Coding FAQs

2026 key stage 1 and key stage 2 technical pre-tests and key stage 2 item validation trial

1   What is coding?

Coding is essentially a 'spectrum' marking method rather than a 'just right or wrong' marking method. Using their subject experience, appointed trial coders apply a coding framework to pupil responses to test questions. Coders award each response a numerical code (typically 0 to 9), chosen from the framework provided. The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) provides NFER with this framework; we then train our coding teams on how to use it.

Coding explores the range of answers to a question, helping test development by understanding the different ways in which pupils respond to a question.

2   I haven't coded before; can I still apply?

For the key stage 1 and key stage 2 technical pre-tests, previous experience of coding is not an essential requirement, although it is desirable.

For the senior and supervisory coder roles, previous experience of coding is essential.

Please see the selection criteria in the recruitment information document for more details.

3   What should I do if I am having problems accessing the online questionnaire?

If you have been locked out, or are being advised that you have already completed the questionnaire, please contact our coding team at coding@nfer.ac.uk so we can look into re-setting, or re-sending your link for you.

If you are being asked for an access data code, this indicates that you may have mis-keyed or mis-copied the unique survey link provided in the email message. Please try again by right clicking on the link directly then selecting 'Open Hyperlink'. If this doesn't work it may be an issue with your internet browser, so we would recommend using the most current version of Google Chrome where possible.

If you have repeated issues, you can enter the short string of characters displayed after the equals sign in your link into the field box that asks for an access code. For example:

'…=abcd12a1a12AB12xx'

You can also copy and paste the link directly into your browser.

4 Why do I have to apply again when I coded these trials in previous years?

In order to be fair and open to everyone who wishes to apply, we need to assess the entire register of coders for every round of recruitment. This ensures that no changes in circumstance have taken place that might affect coder suitability.

5 Are there opportunities for a more senior role?

We tend to appoint Lead coders from an experienced pool of those who have worked with us before. However, we encourage applicants to notify us if they would like to be considered for a Deputy Lead or Senior coder role, even in a reserve capacity.

New supervisory or senior coders are required to provide two references. These could include, for example, references from other coders have worked with or senior, deputy lead or lead coders that you have worked for in a coding role in the past, but this is not a requirement.

In the recruitment survey, you will be asked to indicate if you would like to apply for a senior or supervisory role, so do complete this section if you would like to be considered. Your suitability will then be assessed against the selection criteria specified in the recruitment documentation.

Any applicant for a senior or supervisory role who is unsuccessful will automatically be considered for a coder role, unless they request not to be through the survey.

6 Can I apply for multiple coding exercises?

Yes. You are welcome to apply for multiple subjects, and multiple key stage coding exercises. However, you may only be appointed to multiple trials if the coding dates do not overlap.

7 I was unsuccessful last year. Should I bother applying again?

Please refer to the selection criteria given in the recruitment information document. We intend to give a fair opportunity to all and understand that changes in circumstances might affect coder suitability. In light of this we would advise you to re-apply if taking part in these trial exercises is something that interests you.

8 When would I need to be available to work and what are the rates of pay?

All the details you should need regarding your commitment to be available for work and the rates of pay can be found in the recruitment information document on the coder recruitment site.

9 Will I be required to work over the weekend during the coding periods?

For the key stage 1 and 2 technical pre-test (anchor and main) the coding is completed online at home using our onscreen coding system (OSC). You will be expected to complete 2 to 4 hours of

coding per day throughout the coding period, which could necessitate working during the weekend, and over the bank holiday. It is also a requirement that you log into the OSC each day, including weekends, to check for messages.

10   Which events are residential?

The following events will be face to face and held in a central location:
- KS1 TPT and KS2 TPT coding training day
  - The training day for KS2 TPT anchor coders returning to code the same questions in the main coding window will be held remotely.
- KS2 IVT coding

11   Where will the events be held?

Details on the centre-based events can be found in the recruitment information document. The dates have been set and venues are being confirmed.

12   Will I be reimbursed for any expenses that I incur?

NFER will make all accommodation arrangements for events. All reasonable travel and subsistence expenses will be reimbursed in line with NFER's expenses policy. If appointed, further details will be provided at the point of contract.

13   What does the term 'anchor' mean?

Anchor tests enable STA to maintain standards year on year. Anchor tests follow an identical style to the main technical pre-test in terms of assessing and giving gradated responses to items. The anchor items have already been verified and standardised via a live test in the past, so the code responses captured are used as a benchmark for the later main technical pre-test.

14   Can I forward my invitation email to someone else?

No.

All emails sent by NFER are for the recipient of the email personally and individually unique links to the application form are used for our data capturing purposes. Forwarding the information to another person may result in your application being delayed, corrupted, or needing to be repeated.

15   Can I recommend another coder?

Yes, all recommendations are welcomed. Initial invitations will only been sent to those on the STA's list of approved markers. Recommendations for anyone not on this list will need to be discussed with the STA and the prospective applicant before the application process can begin. Should anyone wish to express an interest, enquiries should be sent to coding@nfer.ac.uk

16   If I am appointed to code at an event during my term time, will supply teacher cover be paid?

Yes.

NFER can arrange to pay supply cover upon request; this will be paid directly to the school or local authority at a fixed rate.

This payment is in lieu of your training attendance fee. Coders working with us in this way are then be paid their usual salary by their school or LA employer.

17   Do I need a DBS check?

All coders will be required to provide a copy of a basic (or higher) DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) certificate. If you don't have a basic (or higher) DBS certificate please let us know through the application form. This will not affect your application, however should you be offered a position you will be contacted by our team who will arrange for a check to be carried out.

NFER does not reimburse the cost of obtaining a DBS check.

If you have any queries about the DBS requirement please contact coding@nfer.ac.uk.

18   Why was my DBS ceftificate not accepted?

To undertake the coding role, you must hold either:
- A basic (or higher) DBS certificate issued within the 3 years before the completion of your coding role

or
- A basic (or higher) DBS certificate which is registered and maintained on the DBS update service.

If one of these criteria does not apply, you will not be able to undertake the coding role without obtaining a new DBS certificate. Please do check certificates you hold with us as we are able to accept those obtained through your work with a different employer, for example.

19   Why am I being asked to verify my identity?

To comply with UK tax and employment legislation, NFER must conduct assurance to confirm that you have the right to work in the UK. If you have not recently worked for NFER, you may be required to undergo a quick identity confirmation with our HR team.

20   How do I find out what my Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) number / Teacher Reference Number (TRN) is?

TRN and QTS number are the same number and consists of 7 digits. TRN and QTS have also been known previously as GTC, DfE, DfES or DCSF. Older versions will also include 'RP/' as well as the 7 digit number. To find out your TRN, please visit the link below and follow the instructions:
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/individual-teacher-records-information-for-teachers.

21   Further information

Should you have any other queries, please contact the coding team at coding@nfer.ac.uk and we will respond as swiftly as possible.