
FE workforce survey and longitudinal feasibility study: Information sheet

Why am I receiving this information sheet?

The National Foundation for Educational Research ([NFER](#)) is undertaking research into the further education (FE) workforce. The research includes an online survey of staff within the FE workforce and a feasibility study exploring the potential for a longitudinal survey of the FE workforce. The feasibility study component includes primary data collection through focus group discussions with FE teachers and leaders; a consultation with key representatives from the post-16 education and training sector; and interviews with DfE policy and data leads. The feasibility study also includes an evidence and data review.

This information sheet provides more information about the primary research activities of this study.

What are the aims of the project?

The project aims to inform targeted and effective FE workforce policy and increase the understanding of the FE workforce experiences and working conditions, for which little up-to-date information exists. It also aims to gather intelligence and views to support decision making on a future longitudinal survey of the FE workforce.

Who is conducting the project?

The research is being undertaken by NFER, which is the leading provider of independent educational evidence and assessments in the UK. As a registered charity, our mission is to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere and to support positive change across education systems. The project is funded by the Department for Education (DfE).

What will the project involve?

The project will involve the activities described below.

Online survey of the FE workforce

An online survey of teachers, managers and leaders within FE colleges, sixth form colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) will be administered in November/December 2025. This will take around 15 minutes to complete and explore the following topics: working conditions (pay, workload, flexible working); teaching experience; continuing professional development; organisation support and culture; wellbeing; career intentions; motivations to work in FE; and challenges around recruitment and retention.

In October, we will invite colleges and independent training providers to sign-up to their organisation's participation in the survey, after which we will send the survey link in November for senior leaders to distribute to their staff.

Online consultation with key representatives from the post-16 education and training sector

Key organisations and individuals in the post-16 education and training sector will be invited to take part in an online consultation in September 2025. They will principally be people and organisations with whom DfE and NFER have existing links. The consultation will primarily include open questions and will take around 20 minutes to complete. It will explore views and opinions relating to the administration of the online survey with the FE sector and the feasibility of a future longitudinal survey.

Online focus group discussions with FE staff

Three online focus groups will be convened with FE staff within FE colleges, sixth form colleges and independent training providers in January 2026. One focus group will include FE leaders and two will include FE teachers and they will each comprise 6-8 participants. FE staff taking part in the online survey will be asked if they are interested in taking part in the focus groups. We may also ask senior leaders if they are willing to identify relevant staff to participate in the focus groups and gain their agreement.

Focus groups will last between an hour and an hour and a half and be undertaken late afternoon/early evening. The online discussion will explore FE teachers' and leaders' views on the feasibility and administration of a future longitudinal survey, including barriers and enablers to securing participation and appetite for receiving tailored findings.

Interviews with DfE staff

Interviews with DfE policy and data leads will be undertaken in September and October 2025. Key staff will be identified by the DfE project manager.

Interviews with policy leads will: explore views and opinions relating to the administration of the online survey with the FE sector and the feasibility of a future longitudinal survey; draw on learning and pitfalls to avoid in undertaking longitudinal research; and gather suggestions for research studies to draw on during the evidence review.

Interviews with data leads will gather suggestions for datasets to consider for the data review and insights on FE workforce data sources, including what they incorporate and the quality and reliability of the data.

There will be no right or wrong answers to any of our questions in the above activities - we simply want to explore perspectives. All responses will be confidential, and no individuals or organisations will be named in the research report.

How will I benefit from taking part in the research?

FE staff taking part in the online survey will provide valuable information on current conditions within the FE sector. The information gathered across all of the activities will help shape the Department for Education's policies and planning in relation to the FE sector, and decisions on administering a longitudinal survey in the future.

Organisations in which more than ten staff have participated in the online survey will be offered a tailored feedback report comparing the anonymised responses of participants from their college/ITP to the national picture. This will allow them to benchmark their results to other similar providers.

All FE staff taking part in the focus groups will receive a £50 thank you voucher.

How will NFER use and protect the data collected?

The results of the project will be shared in a series of internal summary reports as well as a final published report.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the study at any time.

All survey and consultation responses will be anonymised. For interviews and focus groups, with participation agreement, the discussion will be recorded so that the researcher can take detailed notes. This recording will be deleted as soon as the notes have been written up. Full details of how your personal information will be collected, stored and used can be found in our privacy notice, which is on the project web page [here](#).

Who to contact?

If you have any questions, or would like further information about the research, please contact the Project Leader, Matt Walker, at m.walker@nfer.ac.uk