



# Helping schools participate in research

## Teachers don't want chocolate!

Maria Charles and Katie Pyle

Out of context, this statement might appear counter-intuitive, but recent research conducted through NFER's Teacher Voice omnibus panel found teachers would be put off participating in educational research if offered a box of chocolates for doing so. Instead they would rather know that their input has made a difference to policy and practice, and receive research summaries and results. In short, teachers want their say in educational issues, want to be heard and want to be recognised for their input into research.

Schools' participation in research is the backbone of NFER's work. In 2008, over 27,000 schools from across the UK took part in its projects. Without schools, the Foundation would not be able to carry out research with a robust evidence base.

However, it is becoming harder to find schools that will take part in research. NFER is aware of the burden on schools and how difficult it is for teachers and other school staff to find time for themselves or pupils to participate, because of busy timetables – so the Foundation does everything it can to make it as easy as possible.

NFER also aims, where possible, to give something back to them – research summaries, results from questionnaires and tests, and links to useful outcomes on websites. We also show our appreciation in

other ways, like giving certificates to pupils, payment for schools or pupils, and little gifts. The Foundation has recently revamped its website to create a new schools page, which will provide useful material for

schools and allow them to benefit more from its research.

Teachers, pupils, other staff and parents are key to NFER's work and have an enormous impact on policy,

on evaluation and on overall change in education. We hope to continue gathering their views and providing something back for all efforts they make.

**Further information**  
[www.nfer.ac.uk/teacher-voice/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/teacher-voice/)



*without schools, the Foundation would not be able to carry out research with a robust evidence base*

## School Portal makes research easy for schools

Ed Wallis

NFER is committed to making participation in research as easy as possible for schools that give up their valuable time to help with its work.

One area where the Foundation has tried to improve things is how it exchanges data with schools, by introducing a secure School Portal website. Every school that takes part in NFER's research has an account on the Portal, where copies of correspondence and other information about the project are stored, which schools can access to find out more about the research. Many of our projects involve schools submitting some data about participating

pupils, which they can do quickly, easily and safely via the Portal; in most cases schools can just upload a file exported straight from their MIS. Once the research is finished, NFER often makes individual feedback available for schools to download from the Portal. The feedback varies, depending on the type of research, but examples include pupils' test results and an analysis of a school's questionnaire responses compared against other schools' responses.

As well as making the process more straightforward for schools, the Portal

keeps schools' data safe, avoiding the possibility of emails going astray, or paper forms being lost in the post. Any data uploaded to the Portal is encrypted and securely stored, and it has been tested by computer security specialists to ensure that data can't be accessed by anyone else. In addition, it cuts down on the amount of paper used for communicating with schools and reduces costs, ensuring that the public money that often funds research is spent in the most effective way.

*any data uploaded to the Portal is encrypted and securely stored*

Last year, schools accessed the Portal over 20,000 times, downloading

over 25,000 documents and securely uploading over 5,000 sets of data. NFER is committed to improving the Portal, making it more useful and easy to use for schools.

**Further information**  
[www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/what-we-offer/schools/taking-part.cfm](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/what-we-offer/schools/taking-part.cfm)