





The lives of children and young people worldwide are inextricably linked to the amount and quality of education they receive. At NFER, our mission is to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere and to support positive change across education systems.

We do this by:

- creating and sharing research evidence and insights on education policy and practice
- informing policymakers and other key decision-makers
- providing insights, resources and support to strengthen practice in the classroom.

Making a positive impact on children's and young people's experience of education, their outcomes and on teaching and learning is at the heart of everything we do.



An exciting year

With plenty of changes and new developments, 2018 was an exciting year for NFER, as we worked to increase the impact of our work on education at the classroom, school and system level.

At NFER we care deeply about ensuring that our expertise, and the research insights we create, are transformed into improved outcomes for the children and young people at the heart of our education system. It's why we do what we do and how we measure our success.

As an independent, not-for-profit organisation we work closely with practitioners, schools, policymakers and stakeholders in the wider education sector to achieve our objectives.

Raising the visibility of our research and expertise is crucial to ensuring that our research evidence has more impact. This year we launched our new branding and website to help achieve this, signalling a fresh approach for the Foundation.

We wanted to make it easier for you to engage with our robust research and evidence-based insights as well as to remind people why we exist - to generate evidence and insights that can improve outcomes for future generations.

I am very proud of what we have achieved over the last 12 months and this review showcases some of our work. I hope it will inspire you to work with us.

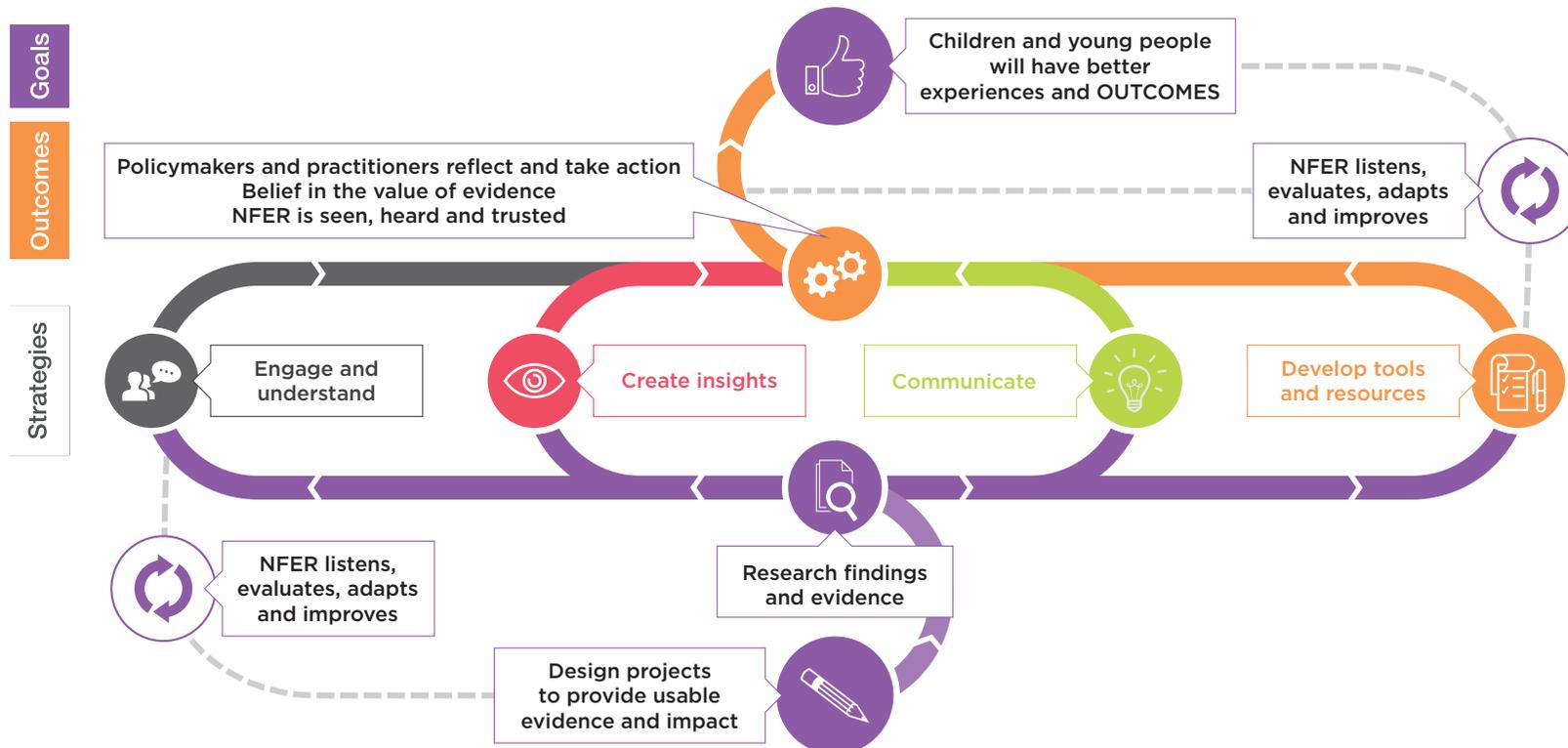
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carole Willis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carole Willis
Chief Executive



Making an impact

NFER has a constant focus on impact that ensures our research, assessments, educational resources and services make a positive difference to the outcomes of all children and young people. We use the NFER theory of change, a framework that describes the steps involved in making impact happen, to inform our work.





Research priorities

We are the leading independent provider of education research. Our robust and innovative research on all aspects of the education system, from early years to further education and employment, is used to identify and develop practical solutions to the challenges facing the education sector in the UK and worldwide.

Our current key areas of focus are:

- Accountability
- Assessment
- Classroom practice
- School workforce
- Education to employment
- School funding
- Social mobility
- Systems and structures.

Accountability

In many countries, schools are held accountable for their performance and their achievements are assessed regularly. This enables governments to set and monitor standards, provides incentives for schools to strengthen their performance against the areas assessed, and informs actions needed to support any necessary improvements. School accountability is a key issue in the education sector.

What makes a good accountability system?

Publication of our report, *What Impact Does Accountability Have on Curriculum, Standards and Engagement in Education?*, put us at the centre of this important policy discussion by identifying and evaluating research evidence on the impact of different types of accountability systems around the world.

It informed *Improving School Accountability*, an Accountability Commission report by the school leaders' union, NAHT, and wider policymaking. The Commission comprised leading educationalists, academics and school leaders, including NFER's Chief Executive, Carole Willis.



NFER and NAHT launched their respective reports on accountability at an event at the Wellcome Trust in London. NAHT's General Secretary, Paul Whiteman, and Deputy General Secretary, Nick Brook, with NFER's Chief Executive, Carole Willis.

Measuring progress in primary schools

Improving the way progress in primary schools is measured has been at the forefront of recent policy developments. A new reception baseline assessment (RBA) is being introduced in England in autumn 2020 to create school-level measures showing the progress pupils make from reception until the end of Key Stage 2.

Using our extensive expert knowledge, NFER is developing, trialling and delivering this child-friendly assessment for the Department for Education. It is based firmly on evidence, including existing research on the key factors affecting later performance, practitioner expertise and large-scale trialling.

The RBA will be a high-quality assessment that provides a positive experience for children, is straightforward for teachers and will lead to a fairer accountability system.

Trialling for the assessment was carried out in over 300 schools with more than 3,000 pupils in autumn 2018.



Assessment

The use of robust assessment is an important part of effective teaching. It can improve children’s learning and inform education system improvements. We have been helping teachers and policymakers to benefit from robust assessments for over 70 years, from individual classroom assessment studies to large-scale national and international assessment studies and research into assessment methods.

Monitoring performance standards

This year we successfully delivered the second live National Reference Test (NRT), providing the first opportunity to compare the performance of students in 2018 against the baseline set in 2017.

The test is developed, administered and analysed annually by NFER assessment experts under contract to the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). It provides additional evidence of whether performance standards are changing to support the awarding of the reformed 9 to 1 GCSEs in English language and mathematics.

Over time, the NRT has the potential to provide examination boards with a valuable additional source of information to inform the awarding of GCSEs.

Understanding assessment without levels

The removal of national curriculum levels in 2014 was designed to complement the introduction of a revised, more challenging national curriculum. The move from a single national assessment system to a more flexible, school-determined approach provided new opportunities, but also some uncertainty, in schools.

This year, our *Assessment without levels: qualitative research* for the Department for Education informed policymakers and schools on the range of assessment approaches now being used in English primary and secondary schools.

Classroom practice

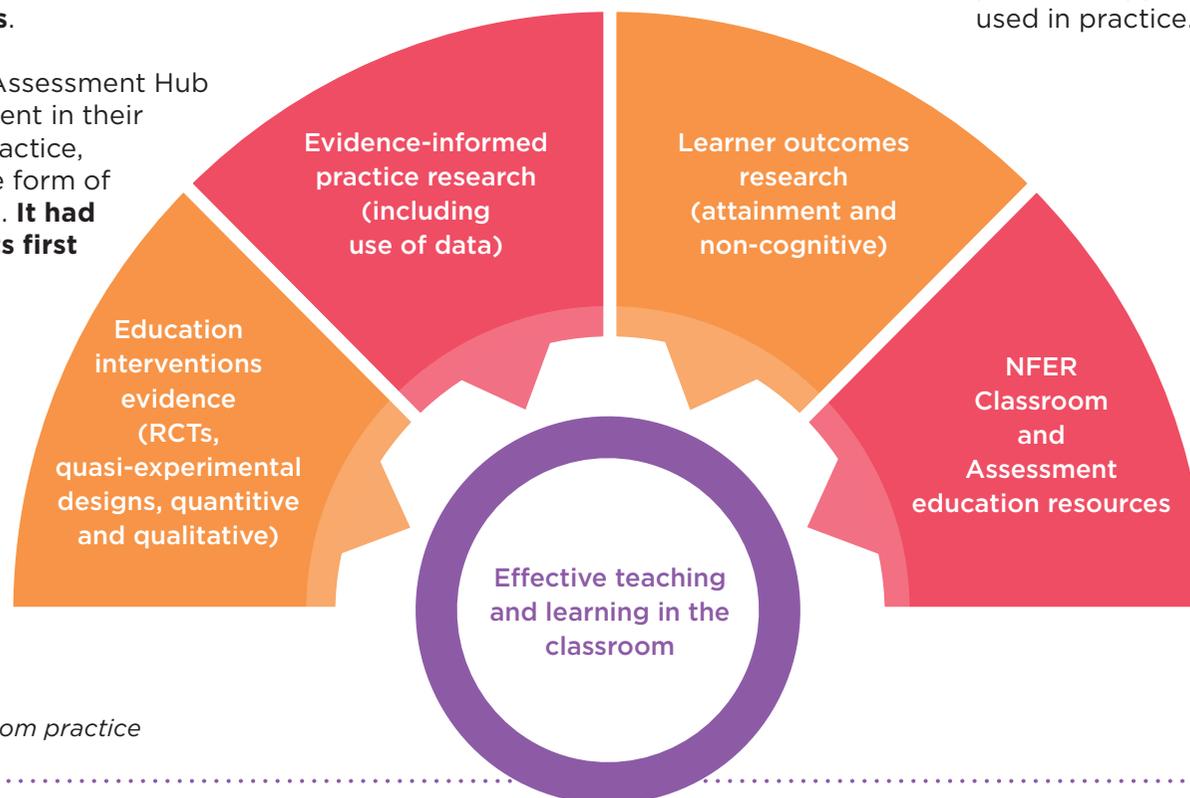
Schools are key partners for NFER and we support practitioners and classroom practice through our research work and our education resources.

Our new 'NFER Classroom' brand brings together all the information, resources and practical support from NFER that is directly relevant to those working in and for schools. This includes digestible research insights, free practitioner resources and expert guidance, in addition to our widely used, evidence-based education resources. **@NFER Classroom has over 14,000 Twitter followers.**

Launched in 2018, the NFER Assessment Hub helps practitioners feel confident in their assessment knowledge and practice, by sharing our expertise in the form of short-read articles and guides. **It had over 6,500 unique views in its first four months.**

We expanded our range of assessments for use by primary schools to help inform teaching, and launched a free online analysis tool for users of NFER Tests to help schools interpret and use their data more effectively. Our range of NFER Tests is used and trusted by thousands of schools.

We continued to evaluate education initiatives to show schools what is effective and what is not. For example, our Literacy Octopus randomised controlled trial (RCT) evaluated the impact of various strategies to disseminate evidence-based materials to primary schools in England, highlighting the need for more proactive approaches to ensuring evidence is used in practice.



How NFER contributes to classroom practice

Twitter responses to NFER report

Today's @TheNFER report on teacher supply is fascinating.

Chris Cook, Journalist
🐦 @xtophercook

Time for a thread on teacher shortages. All graphs come from an excellent report by @worth_jack published today.

Sam Freedman, Chief Executive,
Education Partnerships Group
🐦 @Samfr

Brilliant and engaging overview from @worth_jack on new #TeacherWorkforce report – a must read for everyone.

Tom Middlehurst, Head of Policy, SSAT
🐦 @Tom_Middlehurst

An insightful evening at the launch of the @TheNFER #TeacherWorkforce report. More part-time opportunities, recognising the importance of 'manageability' of workload and targeted pay rises among the recommendations. Well worth a read!

Emma Hollis, Executive Director, NASBTT
🐦 @EHollisNASBTT

Oooh, when did @TheNFER get so good at this comms malarkey? Loving the animation to kick off the #TeacherWorkforce report launch.

Cath Murray, Commissioning Editor and
Head of Digital for Schools Week and FE Week
🐦 @CathMurray

School workforce

Teachers are the heart of the education system. NFER has established a leading voice in school workforce research, building a portfolio of analysis and understanding over a number of years.

Recruiting, developing and retaining teachers and school leaders is one of the most important challenges currently facing education.

We have consistently called for greater attention to be given to teacher retention, not just recruitment, in order to ensure we have enough teachers as pupil numbers increase.

Leading the debate

In the autumn we published our Nuffield Foundation-funded *Teacher Workforce Dynamics in England* report, a major research programme that highlights the scale of the challenge and makes a number of recommendations for policy and practice. The NFER school workforce team was invited to discuss the findings with the Department for Education (DfE) Teacher Recruitment and Retention team ahead of its new strategy launch.

This research, along with some of our earlier work, directly influenced the DfE's new Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (published January 2019), with its central focus on retaining teachers in the profession.

The strategy echoes many of the changes we have been calling for – more opportunities for flexible working, reducing workload, creating a healthier and more supportive working environment and restructuring financial incentives to promote retention.

Our report, *Teacher Supply, Retention and Mobility in London*, highlighted the characteristics and dynamics of the capital's teacher labour market. The cost of living emerged as the main barrier to longer-term retention of teachers in London and we encouraged policymakers to look at how housing policy could help retain teachers. The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, is building on the report findings by supporting schools and teachers in the capital, particularly teachers at an early stage in their career.

We evaluated the DfE's Return to Teaching pilot programme to support qualified teachers to return to teaching EBacc subjects. We also carried out research and published *Early Career Continuing Professional Development (CPD) – Exploratory Research*, providing evidence on the development needs of early career teachers.

Capturing the headlines

Our workforce experts regularly comment on social and other media channels, including the BBC, LBC, Guardian, Schools Week and TES.

They have featured at influential engagements, for example:

- Westminster Education Forum Seminar – *Priorities for teacher retention and development – support, quality and leadership*
- The NFER Debates at the Festival of Education – *How can we encourage more teachers to stay in the profession?*
- SSAT National Conference – NFER Workforce Lead, Jack Worth, was on a panel discussion on Teacher Workforce
- East London and Essex Education Conference and Exhibition 2019 – a keynote presentation, *Tackling teacher supply: how to improve teacher retention*
- Challenge Partners, Growing the top stand-out schools programme event – a presentation, *Tackling teacher supply: how to improve teacher retention.*



We launched our *Teacher Workforce Dynamics in England* report to an audience of key influencers including policymakers, system leaders, academics and the media. This 18-month project was welcomed by the sector and the airwaves were buzzing as the findings were unveiled by NFER Workforce Lead Jack Worth.

This was followed by a lively panel discussion, chaired by education journalist Laura McNerney, with Jack Worth, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) general secretary Geoff Barton, and education author and teacher, Emma Kell.

Josh Hillman, Director of Education at the Nuffield Foundation; Carole Willis, NFER Chief Executive; Emma Kell, education author and teacher; Jack Worth, NFER Workforce Lead; Laura McNerney, education journalist; and Geoff Barton, General Secretary of ASCL; at the launch of the *Teacher Workforce Dynamics in England* report.



Keeping teachers in the profession is available at <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/key-topics-expertise/school-workforce/>



“ We hope this much-needed evidence will help shape an active and urgent policy response to ensure we have a school workforce that can provide the highest quality of education for all children and young people.”

Josh Hillman, Director of Education, Nuffield Foundation



Education to employment

Moving successfully from education to employment is crucial for all young people. Different types of qualification can lead to very different outcomes. Our research informs the development of an education system that supports all young people in this journey, equipping them with the skills, qualifications and information to succeed.

Preparing for T-levels

In preparation for the introduction of T-levels, the technical alternative to A-levels in England, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a consultation seeking views on the development of new T-level programmes, designed to tackle Britain's productivity challenge and to raise the profile of technical education.

NFER's written submission to this consultation contributed to thinking on this priority policy area. It drew on a range of evidence from NFER's Education to Employment research portfolio and was supported with a blog post from Senior Research Manager, Claudia Sumner.

Careers in the spotlight

National Careers Week, an annual event celebrating and promoting quality careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) across the UK, coincided with National Apprenticeship Week. This gave NFER the opportunity to address the importance of quality CEIAG in schools and colleges by sharing our extensive research and free resources.

@TheNFER

From the NFER blog:

- Apprenticeship End Point Assessment – teething problems or looming car crash?
- Innovative approaches to technical education: new and original or just old hard hat?
- There's no doubting that careers advice has improved since my day
- Time for reform of the apprenticeship levy?
- Vocational studies and T-Levels: what will be different this time around?

NFER'S Research Manager, Tami McCrone, attended the National Careers Week launch at the House of Commons.

School funding

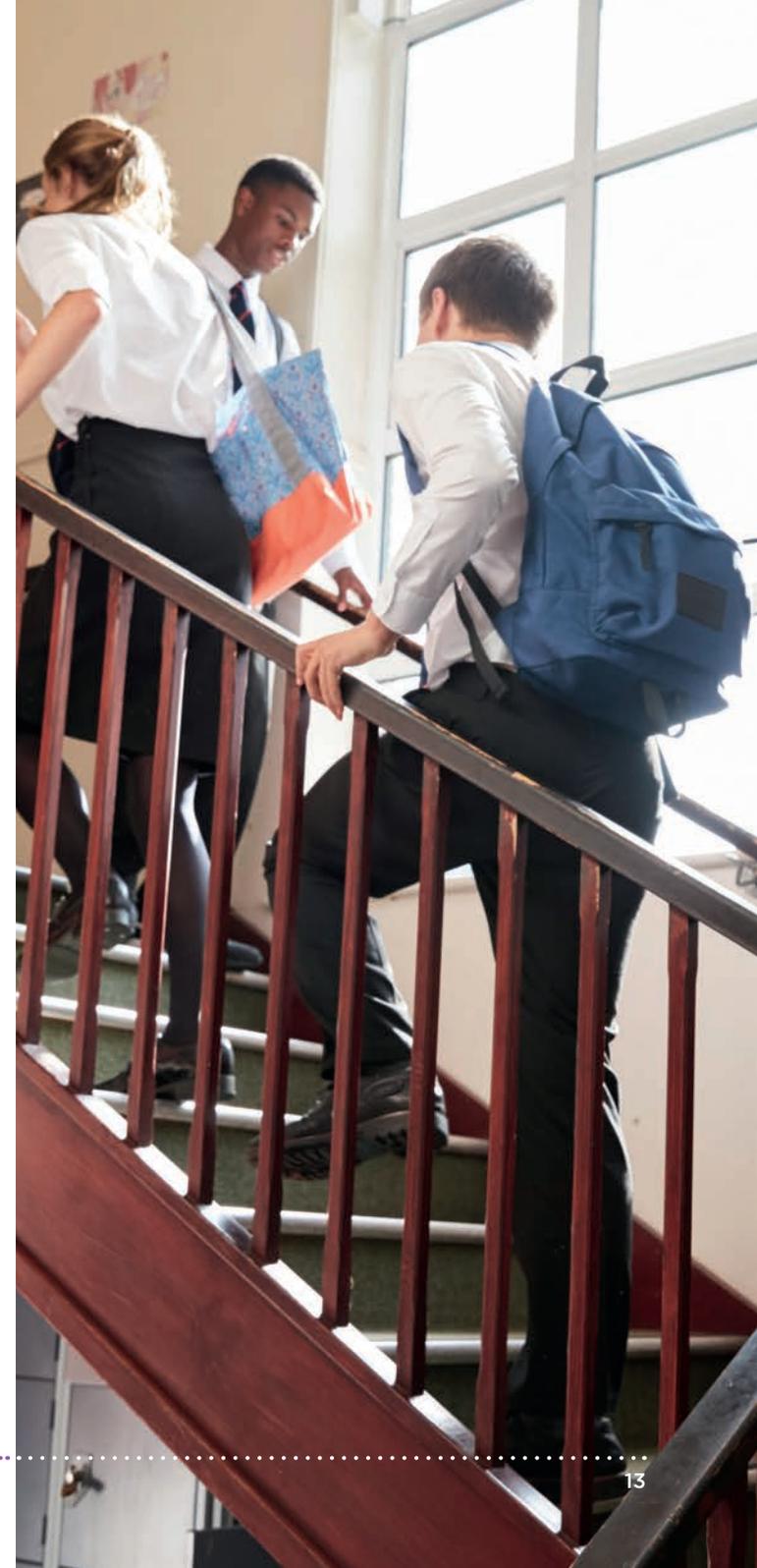
Funding underpins every aspect of education, and changes in funding models have different implications for different types of schools and pupils. With the reality of finite resources, it is important to understand where and how funding may be deployed most efficiently and effectively in order to achieve better outcomes for children.

NFER published a literature review drawing together the evidence base on school funding. It summarised the research and evidence from 2010 to 2017 and looked at the impact these changes have had on patterns of expenditure in schools and their effects, particularly in relation to disadvantaged pupils.

This informed a written submission to the Education Select Committee's Inquiry into School and College Funding and led to NFER's Chief Social Scientist, Angela Donkin, being invited to take part in the committee's first evidence hearing.

Use of funding

How funding is used is just as important as how much is available. The NFER Education Trials Unit undertakes a range of high-quality impact evaluations of school and classroom-based interventions, including working closely with the Education Endowment Foundation.





Social mobility

Education can play a key role in breaking the link between children's social backgrounds and their later outcomes. Our work is providing evidence on the factors affecting social mobility, education outcomes and later careers to ensure young people achieve success.

Opportunity Areas

Opportunity Areas are a key part of the government's national plan for dealing with social mobility through education. NFER's evaluation of the implementation of the Opportunity Areas programme showcased promising practice as well as reviewing the government's delivery plans.

The findings were unveiled at a House of Commons event attended by the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds MP, and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, Nadhim Zahawi MP.

Evaluating pupil grants in Wales

NFER's evaluation of the Wales Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant led to NFER's Senior Research Manager (Wales), Robert Smith, giving evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into targeted funding to improve educational outcomes.

The grant was introduced in 2015/16 to improve outcomes for learners from low-income families receiving Foundation Phase early years education for 10 hours or more in an approved setting.

NFER submitted written evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility.

Systems and structures

The extent to which the structure of education systems affects the quality of education that children receive is an important and much-debated issue.

NFER's work on new and growing parts of the education landscape – university technical colleges (UTCs), multi-academy trusts (MATs) and free schools – has informed policymakers and the wider education sector.

Influencing UTC accountability measure

UTCs, first introduced in 2011/12 to promote diversity in the school system, have faced a number of challenges and significant public and media criticism. There was little research to understand them until NFER published its analysis, *Beneath the headlines*, in 2018. In it we called for a review of how the attainment measure, Progress 8, affects UTCs due to the dynamics specific to these colleges.

It was, therefore, good to see the Department for Education (DfE) address this issue in October 2018. Our research was also cited by the DfE's Permanent Secretary, Jonathan Slater, when he called for a more rounded measure for judging UTCs, while giving evidence to the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee.

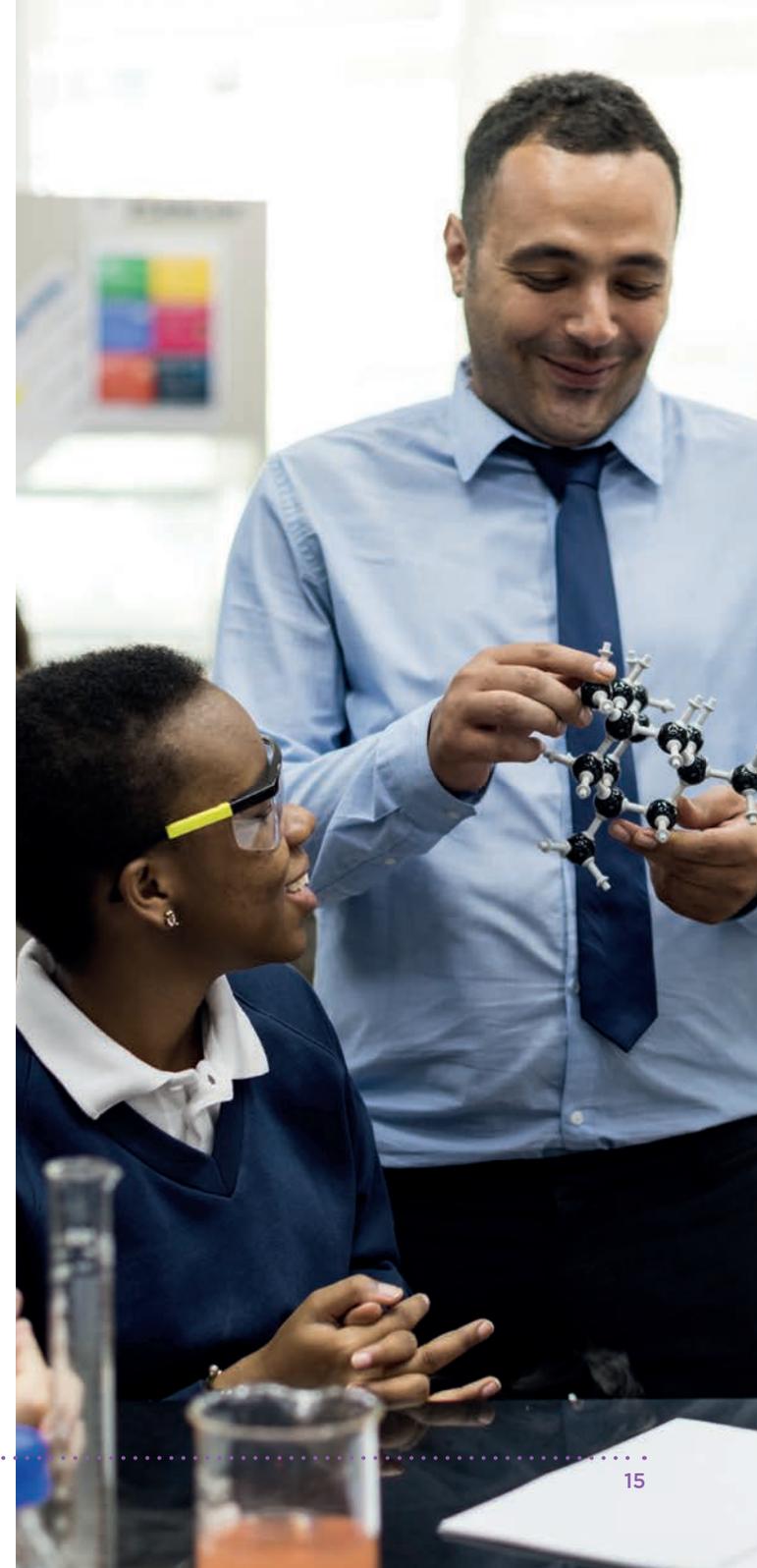
Putting MATs in the spotlight

MATs were put in the spotlight in a series of posts on the NFER Blog examining what we know about MATs. They covered MAT performance, pupil outcomes, teachers and schools. The posts received 2,000 viewings.

Free schools

Free schools were one of the flagship education policies of the coalition government when introduced in 2010. A report by NFER and The Sutton Trust, *Free For All? Analysing free schools in England, 2018*, generated a lot of engagement on Twitter and media interest.

This included NFER's Chief Executive, Carole Willis, being interviewed on the BBC Radio 4's Today programme and Sky's Lunchtime News. There was further national coverage for the report in the Times and Guardian, as well as in the education sector press.





International

NFER International was established in 2016 to focus on education systems globally. Using our extensive experience, we provide insights that support the development of education systems worldwide, through research, evaluation, assessment and the delivery of large-scale comparative studies.

Understanding teacher absenteeism in Embu County, Kenya

Our research on the prevalence and causes of teacher absenteeism explored awareness levels and perceived efficacy of recent reforms implemented by the government to tackle absenteeism.

Improving the life chances of marginalised girls in Mozambique

NFER is the lead evaluator of Save the Children's Successful Transition and Advancement of Rights for Girls (STAR-G) project in Mozambique. The three-year intervention, funded by the Department for International Development's Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) programme, seeks to improve the life chances of 15,000 marginalised girls by focusing on teacher development, community engagement, and self-esteem programming.

Save the Children and the GEC have adapted the programme in light of our recommendations.

Providing global insights

NFER has a long history of delivering international large-scale assessments that provide global insights to improve education. This year:

- NFER presented its briefing paper: *Key Insights from International Large Scale Assessments in the Gulf* at the Gulf Comparative Education Society symposium in the UAE.
- Using insights from the Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) 2015, NFER created a series of science lesson plans. Aimed at supporting teachers to develop the skills of investigative science, they are suitable for any country participating in TIMSS.
- NFER shared its briefing paper, *Key Insights for England from PIRLS, TIMSS and PISA*, with more than 40 key education influencers at a panel discussion: *What relevance do international assessments have for understanding England's education system?*

“ The NFER policy brief on teachers in Kenya is really insightful, especially the findings around school absenteeism and class absenteeism, along with their gender dimension and stakeholder perspectives. I hope policymakers use the recommendations.”

Fazle Rabbani,
Global Partnership for Education

Our year in numbers



Media mentions
increased by
40%



800,000
pupils in England
participated
in our research,
assessment trials
and products



154
research projects
worked on
during 2018

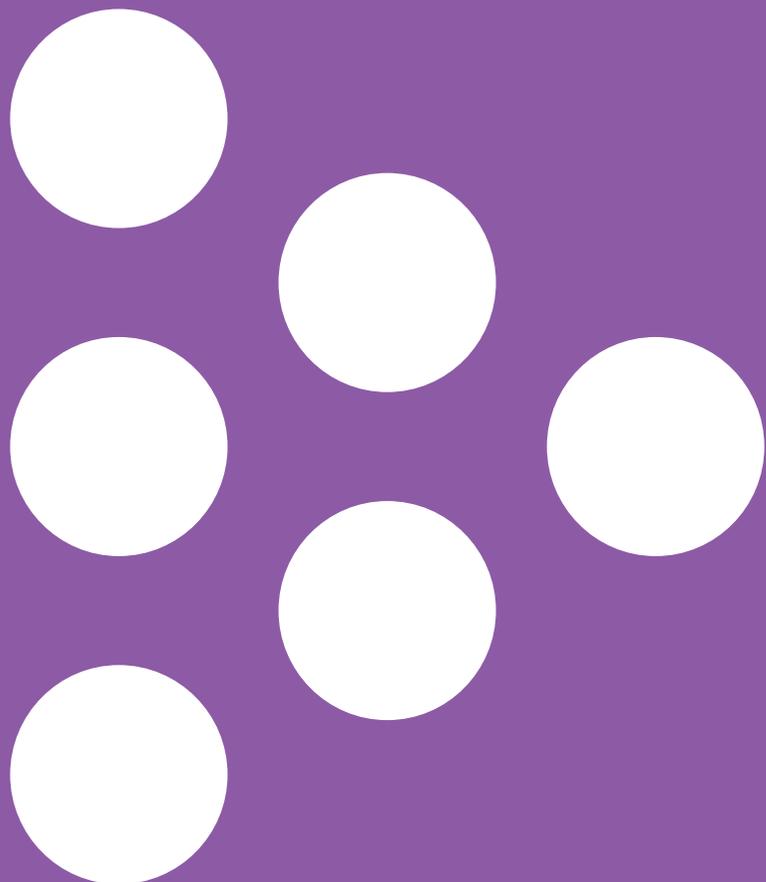


More than
18,500
Twitter followers
by the end of 2018:
up by
32%



More than
24,000
views of
NFER blog posts
@TheNFER





Learn more about NFER

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

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