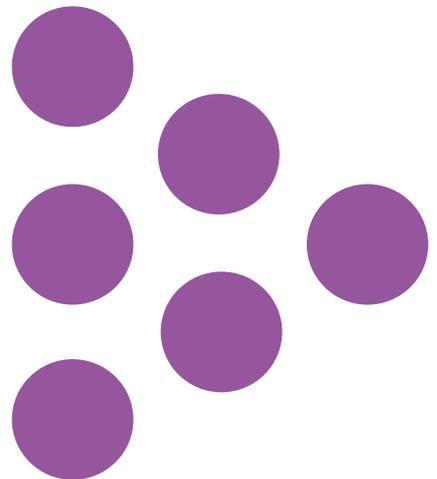

Report

How Aware Are Schools of T Levels?

A Survey of Senior Leaders and Classroom Teachers

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



How Aware Are Schools of T Levels? A Survey of Senior Leaders and Classroom Teachers

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Executive Summary

Our survey of over 700 senior leaders and classroom teachers found that, whilst most senior leaders were aware of T Levels, there was much lower awareness amongst classroom teachers. Around two-fifths of classroom teachers had heard of these new qualifications. In addition, the vast majority of respondents who were aware of T Levels were not well informed about them. As teachers can play an important role in raising the awareness of students and their parents/carers of post-16 options, more progress in informing schools about T Levels is needed.

Introduction

Over the past year, NFER has been undertaking research on T Levels focusing on providers' preparations for the delivery of the first T Levels in Digital, Construction, and Education and Childcare, which are being delivered from September 2020. Our [first research report](#) and [follow-up report](#) have highlighted positive progress, with providers being generally confident in their capacity to deliver from September. However, a number of challenges have been identified, with the awareness of school students and their parents/carers being a key area that still needs attention. Given that teachers are well placed to provide information to students and parents/carers on T Levels, we decided to explore their awareness of these new qualifications by including questions in our November 2019 Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey. It is worth noting that the vast majority of T Level providers are FE colleges. Although schools can apply to deliver T Levels, amongst the 113 providers selected to deliver T Levels from 2020 and from 2021, there are only ten schools.

Summary of key findings and recommendations

Our survey of 732 secondary school senior leaders and classroom teachers found low awareness of T Levels amongst classroom teachers, with four out of ten (41 per cent) reporting that they had heard of T Levels. As might be expected, there was higher awareness of T Levels amongst senior leaders, with the majority (85 per cent) having heard of them.

As the first T Levels will be delivered by a small number of providers (50) and some schools will be geographically closer to a T Level provider than others, we also explored differences in survey responses by the proximity of respondents' schools to these providers. **Encouragingly, a higher proportion of respondents located within five miles of a T Level provider had heard of T Levels than those based over 15 miles away (61 per cent as opposed to 46 per cent). However, it is worth noting that around two-fifths of respondents (39 per cent) located within five miles of T Level provision had not heard of T Levels.**

The message was starker when the 52 per cent of respondents who had heard of T Levels were asked how well informed they were. The vast majority (83 per cent) reported that they were 'not very well informed' or 'not informed at all', with a quarter reporting that they were 'not informed at all'. Senior leaders were a little better informed than classroom teachers. However, looking at awareness levels of senior leaders and classroom teachers by distance from a T Level

provider did not show a clear pattern. There was little difference between those located close to, or further from, T Level providers.

When asked to what extent teachers in their school were aware of T Levels, a similar picture emerged. **Over a quarter of senior leaders and classroom teachers (27 per cent) reported that teachers were ‘not at all aware’ of T Levels, with an additional six out of ten reporting that teachers were ‘not very aware’.** Again, looking at difference by distance from T Level provider showed little difference in awareness with no clear pattern emerging.

Senior leaders and classroom teachers reported that they wanted a deeper understanding of T Levels, including of: T Level course content, structure and assessment criteria; who they target; their credibility with employers; how they compare to other qualifications; which T Level subjects will be available and at which institutions; entry requirements and identifying suitable pupils for T Levels; and progression routes. As highlighted in our previous reports, the detail on some of these areas is still being worked out, which has made the provision of comprehensive information difficult. For example, the qualification specifications which will provide more in-depth information on content and assessment are becoming available from March 2020. There is also uncertainty about progression routes to university and Level 4 apprenticeships, and credibility of T Levels with employers can only be properly assessed once they are in their delivery phase.

The wider research evidence that we reviewed to provide context to our survey findings suggests that, alongside the more significant influence of parents/carers, teachers are a key influence on students’ career decision making. For example, teachers can play an important role in careers awareness raising, both in their interactions with students as teachers and in pastoral roles, and in their work with parents/carers. **Given that the first T Levels are being rolled out from September 2020, our findings show that more work needs to be done in raising teachers’ awareness of T Levels and equipping them with an understanding of what T Levels are, who they target and the benefits to be gained from taking them.** In suggesting this, we recognise the challenges in providing comprehensive detail on some areas due to the early stage of development of these new qualifications. However, **although the [NexT Level awareness raising campaign](#) is welcomed, our findings suggest that more progress in informing schools about T Levels is needed.**

1 About the study

Over the past year, NFER has been undertaking research on T Levels which has focused on providers' preparations for the delivery of the first T Levels from September 2020. This includes a [first research report](#), published in June 2020, which was based on interviews with 25 of the first 50 providers and ten senior sector representatives. Subsequently, a [follow-up report](#) was published in December 2019 which presented further findings from a round table that NFER held in October 2019, alongside some additional data analysis.

Our reports have highlighted positive progress in providers' preparations for the delivery of the first three T Levels in Digital, Construction and Education and Childcare. Providers are preparing determinedly for delivery, feel well informed about the overall design and effectively supported, are generally confident in their staff capacity and expertise to deliver in 2020 and value the funding available to help prepare for the industry placement element. Although they feel fairly confident that they will meet their target student numbers in the first year of delivery, this is linked to the fact that they have set conservative targets. However, providers have also raised a number of challenges, with the awareness of young people and their parents/carers being a key one.

Given that secondary schools have an important role to play in providing both students and parents/carers with information on T Levels, we decided to explore their awareness of these new qualifications by including questions in our November 2019 Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey¹. It is worth noting here that secondary schools can themselves apply to become T Level providers. However, amongst the 113 providers selected to deliver T Levels from 2020 and from 2021, there are only ten schools. The vast majority of T Level providers are FE colleges.

In our online survey, we asked senior leaders and classroom teachers the following questions:

- Have you heard of the new T Levels to be introduced in 2020?
- How well informed are you about the new T Level programmes which will be introduced next academic year?
- To what extent do you think teachers in your school are aware of T Levels?
- What do you think teachers need to know about T Levels to support young people in their post-16 decision making?

A total of 732 senior leaders and teachers, from 588 secondary schools, responded to the survey.

This report presents the findings of these T Level questions, placing them within the context of the influence teachers can have on their students' career decision making. As the first T Levels will be delivered by a small number of providers (50) and some schools will be more closely located to a

¹ NFER's Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey is an online survey with a panel of senior leaders and classroom teachers which NFER runs three times a year. In 2019, 1,568 senior leaders and teachers from 1,354 publicly funded primary and secondary schools completed the survey between 8th and 13th November. Both primary and secondary samples presented good levels of representation of schools in England across high-level school factors, including school phase, performance and local authority type. The secondary school sample was not nationally representative of free school meals (FSM) eligibility. So, to address this, weights were calculated using free school meals eligibility data and then applied to create a more representative sample of secondary schools.

T Level provider than others, we also explored differences in survey responses by the proximity of respondents’ schools to these providers.

The findings of the survey are presented in sections 2 to 5 below.

2 How aware are senior leaders and classroom teachers of T Levels?

Although most senior leaders had heard of T Levels, our survey showed a low awareness amongst classroom teachers, with around two-fifths having heard of them.

Just over half of the senior leaders and classroom teachers responding to the survey (52 per cent) had heard of T Levels. However awareness was lower amongst classroom teachers, with around two-fifths (41 per cent) of classroom teachers reporting that they had heard of T Levels. As might be expected, there was a higher awareness of T Levels amongst senior leaders, with the vast majority (85 per cent) having heard of them.

Table 1.1. Have you heard of the new T Levels to be introduced in 2020?

	Secondary		
	Senior leaders (%)	Classroom teachers (%)	All (%)
Yes	85	41	52
No	15	59	48
N=	178	554	732

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100 and individual figures may not sum to reported totals. The percentages in this table are weighted separately by FSM rates. Reported base sizes (N) are unweighted. This question has been filtered to a subset of respondents.
Source: Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey November 2019.

Looking at awareness of T Levels by distance from T Level provision showed that respondents more closely located to T Level providers had a higher awareness of them. However, it is worth noting that around two-fifths of respondents (39 per cent) located within five miles of T Level provision had not heard of T Levels.

We also looked at awareness of T Levels by the distance of respondents’ schools from T Level provision (see Table 4.1 in the appendix). Encouragingly, respondents closer to T Level providers had a higher awareness of T Levels. For example, 61 per cent of respondents whose schools were located within five miles of a T Level provider had heard of T Levels compared to 46 per cent whose schools were over 15 miles away. This difference is statistically significant. Similar proportions of respondents whose schools were over five miles and up to 10 miles away from a T Level provider and over 10 miles and up 15 miles away (51 per cent and 53 per cent respectively) had heard of T Levels.

3 How well informed are senior leaders and classroom teachers about T Levels?

The message was starker when respondents who had heard of T Levels were asked how well informed they were, with the vast majority reporting that they were not well informed. There was little difference in responses between those located close to, or further from, T Level providers.

We asked the 52 per cent of respondents who had heard of T Levels how well informed they were about them. A large proportion (83 per cent) reported that they were ‘not very well informed’ or ‘not informed at all’, with a quarter (25 per cent) reporting that they were ‘not informed at all’.

Comparing the responses of senior leaders and classroom teachers showed that senior leaders tended to be a little better informed about T Levels. Almost nine out of ten classroom teachers (88 per cent) reported that they were ‘not informed at all’ or ‘not very well informed’ about T Levels, compared to three-quarters of senior leaders. Around a third of classroom teachers (32 per cent) were ‘not informed at all’, with a much smaller proportion of senior leaders (14 per cent) reporting this. Only three per cent of senior leaders and one per cent of classroom teachers reported that they were ‘very well informed’ about T Levels.

Table 2.1. How well informed are you about the new T Level programmes which will be introduced next academic year? Are you:

	Secondary		
	Senior leaders (%)	Classroom teachers (%)	All (%)
Very well informed	3	1	2
Fairly well informed	22	11	16
Not very well informed	61	55	58
Not informed at all	14	32	25
N=	151	228	379

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100 and individual figures may not sum to reported totals. The percentages in this table are weighted separately by FSM rates. Reported base sizes (N) are unweighted.

This question has been filtered to a subset of respondents.

Note: sample sizes for certain cells may be small and should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey November 2019.

Looking at how well informed respondents were by distance from T Level provision did not show a clear pattern, with there being little difference in responses between those located close to, or further from, T Level providers (see Table 5.1 in the appendix). Respondents whose schools were located within five miles of a T Level provider and whose schools were over 10 miles and up 15 miles away were the best informed. For example, 19 per cent of both groups were ‘very well informed’ or ‘fairly well informed’. However, there was little difference between these respondents and those whose schools were located over five miles and up to 10 miles away from T Level provision and over 15 miles away: 14 per cent and 17 per cent of these respondents respectively reported that they were ‘very well informed’ or ‘fairly well informed’.

4 What are respondents' perceptions of the awareness of T Levels amongst their teaching colleagues?

Survey respondents reported similar low levels of awareness of T Levels amongst their teaching colleagues. Exploring distance from T Level provision revealed little difference in perceptions.

Respondents were also asked to what extent teachers in their school were aware of T Levels. Over a quarter of senior leaders and classroom teachers (27 per cent) reported that teachers were 'not at all aware' of T Levels, with an additional six out of ten reporting that teachers were 'not very aware'. Senior leaders and classroom teachers reported similar levels of awareness of their colleagues.

Table 3.1. To what extent do you think teachers in your school are aware of T Levels?

	Secondary		
	Senior leaders (%)	Classroom teachers (%)	All (%)
Very aware		1	0
Fairly aware	9	7	8
Not very aware	62	58	60
Not at all aware	26	28	27
Don't know	3	7	6
N=	151	228	379

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100 and individual figures may not sum to reported totals. The percentages in this table are weighted separately by FSM rates. Reported base sizes (N) are unweighted.
 This question has been filtered to a subset of respondents.
 Note: sample sizes for certain cells may be small and should be interpreted with caution.
 Source: Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey November 2019.

Looking at responses by distance from T Level providers showed little difference in senior leaders' and classroom teachers' perceptions of their colleagues' awareness of T Levels, with no clear pattern emerging (see Table 6.1 in the appendix).

5 What do teachers need to know about T Levels?

Many respondents did not have sufficient knowledge of T Levels to comment on what teachers needed to know about them. Those who could comment reported that teachers needed a more in-depth understanding of T Levels and the progression opportunities following them.

When asked what they thought teachers needed to know about T Levels to support young people in their post-16 decision making, over half of senior leaders and classroom teachers (56 per cent and 53 per cent respectively) did not know. This is not surprising given that many respondents reported that they were not well informed about T Levels and, as a result, it is likely that they would not know what information would be useful. However, the remainder provided a number of suggestions. For further details, see Table 7.1 in the appendix.

The largest numbers of respondents felt that teachers needed to know more about post-18 options and careers guidance (51 respondents) and to gain a deeper understanding of T Levels (44 respondents).

Other responses in order of importance included:

- how T Levels compare to other qualifications (29 respondents)
- T Level course content/structure (27 respondents)
- which T Level subjects will be available (21 respondents)
- assessment criteria (20 respondents)
- identifying suitable pupils for T Levels (17 respondents)
- which institutions will offer T Levels (16 respondents)
- credibility/value of T Levels with employers (16 respondents)
- how they build on other qualifications/GCSEs (9 respondents)
- concise summaries of T Levels (7 respondents)
- entry requirements (6 respondents)
- the positives of the qualification/their value (6 respondents).

The box below provides some illustrative quotations.

Box: Illustrative quotations on information required on T Levels

Curriculum and assessment

A much better understanding of the content and mode of delivery of these qualifications

Information about syllabus and grading

Structure of courses

The vocational focus and mode of learning

The content and volume of student work required

Assessment styles and breadth of content

The work placement commitment

What T Levels are available and where you can study them

What subjects and types of course are offered

What is being offered locally

What is on offer and what subjects are available

Entry requirements and target group

Clear information on entry requirements [so that appropriate advice can be provided]

Selecting appropriate students for T Levels

How they relate to Level 2 qualifications

Comparison to other qualifications

How they compare to other qualifications and who they suit for post-16 decisions

What are the key differences to A levels

The difference between them and Tech Levels and their advantages and disadvantages compared to A levels

How they compare to apprenticeships and BTECs

How they may be better routes to alternative qualifications

Their value

Their value and buy-in from universities and employers

A genuine assessment of their future value

How well received the first T Levels are

How they work with industry

Success rates

Career progression

Career pathways

How they are viewed by higher education

Knowledge of employers of the value of T Levels

Careers they are most suited for

It is worth noting that, as highlighted in our previous reports, the detail on some of these areas is still being worked out which has made the provision of comprehensive information difficult. For example, the qualification specifications which will provide more in-depth information on content and assessment are becoming available from March 2020. There is also still some uncertainty about progression routes to university² and Level 4 apprenticeships, and credibility of T Levels with employers can only be properly assessed once they are in their delivery phase.

² UCAS Tariff points have been allocated for T Levels. However, universities have still to decide whether they will accept T Levels and for which courses. Many are waiting to see the detailed qualification specifications prior to making decisions.

6 What influence do teachers have on their students' career decision making?

Teachers can play an important role in careers awareness raising and supporting decision making, both in their interactions with students and in their work engaging with parents/carers.

Drawing on published literature, this section places the survey findings in context by exploring the importance of teachers in supporting students' career decision making. Some of the sources particularly focus on apprenticeships but many messages can be applied to vocational and technical education more broadly.

There are a range of influences on young people's career decision making, with family, friends and teachers being the main ones, with the family being particularly influential (Blenkinsop *et al.* (2006)). A range of UK and international sources have reported the important role teachers play in empowering young people's choices and contributing to smoother transitions (Blenkinsop *et al.* (2006); Nicoletti and Berthoud (2010); McCrone *et al.* (2005); Cheung *et al.* (2013); Howard *et al.* (2009)). Hooley, Watts and Andrews (2015) noted that teachers can support students' career decision making, through their informal conversations with students, their pastoral role as tutors, and through their subject teaching.

Several studies have noted the role that subject teachers, particularly science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teachers, can play in linking their subject to potential careers and influencing students' motivations towards study and employment (Munroe and Elsom, 2000; Hooley, Watts and Andrews, 2015). Clemence *et al.* (2013) reported that 49 per cent of young people acquire their information about careers from their subject teacher.

Some studies have focused on the impact that teachers' lack of knowledge of the range of post-16 options can have on students. In their study on teenage apprenticeships, Kashefpakdel and Rehill (2018) noted that 'teachers lack confidence and experience in promoting apprenticeships, leaving young people with advice that often focuses on university'. Hooley, Watts and Andrews (2015) observed that many teachers have good insights about UCAS processes but less experience of vocational routes. In addition, a study by Watermeyer *et al.* (2016) noted that teachers' informal advice to students can be narrow and lacking objectivity, due to their lack of employment experience outside of teaching and lack of up-to-date information.

As well as supporting the provision of information and advice to students, it is also crucial that senior leaders allow education and training providers into school to talk to students about technical education and apprenticeships. However, in reviewing the Baker clause³ one year on, Hochlaf and Dromey (2019) found that compliance with the Baker clause was limited, with technical education providers still finding it difficult to access schools to inform young people of their options.

³ The Baker clause stipulates that schools must ensure that a 'range of education and training providers' have access to pupils from year 8 to year 13, so that they can be informed about what technical education and apprenticeship opportunities are available to them.

As suggested above, the influence of parent/carers on their children’s career decision making should not be under-estimated. Clemence *et al.* (2013) reported that 67 per cent of young people acquire their information about careers from their family. More recently, Barnes *et al.* (2020) reported that there is evidence to indicate that ‘parental engagement in careers is important to facilitate and/or expand opportunities for young people’, and that parents/carers need to be ‘career aspirants’, that is ‘supporters of education and career pathways and providers of information’. However, parents’/carers’ lack of awareness of apprenticeships and vocational education and, in some cases, outdated views of what vocational options entail, can hamper student interest and take-up. For example, research undertaken by Kashefpakdel and Rehill (2018) showed that parents’ negative perception of apprenticeships affected take-up and that the better performing schools, in terms of the percentage of school leavers applying for an apprenticeship, actively engaged parents in employer activities. Within this context, teachers can play a part in ensuring that parents/carers have up-to-date information on their child’s post-16 options.

In conclusion, teachers have an important role in providing both students and parents/carers with information on T Levels as a worthy technical alternative to A levels. They, therefore, need to be aware of them and understand their value in supporting students’ progression into the labour market or higher education. It is also vital that T Level providers are welcomed into schools to talk directly to teachers, students and parents/carers about these new qualifications.

7 Discussion

Our survey of senior leaders and classroom teachers showed a low level of awareness of T Levels amongst classroom teachers, with around two-fifths having heard of them. Awareness amongst senior leaders was much higher, with almost nine out of ten reporting awareness of T Levels. However, amongst the senior leaders and classroom teachers who had heard of T Levels, the vast majority were ‘not very well informed’ or ‘not informed at all’. Although respondents more closely located to T Level provision were more likely to be aware of them, around two-fifths of respondents located within five miles of a T Level provider had not heard of them.

Given the important role that teachers can play in raising the awareness of students and parents/carers of the range of post-16 options available locally, these messages point to the need to give further attention to this area. This is particularly the case given that the first T Levels are being rolled out from September 2020. We recognise the challenges in providing comprehensive detail on some areas due to the early stage of development of these new qualifications. However, although the [Next Level awareness raising campaign](#) is welcomed, our findings suggest that more needs to be done to inform schools about T Levels. National and local T Level awareness raising campaigns and information provision could usefully draw on what teachers in our survey say they would like to know about T Levels. They reported that they require more information on a range of areas, including: T Level course content, structure and assessment criteria; who they target; their credibility with employers; how they compare to other qualifications; which T Level subjects will be available and at which institutions; entry requirements and identifying suitable pupils for T Levels; and progression routes.

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Appendix

Senior leaders' and classroom teachers' awareness of T Levels by their school's distance from a T Level provider

Table 4.1. Have you heard of the new T Levels to be introduced in 2020?

	Secondary			
	5 miles or less (%)	Over 5 miles and up to 10 miles (%)	Over 10 miles and up to 15 miles (%)	Over 15 miles (%)
Yes	61	51	53	46
No	39	49	47	54
N=	155	181	141	255

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100 and individual figures may not sum to reported totals. The percentages in this table are weighted separately by FSM rates. Reported base sizes (N) are unweighted.

This question has been filtered to a subset of respondents.

Distance is based on number of miles from each respondent's school postcode to the closest T Level provider.

Source: Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey November 2019.

How informed senior leaders and classroom teachers are of T Levels by their school's distance from a T Level provider

Table 5.1. How well informed are you about the new T Level programmes which will be introduced next academic year? Are you:

	Secondary			
	5 miles or less (%)	Over 5 miles and up to 10 miles (%)	Over 10 miles and up to 15 miles (%)	Over 15 miles (%)
Very well informed	1	3	3	1
Fairly well informed	18	12	16	16
Not very well informed	60	58	52	59
Not informed at all	21	28	28	24
N=	93	93	73	120

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100 and individual figures may not sum to reported totals. The percentages in this table are weighted separately by FSM rates. Reported base sizes (N) are unweighted.

This question has been filtered to a subset of respondents.

Distance is based on number of miles from each respondent's school postcode to the closest T Level provider.

Note: sample sizes for certain cells may be small and should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey November 2019.

Senior leaders' and classroom teachers' views on their colleagues' awareness of T Levels by their school's distance from a T Level provider

Table 6.1. To what extent do you think teachers in your school are aware of T Levels?

	Secondary			
	5 miles or less (%)	Over 5 miles and up to 10 miles (%)	Over 10 miles and up to 15 miles (%)	Over 15 miles (%)
Very aware	1	0	0	0
Fairly aware	2	5	11	13
Not very aware	61	65	53	58
Not at all aware	25	27	30	26
Don't know	10	2	7	3
N=	93	93	73	120

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100 and individual figures may not sum to reported totals. The percentages in this table are weighted separately by FSM rates. Reported base sizes (N) are unweighted.

This question has been filtered to a subset of respondents.

Distance is based on number of miles from each respondent's school postcode to the closest T Level provider

Note: sample sizes for certain cells may be small and should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey November 2019.

What teachers need to know about T Levels

Table 7.1. What do teachers need to know about T Levels to support young people in their post-16 decision-making?

Open responses	Secondary		
	Senior leaders (N)	Classroom teachers (N)	All (N)
Post-18 options and careers guidance	16	35	51
Deeper understanding of T Levels	12	32	44
How they compare to other qualifications	10	19	29
Course content/structure	14	13	27
Which subjects will be available	9	12	21
Assessment criteria	5	15	20
Identifying suitable pupils	6	11	17
Which institutions will offer them	7	9	16
Credibility/value with employers	4	12	16
How they build on other qualifications/GCSEs	4	5	9
Concise summaries of T Levels	3	4	7
Entry requirements	2	4	6

Understanding of the positives of the qualification/their value	2	4	6
How to apply for them	1	3	4
How to deliver them	3	1	4
What infrastructure is needed	3	1	4
Whether they are sustainable	3	1	4
Very little/Don't need to know about them	1	3	4
How accessible they are	1	2	3
How to collaborate successfully with local companies to help deliver	1	2	3
The criteria to deliver them	1	1	2
Funding	2		2
How to give suitable work experience support and advice	2		2
How they influence A level choices		1	1
T Levels will not last		1	1
How to support/advise pupils		1	1
How to access information about them		1	1
Potential progression rates	1		1
How they fit into league tables		1	1
No need for them	1		1
Irrelevant answer		2	2
N=	64	108	172

More than one answer could be given so counts may sum to greater than base size.
 The counts in this table are weighted separately by FSM rates. Reported base sizes (N) are unweighted.
 Source: Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey November 2019.

Evidence for excellence in education

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