a sustainable business strategy.
- Implementing changes across several schools to improve performance.
- Assessing and improving the quality of teaching across schools.
- Assessing and improving pupil progress, behaviour, and attainment in a range of different contexts.
- Deploying school-to-school support systems effectively to improve teaching quality, the school curriculum, pupil progress and attainment.
- Motivating and uniting a wide range of people across organisations around visionary or challenging goals.
- Using school-to-school partnerships and collaboration to drive improvement in a range of different areas (e.g. continuous improvement, governance, project management or financial efficiency).
- Expanding a school partnership enabling a school to join a partnership effectively.
- Deploying resources strategically across a number of schools whilst improving pupil outcomes.

- Maximising financial resources through income generation activities.
- Holding those with responsibility for the management of resources and risks to account effectively.
- Identifying long-term or strategic capability gaps across several schools, in collaboration with the governing board.
- Deploying staff strategically to increase the organisation's responsiveness and resilience to change.

Appendix 2: Description of the counterfactual analysis undertaken

Teacher level analysis

To explore the impact of the NPQs on teacher outcomes we carried out a counterfactual analysis using a *difference-in-difference (DD) method with matching*. This quasi-experimental design makes use of data from the treatment group (TG) of teachers who gained an NPQ as part of the 2017-18 cohort, and a matched control group (CG) of teachers who did not take an NPQ as part of the 2017-18 cohort. Outcomes for the groups are traced from 'before' the NPQ to 'after', and the changes in outcomes are compared. We carry out separate analyses for each of the three different levels of NPQ: middle leaders (NPQML); senior leaders (NPQSL); and headteachers (NPQH).⁵⁹

NPQ take-up is voluntary so one concern is that those who obtain NPQs would have better outcomes than those who do not, even in the absence of these qualifications. This is because they may be systematically different types of teachers, in different roles and different types of schools, compared to those who did not take an NPQ. They may also have different levels of motivation or different personality types more generally.

The combination of DD analysis with matching is undertaken to overcome (as far as possible) any bias that results from this non-random allocation of the *treatment* (the uptake of NPQs). It aims to reduce the concern that any difference in outcomes is due to the type of people who take NPQs, and is more likely due to the NPQs themselves. The method is not a complete solution to the problem of non-random allocation and in particular the key underlying assumption of parallel trends (see below) is not testable – although we can obtain some idea of whether it is likely to hold. Nevertheless these results provide our best estimate of the impact of the NPQs, and we spend some time exploring their validity.

Matching is a very important part of this analysis. It is used to construct a CG which is as close as possible to the TG at baseline, using the *observable characteristics* that we have (individual teacher, school, and area characteristics – see **Error! Reference source not found.**). The DD design (which compares the change in outcomes for both groups from baseline to follow-up) also controls for the effect of any *unobservable factors* that do not change over time (for example teacher personality type and motivation, or pre-existing levels of education, training, and experience).

The underlying assumption is that the matched CG is a good representation of what would have happened to the TG in the absence of the intervention i.e. it estimates what would have happened to the NPQ completers if they had not taken an NPQ. The CG is constructed to be as similar as possible to the TG, except for the fact that CG teachers

⁵⁹ We did not estimate the impact of NPQEL due to the small number of completers (Base=148).

did not take an NPQ. If the analysis shows that outcomes for the TG have changed significantly compared to the CG, then as long as the CG was chosen appropriately and the standard assumptions around the DD analysis hold, we can have reasonable confidence that the differential effects for the TG were caused by the NPQs. The method we employ provides an estimate of the *average treatment effect on the treated* (ATT); that is the impact of taking NPQs for teachers who took them.⁶⁰

In order to find an appropriate matched CG, and check the robustness of the results, we explored a number of different matching methods. The results that we report here are for *single nearest neighbour propensity score matching (PSM) without replacement*. This essentially means taking each NPQ participant (each treated individual) and then finding a non-participant (a control individual) who looks as similar as possible to them according to their propensity score. This score is the predicted probability that any individual teacher will be 'treated' i.e. take an NPQ, given their observable characteristics. It is found by estimating a probit regression on the pooled sample of the TG and CG. The predicted probabilities from this regression are used to select the closest matches, in this case the CG teacher with the closest propensity score to the TG teacher. A feature of the data is that the CG is very large compared to the TG; that means we have a very large number of potential matches to choose from, which enhances the probability of finding a good match for each TG member, even though we match across a wide set of characteristics.

The results that we present are robust to different matching methods; this is largely due to the very large number of potential control individuals. While the size of the estimated impact varies slightly depending on the matching method used, the story that we report remains essentially the same. Note in particular that our chosen method produces very similar results to other nearest neighbour PSM methods under a number of different criteria.⁶¹ All nearest neighbour methods achieve good balance across the set of covariates that we match on (**Error! Reference source not found.**).⁶² That means that these methods do find good matches. While we have chosen a method that achieves good balance, it is worth noting that that balancing is not strictly necessary when DD analysis is employed because we are comparing the *change* in outcomes for the TG and CG not the *levels*.

The *parallel trends assumption* is much more important than balancing in this context. It is critical to ensure the internal validity of the DD estimates, and requires that in the absence of treatment, the difference between outcomes for the TG and the CG is constant over time. Violation of this assumption will lead to biased estimation of the causal effect of the NPQs. There is no way of directly testing the parallel trends

⁶⁰ Distinct from the 'average treatment effect' (ATE) - the average effect across all individuals (treatment and control).

⁶¹ We varied the number of neighbours, the caliper value and whether or not to impose common support.

⁶² The only technique that did not perform well in terms of balance was kernel PSM, which is fundamentally different to nearest neighbour matching because it uses a weighted average of all CG individuals.

assumption (because we cannot know what would have happened to the TG if they had not been treated). However, we can get an idea of its validity by comparing trends in outcomes for both groups in the pre-NPQ period. As we will see, in some instances in our analysis the two unmatched groups do not display similar trends in the pre-treatment period, and this can cast doubt on the parallel trends assumption. Matching can go some way to alleviate this doubt because it makes the two groups more similar in levels at baseline. If we believe that the same mechanism that affects the levels also affects the trends, then matching can be expected to bring the trends closer too. Unfortunately, while our matching method works very well to bring the levels together at baseline, we also carry out *placebo tests* which cast further doubt on the validity of the DD estimates. **This evidence suggests that matching has not alleviated the problem of non-parallel trends.** We discuss this further, and the implications for our findings, when we present the results.

Data and variable definitions

We use School Workforce Census (SWC) data from 2015 to 2019 combined with data on NPQ uptake and teacher qualifications. Data from 2017 to 2019 is used for the main impact analysis. The baseline (academic) year (pre-NPQ) is 2017, the treatment (NPQ) occurs in 2018, and the follow-up period is 2019. Note that individual teachers (in our TG) started NPQs at different times from Oct 2017 to August 2018, and completed between November 2018 and December 2019. This means that the follow-up period is relatively short and varies by individual teacher. Therefore this analysis can only provide information about the short-term effects of taking an NPQ. SWC data from the pre-treatment period (2015-2017) is used to explore whether or not outcomes for the TG and CG were displaying similar trends before the TG took the NPQs. This is a way of informing the parallel trends assumption because if outcomes for the two groups were behaving similarly before the NPQs we may assume that they would have continued in this way in the absence of the NPQs. Unfortunately in these data, that does not seem to be the case for a number of the outcomes.

We also use the 2015 to 2017 data to carry out *placebo tests*, which are another way of informing the parallel trends assumption. While the real treatment occurred in 2018 with baseline in 2017 and follow-up in 2019, the placebo design uses a baseline of 2015, a ‘treatment’ in 2016 and follow-up in 2017. There is no NPQ treatment in 2016⁶³ so if we find a significant impact in this placebo scenario it is a spurious effect. The most likely reason for finding a significant effect in the placebo test is that the matched CG and TG were already on different trajectories in this period. The placebo tests are more informative than simply comparing pre-treatment trends because they compare outcomes

⁶³ We have to assume that other leadership programmes were not taking place at that time. Throughout this analysis it was not possible to control for teachers’ participation in other leadership programmes as this information was not available.

for the TG to the *matched* CG. Failure of the placebo test means that while the matching brought the levels of the two groups together it did not bring the trends in line.

However, pre-treatment trends in the unmatched groups and placebo tests with the matched groups all cast doubt on the validity of the DD estimates. Matching was able to bring the outcome levels of the CGs and TGs together at baseline, but it does not seem to correct for the fact that the groups were already on a different trajectory before the NPQs were introduced. This is particular clear for both salary and post-level, where the NPQ groups were progressing faster than the controls even before the NPQs. One possible reason for this is that the TG were taking, or had already taken, other leadership (or similar) qualifications in the pre-treatment period; and that these qualifications were already having a positive impact on their career progress.

The DD estimates are therefore biased. We should not attribute all of the estimated effects to the NPQs because some of the effect would likely have happened anyway. The impact estimates for salary and post level are likely to be biased upwards given the pre-treatment trends. For these outcomes there seems to be some convergence towards 2019 and hence in the longer term the estimated impact may dissipate.

Treatment Groups

There are three different TGs (and three different CGs) because we carry out separate analysis for the three different levels of NPQ. In each case the TG is the group who were classified as successfully *completing* the NPQ by the end of 2019. Those NPQ starters who were classified as awaiting achievement, not achieved, continuing, deferred, withdrawn or unknown are excluded from both the TG and the potential CG. The sample sizes are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9: Sample sizes for Treatment Groups and Potential Controls.

Treatment	No. of starters	No. of completers (TG)	Potential controls
NPQML	3,431	2,076	470,521
NPQSL	3,435	2,033	470,521
NPQH	1,677	874	470,521

The actual matched CG in each case is the same size as the TG because we implement single nearest neighbour matching. For example, 2,076 teachers from the controls are chosen to match the 2,076 teachers who completed a NPQML.

Outcomes

We estimate the impact of the NPQs on four outcomes (full definitions for all variables are given in Appendix Table A1):

- (i) salary (annual);
- (ii) level of post;
- (iii) changing schools;
- (iv) leaving the SWC.

Level of post is a categorical variable on a 5-point scale from 1: Classroom Teacher to 5: Head Teacher; it is treated as continuous here since the DD analysis uses the change in average level. Outcomes (iii) and (iv) are dichotomous and we use a linear probability model (LPM) for these; which essentially treats these outcomes as continuous. This is a simple direct approach to estimating probability differences between the TG and CG (which is our estimate of interest).⁶⁴

Variable definitions

Variable	Definition
Salary	Annual salary in £. Salary data was truncated to only include values from £1000 to £250,000. (Modelled in logs)
Post Level	Categorical: 1-classroom teacher, 2- Advisory Teacher/Leading Practitioner, 3-Assistant Head, 4- Deputy Head, 5–Head Teacher.
School change	Dummy: identifying a change of school
Left SWC	Dummy: identifying leaving the SWC.
Age	Age in years
Gender	Dummy: male
Ethnicity	Dummy: white
Part-time	Dummy: PT work (< 30 hours/wk)
QTS	Dummy for Qualified Teacher Status
Sickness absence	Days absent in the last year. Absence days were top-recorded to 365.
Post-grad qualification	Dummy: Masters or PhD qualification
Phase	Categorical: 1-primary, 2-secondary and 3-

⁶⁴ Two possible problems arise from using a LPM in this context: the model gives predictions outside the 0-1 range, and there is a high chance of heteroscedasticity. These are unlikely to be a problem in our DD set up. We are estimating a treatment effect via the DD in mean outcomes, and this is not being used for prediction. We also use robust standard errors to minimise heteroscedasticity.

Type	Categorical: 1-LA Maintained, 2-Academies,3-Free Schools, 4-Independent, 5- Special Schools.
School size	Number of pupils.
Small school	Dummy: schools with less than 100 pupils.
Ofsted Rating	Categorical: 1-Outstanding, 2-Good, 3-Requires Improvement, 4-Serious Weaknesses, 5-Special Measures.
Free School Meals (FSM)	% of pupils receiving FSM
Opportunity Areas (OAs)	Dummy identifying the OAs: Bradford, Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire, Doncaster, Stoke-on-Trent, Ipswich, Hastings, West Somerset, Norwich, Blackpool, Scarborough, Derby and Oldham.
Urban	Dummy identifying urban areas.
Region	Dummy for each region: London, East Midlands, East of England, North East, North West, South East, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber.

Matching

In order to construct a CG which is as close as possible to the TG we match on a wide set of covariates in the baseline year (2017) that might be expected to influence the ‘gains from treatment’, i.e. influence how teachers’ outcomes respond to the NPQ. These variables include teacher, school and area characteristics and are summarised previously. A separate CG is constructed for each TG. As explained in the methods previously, the single nearest neighbour propensity score matching (PSM) method that we use achieves a good balance across this set of covariates, so we can be confident that our CG and TG have very similar characteristics in the base year 2017.

The following variables used in the matching the control group to the treatment group. The variables matched were the following:

- **Teacher Characteristics:** Age, Sex, Ethnicity, Post, FT vs PT work, QTS status, Sickness absence, Post-grad qualification
- **School Characteristics:** Phase, Type, Small School, Ofsted Ratings, % Free School Meals
- **Area Characteristics:** Opportunity Area, Urban vs Rural, Region

To inform the analysis we first explored the difference between the group NPQ completers as a whole and teachers who did not start an NPQ. Descriptive statistics for these two groups in all years (2015 to 2019) are reported in Table 10. These statistics

confirm that as expected NPQ teachers are a systematically different group of people, and they were different even before they took an NPQ.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics by NPQ Group vs non-NPQ

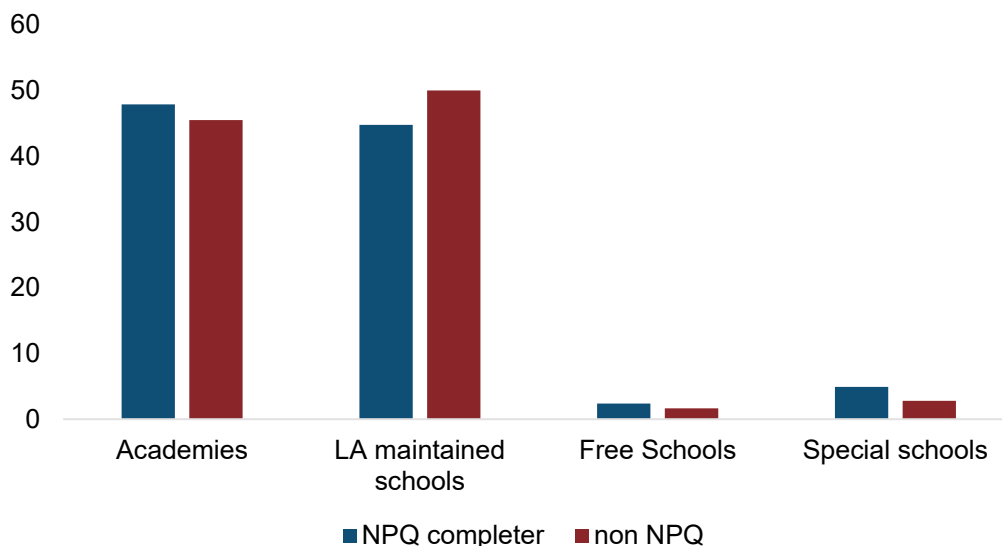
Teacher Descriptors	NPQ Completers: 2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Non NPQ: 2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Age (years)	33.4	34.3	35.3	36.3	37.3	38.8	39.2	39.3	39.5	39.8
Gender - male	26.4	27.5	27.7	27.3	26.9	18.6	19.8	19.5	19.2	18.9
Ethnicity - white	86.0	87.9	88.3	87.9	87.6	85.1	87.6	86.9	86.3	85.7
Part-time	25.4	26.3	25.9	25.3	23.9	35.2	37.4	37.9	38.3	38.2
QTS	98.3	98.8	98.9	98.9	98.9	97.1	97.0	97.1	97.2	97.4
Pg qual.	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	9.6	9.6	9.6	9.6	9.6
Absence	3.08	3.30	3.01	2.61	3.65	4.01	4.48	4.91	4.90	4.98
Post -level (1-5)	1.53	1.63	1.74	1.89	2.03	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.44
Salary £	37215	39233	41582	44456	47228	38086	38657	39286	40250	41549
Phase (1-3)	1.53	1.53	1.54	1.54	1.54	1.57	1.57	1.57	1.57	1.58
Type (1-5)	1.60	1.66	1.73	1.75	1.77	1.51	1.55	1.59	1.62	1.65
Size (No.)	659	646	634	626	624	718	717	717	715	716
Free School Meals	20.2	20.5	21.0	21.3	21.4	17.9	17.9	18.1	18.3	18.3
Ofsted rating (1-5)	1.59	1.57	1.53	1.50	1.48	1.62	1.61	1.57	1.53	1.49
Opportunity Area	12.2	12.7	13.3	13.4	13.2	7.0	7.4	7.3	7.2	7.1
Urban	89.2	88.8	88.7	88.8	88.8	88.8	88.1	88.3	88.3	88.4

Notes: NPQ completers: Base=4983. Non NPQ, Base=470,521. Actual sample sizes vary for each variable due to missing data. All figures are % in that category except for: age in years, absence in days, post-level on scale of 1-5, salary in £, phase (1-3), Type (1-5), Ofsted rating (1-5).

NPQ completers are on average younger than those who had not started an NPQ; they are also more likely to be male, have qualified teacher status (QTS), have a post-graduate qualification, and be in a higher level post, with consequent higher salary levels. They are less likely to work part-time, and they have fewer days absence. There appears to be little difference in ethnicity between the two groups.⁶⁵ On average they work in slightly smaller schools, with a higher percentage of children entitled to free school meals. They are also more likely to be in an Opportunity Area. The figures in Table 4 suggest that they also work in different phase and type of schools and more information on these variables is given in Figure 32 and

Figure 33 below. In 2017 (chosen because this is the base year that we match on for the analysis) NPQ completers are less likely to work in Local Authority maintained schools than teachers who have not started an NPQ. They are also less likely to work in secondary schools.

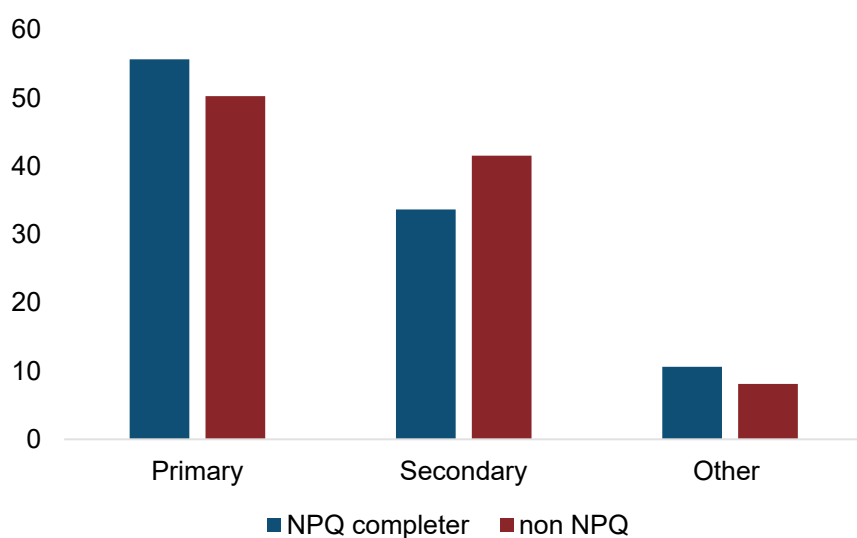
Figure 32: % School Type by NPQ Status 2017



NB: Independent schools are omitted from the graph due to very small numbers.

⁶⁵ Note that the ethnicity variable only distinguishes between white and non-white, due to small sample sizes in more disaggregated groups.

Figure 33: % School Phase by NPQ Status 2017



Difference-in-difference estimates and placebo tests

Table 11: Difference-in-difference 2017-2019, Results

NPQML

Statistical Measure	Salary	Post level	Left SWC	Changed school
<i>DD</i>	947***	0.013	-0.031***	-0.056***
Mean control t(0)	32533	0.991	0	0
Mean treated t(0)	33523	1.004	0	0
Diff t(0)	991	0.013	0	0
Mean control t(1)	37798	1.084	0.061	0.243
Mean treated t(1)	39735	1.106	0.03	0.187
Diff t(1)	1938	0.022	-0.031	-0.056

NPQSL

Statistical Measure	Salary	Post level	Left SWC	Changed school
<i>DD</i>	549	0.353***	-0.033***	-0.024
Mean control t(0)	37049	1.461	0	0
Mean treated t(0)	41773	1.499	0	0
Diff t(0)	4724	0.038	0	0
Mean control t(1)	41357	1.526	0.057	0.228
Mean treated t(1)	46630	1.923	0.025	0.204
Diff t(1)	5273	0.397	-0.033	-0.024

NPQH

Statistical Measure	Salary	Post level	Left SWC	Changed school
<i>DD</i>	2191**	0.555***	-0.031**	0.069***
Mean control t(0)	53104	3.721	0	0
Mean treated t(0)	52052	3.557	0	0
Diff t(0)	-1052	-0.164	0	0
Mean control t(1)	56387	3.646	0.067	0.191
Mean treated t(1)	57526	4.018	0.036	0.251
Diff t(1)	1139	0.372	-0.031	0.069

*** p<0.01; t(0) = 2017, t(1) = 2019, salary was modelled in log form and has been back-transformed to £ equivalents.

Table 12: Placebo tests 2015-2017

NPQML

Statistical Measure	Salary	Post level	Left SWC	Changed school
<i>DD</i>	1139**	-0.052***	-0.075***	-0.025*
Mean control t(0)	30333	1.01	0	0
Mean treated t(0)	28854	1.007	0	0
Diff t(0)	-1479	-0.003	0	0
Mean control t(1)	34201	1.06	0.092	0.269
Mean treated t(1)	33860	1.005	0.017	0.244
Diff t(1)	-340	-0.055	-0.075	-0.025

NPQSL

Statistical Measure	Salary	Post level	Left SWC	Changed school
<i>DD</i>	450	0.208***	-0.061***	0.016
Mean control t(0)	33523	1.169	0	0
Mean treated t(0)	37049	1.219	0	0
Diff t(0)	3526	0.05	0	0
Mean control t(1)	37798	1.258	0.079	0.224
Mean treated t(1)	41773	1.522	0.019	0.24
Diff t(1)	3975	0.264	-0.061	0.016

NPQH

Statistical Measure	Salary	Post level	Left SWC	Changed school
<i>DD</i>	2514**	0.626***	-0.069***	0.035*
Mean control t(0)	47572	3.165	0	0
Mean treated t(0)	47099	2.951	0	0
Diff t(0)	-473	-0.214	0	0
Mean control t(1)	50011	3.142	0.088	0.194
Mean treated t(1)	52052	3.572	0.019	0.229
Diff t(1)	2041	0.43	-0.069	0.035

*** $p < 0.01$; $t(0) = 2015$, $t(1) = 2017$, salary was modelled in log form and has been back-transformed to £ equivalents.

School level analysis

To explore the impact of the NPQs on school level outcomes we carried out a counterfactual analysis using a *difference-in-difference (DD) method with matching*. This quasi-experimental design makes use of data from a treatment group (TG) of schools who had teachers who had completed an NPQ as part of the 2017/18 cohort, and a matched control group (CG) of schools who did not have any teachers who started an NPQ as part of the 2017/18 cohort. Outcomes for the groups are traced from ‘before’ the NPQ to ‘after’, and the changes in outcomes are compared. We carry out separate analyses for primary and secondary schools.⁶⁶

NPQ take-up is voluntary so one concern is that those schools with NPQ teachers would have better outcomes than those who do not, even in the absence of these qualifications. This is because they may be systematically different types of school with different pupil intakes and in different locations. As a result they may employ different types of teachers,

⁶⁶ We only consider state-funded schools; these make up the vast majority of schools in the NPD.

who may be more likely to take NPQs. A similar approach was taken as with the teachers to reduce the bias of non-random allocation.

Matching is a very important part of this analysis. It is used to construct a CG which is as close as possible to the TG at baseline, using the *observable characteristics* that we have (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). The DD design (which compares the change in outcomes for both groups from baseline to follow-up) also controls for the effect of any *unobservable factors* that do not change over time. The underlying assumption is that the matched CG is a good representation of what would have happened to the TG in the absence of the intervention i.e. it estimates what would have happened to the NPQ schools if they had not had teachers with NPQs.

A full explanation of matching is provided in the teacher level analysis section. Matching can be done in a number of different ways and in this school level analysis we use *kernel propensity score matching (PSM)*. This matches each TG school to a weighted sum of CG schools who have similar propensity scores, with greatest weight being given to schools with closer scores. The matching is done at baseline. To further increase the internal validity of our results we restrict the estimate to the area of common support. There is a distribution of propensity scores for the TG and CG and this method restricts estimation to the overlapping region of the two distributions. Schools from either group who have propensity scores outside the range of values of the other group are discarded.

The *parallel trends assumption* is critical to ensure the internal validity of the DD estimates, and requires that in the absence of treatment, the difference between outcomes for the TG and the CG is constant over time. Violation of this assumption will lead to biased estimation of the causal effect of the NPQs. There is no way of directly testing the parallel trends assumption (because we cannot know what would have happened to the TG if they had not been treated). However, we can get an idea of its validity by comparing trends in outcomes for both groups in the pre-NPQ period. As we will see below, in all instances the pre-treatment trends in outcomes for the two groups seem to be the same. This (combined with the fact that matching is successful) gives us some confidence that the parallel trends assumptions holds, hence increasing confidence in the validity of our school level impact estimates.

Data and variable definitions

We use school level data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) for the years 2015 to 2018⁶⁷ combined with data on teachers' NPQ uptake. Data from 2016 to 2018 is used for the main impact analysis. The baseline year (pre-NPQ) is 2016, and the follow-up period is 2018. Note that individual teachers (in our TG) started NPQs at different times from September 2017 and July 2018, and completed them between August 2018 and July 2019. This means that the follow-up period is very short. Therefore this analysis can only

⁶⁷ 2015 refers to the academic year 2015/16, 2016 is 2016/17 and so on.

provide information about the short-term school effects of having teachers who had taken an NPQ. NPD data from the pre-treatment period (2015-2016) is used to explore whether or not outcomes for the TG and CG were displaying similar trends before teachers in the TG schools took the NPQs. This is a way of informing the parallel trends assumption because if outcomes for the two groups were behaving similarly before the NPQs we may assume that they would have continued in this way in the absence of the NPQs.

Treatment Groups

We carry out separate analyses for primary and secondary schools. In each case the TG is the group of schools who had any teachers who had successfully completed an NPQ by July 2019. This is a simple dichotomous treatment, and does not take into account the different number of teachers in each school who had acquired the qualification. The reason for this is that the vast majority of ‘treated’ schools only had one teacher who had completed an NPQ.⁶⁸ The sample sizes are summarised in Table 13.

Table 13: Sample sizes for Treatment Groups and Potential Controls.

Treatment: Teachers with NPQ	No. of schools with at least one NPQ completer (TG)	Potential controls
Primary schools	1,858	14,741
Secondary schools	829	2,342

Note: the actual TG and CG used in the analysis will be smaller as we impose common support.

Outcomes

For primary schools we consider four Key Stage 2 outcomes:

- (i) percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths;
- (ii) percentage of pupils achieving a high standard in reading, writing and maths;
- (iii) average attainment score in reading;
- (iv) average attainment score in maths.

For secondary schools we consider one Key Stage 4 outcome, the average Attainment 8 score (per pupil).

Variable definitions

Variable	Definition
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⁶⁸ Of the 2687 treated schools, 1738 had only one teacher with an NPQ, and a further 553 schools had two teachers. The numbers with more than 2 teachers who had an NPQ are very small.

School Type	Categorical: 1-LA Maintained, 2-Academies,3-Free Schools, 4-Independent, 5- Special Schools.
School size	Number of pupils.
Small school	Dummy: schools with less than 100 pupils.
Ofsted Rating	Categorical: 1-Outstanding, 2-Good, 3-Requires Improvement, 4-Serious Weaknesses, 5-Special Measures.
% Free School Meals (FSM)	% of pupils receiving FSM
% SEN	% of pupils with special educational needs support
% English not first language	% of pupils where English is not their first language
Opportunity Areas (OAs)	Dummy identifying the OAs: Bradford, Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire, Doncaster, Stoke-on-Trent, Ipswich, Hastings, West Somerset, Norwich, Blackpool, Scarborough, Derby and Oldham.
Urban	Dummy identifying urban areas.
Region	Dummy for each region: London, East Midlands, East of England, North East, North West, South East, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber.

Primary schools only:

Variable	Definition
Pupil intake: average cohort KS1 score	Cohort level key stage 1 average points score
% RWM expected standard	% of pupils achieving expected standard in reading, writing and maths.
% RWM high standard	% of pupils achieving high standard in reading, writing and maths.
score maths	Average scaled score in maths
score reading	Average scaled score in reading

Secondary schools only:

Variable	Definition
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Pupil intake: average cohort KS2 score	Cohort level key stage 2 average points score
Gender mix of intake	Categorical: 1-boys, 2-girls, 3-mixed
Attainment 8 score	Average Attainment 8 score per pupil

Matching

In order to construct a CG which is as close as possible to the TG we match on a wide set of covariates in the base year (2016) that might be expected to influence the ‘gains from treatment’, i.e. influence how having teachers with NPQs is likely to influence pupil attainment in schools. These variables include school and area characteristics and are summarised in **Error! Reference source not found.**⁶⁹

The variables used to match the CG with the TG group were the following:

- **School Characteristics:** Type, Size, % Free School Meals, % SEN, % English not first language, Ofsted rating
- **Area Characteristics:** Opportunity Area, Urban vs Rural, Region
- **Primary schools only:** Pupil intake: average cohort KS1 score
- **Secondary schools only:** Pupil intake: average cohort KS2 score, Gender mix of intake

The kernel PSM method that we use achieves a good balance across this set of covariates, so we can be confident that our CG and TG have similar characteristics in the base year 2016. For secondary schools balance is achieved across all covariates. For primary schools balance is achieved across all covariates except for school size and the probability of being in an Opportunity Area (OA). Even after matching, TG primary schools are slightly larger and more likely to be located in an OA. While we have chosen a method that achieves good balance, it is worth noting that that balancing is not strictly necessary when DD analysis is employed because we are comparing the *change* in outcomes for the TG and CG not the *levels*. Parallel trends are more important than balancing, and this assumption appears to hold for these data.

Difference-in-difference impact analysis

In this section we carry out separate analyses for primary and secondary schools.

⁶⁹ We were not able to control for teacher involvement in previous leadership programmes as this information was not available.

Primary schools.

Table 14 reports descriptive statistics for the treated and control primary schools for all years 2015 to 2018. These statistics show that that the primary schools with NPQ teachers are systematically different to the schools without, and they were different even before the NPQ ‘treatment’.

The TG schools are on average larger and more likely to be academy schools. They have higher percentages of pupils receiving free school meals, as well as higher percentages with special educational needs, and without English as their first language. Pupils come into TG schools with slightly lower KS1 scores. They also have lower Ofsted ratings, are more likely to be in an urban area and an Opportunity Area.

Table 14: Primary Schools - Descriptive Statistics by NPQ Schools vs non-NPQ

School Characteristics

Statistical Measure	Schools with NPQ teachers:				Non NPQ schools:			
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2015	2016	2017	2018
Type*	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.30	1.30	1.30	1.30
Size*	357	357	357	357	272	272	272	272
% FSM*	19.98	19.98	19.98	19.98	17.08	17.08	17.08	17.08
% Eng. not 1st lang.	20.23	20.72	20.51	20.73	14.67	15.12	15.26	15.30
% SEN	12.43	12.45	12.70	12.94	12.10	12.25	12.55	12.82
Av KS1 score	15.48	15.67	15.94	16.19	15.73	15.95	16.13	16.32
Ofsted rating*	1.97	1.97	1.97	1.97	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
Opportunity Area	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11
Urban	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.70

Outcomes

Statistical Measure	Schools with NPQ teachers:				Non NPQ schools:			
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2015	2016	2017	2018

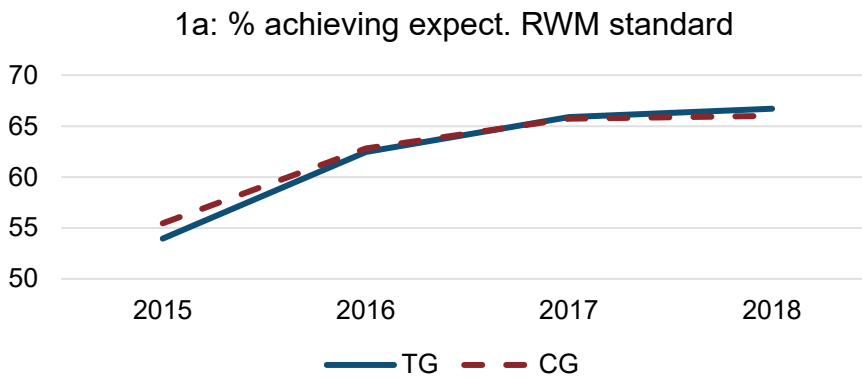
% RWM expected standard	53.96	62.46	65.89	66.71	55.46	62.81	65.74	66.01
% RWM high standard	5.28	8.58	9.77	10.44	5.66	9.09	10.05	10.52
Score maths	102.36	103.97	104.98	104.39	103.00	104.50	105.30	104.59
Score reading	103.09	104.22	104.40	105.09	103.16	104.27	104.35	104.95

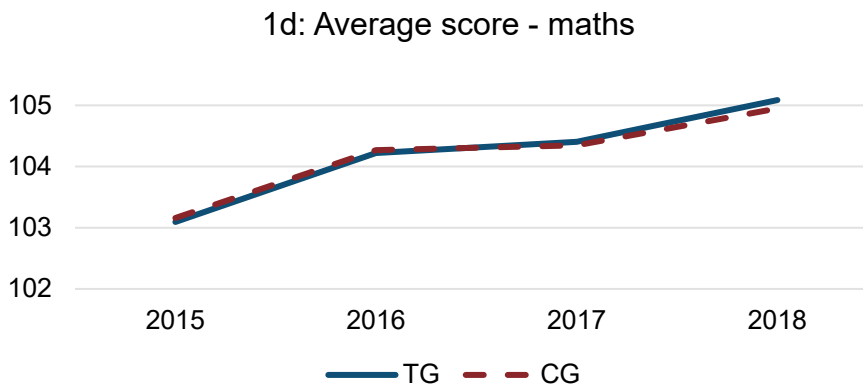
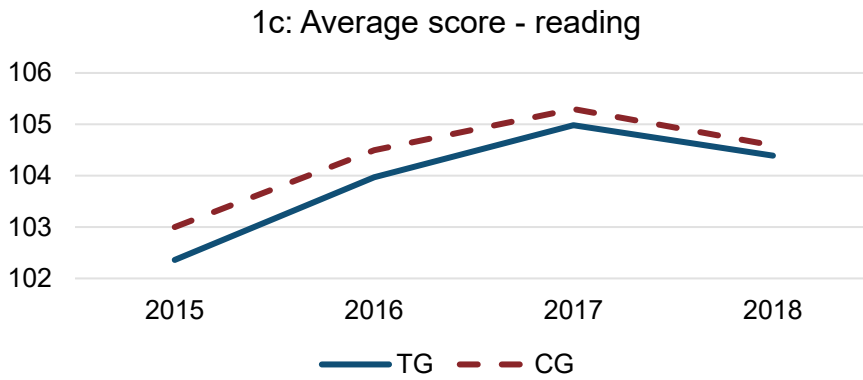
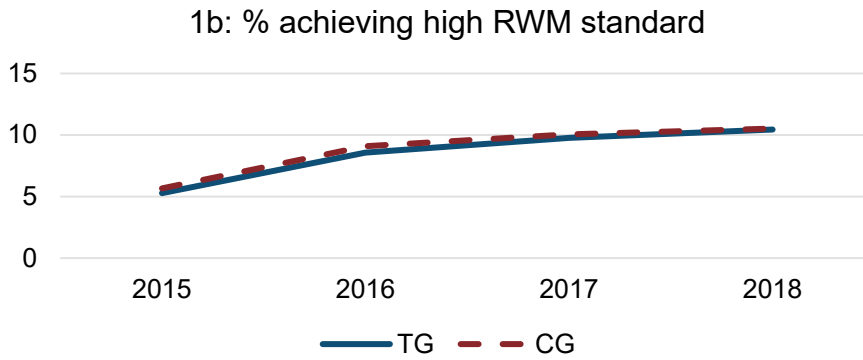
* These variables are measured in 2016.

To further explore the difference between the treated and potential control schools,

Figure 34 plots line graphs of all four outcome variables in each year 2015 to 2018. These graphs also enable us to explore pre-treatment trends in the outcomes, which is important to inform the assumption of parallel trends. All four graphs suggest that regardless of the differences in characteristics between the two groups of schools, the outcomes were all on similar trajectories throughout the period. Indeed, apart from the reading scores the two groups also had similar outcome levels throughout. For the reading score there is some indication that the gap was narrowing to 2018, and that this convergence started in the pre-treatment period.

Figure 34: Line graphs of KS2 outcomes by NPQ Status 2015-2018





The DD impact estimates presented in Table 15 below compares the gap between the outcomes of the two groups in 2016 with the gap in 2018. However, the CG used in the DD analysis is not exactly the one plotted above. The actual CG group is *matched* (at baseline, 2016) using the methods described above, to ensure that it is as similar as possible to the TG.

Table 15 reports all of the DD impact analysis results. Unlike in the simple descriptive statistics, in the DD analysis each TG is compared to a matched CG, where good balance is achieved across the matching variables at baseline. This is illustrated in

Table 16 by looking (as an example) at the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, for the matched and unmatched groups. The

matched outcomes are closer in 2016 and the gap slightly widens by 2018; for these groups the TG has higher scores throughout. In the unmatched groups the CG has a higher score than the TG, but this gap narrows by 2018. Overall though, there are not large differences between the matched and unmatched outcomes, and this is not surprising given the plots shown in Figure 1.

The DD results for KS2 are shown in Table 15. Each column represents a different outcome variable. The table also reports the mean outcome for each group at baseline (t0) and follow-up (t1), and the difference between the groups at each time point. The first row is the key DD estimate. This is the estimate of the impact (or ATT). The lack of asterisks in Table 15 signifies that none of these impact estimates are statistically significant; therefore, we estimate that having teachers in the schools with NPQs had no impact on pupil attainment in this outcome. The same is true for the other three KS2 outcomes.

Table 15: Difference-in-difference 2017-2018, Results

Statistical Measure	% RWM expected	% RWM high	score reading	score maths
DD estimate	0.446	0.052	0.090	0.041
Mean control t(0)	61.42	8.382	104	104.1
Mean treated t(0)	62.03	8.366	103.9	104.2
Diff t(0)	0.611	-0.0157	-0.0598	0.0682
Mean control t(1)	65.61	10.27	104.3	105
Mean treated t(1)	66.67	10.30	104.4	105.1
Diff t(1)	1.057	0.037	0.030	0.109

Table 16: Comparing outcomes in matched and unmatched samples - % achieving expected RWM standard

Statistical Measure	Further Measures	Matched	Unmatched
Diff-in-diff	DD	0.45	0.26
2016 (t0)	CG	61.42	62.81
	TG	62.03	62.46
	Diff	0.61	-0.35
2018 (t1)	CG	65.61	66.10

	TG	66.67	66.01
	Diff	1.06	-0.09

Secondary schools

Table 17 reports descriptive statistics for the treated and control secondary schools for all years 2015 to 2018. These statistics show that that the secondary schools with NPQ teachers are systematically different to the schools without, and they were different even before NPQ ‘treatment’.

Similar to the primary schools, the secondary TG schools are on average larger and more likely to be academy schools; they are also less likely to have a single sex intake. They have higher percentages of pupils receiving free school meals, as well as higher percentages with special educational needs, and without English as their first language. Pupils come into TG schools with slightly lower KS2 scores. They also have slightly lower Ofsted ratings, and are more likely to be in an urban area and/or an Opportunity Area.

Table 17: Secondary Schools - Descriptive Statistics by NPQ Schools vs non-NPQ

School Characteristics

Statistical Measure	Schools with NPQ teachers:2015	2016	2017	2018	Non NPQ schools: 2015	2016	2017	2018
type*	1.76	1.76	1.76	1.76	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.72
size*	1094	1094	1094	1094	1022	1022	1022	1022
gender mix	3.40	3.51	3.67	3.77	3.28	3.37	3.52	3.67

% FSM*	18.75	18.75	18.75	18.75	16.85	16.85	16.85	16.85
% Eng. not 1st lang.	17.13	17.94	18.34	18.58	14.55	14.78	14.74	14.71
% SEN	11.50	11.20	11.30	11.57	11.20	11.09	11.12	11.29
av KS2 score	27.40	28.37	28.36	28.63	27.68	28.63	28.61	28.82
Ofsted rating*	2.13	2.13	2.13	2.13	2.15	2.15	2.15	2.15
Opportunity Area	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
urban	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.85	0.85	0.85	0.85

Outcomes

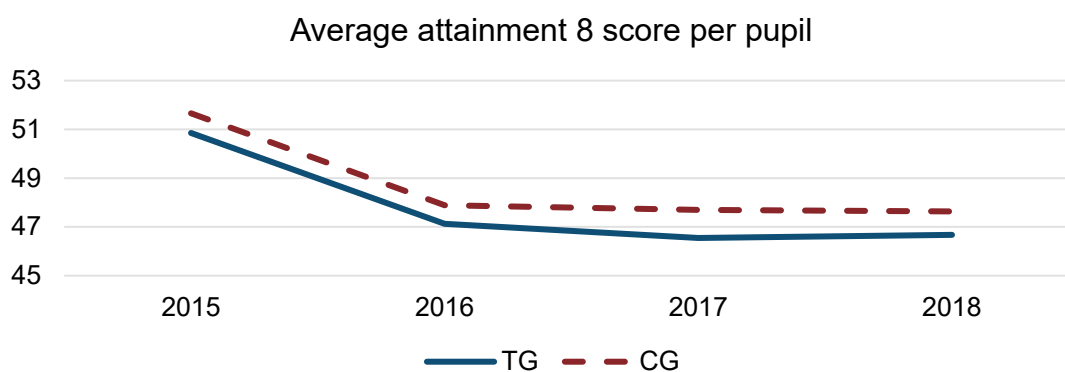
Statistical Measure	Schools with NPQ teachers:2015	2016	2017	2018	Non NPQ schools: 2015	2016	2017	2018
Attainment 8 score	50.85	47.13	46.55	46.68	51.66	47.89	47.70	47.64

* These variables are measured in 2016.

Figure 35 plots the outcome (pupil average attainment 8 score) for each year 2015 to 2018. This shows that while the TG schools have lower attainment throughout the period, the trends for the two groups behave very similarly.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The drop from 2015 to 2016 is to a change in methodology. This will not affect the DD analysis, which only uses data from 2016 to 2018.

Figure 35: Line graph of KS4 outcome by NPQ Status 2015-2018



The DD results for KS4 are shown in Table 18. This compares the matched groups. The attainment 8 score actually improves more in the matched CG than the TG, but this DD estimate is not statistically significant. So again we estimate that having teachers in the schools with NPQs had no impact on pupil attainment in this outcome.

Table 18: Difference-in-difference 2017-2018, Results

Statistical Measurement	Att. 8 score
DD	-0.050
Mean control t(0)	46.17
Mean treated t(0)	46.29
Diff t(0)	0.12
Mean control t(1)	46.24
Mean treated t(1)	46.31
Diff t(1)	0.070

Appendix 3: Additional analysis

Travel and subsistence

Several factors influenced whether or not a school would cover all of the travel and subsistence costs associated with their NPQ:

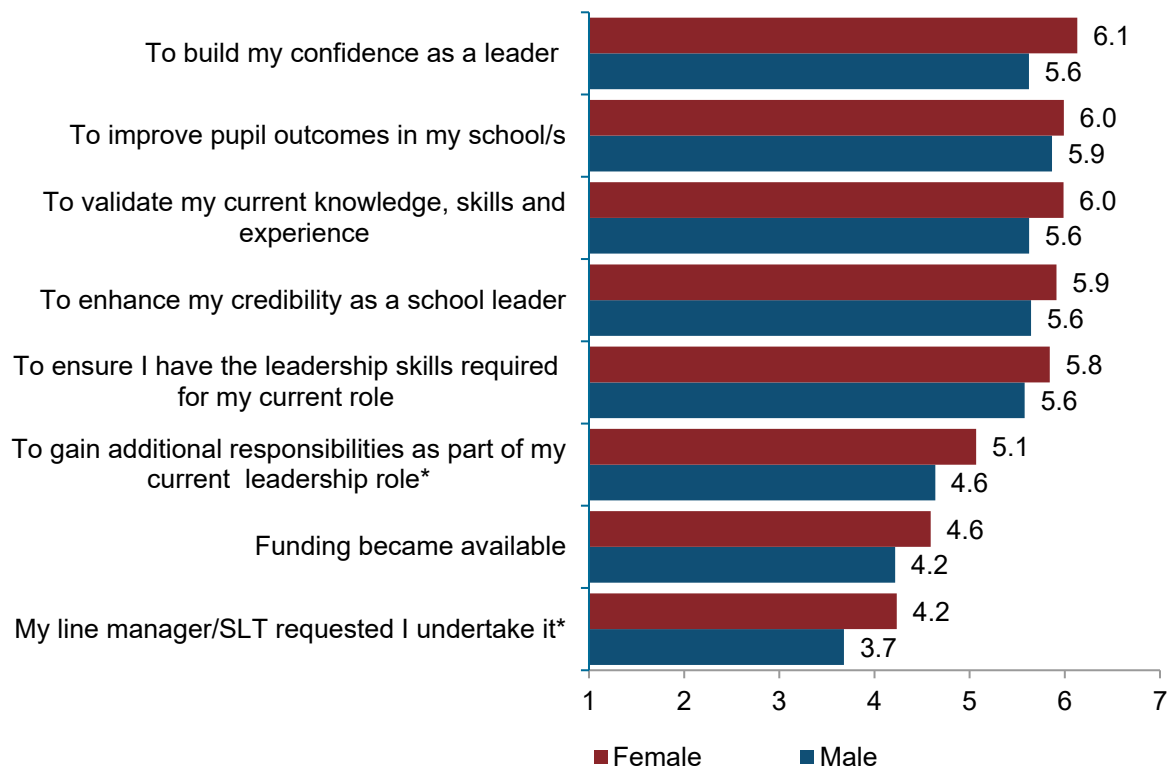
- **Qualification level:** a higher proportion of respondents undertaking NPQEL (46%) reported that their school was covering those costs compared with respondents undertaking all other levels of the qualification (22%);
- **Phase:** a higher proportion of secondary school respondents (27%) reported this compared with primary school respondents (18%); and
- **Gender:** a higher proportion of males (28%) reported this compared with females (20%). While phase and qualification level does influence these findings, it does not explain all differences by gender.

Motivations for undertaking the qualifications

The importance of the motivating factors for individuals starting a qualification differed across participants:

- **Gender:** Females rated numerous factors (as shown in Figure 36) as more important than males; these primarily related to potential outcomes for themselves rather than the school. The most notable differences related to females placing a higher level of importance on building their confidence as a leader (6.1 compared with 5.6 for males), and because their line manager or a member of the senior leadership team requested that they undertake the qualification (4.2 compared with 3.7).

Figure 36: Mean importance of various factors when deciding to undertake an NPQ, where there was a statistically significant difference between males and females.

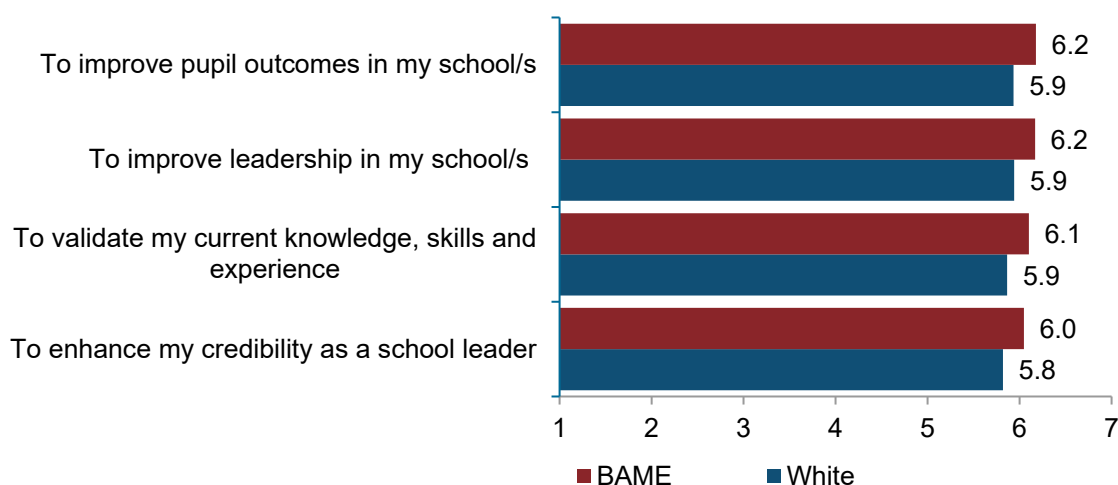


Source: SPA survey. Bases variable. *Not all respondents were asked this option
Scale of 1 to 7 (where 1=very unimportant and 7=very important).

- Ethnicity:** There were fewer differences by ethnicity, and the differences were smaller than those observed by gender. However, overall BAME⁷¹ participants placed a greater level of importance on improving pupil outcomes (6.2 compared with 5.9); improving leadership in schools (6.2 compared with 5.9); and developing in their existing role by validating their current knowledge, skills, and experience (6.1 compared with 5.9) than white participants (Figure 37).

⁷¹ The BAME categorisation (white ethnic groups versus other ethnic groups) of NPQ participants was based on internal MI information held by DfE. This data was collected from providers of NPQs and required data cleaning before analysis. It should be noted that DfE implemented further data-cleaning procedures between SPA and SPB, which means that the two BAME categorisations were not identical across the two data points; however, this only affected a small number of cases. A small number of participants at SPA may have been classified incorrectly as data was inputted incorrectly – e.g. a person’s nationality was used rather than their ethnicity.

Figure 37: Mean importance of various factors when deciding to undertake an NPQ, where there was a statistically significant difference between BAME and White groups.



Source: SPA survey. Bases variable
Scale of 1 to 7 (where 1=very unimportant and 7=very important).

Participants' experience of the application process

Further analysis showed that there were various respondent characteristics that influenced the challenges experienced at the application phase, which are described below.

Concern about finding the time to complete the qualification requirements outside of the school day

- **Gender:** A higher proportion of females reported this concern compared with males (48% compared with 43%).
- **Phase:** A higher proportion of primary school respondents were concerned about this compared with those from secondary schools (50% compared with 43%).

Challenges securing funding to cover the cost of the qualification

- **Qualification level:** A higher proportion of those undertaking NPQEL (21%) and NPQH (20%) reported difficulties in securing funding to cover the costs of the qualification compared with those undertaking NPQSL (9%) and NPQML (4%).
- **Aspiring for role vs in role:** A higher proportion of those aspiring to the role they were studying for reported challenges in securing funding to cover the costs of the qualification compared with those already in the role they were studying for (12% compared with 8%), to cover the cost of travel and subsistence (4% compared with 2%), and to cover release time (8% compared with 4%).

- **Phase:** A higher proportion of primary school respondents reported a challenge in securing funding to cover the cost of the qualification compared with those in secondary schools (11% compared with 7%).

Challenges undertaking the qualification

Similar to the challenges experienced at the application stage, respondent characteristics influenced the challenges experienced.

Obtaining release time to undertake activities associated with the qualification

- **Gender:** A higher proportion of females reported this as a challenge compared with males (22% compared with 14%).
- **Phase:** A higher proportion of primary respondents reported this compared with respondents from secondary settings (27% compared with 11%).

Meeting the cost of the qualification

- **Qualification level:** A higher proportion of respondents undertaking NPQEL reported this was a challenge (9%) compared with those undertaking NPQSL (1%) and NPQML (1%).

Travel time to attend the qualification

- **Qualification level:** A higher proportion of NPQEL respondents reported this was a challenge (24%) compared with those undertaking NPQH (8%) and NPQSL (7%). One NPQEL interviewee explained that they had specifically chosen to undertake their qualification outside of their geographical region, which may explain why travel time to attend the qualification was more of a challenge for these participants.

Readiness and confidence for role

Respondent characteristics influenced the change in participants' readiness and confidence for the role they had studied for.

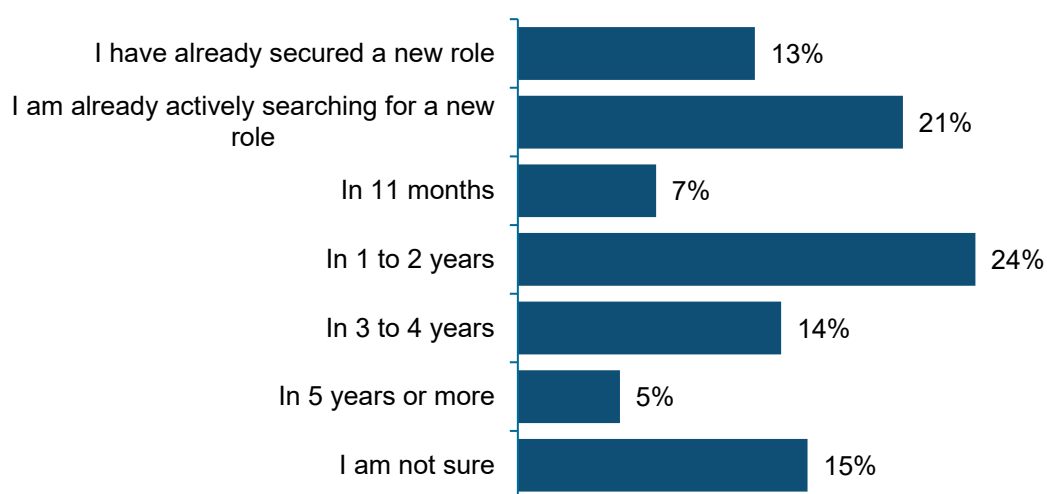
- **Gender:** Females, on average, reported a slightly greater improvement in their confidence levels from 4.2 to 6.2 (a difference of 2.0), compared with males who increased from 4.4 and 6 (a difference of 1.6).
- **Phase:** Primary school participants, on average, reported a slightly greater change in their confidence levels from 4.2 to 6.1 (a difference of 1.9), compared with secondary participants, who improved from 4.5 to 6.1 (a difference of 1.6).

- **Ethnicity:** On average, BAME⁷² participants reported a larger improvement in their confidence levels from 4.1 to 6.3 (a difference of 2.2), compared with white participants, who improved from 4.3 to 6.1 (a difference of 1.8).

Timescales for seeking next level of school leadership

Over one-tenth (13%) of participants who stated that they aspired to the next level of school leadership had already secured this new role but had not yet moved into it when they completed the SPB survey; one-fifth (21%) were actively searching for this role; and approximately one-third (32%) planned to look for this role within two years (Figure 38).

Figure 38: Participants’ timescales for searching for a role in the next level of school leadership



Source: SPB survey. Base=569

Unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of participants who had not yet secured a position in the leadership role that they studied for (Group 1, as described in the previous section) were already actively searching for this role (37%) – reflecting their aim to move into this position – compared with participants who were already in the role they studied for (group 3) (10%) who had not necessarily undertaken the qualification to seek a promotion.

Conversely, a higher proportion of aspiring leaders now in the role for which they studied (39%) and those who were already in the role of study at the start of their qualification (24%) planned to look for a role in the next level of school leadership in 3 years or more

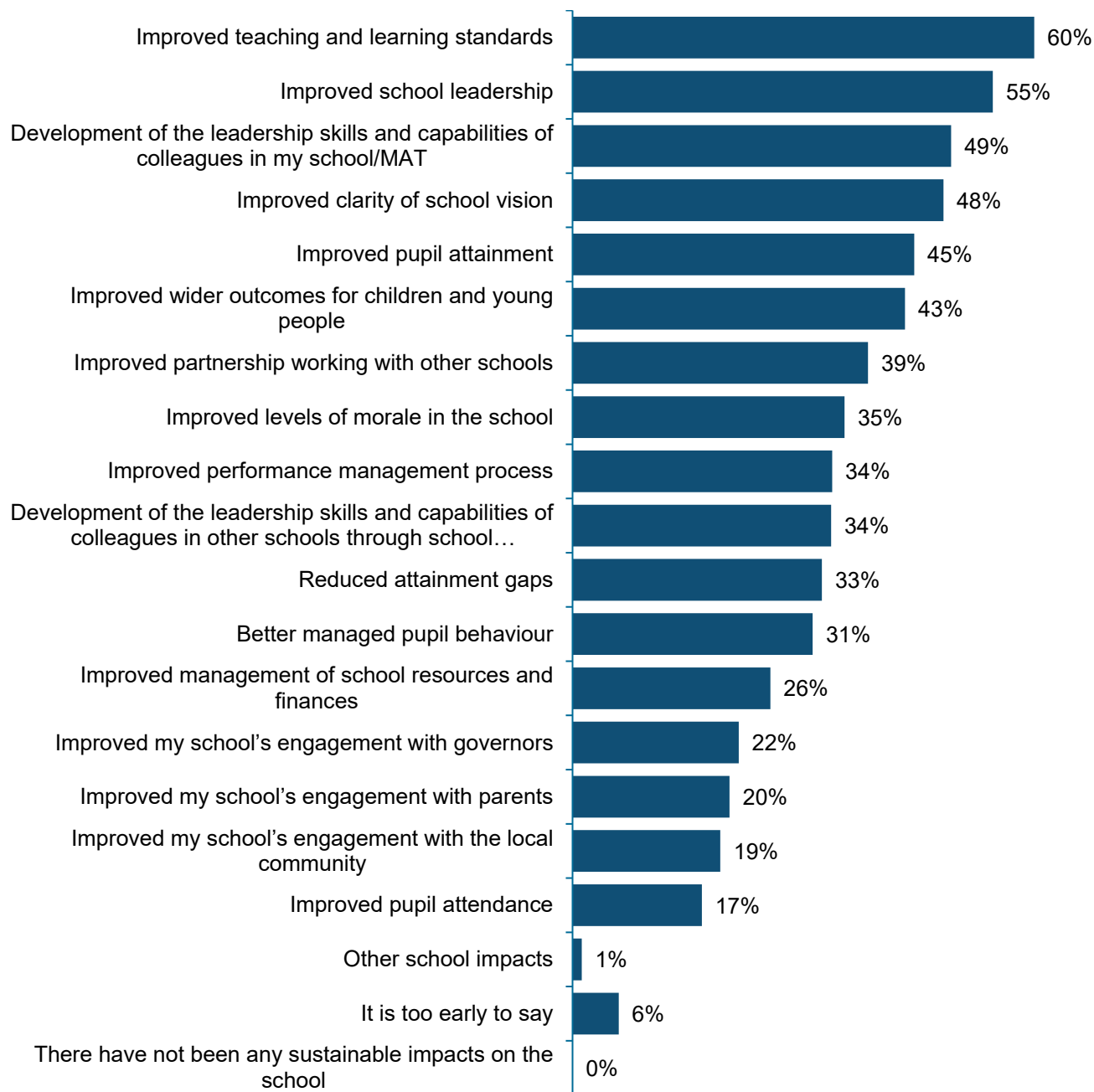
⁷² The BAME categorisation (white ethnic groups versus other ethnic groups) of NPQ participants was based on internal MI information held by DfE. This data was collected from providers of NPQs and required data cleaning before analysis. It should be noted that DfE implemented further data-cleaning procedures between SPA and SPB, which means that the two BAME categorisations were not identical across the two data points; however, this only affected a small number of cases. A small number of participants at SPA may have been classified incorrectly as data was inputted incorrectly – e.g. a person’s nationality was used rather than their ethnicity.

compared with aspiring leaders who had not yet secured a position in the role they studied for (7%).

School level impacts

All respondents to the colleague survey reported that the changes participants made in their school had resulted in sustainable impacts on their school/MAT. These impacts most frequently related to improved teaching and learning standards (60%); improving school leadership (55%); the development of leadership skills and capabilities among other staff (49%); improved clarity of school vision (48%); and improved pupil attainment (45%). These findings also support the self-reported impacts on schools by participants within the SPB survey.

Figure 39: Impact on participants' schools as reported in the Colleague Survey



Source: Colleague survey. Base=83

Appendix 4: Provider Learning Reports

Below are the learning reports developed following the learning labs.

Marketing, communications and recruitment for the NPQs

Emerging learning for providers

In March 2018, NPQ providers gathered at two Learning Labs organised by the DfE to share their experiences, successes and challenges in delivering the NPQs. CFE Research attended these sessions and also conducted focus groups with providers to explore feedback in greater depth.

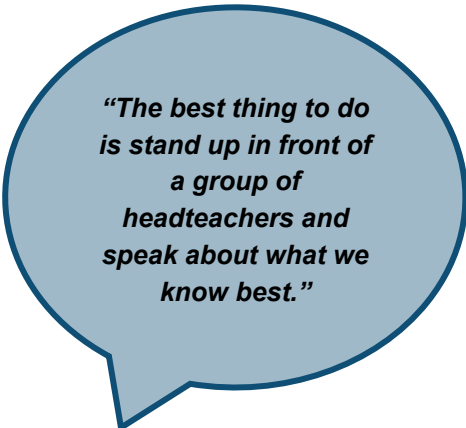
This document draws upon content from the Learning Labs with a particular focus on marketing and recruitment. It highlights key challenges experienced by providers and shares ideas and successes to support them and aid their continuous improvement. Learning centred on delivery approach and course content will be addressed at a later date.

Marketing and communications

Strategically positioning the NPQs

Making schools aware of the NPQs was a key concern, both due to a lack of knowledge about the nature of the reforms and to ensure that NPQs are at the forefront of schools' leadership training agendas. Success is therefore dependent on both drawing upon existing networks and contacts and developing relationships with new contacts to ensure that NPQs are positioned strategically. Approaches shared to overcome these challenges included:

- Liaising with **your local authority; Regional School Commissioner; school network, MAT and TSA leaders** to ensure they know about the reformed NPQs. Such individuals have respect, integrity and trust, which makes them influential in marketing the NPQs. Request that these contacts cascade the message to schools.
- Making the most of your **existing contacts and networks to advertise** the NPQs and use these to **broker relationships with new contacts** where appropriate.



“The best thing to do is stand up in front of a group of headteachers and speak about what we know best.”

- Inviting yourself to **meetings with key stakeholders** – this is another way of ensuring NPQs are on the school leadership agenda.

Engaging decision-makers

Identifying and engaging decision-makers is a challenge for many. Discussion on how to achieve this covered various approaches and success often stemmed from working with schools by supporting the implementation of their individual School Improvement Plans. Providers shared the following tips to engage decision makers:

- **Coordinate NPQ marketing activity with schools' performance management timetables.** These discussions often occur at the end of the summer term or in January. This is when decision makers will be considering how best to upskill their leadership.
- Work alongside schools **to help them to think about their leadership succession planning.** This will put the leadership pipeline on their agenda and help to frame NPQs as a solution to address this.
- Consider the **order in which you target marketing activity** to specific individuals in schools to maximise effectiveness. E.g. providers indicated that when marketing NPQML and NPQSL they experienced success when they approached CPD coordinators or head of departments first, followed by deputy headteachers or headteachers, and finally targeting communications at middle and senior leaders. When marketing NPQH and NPQEL, the participants are the decision makers, so a different approach is required.
- **Address communication directly to school governors and/or trustees** in addition to headteachers as they have responsibility for school leadership and budgets.

Marketplace

The marketplace for leadership training provision can be overwhelming for schools, particularly in Opportunity Areas where schools are being offered numerous types of support. Providers indicated that schools sometimes display confusion in relation to the different levels of the NPQs and which providers deliver these qualifications. To help with this:

- DfE have created a central [website](#) which details the NPQs delivered by each **provider** and the geographical areas in which they operate. This can be used to help clarify any enquiries providers receive from schools and can be shared directly with them.
- If you have delivery partners, ensure that they clearly identify which NPQ accredited provider they are working with when marketing the NPQs. This will help

to reduce confusion amongst schools who may be contacted by multiple NPQ providers.

Communication approach and tools


Providers shared their approaches to marketing, which primarily involved them engaging with existing contacts but also undertaking email, postal, social media and other outreach activities. Many providers take a different approach to communications depending on the audience; key factors underpinning the strategies adopted included the NPQ level and whether they were engaging a decision-maker or potential participant. Providers discussed the merits of using the following approaches:

- Making use of **social media**, such as Facebook and Twitter, to market your NPQ provision. This was seen to be particularly useful for the NPQML and NPQSL participant populations. Linked In was noted as being a possible route to engage Executive Leader interest.
- Emails were universally acknowledged as problematic, with the majority experiencing that these were simply ignored. Other tools to reach school leaders were discussed, with successes mainly seen by **telephone calls or postal letters**.
- Creating marketing materials including, brochures, posters or flyers advertising the NPQs that schools can put in **staff rooms**.
- Having easily **accessible websites** with an overview of what the NPQs are, who they are for, what is involved, the benefits and how to get more information.
- **'Piggy-backing' on existing events** which gives you the opportunity to market the NPQs to a captive audience.
- **Hosting taster events**. Whilst some providers had experienced a low turnout to such events, others explained that they provide some success in the long run.
- **Using blogs and articles** for NPQ graduates to **share their experiences** of undertaking an NPQ.
- Taking a **multi-pronged approach to communication was felt to be important**. Multiple formats raise the profile of the NPQs and help to amplify the message to different audiences.

Marketing content

Discussion on the content of communications highlighted differences in approaches, from generic communications signposting to a website for more detail, to a tailored multi-method approach for each NPQ level. Some key points shared were:

- **Emphasise the quality** of the provision, the resulting **qualification** and the wider **benefits** it has **for participants and schools**. This is particularly pertinent when liaising with MATs who may have their own leadership provision.
- **School leaders'** involvement in the **design** and, where relevant, **delivery** of the qualifications is a **powerful marketing message**, so include this in communications with prospective participants and schools.
- Schools trust the DfE, therefore, it may help to **reference that the NPQs are accredited by DfE** in your communications.
- Thinking about the **audience for the different NPQ levels** and modifying your approach accordingly e.g. providers indicated that NPQH and NPQEL often attracted aspirant leaders, whereas NPQML and NPQSL attracted leaders already in such roles.
- Create clarity of your **unique selling point** to convey to schools. This is particularly important for the NPQH and NPQEL where providers have experienced that participants are 'actively shopping around' to find a provider that meets their needs.
- The **content of the NPQs is flexible and can be tailored** to specific contexts or cohorts of leaders, which is a distinct **advantage of the qualification that schools value**. If this is something you are doing, make sure you emphasise this when communicating with schools.
- **Consider the benefits** of the qualifications for **different audiences**. E.g. the flexibility of the content is particularly pertinent if you are considering tailoring content for specific MATs who sign up multiple participants. Another potential benefit for MATs, who offer the provision to leaders across the trust, is better staff retention.
- **Personal stories are powerful, so use testimonials** from NPQ graduates in marketing materials to help make the content relatable for prospective participants.



“The most success for us...have been repeat customers...establish your credibility as a high-quality provider...those people going back to their establishments recommend that and then growth comes from that.”

Creating word of mouth

A key theme in the discussion on marketing was that providers have largely found success from repeat custom and recommendation. More established providers advised

that this should not be underestimated. Processes to support maximising this opportunity included:

- Actively engaging with NPQ participants and graduates to **explore their desire to undertake future NPQs**; whilst this won't provide participants immediately, it will help drive future recruitment.
- Approaching **NPQ graduates** to see if they can **provide testimonials** for marketing materials or **recommendations to colleagues**.
- **Identifying representative(s) who hold influence with local schools** and selling them the benefits of the NPQs. These individuals can then cascade the message amongst their networks and help you to broker new relationships. This is particularly **beneficial when you have no existing relationship with a school or are marketing levels of NPQs where you have no track record**.

Cost

The cost of NPQs can be a challenge for schools and some have been unable to engage with the qualifications because the cost is too great. Providers are finding this is particularly difficult for small schools, schools not part of a MAT or alliance, special schools and PRUs. Some key points shared included:

- Schools often have an annual training budget. Allowing schools to **spread the cost of the qualification over two or more years has proven successful** (particularly for small schools).
- Headteachers may have several members of staff who are eligible to take an NPQ, but limited training budgets to pay for the qualifications. To mitigate against difficult decisions being made at a school level, some providers suggested the possibility of **offering discounts to schools who sign up more than one participant at a time**.
- Discounts could also be offered to **NPQ graduates** and **MATs** who are likely to sign up multiple participants.
- Be mindful that **headteachers and Executive Leaders will be conscious of cost** for themselves and their middle and senior leaders, but will be willing to pay for good quality provision. Remember to relay the **quality of the provision and the benefits** when liaising with schools.

Funding for NPQs

Some providers explained that schools in Opportunity Areas or those in category 5/6 areas are not aware that they are eligible for TLIF funding to pay for NPQs. They suggested:

- **Liaising with local authorities and school networks** to check awareness of this funding and how they are communicating it in their area.
- **Explaining** what Opportunity Areas and category 5/6 areas are in any communication.

Recruitment

Providers are at various stages with recruitment; whilst some are experiencing difficulties, others are not. Below are some of the key challenges experienced by providers alongside strategies they have used to overcome these.

Selection process

Some providers explained that the TLIF funding had resulted in an influx of applicants for the NPQs; whilst demand for the qualifications is great, such volumes had been difficult to manage and at times had resulted in waiting lists for NPQs. Providers suggested some key strategies to help address this issue, which are also important to consider when demand is not as high:

- Introducing a **selection process** to explore applicants' readiness for the qualification, and their motivations for undertaking it. **Interviews and application assessment** are ways in which providers are managing this, which can also serve as a way to gather information to **tailor the NPQ content to the individual and their school**.
- **One to one contact with applicants** will help to ensure that they **understand the commitment** they are making and allow them to make an **informed decision** before they begin the qualification.

Targets

DfE have set providers individual targets to engage participants with specific characteristics e.g. leaders with a BME background and teachers from FSM schools. These targets are reflective of the teacher and leader populations in their local area. Meeting these targets is a concern for providers, with some voicing unease about the sensitivities of recruiting on the basis of personal characteristics. Providers who had already met their targets for this year expressed concern about meeting future targets as they felt they had 'exhausted' the potential pool of candidates or schools that met the target criteria. Providers offered several solutions to help address such challenges:

- Whilst TLIF funding works as an incentive for some eligible participants, others questioned the parity with other teachers / schools. Therefore, **communicate the intended outcome of the funding**: to enhance the supply of high quality leaders to drive improvements in school and pupil-level outcomes in areas of need through the application of leadership and management skills, and contribute to social mobility.
- Outside of TLIF funded areas, you may want to consider offering **discounts** to schools who sign up **multiple participants** to help reach your targets.
- **Enlist champions** that share the characteristics of participants you want to recruit. Use such champions to help promote the NPQs.
- If you have reached **saturation point** and you have no further leads in your area to pursue, **communicate with DfE**.

“Getting some champions from those communities was really important.”

“It drives us to train a leadership group that reflects the communities that we serve. It’s good in that respect.”

Networking with other providers

There are 41 providers offering NPQ provision that all have a wealth of expertise in school leadership provision and a range of experience in delivering the NPQs.

- It was obvious that providers are keen to **learn from each other**. If you are struggling with specific aspects of delivery, reach out to other providers: there is a strong chance that another provider will have experienced similar challenges and may be able to offer advice to help you address such issues.
- You may want to consider organising **observation days** with another provider to **exchange learning**.
- Awareness of the NPQ reforms and provision varies by school, so many providers are keen to **work together to help promote the NPQs**.
- Feel free to **suggest themes for discussion, speakers and content for future learning labs**. If you have experienced particular success with tools or approaches, **presentations or demonstrations to showcase these will be welcomed**.

NPQ content, delivery and assessment

Emerging learning for providers

Between March and July 2018 NPQ providers gathered at four Learning Labs organised by the DfE to share their experiences, successes and challenges in delivering the reformed NPQs. CFE Research attended three of these sessions and also conducted focus groups with providers to explore feedback in greater depth.


This document draws upon content from the Learning Labs with a particular focus on qualification content, delivery approach and emerging findings regarding assessment. It highlights key challenges experienced by providers and shares ideas and successes to support and aid your continuous improvement. Learning centred on marketing, communications and recruitment was addressed in an earlier paper.

Qualification content


Using expertise to develop NPQ content

The reformed NPQ model gives providers the autonomy to innovate and develop content against the NPQ content and assessment framework. Providers welcome this change, although there is some unease as there is no 'right answer'. The following approaches were shared to navigate and thrive with the new framework:

- There is no single solution to developing NPQ content **so develop qualification content based on your knowledge and expertise in school leadership.**
- Those who felt most confident in this area talked about **considering the type of school leaders that they want to develop** and developing content to meet this need.
- **Consulting with school leaders** was seen as non-negotiable to ensure that **content is relevant, current** and fit for purpose. It also helps to **achieve buy-in** from schools.
- A successful approach shared by several providers is to **use examples from other sectors** including retail. While at first some participants can question this approach, it



"The benefit of us using current leaders is that everything is current. You're tackling real problems as they exist today, in a changing environment, and it's very different now to what it was ..."



"It's been really interesting how much they're loving the other sector models and scenarios ... Looking at Starbucks and Lego... The feedback was amazing... they could see how school leaders could tweak and change business models, and how they could apply that to their own context."

has been widely highlighted as a positive element for those who have included it, helping to embed learning.

- **Map your qualification content to the content and assessment criteria.** Different approaches were shared to achieve this, with no consensus of which worked better. Some use the same author (or team) to develop content across all qualification levels to achieve clarity of progression. Others tackled each level in a different way, with different content developers, using the content and assessment framework as the common ground.

Networking with other providers

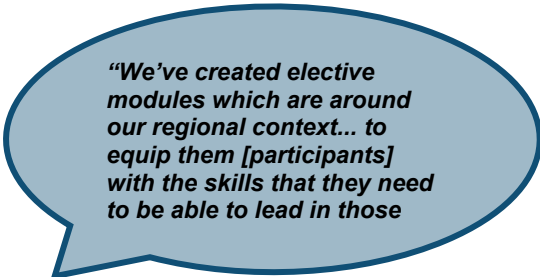
Despite the increased element of competition that now exists, providers still exhibit an appetite to learn from each other as all acknowledge there is a shared goal in developing leaders in education. Outside of the Learning Labs, providers have been using the following approaches to work together:

- **Informally sharing ideas and learning** to identify theories that they were previously unaware of and develop qualification content.
- **Exchanging participant handbooks or guidance** documents.
- **Identifying providers of a similar size** and approaching them to collaborate.

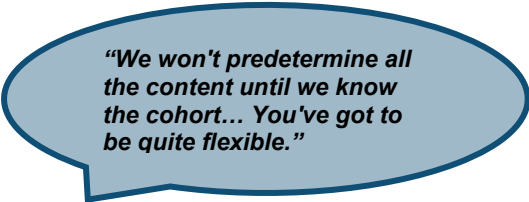
Tailoring NPQ content to meet participants' needs and school contexts

Providers appreciate the flexibility the reformed NPQ model gives them to tailor their NPQ provision to meet their participants' needs. Whilst some providers have created entire NPQs which are relevant to specific school contexts, including NPQs for those working in faith schools, other providers have used the following alternative approaches to tailor their provision:

- Creating a range of **elective modules** for participants to choose from. These modules could be based on the needs of schools in a particular geographical area, such as rural vs urban schools or those with high proportion of pupil premium funding; or different school contexts, for example.
- **Adapting provision for each cohort of participants** by reviewing their applications, development areas or school contexts.



"We've created elective modules which are around our regional context... to equip them [participants] with the skills that they need to be able to lead in those"



"We won't predetermine all the content until we know the cohort... You've got to be quite flexible."

- If you are adapting your NPQ content for specific participants or offering participants elective modules, **remember to advertise this, as it is a new approach to developing content.**

Adapting content based on feedback

The ongoing revision of NPQ qualification content, is seen as vital to **ensure that the NPQs remain current.** Therefore, it is important that continuous improvement prevails beyond the first year of delivery. Primarily, providers report that they adapt their qualification content after consulting with participants to understand what works well and what needs improving to better meet participants' needs. Feedback from facilitators or partners delivering the content supplements this.

Providers discussed the range of different approaches they are using to obtain participant feedback (e.g. paper surveys and face-to-face discussions) and the difficulties associated with this. Two solutions which were highlighted as being successful were given:

- **Providing a feedback loop**, where actions taken as a result of previous feedback are presented to demonstrate that it makes a difference.
- **Building feedback into delivery**, either by asking at the end of a face-to-face session/webinar or making completion of feedback materials a condition of moving to the next element.



Delivery approach

Taking a flexible approach to delivery

As with content, no single delivery approach is seen as being the most successful, and providers agree that the focus is on what works for each level, cohort and/or participant. Some successful ways of determining how to deliver the qualifications flexibly were shared:

- **Exploring the use of online learning, webinars, libraries, peer-learning and tutor support.** These can be accessed flexibly, which gives participants the opportunity to engage in the qualification at their own convenience. Providers using these tools highlighted the need to build in time to allow participants to get used to how these delivery mechanisms work and develop the confidence to contribute to any interactive sessions.

- **Consulting with participants regarding the timing of face-to-face activity (if applicable)** to help improve attendance and minimise the burden on participants' schools. For example, some participants may be keen to attend whole day sessions whilst others prefer twilights or weekend residentials. Providers flagged that preferences often differ between cohorts of participants regardless of qualification level.
- **Consider your delivery methods for each level of the qualification.** Participants across the NPQs are at different stages in their careers and will have differing preferences about how the qualifications are delivered. For example, your approaches for delivering NPQML may not be well received by participants on NPQEL despite the differing content. For example, NPQEL participants may be less receptive to the use of role play. Providers explained that they had adapted their delivery approaches across the qualification levels to account for this.

"We know that getting out of school... that's a big undertaking. What we're looking to do is make them [face to face sessions] facilitated online, so they're live online sessions. So, actually, you're still turning up at the same time, but you could be at home... doing that session."

"We have found that we need to structure the learning differently at NPQEL level so that they engage, so that they see it as being worth their time."

Communicating with participants

Clear communication with participants about what is expected from them was discussed as an important element of creating a positive learning experience. Successful approaches included:

- Highlighting that **participants' experience of the qualification is what they make it** – they need to drive their own learning and it is not all about them being 'taught'.
- **Providing participants with a qualification handbook or guide** that they can refer to at their convenience.
- **Emphasising** that the **NPQs have been reformed**, and that when seeking advice from colleagues it is possible they undertook a previous version of the NPQs which followed a different assessment criteria.

"We say that 'this is coming from you and it's about sharing your experiences and, kind of, your personal learning journey as well, rather than just being talked at.'"

- Providing participants with **reading lists** with sufficient time to action them. **Reading ahead** of face-to-face sessions can help to **free up time for discussion on the day**.
- Providing **clarity about what resources are compulsory to read**, and which are to supplement learning where participants feel it is needed – so that participants don't feel overburdened or are underprepared.
- Allocating participants a **single, consistent key point of contact**. This might be a coach, mentor or an online tutor – someone who can support participants when they have questions.

"A lot... have said the online tutor is really helpful, because if I'm worried about something and I email them on a Sunday when I'm, you know, researching it, I'll get a response back."

Forming clear parameters for delivery

While the use of current leaders or experts on a particular topic is seen as a key way to deliver content, there have been mixed experiences. Some key thoughts to make best use of different types of speakers and strategies used to maintain the consistency and quality of delivery are:

- Inviting **current school leaders to talk** about their experiences to **contextualise learning**, but solely relying on this group can narrow the focus.
- **Be clear with guest/expert speakers on the core topics to cover** in a session, and where they can adapt to suit their style or experience.
- Using **skilled facilitators to deliver sessions** who have the specific skill set needed to ensure that core subjects are covered sufficiently but are able to adapt to discussions during the sessions.
- Providing delivery partners with **clear instructions** about what they can and cannot change. Generally it is safer to tell them that they **can add content but cannot take any away**. **Monitor** what delivery partners are doing.
- Ensuring all delivery staff **understand the changes of the reformed model**.

Providing support for participants' sponsors

Sponsors are no longer involved in participants' final assessment, which can lead to an assumption that there is less support needed, yet it is increasingly important that sponsors are involved in

"We're... thinking about how we can improve the quality of sponsor support, because I think it's the make or break of an outstanding experience, so we're really going to invest in how we can engage, train, even QA the sponsorship that our participants get."


participants' NPQ journeys. Processes to communicate and support the sponsor's role include:

- Creating **guidance or developing training for sponsors** about their role to **improve the quality of support they provide to participants**.
- Inviting sponsors to attend an **initial face-to-face session alongside participants** where they can be briefed on their role.

Assessing what works well and what needs improving

During their first year of delivery, both new and experienced providers explained that they had learnt a lot about which delivery approaches work and which do not. Tips shared to ensure provision is constantly improving include:

- **Appraising delivery approaches with delivery staff** so that they can be modified – this can be done from one session to the next or as part of a longer-term review.
- **Seeking feedback from your participants** to explore how the delivery approach impacted on their learning.



"We've revised the design... We've then listened, face-to-face with candidates themselves, to say what worked, what hasn't worked, and we've tweaked."

Assessment

Designing processes and templates

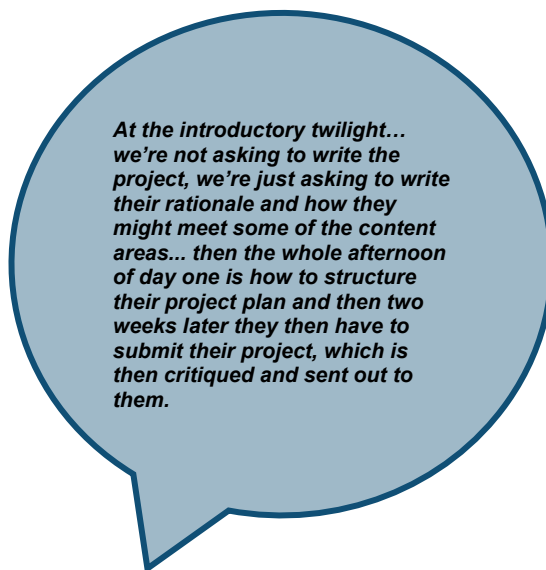
There is a sense of unease around designing NPQ assessment driven by the acknowledgement that providers need to deliver this to the same standard. To support this aim, ideas given by providers in the Learning Labs are outlined here:

- Make contact with other providers to explore the possibility of **critically reviewing your assessment materials and processes**.
- Once the first cohort have successfully passed their NPQs, **select the best assessments, fully anonymise them and use these as examples** for future cohorts.

Building assessment into qualification delivery

Assessment encompasses learning from the entire qualification, it is therefore necessary for it to be built into delivery. Providers shared the following tips to help ensure participants are fully prepared for assessment:

- **Ask participants to give a draft of their proposed project plan upon registration.** This will help participants to think about assessment from the outset, and it will help with tailoring your content and delivery approaches.
- **Consider assessment** when you are designing the **delivery structure**. Each element of the qualification content will be useful to participants when they are completing their assessment, so bear this in mind when deciding on the order of delivery.
- **Include a discussion on assessment during each delivery session.** This will encourage participants to develop their final assessment on an on-going basis and give them an opportunity to seek guidance where required.
- **Create a guide or webinar about assessment** that takes participants through each stage of assessment in a format that they can refer to at their convenience.



Guidance from DfE

At the Learning Labs, DfE reiterated that the **QA Agency will be verifying providers' assessment materials and processes** to check that they are using them consistently and not passing judgement on what they are using. DfE provided the following guidance for providers relating to assessment:

- Providers are highly experienced in delivering school leadership provision. DfE encourages you to **use your expertise to design innovative assessment materials and processes** that meet the requirements of the content and assessment framework and **compliment your own unique qualification content**. A generic assessment template would stifle innovation and would not tie in with your provision, so it is not appropriate.
- Where providers are willing, DfE also encourages providers to **work together to harness your combined expertise** to develop processes, materials and templates.



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