



Foreword

The year 2022 has been hugely busy as the sector continues to recover from the damaging effects of the pandemic while grappling with workforce and funding challenges and a disadvantage attainment gap which remains far too wide.

NFER continues to play a vital role in tackling these issues, analysing robust education data and drawing out the evidence and insights to help equip decision makers with the information they need to drive change within the sector.

We have continued to monitor the speed of children's recovery from Covid – both in terms of academic attainment and mental health & wellbeing – while evaluating the impact of the National Tutoring Programme.

We have expanded our research on the school workforce, exploring issues of pay and diversity as well as monitoring the worrying recruitment and retention picture – making recommendations to the Government every step of the way.

We have also extended our work in other countries, supporting young people to flourish – particularly in areas of east Africa.

Social mobility is the thread which has run through all our work. We want to help ensure all children and young people receive a high-quality education and can make successful transitions from education into employment. That is our number one mission and we are proud to be working with each and every one of you along the way.

None of our work would be possible without the fantastic support received from schools, colleges and our partners. We are hugely grateful for your time and engagement. We owe it to you – and the children and young people you support – to continue increasing our efforts to ensure our insights get into the hands of key decision makers, in governments and in schools, to help improve education outcomes for all.



Ninety-one per cent of stakeholders who read our reports said that NFER research had an impact on their organisation.

NFER Annual Stakeholder Survey 2022

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Proud that Slough has the national headquarters of NFER – the UK’s largest independent provider of educational research. Fascinating to hear their research into the pandemic’s impact on schools, children’s services, home learning effectiveness, teacher recruitment and training trends.

Tan Dhesi MP (Twitter)



Our impact

At NFER, we use our influence as a leading independent provider of education research and insights to improve education in the UK and worldwide, with the goal of improving outcomes for children and young people.

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

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

This year, we continued to identify the impact of Covid-19 on education, exploring what this has meant for education and for children and young people, and informing key debates on recovery, such as the effectiveness of the National Tutoring Programme. A particular focus of our research into the teaching workforce has been exploring issues and solutions linked to teacher supply, teacher pay modelling and understanding racial equality in the teaching workforce. This has informed decision making and policies around the relevant resources, approaches and support needed to strengthen the workforce.

We have also explored key issues in the 16 to 19 arena. This has focused on the future skills needed by employers, the role education plays in that, and creating progression opportunities for all, including better understanding of key progression routes such as apprenticeships.

Policy and practice stakeholders, partners, schools and colleges are core to NFER's work and impact. We drive change and improvement by working with and through others. We have made sure the evidence and insights we have generated have been fed into live policy discussions, into classrooms and into ongoing debates. As well as engaging decision-makers and the wider sector with our insights to inform education policy and practice, working with stakeholders enables us to ensure our research is topical, relevant and reflects the context in which it is applied.

There are multiple groups, institutions and bodies that are working to improve education outcomes for children and young people, which is why we recognise the importance of engaging with stakeholders across sectors and disciplines. These include governments, non-governmental bodies and agencies, membership organisations, schools, colleges, training providers, professional bodies, research organisations, think tanks and parent bodies.

Our approach to achieving impact is presented in the diagram on the next page.



Impact diagram



Influence and engagement

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

Over the past year, we engaged stakeholders with our insights in multiple ways, increasing the reach of our evidence and ensuring that our insights inform key issues, decisions and debates in education policy and practice.

○ Engagement with policymakers

NFER develops insights and policy recommendations with the aim of improving the lives of children and young people. We provide our insights to policymakers through a variety of means. This includes both submitting and giving in-person evidence to government consultations and select committee inquiries, meeting politicians and advisers in-person, and attending meetings of All-Party Parliamentary Groups and other events.

This year, we submitted evidence to a wide-range of inquiries, and presented oral evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee and the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee. In addition, we held events at the Conservative and Labour party conferences, focused on the skills needed for the future of work.

We held our annual reception in the House of Commons' Terrace Pavilion to belatedly celebrate our 75th anniversary. Speakers included former Shadow Education Secretary, Kate Green and Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza.



○ Engagement with other stakeholders

NFER works directly with a range of stakeholders to inform our research, and feed evidence and insights into policy and practice. In 2022, this included our Chief Executive, Carole Willis, being appointed to the Strategic Tutoring Advisory Group and the board of the National Institute of Teaching.

We also shared our expertise through a wide range of expert panels, steering groups and advisory groups across the education and skills sectors. This included the Edge Foundation Research Review Group, Impetus Youth Employment Group and the Fair Education Alliance Racial Equality Working Group.

Regular strategic meetings were held with leading sector organisations, including teaching unions and non-departmental government bodies.

○ Sector events

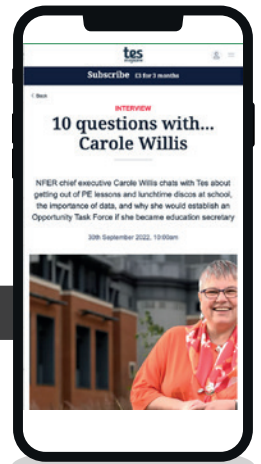
NFER engages with the education sector in a variety of ways, including reaching thousands of stakeholders through our involvement in events. In 2022, NFER spoke at and chaired over 100 events on education policy and related issues. This included keynotes at the Association of Colleges Annual Conference and the Learning and Work Institute Convention. We also regularly presented to practitioner audiences, including at the Festival of Education and ResearchED.



○ Media and social media

NFER's research achieves significant exposure across national and sector media outlets, enabling us to raise awareness and increase the reach of our evidence and insights.

This year, our research experts participated in over 100 broadcast interview appearances and our social media posts received over 2.1 million impressions.



I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff at the Foundation. I am aware of how hard they will have worked in recent times and how hard they continue to work, and I would like them to know that their contributions do not go unrecognised.

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

The year in numbers

We are grateful to all school and college leaders, teachers, staff and pupils for their ongoing support of our work. This year, 76 per cent of publicly-funded schools in England took part in NFER research and assessment trials:



16,984

Number of publicly funded schools in England who took part in NFER research and assessment trials



1,417,209

Number of pupils who took part in NFER research, assessment trials and products



71,594

Number of teachers and senior leaders who took part in NFER research, assessment trials and products.



We are a trusted and leading destination for those with an interest in independent education research and insights:



315,000

Number of unique visitors to the NFER website



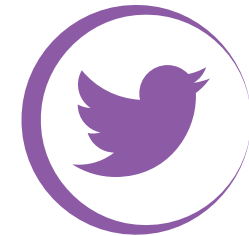
114,000

Number of downloads of NFER reports, resources and classroom materials



2,639

Number of mentions of NFER in national, sector and international media



14,000

Number of engagements with NFER Twitter posts

The impact of Covid-19 on education

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education. NFER continues to be at the forefront of growing understanding about what this means for children and young people, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches to support recovery.

Over the past year, we started to build a longer-term picture about the pandemic's impact on children's learning and wider development. This included a focus on evaluating where additional support needs to be targeted and what interventions are best aiding the recovery process.

○ Identifying the long-term impact

We continued to monitor a sample of younger pupils to understand the long-term impact of Covid-19 disruption on their attainment and social skills as they move through primary school. This raised concern about the reading development of younger children (particularly those in Year 2 and lower attaining pupils), identifying a considerable increase in the additional support required for literacy activities.

Our two briefing papers, pulling together evidence about the impact of Covid-19 on pupils' attainment and wellbeing, sparked widespread debate. Their publication was covered by national and sector news outlets, including the Guardian and the Telegraph.

Recommendations prompted a response from stakeholders, including calls for catch-up support to be targeted on the lowest attaining pupils, and to ensure schools are adequately funded to deliver long-term support.

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO:

- Education Endowment Foundation
- Department for Education
- Kantar Public
- University of Westminster

www.nfer.ac.uk

○ Evaluating approaches to aid recovery

Since its launch in autumn 2020, NFER has been the lead evaluator for the government's flagship National Tutoring Programme. The programme provides subsidised tutoring to help pupils catch up on missed learning due to the pandemic.

Our year one evaluation directly informed the government's approach to the second year of the programme. This included increasing targets for the number of children who are eligible for pupil premium funding gaining access to tutoring.

The year two report had similar levels of impact on policy and practice, identifying the need to focus on reaching more disadvantaged pupils. On publication, NFER held briefings with the Department for Education's Permanent Secretary and other key education stakeholders, including Ofsted. The report achieved widespread media coverage and the findings were referenced in a number of parliamentary debates.

Our contribution to this evidence base led to Carole Willis (CEO at NFER) being selected as a member of the government's Strategic Tutoring Advisory Group. This expert group will have considerable influence on the future direction of the programme and on the wider role of tutoring in schools. Other NFER researchers were invited to participate in a range of high-profile speaking appearances, including at the National Tutoring Summit.



Poorest pupils fall further behind in wake of pandemic

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

DISADVANTAGED pupils aged seven and eight have dropped up to nine months behind their peers in reading skills and eight months behind in maths, a study into how the pandemic has affected the attainment gap found.

The gap has widened since pre-pandemic, the Education Endowment Foundation and [National Foundation for Educational Research](#) said. Their research followed 6,000 pupils who were in reception class and year one, aged four to six, in March 2020 until the spring term of 2022.

While most pupils have caught up, for the most disadvantaged, the picture is bleak.

Poorer pupils who were in year two this spring were around six months behind in reading and around five months behind in maths compared to their more advantaged peers.

In year three, the gaps were nine months for reading and eight months for maths.

The findings have prompted those behind the study to call for pupil premium funding – which is targeted at poorer children – to be protected.

The Telegraph

Systems and structures

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

Over the past year, we made important discoveries around measuring the disadvantage attainment gap and the targeting of government funding. We also designed a series of destination measures to inform school and college approaches towards helping pupils achieve better labour market outcomes.

○ Measuring pupil disadvantage

We examined the impact of recent and anticipated changes in free school meal eligibility on state-funded mainstream schools in England. This highlighted that the disadvantaged attainment gap measure will no longer provide a meaningful indication of how the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is changing over time. The discovery has profound implications for policy development.

NFER hosted a roundtable to explore this area further, which was attended by senior policymakers, civil servants and academics. The findings have since been used by other research organisations to shape their own research methodologies.

The report launch attracted national and sector media coverage, including in the Daily Mail, iNews and Times Radio. This resulted in a number of parliamentary questions being submitted, leading to a formal ministerial response on the issue.

○ School and college destination measures

We identified existing data that could be used to help schools and colleges better understand how they are preparing young people for the future labour market.

Schools and colleges were able to request provider-level reports of their own longer-term destinations data. As a result, our research supported schools and colleges to directly engage with their institution's own destination measures, helping to influence practice and decision-making within schools and colleges.

This research prompted debate across the sector about how Longitudinal Educational Outcomes data could be used. This included presenting virtually to over 100 policy makers, practitioners and researchers. The findings also directly influenced the recommendations in a Teach First report on careers guidance. Since the report was first published, additional data on longer-term destinations has been released by the Department for Education.

NFER's dedication to producing quality research in every corner of education is absolutely vital to ensure the system meets the needs of all learners, no matter what their age or background.

Jean-Louis Dutaut,
Commissioning Editor at Schools Week

○ Socio-economic data

The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) commissioned NFER to identify the current barriers to finding and using socio-economic data, to outline a vision of what an improved data environment could look like and how it might benefit future policy-making. The SMC has been drawing on this research to promote the case for more strategic investment in data for understanding social mobility across government.

○ International Large-Scale Assessments

This year, NFER has worked across three International Large-Scale Assessments (ILSAs); the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 in Northern Ireland, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 in Scotland and the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) in England. ILSAs provide education policymakers, school leaders, practitioners and researchers with powerful insights into how education and training systems are functioning and how background factors relate to attainment, enabling them to identify potential improvements.

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO:

- Edge Foundation
- Department of Education Northern Ireland
- Scottish Government
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Social Mobility Commission



School workforce

NFER is considered one of the country's leading experts around teacher recruitment and retention, providing informative, reliable and policy-relevant insights that reach the heart of government and sector decision making.

Over the past year, we published regular insights and reports on the evolving teacher labour market and the implications of teacher pay for recruitment and retention. We also received commendation for our research from the Office for National Statistics into racial equality in the teacher workforce.

Teacher labour market trends

Our ongoing analysis of teacher training applications raised early awareness about the difficulties in recruiting and retaining enough teachers in the post Covid-19 labour market. We forecast that recruitment targets would be missed across a range of secondary subjects nine months before official data became available. This timely analysis enabled policymakers and other stakeholders to understand the changing situation and act accordingly. It also attracted national media interest, including from the Financial Times.

The launch of a data dashboard enhanced the ability of policymakers and practitioners to access insights across different dimensions and regional geographies.

Other research provided a practical insight into the impact of the teacher supply challenge. This included exploring the nature of teacher shortages and how school leaders mitigate them, with potentially negative impacts on children's learning. NFER engaged with senior civil servants and politicians to discuss the findings, including at a roundtable with the shadow schools minister. We also provided regular commentary on the issue in sector titles and podcasts, including TES and Schools Week.

Teacher pay

Our research on teacher pay and financial incentives was cited by the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), which makes independent recommendations on teacher pay.

The STRB recommended a higher teacher pay award than the government put forward in its initial proposals, in line with recommendations from NFER. Our insights also shaped the thinking of other influential national and sector commentators.

Racial equality in the teacher workforce

We explored the representation and career progression of people from different ethnic backgrounds within the teaching profession in England. This highlighted the under-representation of people from ethnic minority backgrounds at senior leadership level, which was found to be largely driven by disparities in the early career stages.

Our researchers worked with an advisory group, which included practitioners from ethnic minority backgrounds, academics, teacher training providers, and representative bodies from across the education sector. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Race Equality in Education used the research to highlight that racial equality in the teaching profession is a critical issue which must be addressed.

NFER was nominated for a Research Excellence Award and received a Commendation for Collaboration from the Office for National Statistics. This recognised NFER's engagement with diverse voices to shape and inform the research and its dissemination and impact.



Shortfall in new teachers 'exacerbates' science crisis

By Louisa Clarence-Smith, Catherine Lough and Ben Butcher
 The STRB recruitment has fallen to a record low with fears that "catastrophic" shortfalls in science candidates will worsen existing supply issues.
 Just 71 per cent of the Government's targets for initial teacher training recruitment have been met for 2022-23, figures released by the Department for Education show.
 In total, 28,991 teachers were recruited for the start of this academic year in September, down by a fifth on the previous year. Fewer than half the science teachers required to meet school needs – 44 per cent – were taken on. The target for physics hit just 17 per cent, and computing 30 per cent.
 Jack Worth of the National Foundation for Educational Research warned that the figures would "exacerbate existing shortages" in science, adding: "Teacher recruitment and retention will remain a key challenge for the education system for the foreseeable future, unless radical action is taken to address the most pressing underlying challenges, such as pay and workload."
 Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the figures for recruitment were "nothing short of catastrophic".
 "The Government has consistently missed its own targets for recruitment over the course of the past decade but this is a new low," he added.
 He said that long-term erosion of teachers' pay was a "key cause" of the crisis, as it had fallen in real terms by a fifth since 2010.
 "This is compounded by the Government's underfunding of schools, which has driven up workload and made the profession less attractive," he said. In total, the Government met 59 per cent of its secondary school recruitment targets and 93 per cent of its primary school goals.
 A government spokesman said: "We understand that teacher recruitment is challenging, which is why we have taken action to raise the profile of this important and prestigious profession."
 He said next year's increases worth up to £7,000 and scholarships of up to £25,000 would be available to trainees in subjects such as chemistry, computing, maths and physics.



WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO:

- Nuffield Foundation
- Ambition Institute
- Office of Manpower Economics.
- Gatsby Foundation
- Teach First
- The Chartered College of Teaching (CCoT)
- Confederation of School Trusts (CST)

Classroom

NFER designs and conducts randomised controlled trials of education interventions. This generates robust evidence that can inform the decision making of teachers, schools and others across the education sector.

Over the past year, we continued delivering a number of long-term trials which will improve knowledge around effective teaching and learning approaches. We also published a series of accessible practice guides for teachers, through NFER Classroom.

○ Innovative trials

We continued as lead evaluator for a new type of trial, which aims to increase understanding about the everyday choices teachers make when planning their lessons and supporting their students. This included testing different approaches to starting a lesson and structuring whole-class reading. The trials attracted strong interest and engagement across schools, with findings due to be published next year.

○ School engagement

We published a series of research bites for school leaders and teachers. This included a guide and poster on implementing effective tutoring, based on practical learnings from our evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme. The guide was viewed over 1,200 times and supported by the country's two largest unions for school leaders (ASCL and NAHT).

NFER's detailed research, analysis and briefings are a vital resource to help identify and explain key trends, issues and developments that everyone in education should be aware of on a regular basis.

Dan Worth, Senior Editor at TES

NFER continues to make valuable contributions to the education evidence base. Their research provides reliable, independent insights on a range of topical and important areas of teaching and learning.

Becky Francis, Chief Executive at Education Endowment Foundation

Our ability to generate robust and influential insights is dependent on the continued support of school and college leaders, teachers and students. I am extremely grateful for your engagement over the past year.

NFER is focused on ensuring that schools' and colleges' experience in our research is always positive, straightforward and valuable. We are also committed to giving back, through the creation and sharing of practical guides and other tools designed specifically for educators.

Carole Willis, CEO at NFER

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO:

- Education Endowment Foundation
- ASCL - Association of School and College Leaders
- NAHT - National Association of Head Teachers



Education to Employment

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

Over the past year, we continued to investigate how demand and supply of essential employment skills is likely to change over the next 15 years, and how these skills can be developed through the education system.

We hosted events at the Labour and Conservative party conferences and were invited to give oral evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee's inquiry on the future of post-16 education and the House of Lords Communication and Digital Select Committee's inquiry on a creative future.

○ Skills for tomorrow's workforce

Emerging evidence from our five-year strategic research programme The Skills Imperative 2035 is contributing to a data-driven understanding of future skills needs.

Our latest work highlighted the considerable impact of various megatrends on the size and composition of the labour market. Our recommendations included establishing a cross-cutting body, which reports directly to the Cabinet Office.

Our launch event was chaired by former skills minister Anne Milton, and the panel discussion included senior representation from the Department for Education. Private briefings were also held with a range of ministers and shadow ministers with education and industry remits.

○ T Levels preparation and delivery

We published research exploring how the T Level Transition Programme was prepared for, and delivered, whilst identifying learning for future delivery. Our findings showed that providers were highly engaged in preparations and implementation, with delivery generally well received by learners.

○ Impact of apprenticeship reforms

Our previous research has shown that the number of apprenticeships started by young people from deprived backgrounds has been disproportionately impacted as a result of significant reforms over the past decade.

This year we investigated the availability of intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, and associated age, qualification, skill and experience requirements.

Our findings and recommendations were widely covered across national and sector media outlets, including the Daily Mirror and LBC. NFER researchers also presented to Department for Education roundtables and the House of Commons Select Committee's inquiry into post-16 qualifications.



WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO:

- Cambridge Econometrics
- The Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick
- Nuffield Foundation
- Learning and Work Institute
- NatCen
- University of Sheffield
- Deloitte
- Department for Education
- University of Roehampton

The Skills Imperative programme will provide much needed practical insights and evidence necessary to inform planning for how to meet future employment skills demand.

Robert West, Head of Education & Skills at Confederation of British Industry

Assessment

NFER is spearheading assessment development and research in the UK and around the world, because we know the importance it has for children's learning and development.

Over the past year, we have continued to aid schools with their Covid recovery via our range of high-quality educational resources and our pioneering assessment research. We also continued to deliver nationwide assessments in England, reaching thousands of children and young people.

○ National Reference Test

NFER has been commissioned to deliver the National Reference Test since 2017. This provides evidence to support the awarding of GCSEs in English language and maths.

In 2022, almost 13,000 Year 11 students from over 330 schools participated.

This year's test had added significance due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on national assessments. Professor John Jerrim, from University College London Institute of Education (IOE), said these figures provided probably the best measure we have on how much learning loss there has been amongst secondary school pupils over the last few years.

Due to the importance of this test in the context of Covid-19 disruption, NFER published additional analysis of 2021 data to better understand any variances in school and pupil characteristics associated with changes in performance. We also considered how particular areas of the curriculum were impacted differentially. This contributed valuable insights to the evolving evidence base.

○ Age-appropriate assessments

We delivered the second year of the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment. This provides a fair and accurate measure of children's abilities as they enter school, which is comparable within and across schools.

This year we delivered the on-entry assessment to more than 600,000 pupils. The evidence can be used to help monitor children's outcomes at the end of primary school and ensure schools are recognised for the contribution they make to pupils' progress.

○ Tailored assessments

We worked with a number of international partners on assessments, tailored to each client's needs, to allow them to better monitor the impact of education programmes on students' learning as well as to support teaching and learning. This included developing an assessment framework and materials for a network of schools in remote communities in Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal and Madagascar. In addition, we continued our collaborative work in Victoria (Australia), providing teachers with high-quality assessment materials for formative use in classrooms.

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO:

- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)
- United World Schools
- Standards and Testing Agency
- Victoria Curriculum and Assessment Authority



International development

NFER's mission is to build better futures for children globally, and to support improvements within education systems.

Over the past year, we continued to grow our portfolio of research, evaluation and assessment projects delivered in collaboration with international development partners. This has included a focus on projects in Sub-Saharan Africa.

○ Innovative solutions

We were involved in the development of a pioneering assessment measure, which will allow Botswana to accurately measure how learners have achieved against national educational goals. The design is based on a curriculum-based assessment framework for mathematics, reading and life skills for children aged nine to ten. This new national educational achievement monitor will enable Botswana to gain reliable insights into educational quality, and respond effectively to trends over time.

○ International education systems

We were involved in the production of a background paper for the 2021/22 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report. This contributed to a growing body of evidence showing how civil society actors and organisations play a crucial role in international education and policy making. NFER research and insights informed a number of recommendations, including how state and non-state actors can address issues of quality and inequality in education.

○ Classroom observation

We published a guide to understanding classroom observation tools. This was targeted at practitioners and policymakers in low- and middle-income countries, where education systems often face complex societal and economic challenges.

The guide compared the advantages and limitations of three commonly used tools. This helped users to make informed decisions about which tool might best suit their context, leading to potential improvements in classroom practices.

GCE considers NFER as one of its top research partners for evidence gathering, analysis and reviews relating to the global education landscape, and education targets on sustainable development goals.

Khuselwa Mxatule, Global Campaign for Education

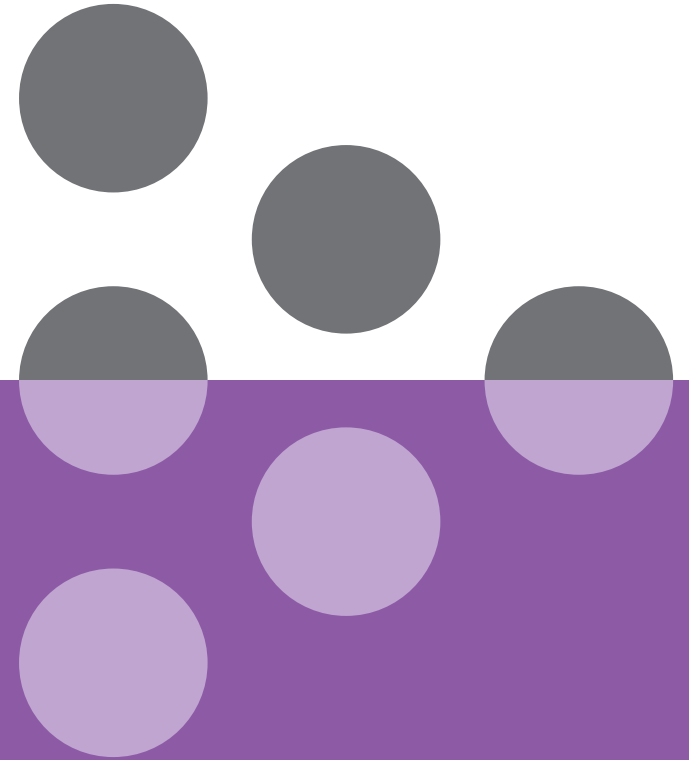
WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO:

- Botswana Examinations Council
- International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
- Global Campaign for Education
- Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS)



In a world of unprecedented disruption and change caused by a global pandemic, social upheaval, technological innovation and the climate crisis, it is more important than ever that education policy and practice is informed by high-quality evidence.

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



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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