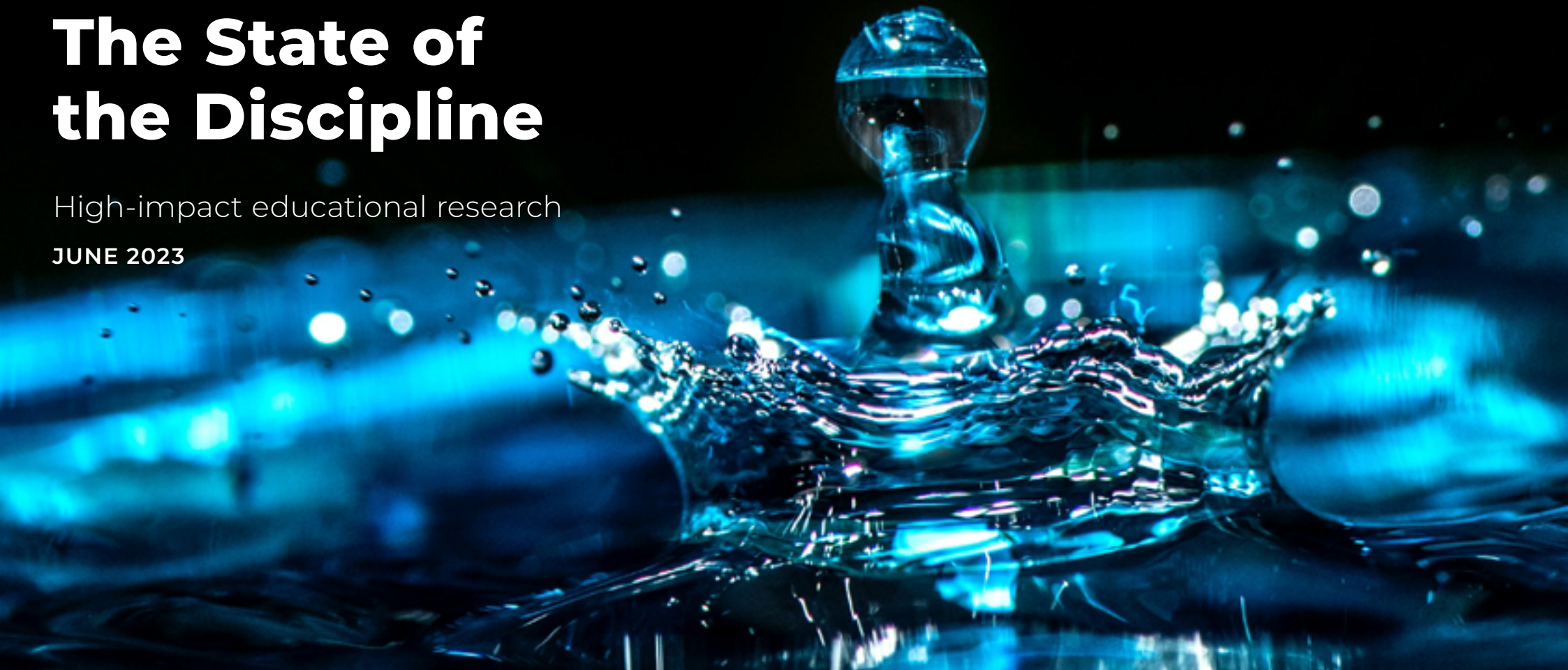


Education: **The State of the Discipline**

High-impact educational research

JUNE 2023



The British Educational Research Association (BERA) is the leading authority on educational research in the UK, supporting and representing the community of scholars, practitioners and everyone engaged in and with educational research both nationally and internationally. BERA is a membership association and learned society committed to advancing research quality, building research capacity and fostering research engagement. We aim to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best quality evidence produced by educational research.

Our vision is for educational research to have a profound and positive influence on society. We support this by promoting and sustaining the work of educational researchers. Our membership, which is more than 2,500 strong, includes educational researchers, practitioners and doctoral students from the UK and around the globe.

Founded in 1974, BERA has since expanded into an internationally renowned association. We strive to be inclusive of the diversity of education research and scholarship, and welcome members from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, sectoral interests and institutional affiliations. We encourage the development of productive relationships with other associations within and beyond the UK.

We run a major international conference each year alongside a diverse and engaging series of events, and publish high-quality research in our peer-reviewed journals, reports, book series and the groundbreaking BERA Blog. We recognise excellence through our awards and fellowships, provide grants for research, support the career development of our members, and nurture an active peer community organised around networks, forums and special interest groups.

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The State of the Discipline initiative aims to provide a clear, comprehensive account of the state of education as an academic discipline in universities; as a field of practice; and as a significant and central element of social and political policy in the four nations of the UK.

Reports from each stage of the initiative will equip stakeholders in every part of the sector with the most objective and powerful information on which to base their advocacy for the importance of education and education research. It will also be key to informing decision-making processes within BERA.

Two elements are central to the initiative:

- the definition of education as an academic discipline that shares characteristics with many other disciplines, including those that have been established for much longer in universities worldwide;
- the intersections between education research and practice including in teacher education and training, which in recent work has been articulated as 'close-to-practice-research'.

Published in June 2023 by the British Educational Research Association.

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Citation

If referring to or quoting from this document, our preferred citation is as follows:

British Educational Research Association. (2023). *Education: The State of the Discipline. High-impact educational research*. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/education-the-state-of-the-discipline-high-impact-educational-research>

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Foreword

David James¹, Cardiff University

I am delighted that BERA has assembled this selection of summaries of high-impact educational research. An important part of the association's State of the Discipline work, this also echoes its 2016 contribution to a series of booklets published by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS, 2016). I had an advisory and editorial role in that earlier work which culminated in a launch at the House of Commons. I believe there is a continuing need to raise awareness of the evidence we have for how educational research already contributes to policy, practice and understanding, and that this collection will help in that endeavour.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) defines impact as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'. The guidance on submissions also states:

'Impact includes, but is not limited to, an effect on, change or benefit to:

- *the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding*
- *of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals*
- *in any geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.'*

REF, 2019, p. 68

Impact is assessed against the criteria of 'reach' and 'significance' (REF, 2019, p. 68). While these definitions and criteria are not the only way in which research impact can be understood, the REF definition is vitally

¹ David James was chair of the REF 2021 Education Sub-panel; he writes here in a personal capacity.

important: REF is the mechanism by which the quality of research in UK universities is assessed, and its most recent iteration gave a weighting of 25 per cent to impact (alongside 60 per cent to outputs and 15 per cent to research environment).

Institutions were asked to submit two impact case studies in submissions of up to 19.99 full-time equivalent staff, and then additional case studies for larger submissions using a sliding scale. Within 83 institutional submissions, the Education Sub-panel received 230 impact case studies. Assessment began with calibration exercises and continued with the sub-panel divided into six groups, each of which included a panellist who had been specifically appointed for their impact expertise. As with all aspects of the sub-panel's activities, there was ongoing moderation between the groups, assiduous avoidance of conflicts of interest and constant attention to the dangers of unconscious bias.

REF 2021 outcomes gave UK educational researchers good grounds for celebration about the quality of educational research. With impact, the proportion judged as outstanding (4*) had increased since REF 2014, from 42.9 to 51.1 per cent. REF 2021 also showed that in education, the proportion of outstanding research impact was significantly above the UK social sciences' average (education's 4* was 51.1 per cent, while that across all 12 social science units of assessment [UoAs] within Main Panel C was 44.8 per cent). Changes in both impact and outputs scores were reflected in the overall quality profile of educational research, where the combined proportion judged to be world-leading (4*) and internationally excellent (3*) had risen from 66 per cent in REF 2014 to 72 per cent in REF 2021.

The assessment of impact was included for the first time in UK research assessment in REF 2014. There remain differing views on whether and how impact should be measured as part of research quality, and on how much weight should be given to it. Having listened to a range of views, among and beyond educational researchers, and having now been closely involved in two cycles of REF, my own view can be expressed in two arguments, which lead to a third, as follows.

(a) *The measurement of impact is a legitimate element in arriving at a rounded picture of the quality of research.*

This first point is key in fields of study that have strong relevance to contemporary policy and practice. In the UK, education provision in all its forms is the second largest area of public expenditure after health. This is certainly a powerful justification for the funding of research itself, especially if we care about the nature of educational activity and wish to live in a democracy. It is also reasonable to expect that at least some of this research might play a demonstrable role in confirmation, refinement or challenge to existing systems, arrangements, assumptions, and practices at a variety of levels, showing up as evidence of impact. Here, my own concern is not whether we attempt to measure examples of impact, but whether sufficient *independent* educational research is being carried out. As the REF sub-panel report states (and as I have argued elsewhere – see James, 2023), given the volume of taxpayers’ money spent on educational activity in the UK, the total level of investment in UK educational research appears worryingly small, and is declining.

(b) *However, it is a mistake to assume that the strength, presence or absence of impact is always due to the qualities of the research or the researcher.*

On several occasions I have heard people speak about impact in ways suggesting they assume that high impact is *simply* an indicator of high-quality research, and/or *simply* an indicator of the skills and characteristics of researchers or teams of researchers. I can see how this may be a seductive idea, in keeping with a view of research being in some sort of market where the best concepts, insights and recommendations ‘win through’ and become impact, and conversely, those not ‘winning through’ are assumed to be inherently weaker. The problem is that the world doesn’t work this way! Such assumptions reveal lazy thinking, or perhaps a pretence that the social and political realities that mediate any relationship between research and its

potential influence are not really there. As experienced researchers in every field know, to treat high-quality research as a *sufficient* condition for high impact is either naïve or disingenuous. The achievement of impact of the sort measured by REF depends on many factors in addition to the quality of the underpinning research and the skills of those who carried it out, and many of these factors are well beyond the control of the researcher. In the case of research that may impact on policy, such factors include the nature of prevailing political values and preferences, the degree of ideological compatibility with existing or planned measures, competing priorities for resources, and the power of other extant interests and how they frame or enter debate and decision-making. Put another way, the best research may have little or no impact in any direct or immediate sense.

Together, (a) and (b) lead to the following:

(c) *Research impact is important, but it has limitations as an indicator of research quality, and it would be illogical to allow it to dominate in the assessment of research excellence.*

This collection includes summaries pertaining to 16 of the 230 impact case studies that were submitted in the education UoA in REF 2021. All were chosen from submissions where 75 per cent or more of the impact had been assessed as ‘outstanding’ (4*). They are a cross-section that bears witness to the nature of some of the high-quality impact behind the figures cited above. Examples were assembled to reflect a diversity of institutions, institutional locations, researchers, and types of impact, while also reflecting something of the wide substantive and methodological range of educational research seen during the REF process. More details of the latter can be found in the sub-panel’s overview report (REF, 2022).

The 16 summaries provided each include a link to the text of the case study itself on the REF webpages. I would encourage readers to follow at least some of these to read the case studies more closely. The REF webpages provide a useful resource in this and in many other ways and, following REF 2021, have new and more interactive features that are easy to navigate and engage with.

Finally, in addition to its many messages about research quality, the sub-panel's overview report offers some positive news about the character and role of educational research and its role in society, concluding as follows.

‘Educational research plays a vital role in supporting the many organisations, individuals and activities involved in education, providing independent analysis and insight to promote reflection, understanding, effectiveness, improvement, and renewal. The sub-panel saw strong evidence that educational research has impressive national and international reach and responds well to the needs of policy, relevant professional groups, the public and specific communities. Crucially, however, the best educational research is not confined to the role of a supplier responding to demands that are articulated by – or on behalf of – these stakeholders: educational research is also itself a vital source of new ideas, insights, perspectives, and challenges to current thinking, policy and practice, making a valuable and distinctive contribution to democratic life.’

REF, 2022, p. 169

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Transforming how autistic pupils are understood, taught and treated in mainstream education settings



[Professor Karen Guldberg](#), [Professor Rita Jordan](#), Dr Glenys Jones, [Dr Andrea MacLeod](#), Dr Sarah Parsons and Dr Kerstin Wittemeyer



University of Birmingham



[Autism Centre for Education and Research](#)



UK

“ they have empowered teachers to perceive autistic pupils as having distinct learning needs, rather than being ‘faulty’, ‘problematic’ and in need of ‘fixing’ ”

Focus

There are more than 120,000 autistic pupils in England's schools, of which more than 70 per cent are educated in mainstream settings. Given that autism is a complex condition that impacts pupils' daily functioning, it is especially important that autistic pupils receive evidence-based, tailored support. To improve the quality of education that autistic pupils receive, researchers at the University of Birmingham's [Autism Centre for Education and Research](#) (ACER) **developed a distinctive framework and pedagogy for autistic pupils and challenged the prevalent misconception that autism is a disorder**, rather than a different way of being. In so doing, they have empowered teachers to perceive autistic pupils as having distinct learning needs, rather than being 'faulty', 'problematic' and in need of 'fixing'.

Impact

ACER's framework is a key component of the Autism Education Trust's (AET) continuing professional development programme, which was co-created by ACER and the AET. This partnership has **trained 275,000 education staff across England**. The programme consists of: a set of autism standards (for educational settings to assess autism practice in education); an autism competency framework (guidance on the knowledge, skills and competencies needed by practitioners); and autism training for educators. The roll-out of this programme has produced a step-change in autism education practice and is **setting the standard for best practice nationally**. The programme is the largest national training programme on autism in England for education-based staff and is also the **only continuing professional development programme to be referenced in the 2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice**.

Reduction in exclusions

The training now reaches 50 per cent of the 24,821 schools in England and a notable benefit of it has been a reduction in exclusions of autistic pupils. Additionally, in Birmingham, between 2016–19, four per cent more pupils were educated in mainstream rather than specialist provisions. As the average cost of specialist provision in Birmingham is £67,000 per year per child, a four per cent increase equates to a saving of £11 million.

International impact

Internationally, ACER has also challenged misconceptions about autism in Italy and Greece, again framing autism as a 'different way of being' rather than a disorder. This was achieved by working with schools in Greece and Italy using funding from the European Union between 2014–17. Subsequently, the Greek Ministry of Education has endorsed the provision of the (translated and adapted) professional development programme throughout Piraeus and Athens.

275,000

education staff trained across England

Improving graduate outcomes



[Professor Anna Vignoles](#), [Professor Jan Vermunt](#) and [Dr Sonia Ilie](#)



[University of Cambridge](#)



[LEO Graduate Outcomes](#)



[UK](#)

“ Vignoles has regularly advised parliamentarians and politicians from across the political spectrum and several ministers have spoken positively about the impact of her research ”

Focus

In recognition of the importance of measuring the benefits of higher education and how they are distributed across different demographic groups, Professor Anna Vignoles and her colleagues at the University of Cambridge conducted a **multi-faceted investigation into the learning and labour market outcomes of graduates** in England. Their research informed an independent review of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), a national scheme that is used by the Office for Students to monitor, evaluate and enhance students' experiences of higher education; highlighted sizable socioeconomic inequalities in graduate incomes; and catalysed the creation of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset, which provides insights into how graduate incomes differ according to what and where students study.

Impact

One of the main benefits of the LEO dataset is that it has made it far easier for prospective students to gauge what the average student who took this course gained from their higher education, depending on their choice of subject and institution. Nicola Dandridge, CEO of the Office for Students, noted that this 'important research ... provides a wealth of data to let students understand how the course and institution they choose may affect their earnings potential'. It has been downloaded by more than 32,000 individuals.

In addition to providing a useful insight into the benefits that students gain from different higher education courses, Vignoles and her colleagues' research has also **informed and enlivened recent debates about social mobility**. For example, their finding that there is a notable post-graduation socioeconomic gap in graduate earnings has focused attention on the structural factors that continue to impact social mobility by demonstrating that, despite widening participation, family background still has a strong

influence on graduate labour market prospects. This finding also led the Office for Students to recommend that higher education institutions should be required to provide more support to help students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, to successfully transition into the labour market.

“*no doubt that Professor Vignoles' work has had real-world impact on higher education in England*”

Influencing politicians

Vignoles has regularly advised parliamentarians and politicians from across the political spectrum and several ministers have spoken positively about the impact of her research. For example, in 2019, Lord David Willetts, who was Universities Minister from 2010–14, wrote that he had 'no doubt that Professor Vignoles' work has had real-world impact on higher education in England', and that 'she has developed a long-standing and trusted advisory relationship with the DfE [Department for Education] and BEIS [Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy] over a number of years'. Other former universities ministers to have praised the usefulness of Vignoles' research include Jo Johnson and Sam Gyimah.



Reshaping the effective delivery of early years and primary education in Wales



[Professor Chris Taylor](#) and [Professor Sally Power](#)



[Cardiff University](#)



[How is my child doing in the Foundation Phase?](#)
[A guide for parents and carers](#)



[UK](#)

“
improved the delivery and effectiveness of early years and primary education in Wales by providing evidence-based recommendations on how to enhance the Welsh government’s new Foundation Phase”

Focus

Professor Chris Taylor, Professor Sally Power and their colleagues at Cardiff University **improved the delivery and effectiveness of early years and primary education in Wales** by providing evidence-based recommendations on how to enhance the Welsh government’s new Foundation Phase (FP) curriculum. The FP covers the teaching and learning of all three-to-seven-year-olds in maintained primary schools and funded non-maintained pre-school settings. These recommendations, which were based on **independent, mixed-methods evaluations**, were adopted by the Welsh government and applied in all schools and nurseries.

Impact

The FP’s radical new curriculum introduced a pedagogical approach focused on developmental, experiential and active learning. Following its roll-out from 2004–11, the researchers at Cardiff University undertook three evaluations of the FP in **one of the largest independent evaluations of a new curriculum to be conducted in the UK**. The evaluation collected data from a range of stakeholders, including policymakers, headteachers, lead practitioners, teachers, teaching assistants, pupils and more than 1,000 parents and carers.

Recommendations adopted by the Welsh government and applied in all schools and nurseries

“

Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education, thanked the researchers for their ‘extremely robust and comprehensive approach’ and their ‘continuing support and vigour in delivering a successful early education experience for our youngest learners’.”

The researchers concluded that the FP had been successful in improving children’s educational achievement, wellbeing and involvement and that its approach and design should be both continued and supported by the Welsh government. It also examined the attitudes of practitioners, pupils and parents. This aspect of the research generated 29 formal recommendations for the further development of the FP. In so doing, the researchers provided an evidence base for the Welsh government to continue developing the FP. Reflecting on this evaluation, Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education, thanked the researchers for their ‘extremely robust and comprehensive approach’ and their ‘continuing support and vigour in delivering a successful early education experience for our youngest learners’.

Developing the Pupil Premium Toolkit



[Professor Steve Higgins](#), [Dr Dimitra Kokotsaki](#) and [Professor Rob Coe](#)



[Durham University](#)



[EEF Guide to the Pupil Premium](#)



UK and international

“
guides the work of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and its funding strategy for the £200 million being spent over 15 years to reduce inequalities in school outcomes in England
”

Focus

The Pupil Premium Toolkit is an evidence-based resource that was developed by Professor Steve Higgins and his colleagues at Durham University for schools seeking guidance on improving learning outcomes, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It guides the work of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and its funding strategy for the £200 million being spent over 15 years to reduce inequalities in school outcomes in England. The Toolkit has directly influenced UK government policy and spending on education and the policy decisions of governments outside England. It has also influenced the development of the [What Works Network for Education](#) in the UK and is consulted by two-thirds of all the headteachers in England.

Methods

The Toolkit is a synthesis of research evidence from 200 systematic reviews, meta-analyses and other quantitative studies. It aims to **support schools in spending their resources, especially their Pupil Premium allocation, more thoughtfully and more effectively**. The Pupil Premium will account for an estimated £16 billion of education spending in England between August 2013 and July 2020, representing a significant element of resourcing for disadvantaged pupils.

Domestic impact

The contribution of the Toolkit is that it **provides estimates of the relative benefit of the impact of different approaches on pupils' attainment**.

It also includes an estimate of the financial costs of adopting each of the different approaches. The resulting findings about the relative cost/benefit of adopting different educational approaches on attainment in schools provides highly valued support to schools. It advises that some of the most popular uses of the Pupil Premium, such as appointing additional teachers

or the general deployment of teaching assistants, are unlikely, on average, to be cost effective in increasing pupils' attainment. The Toolkit identifies other approaches, such as providing feedback, or developing pupils' skills in planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning, and identifies interventions that are more likely to be successful.

The UK government has acknowledged that the Toolkit 'is helping teachers to find and use evidence about the most effective teaching methods to improve standards for all children, including the most disadvantaged' and cites the Toolkit as an example of the evidence base which sets out 'what works and what doesn't, and which develops and evolves over time'.

International impact

In 2018, EEF, in partnership with BHP Billiton Foundation, announced a five-year £9.8 million fund to improve learning outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the world by building a global evidence network with the development of the Toolkit as a central aim. As a result of this development, the EEF entered into partnership with EduCaixa (Fundación Bancaria 'la Caixa') to develop a Spanish version of the Teaching & Learning Toolkit. Additionally, in 2019, the EEF established a partnership with the Queen Rania Foundation which will see the translation and contextualisation of the Toolkit into Arabic for teachers and policymakers in the Middle East and North Africa. A similar agreement with Effective Basic Services Africa will see the adaptation of the Toolkit for teachers in Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad and Niger.

Consulted by two-thirds of all the headteachers in England

The Mediator Toolkit: Supporting mediators working with children using picturebooks in contexts of displacement



Professor Evelyn Arizpe, [Dr Maureen Farrell](#), [Dr Jennifer Farrar](#),
[Dr Lavinia Hirsu](#) and [Dr Julie McAdam](#)



University of Glasgow



[The Mediator Toolkit](#)



Mexico, Egypt and Chile



“ the research ultimately benefits displaced children and young adults by reducing the negative effects of transience and offering a pathway into literacy for those without access to formal education ”

Focus

Approximately 28 million children are living in forced displacement, including 12 million refugees who are five times more likely to be out of school than other children. **Few resources and approaches have been specifically developed for facilitating learning, inclusion and intercultural communication for those living in transient conditions.** This is despite the fact that when children have had their education interrupted because of migration, forced displacement, or have experienced violence or economic precarity, they are in particular need of an approach to learning which is mediated, inclusive and enjoyable.

Innovation

To address this absence of resources, researchers at the University of Glasgow developed the Mediator Toolkit. The Toolkit has changed the practice of ‘mediators’ (that is, third-sector employees, volunteers and teachers) in Mexico, Egypt and Chile by training them to use the aesthetic and affective features of picturebooks to reduce the negative effects of displacement (for instance by enabling children to talk about their future intentions within the host country). The Toolkit has in-built flexibility allowing for adaptation and delivery according to age group and context (such as post-conflict or post-disaster) and includes criteria for selecting picturebooks, mediation strategies and the creation of arts-based, ethical response activities suitable for the context.

Changed the practice of third-sector employees, volunteers and teachers in Mexico, Egypt and Chile

Knowledge transfer

The team’s research has made a significant contribution to changing mediators’ practice through government programmes and the work of non-governmental organisations. A project website, which contains resources including a searchable database of books, serves as a knowledge exchange portal. This ensures sustainability and provides a platform for the training of new partners who cannot benefit from in-situ training. The research ultimately **benefits displaced children and young adults by reducing the negative effects of transience and offering a pathway into literacy for those without access to formal education.**

Supporting young people's aspirations and engagement in science



[Professor Louise Archer](#), Professor Jonathan Osborne, Dr Jennifer DeWitt and Dr Heather King



King's College London



[Science Capital: making science relevant](#)



UK and international

“ provided the underpinning rationale for national governmental and third-sector strategies aimed at supporting aspirations and public engagement in science ”

Focus

Despite targeted funding, participation in science-related study and extra-curricular activities in post-compulsory education remains patterned along gender, ethnicity and social class lines. To better understand these inequalities, Professor Louise Archer and her colleagues at King's College London conducted a 10-year Economic and Social Research Council-funded research programme called the **Young People's Career Aspirations in Science studies** (ASPIRES).

Innovation

Based on their research, the team proposed the concept of 'science capital'. Science capital encapsulates the science-related knowledge, attitudes, experiences and connections that an individual acquires and builds throughout their life. It equates to what you know about science, how you think about science, what you do that is science-related and who you know who engages with science. Their research has **provided the underpinning rationale for national governmental and third-sector strategies aimed at supporting aspirations and public engagement in science**, as well as informing national and international science assessment measures.

The concept of science capital and other research by Archer and her colleagues has provided the foundation for the design and implementation of new policies and practices aimed at widening participation to science-related courses and careers. These recognise the importance of building learners' science identities from an early age and the role played by families and schools in forming young people's science-related aspirations.

Impact on domestic assessment

Additionally, their research has impacted assessment practices in primary schools across England. For instance, science capital is now a key criterion in the Ofsted-endorsed Primary Science Quality Mark, which impacts 240,000 children and 9,000 teachers annually.

Impact on outreach activities

In terms of outreach activities, science museums (such as the Science Museum Group), learned societies (such as the British Science Association [BSA]) and charities have used the concept of science capital, and research on how it can be cultivated effectively, to direct their engagement and outreach activities. The Public Programmes Manager for the Institute of Physics, for example, stated that this research had 'been invaluable in guiding and shaping' their outreach activities.

Impact of international assessments

On the international stage, research by Archer and her colleagues has had a direct impact on how the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluates science education. PISA results are often used as a measure of a country's educational success, and science capital is being incorporated as a key indicator in the new 'Scientific Identity' dimension that is being introduced in 2024. Seventy-nine countries currently participate in PISA and many shape their curricula in response to its dimensions.

Science capital is now a key criterion in the Ofsted-endorsed Primary Science Quality Mark, which impacts 240,000 children and 9,000 teachers annually

Evaluating and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in higher education



Professor Paul Ashwin, Professor Murray Saunders
and Professor Paul Trowler



Lancaster University



UK and international

“
the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education has reported that this research has been ‘been crucial in developing policies for enhancing higher education’”

Focus

Higher education (HE) makes significant economic, social, cultural and political contributions to societies globally. For this reason, governments across the world, as well as many international agencies, such as the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank, have identified enhancing the quality of HE learning and teaching (L&T) as a significant and urgent policy priority. In 2015, for example, European HE ministers concluded that ‘enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching is the main mission of the European Higher Education Area’. Research by Professor Paul Ashwin, Professor Murray Saunders and Professor Paul Trowler of Lancaster University has addressed this pressing concern by shaping policy mechanisms, as well as institutional and individual approaches to evaluating and enhancing L&T in HE.

Innovation

It is common for national and institutional policymakers to identify individual examples of good practice in L&T and to then attempt to ‘scale up’ to institutional or national level. Lancaster’s researchers have exposed the deficiencies in this model and demonstrated how it often leads to ineffective and unsustainable changes. Furthermore, the researchers developed an approach which emphasises that change requires shifts in practice that are situated, adaptable and embedded. Collectively, their research highlights that changes need to be captured in new systems and structures, as well as individual routine practices, and demonstrates that evaluating and enhancing L&T requires the following:

- an awareness of the differently situated demands that quality-enhancement involves at individual, institutional and national levels
- at a national level, policymakers need to deploy an explicit ‘theory of change’ that explains the underlying thinking in relation to how and why new initiatives can lead to improvements in the quality of learning and teaching, and offer a path to achieving this

- at an institutional level, those leading change need to take account of how new initiatives will be integrated into the existing practices of those engaged in learning and teaching
- at an individual level, rather than simply providing examples of ‘best practice’ that do not take account of the situational context of day-to-day practices, educational practitioners need to be supported to develop evidence-informed reflective practices that can change their everyday approaches to teaching and learning.

Impact on learning and teaching in higher education

Lancaster’s research has informed how L&T is evaluated and enhanced in both the UK and internationally. Reflecting this, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education has reported that this research has been ‘crucial in developing policies for enhancing higher education in general and has shaped the Centres for Excellence in Education Programme (SFU)’. The SFU is a long-term initiative, launched in 2010, which an independent evaluation has found to have been successful in enhancing the quality of HE programmes across Norway and beyond. Lancaster’s research has ‘influenced practices across the Norwegian higher education sector and inspired the HEIs and educators to work more systematically with reflective teaching and curriculum change’.

Informed how L&T is evaluated and enhanced in both the UK and internationally

Monitoring and supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing



[Professor Neil Humphrey, Dr Michael Wigelsworth, Dr Kirstin Kerr and Professor Pam Qualter](#)



[University of Manchester](#)



[Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools](#)



[UK](#)

“
the vast majority of teachers agreed that their understanding of social and emotional learning had improved, and all agreed that their pupils would benefit from the recommendations
”

Focus

Amid widespread concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in England, the ‘front line’ role of schools has assumed greater significance. Critically, schools can provide stable, nurturing environments, where pupils can feel safe, secure and happy. Additionally, schools can identify, monitor and support pupils’ mental health, as well as refer pupils to specialist services. Despite this, it has been found that a minority of schools use evidence to inform their decision-making in relation to mental health provision.

Innovation

Recognising the unfilled potential of schools to provide evidence-based, high-quality mental health support to pupils, Professor Neil Humphrey and his colleagues at the University of Manchester sought to generate a **better understanding of how schools in England monitor and support pupils’ mental health and wellbeing** and how this could be improved.

Impact on assessment of pupil mental health

Humphrey and his colleagues conducted several studies aimed at discovering what policies and practices best support pupils’ mental health and wellbeing, and subsequently developed a universal measure of pupil mental health in collaboration with researchers at other institutions. This measure is called the [Wellbeing Measurement Framework \(WMF\)](#) and can be used to identify and monitor pupils’ needs. The WMF is now being used by almost 300 schools in 68 local authorities¹ (LAs) in England to routinely and systematically assess and monitor the mental health of more than 100,000 pupils. Reflecting on their adoption of the WMF, one headteacher commented that it ‘overcomes a downfall of our previous approach, in which we were using many different measures that were all administrated variably and then reported on and

¹ 20 per cent of LAs in England

interpreted differently’. In some cases, WMF data have also been integrated with police, LA and National Health Service Foundation Trust data to provide a comprehensive assessment of community needs in order to inform a population-wide approach to resource allocation.

Impact on social and emotional learning

Humphrey and his colleagues’ research has also led to an increased use of evidence-informed social and emotional learning practices in primary school classrooms. In 2019, for example, Humphrey and his colleagues produced a guidance document for the Education Endowment Foundation, the UK government’s What Works Centre for Education, which has since been downloaded by more than 11,000 individuals.² Consequently, it has enabled teachers to adopt evidence-based strategies to promote social and emotional learning, which fosters positive experiences and outcomes for pupils. Following continuing professional development in Manchester and York used to showcase their guidance, the **vast majority of teachers agreed that their understanding of social and emotional learning had improved, and all agreed that their pupils would benefit from the recommendations.**

Informing evidence-based decisions about school-based targeted mental health interventions

The teams’ research has also provided a key instrument for Newham in determining what works in promoting mental health among their most vulnerable children and young people. For example, their randomised trial of [Bounce Back](#) provided high-quality independent evidence that demonstrated its efficacy in reducing children’s emotional symptoms, especially among those whose attendance was highest – a finding that led to Bounce Back being maintained and subsequently delivered to nearly 1,200 children and young people with emergent mental health difficulties.

² As of December 2020

Transforming early education policy and practice



Professor Edward Melhuish, Professor Pam Sammons, Professor Iram Siraj and Professor Kathy Sylva



University of Oxford



Study of Early Education and Development



UK, Australia, Hong Kong, Japan and Norway

“ their research provided the evidence to underpin the UK government’s decision to provide free early childhood education to millions of two-to-four-year-olds ”

Focus

Research conducted by academics at the University of Oxford has transformed early childhood education and home learning policy, provision, practice and research in both the UK and internationally. In particular, their research has highlighted the varied and profound short- and long-term benefits of providing high-quality early childhood education and a supportive home learning environment, and they have received funding from both the Department for Education (£8 million) and the Sutton Trust. Their research has also led to the creation of evidence-based resources and training for practitioners and has been used to inform advice given to governments in high- and low-income countries.

Discoveries

To investigate the impact of early childhood education and the home learning environment, the researchers conducted two large-scale longitudinal studies. Amid a range of discoveries, the team found that pre-school education attendees make a stronger start to school; that they continue to make accelerated progress throughout primary education; and that they show academic advantage at the end of compulsory schooling, in addition to social-behavioural benefits. Their research also identified the most effective home learning practices and that high-quality early childhood education has a wide range of benefits for children's development.

Innovation

Based on their research, the team developed the Early Childhood Environment Rating-Scale Extension and the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being scales, which are now being used across the UK and internationally by educational practitioners to identify effective practices in their own centres and thereby improve the quality of their teaching.

Impact on early education provision

Internationally, governments and early education providers in countries such as Australia, Norway and Japan have also used the research conducted by Melhuish and his colleagues to improve the early education provision of tens of thousands of children. Domestically, **their research provided the evidence to underpin the UK government's decision to provide free early childhood education to millions of two-to-four-year-olds**. Reflecting on the widespread, international impact of their research, a professor of early childhood and family policy at Columbia University concluded that it had 'transformed the global discussion on quality in young children's learning experiences'.

“
*transformed the global discussion on quality
in young children's learning experiences*”

The mainstreaming and internationalising of shared education



[Professor Tony Gallagher](#) and [Professor Joanne Hughes](#)



Queen's University Belfast



[Shared Education](#)



Northern Ireland, Israel, North Macedonia and the USA

“ provided the basis for a model of collaboration between Protestant and Catholic schools in Northern Ireland that is focused on promoting reconciliation and school improvement ”

Focus

Research conducted by Professor Tony Gallagher, Professor Joanne Hughes and their colleagues at Queen's University Belfast has **provided the basis for a model of collaboration between Protestant and Catholic schools in Northern Ireland that is focused on promoting reconciliation and school improvement**. It is referred to as the **Northern Ireland Model of Shared Education**.

Discoveries

Research led by Hughes has both demonstrated the importance of sustained, regular contact as a mechanism for promoting reconciliation and highlighted the need for system-level support to maintain reconciliation as a priority goal. Other research has focused on the role that cross-denominational school partnerships can perform in facilitating engagement between communities and a variety of statutory and non-statutory agencies.

Domestic impact

Importantly, their research has led to **Shared Education becoming a statutory duty of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and the Education Authority**. Furthermore, the format that the researchers have pioneered has been adopted in the two current official government-supported projects, the [Shared Education Signature Project](#) (SESP) and the [Collaboration and Sharing in Education](#) (CASE) project. A number of research strands led by Gallagher and Hughes on aspects of shared education have continued, and both researchers continue to provide **regular briefings to official steering groups as part of the ongoing implementation and evaluation of the initiative**.

International impact

International interest in the Northern Ireland Model of Shared Education has led to a range of comparative studies. This has included research on the challenges and opportunities associated with applying the model to other divided societies. The researchers have also examined the importance of institutional support at school, policy and political levels across different jurisdictions in order to identify forms of leadership that are most likely to promote transformational change in local policy and practice. This research has focused on countries where the Northern Ireland Model of Shared Education has been adapted for local implementation, such as Israel, North Macedonia and the USA (Los Angeles, specifically).

“
Importantly, their research has led to Shared Education becoming a statutory duty of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and the Education Authority.”



The Sounds of Intent framework: Transforming the lives of children through the power of research- informed music education



[Professor Adam Ockelford](#)



[University of Roehampton](#)



[Sounds of Intent](#)



[UK](#)

*“
enriched the musical
experiences and progress
of children with special
educational needs around
the world”*

Focus

Pioneering research by Professor Adam Ockelford of the University of Roehampton into the musical development of children across the spectrum of neurodiversity has **enriched the musical experiences and progress of children with special educational needs around the world**. Ockelford's research led to the development of the [Sounds of Intent](#) (Sol) framework, which has been used to **create, disseminate and embed new music curricula, resources, teaching strategies, qualifications and assessment protocols** in a wide range of educational contexts. Through the implementation of the framework in special schools and in projects developed by voluntary organisations, Sol has **transformed the lives of children through the power of research-informed music education**.

Innovation

Ockelford's research identified a dearth of research into how children with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties develop musically, how they learn and, therefore, how they may most effectively be taught. This led him to develop the Sol framework, which presents a model of how children's capacities to understand, produce and interact through music develop. The framework was initially conceptualised within the context of those with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. However, it covers the full span of the capacity to engage with music, from the stage at which auditory processing starts to musical 'maturity', in which there is an appreciation of the emotional, social and cultural aspects of music.

11.3 million unique visitors to the Sol website and **3,262,528** individual downloads of the support materials

Domestic impact

Since its launch in 2012, the Sol website has had more than 11.3 million unique visitors and there have been 3,262,528 individual downloads of the support materials. Furthermore, Sol-based initiatives have enhanced the capacity of parents to engage children using accessible musical activities and **supported the professional development of music educators in the UK and internationally**. Additionally, Sol informs music curricula in the vast majority of special schools in the UK, as well as programmes, activities and campaigns by voluntary sector organisations reaching and benefiting children with special needs. UK-based charities that have used Sol to inform their practices include, for example, Live Music Now, Soundabout and the Amber Trust, benefiting hundreds of children and their families, including some of the most disadvantaged in the country.

International impact

Sol-based initiatives have also been beneficial internationally. From 2017 to 2019, for example, six special education centres for children with disabilities in Pakistan implemented a Sol-based curriculum, directly benefiting 682 children. One trainer reflected: 'I believe this approach solves the primary issue music educators in Pakistan have ... understanding the student responses to music and incorporating the inclusion of [the] participants' profound disabilities in music education.' Furthermore, in 2020, it was announced that the Malta Trust Foundation will fund a school that will focus on providing high-quality, Sol-based music education to pupils with varying abilities, including autistic children and those with Down Syndrome or visual impairments, after being awarded €1 million from its international partners and 15 Maltese entrepreneurs.



Supporting parents to enhance early literacy development



[Professor Cathy Nutbrown](#)



[University of Sheffield](#)



[Sheffield REAL project: Working with parents to promote early literacy development](#)



[UK](#)

“the programme has informed practice in a wide range of schools, communities and prisons, and has benefited thousands of practitioners, parents, carers and children”

Focus

Recognising the enormous importance of providing children with a wide range of rich opportunities to improve their literacy, Professor Cathy Nutbrown of the University of Sheffield developed an evidence-based programme that aimed to teach parents about early literacy development and what they could do to actively support their children. This was called the **Raising Achievement in Early Literacy (REAL)** programme. The programme focuses on working collaboratively with practitioners and parents, and has since been **used or adapted to support families from a diverse spectrum of backgrounds and in a variety of settings.**

Innovation

Importantly, the effectiveness of the programme has been systematically evaluated and refined on several occasions, allowing it to be enhanced and modified to meet the context-specific needs of different families and communities. For example, the National Children's Bureau – a national charity dedicated to improving children's lives, especially the most vulnerable – developed and evaluated a REAL programme-based intervention. The evaluation found that the intervention led to several benefits, including: enhanced parental knowledge of early literacy development; improved learning outcomes; and the co-production of innovative resources for practitioners to use in a diversity of social and cultural environments.

Domestic impact

Since its inception, the programme has informed practice in a wide range of schools, communities and prisons, and has **benefited thousands of practitioners, parents, carers and children.** Furthermore, in 2013, [Nutbrown won the Economic and Social Research Council Celebrating Impact Prize](#) for the 'outstanding' social benefits of her research, especially for families experiencing social deprivation. Several councils and local authorities have also used REAL programme-based practices to support families. For instance, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, which developed the bespoke *Chat, Play, Read* family literacy training for foster carers of two-to-eight-year-old children, concluded that it had 'been so successful' that they made it mandatory training for prospective foster carers.

Examples of other REAL programme-based initiatives

[Family Literacy in Prisons](#) (PACT); Peer Learning Together Programme (PEEPLÉ); and Tune-in to Talking (Oldham Council Music Service).

“
In 2013, Nutbrown won the Economic and Social Research Council Celebrating Impact Prize for the 'outstanding' social benefits of her research, especially for families experiencing social deprivation.”

Enabling second chance education for out-of-school children in Ghana and Ethiopia



[Professor Kwame Akyeampong](#), [Professor Keith Lewin](#), [Dr Ricardo Sabates](#), [Dr Jo Westbrook](#) and [Professor John Pryor](#)



University of Sussex



[Roho's story: How Speed School inspired her](#)



Ethiopia and Ghana

“research conducted by Akyeampong and his colleagues was used to justify government adoption of second chance education programmes targeting 450,000 school dropouts”

Focus

The widest inequalities in access to education occur in the least economically developed countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 20 per cent of 6-to-11-year-olds, 33 per cent of 12-to-14-year-olds and almost 60 per cent of 15-to-17-year-olds are out of school, and once children miss several years of school, reintegrating them is extremely difficult because many teachers lack the ability to tailor their teaching to meet their needs. To address this problem, Professor Kwame Akyeampong and his colleagues at the University of Sussex's [Centre for International Education](#) conducted research aimed at generating a better understanding of how to alleviate educational inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa, eventually evaluating the effectiveness of second chance education programmes for children who have dropped out of school.

Discoveries

In Ethiopia, the government rolled out second chance education programmes for out-of-school children in five regions on the basis of evidence produced by an evaluation conducted by Akyeampong and his colleagues. The evaluation demonstrated that Speed Schools significantly reduce dropout, improve learning outcomes, and enhance school completion rates. Crucially, the evaluation highlighted that the Speed School instructional approach was superior to the instructional practices of teachers in government schools and that the pedagogy transformed the learning environment, **enabling children who were initially unable to recognise letters to progress to reading passages in less than a year.** In Ghana, the government used evidence from another evaluation by Akyeampong and his colleagues to base its decision to commit one per cent of the education budget to complementary basic education targeting school dropouts.

Impact

In Ethiopia and Ghana, **research conducted by Akyeampong and his colleagues was used to justify government adoption of second chance education programmes targeting 450,000 school dropouts.** A senior official from the Ethiopian Ministry of Education commented that the research 'contributed significantly in persuading many decision makers on the merits and usefulness of the Speed School model' and is 'also influencing the country's education system to bring about system change and ... [a] shift in mindset of education officials and practitioners'.

“
In Ghana, the government used evidence from another evaluation by Akyeampong and his colleagues to base its decision to commit one per cent of the education budget to complementary basic education targeting school dropouts.”

Advancing global gender equality through educational partnerships



[Professor Jenny Parkes](#) and [Professor Elaine Unterhalter](#)



University College London



[The Good School Toolkit](#)



Africa (eight countries)



“ helped to create and sustain more gender-equitable, safe schools, with far-reaching effects on the safety and wellbeing of girls and boys in schools across eight countries in Africa ”

Since 1995, research conducted by Professor Jenny Parkes and Professor Elaine Unterhalter of University College London has **helped to create and sustain more gender-equitable, safe schools, with far-reaching effects on the safety and wellbeing of girls and boys in schools across eight countries in Africa**. Their research has influenced global and national agencies, governments and non-governmental organisations. It has **strengthened the ways in which gender equality in education is understood and evaluated** by collaborating extensively with multiple partners to co-produce evidence; generating robust data; and using rigorous research methods to enhance global, national and local policy and practice.

Recent examples of their research include the Good Schools Study (2012–15) and the Contexts of Violence in Adolescence Cohort Study (COVAC) (2018–23). The objective of the Good Schools Study was to evaluate whether the [Good Schools Toolkit](#) – which was developed by [Raising Voices](#), a Ugandan charity which aims to reduce violence against women and children – reduced physical violence from school staff to students. The research, led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, used methods such as a randomised control trial and qualitative interviews and focus groups. This research, which was funded by the Medical Research Council, found that the Good Schools Toolkit **reduced violence in schools by 42 per cent over 18 months** and improved children’s sense of wellbeing and connection to schools. The COVAC study was a long-term follow-up of participants in the Good Schools Study which used a mixed-methods cohort design to generate detailed insights into how adolescents’ violence-related experiences, perspectives and practices relate to their social contexts and how these change over time.

Another recent example of their research is the development of an indicator framework in education supporting the relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and government initiatives on gender equality in education. This included developing a gender equality in education monitoring ‘dashboard’ and convening a community of practice on indicators for gender equality in education, which involved the United Nations Girls Education Initiative and UNESCO.

42%

the Good Schools Toolkit reduced violence in schools by 42 per cent over 18 months

The Paired Peers project: Improving access to the university experience and graduate careers for young working-class people



[Professor Harriet Bradley](#), [Professor Ann-Marie Bathmaker](#),
[Dr Vanda Papafilippou](#), [Professor Richard Waller](#), [Dr Laura Bentley](#),
[Dr Michael Ward](#), [Dr Tony Hoare](#), [Dr Jessie Abrahams](#), [Dr Phoebe Beedell](#),
[Dr Jodie Mellor](#) and [Professor Nicola Ingram](#)



University of the West of England



[The Paired Peers Project: Moving on Up](#)



UK

“this research ‘directly influenced’ the Social Mobility Commission’s decision to argue in favour of greater financial support for students from poorer backgrounds”

Focus

Education, and access to higher education (HE) in particular, has long been seen as a key catalyst to enhancing a person's life prospects. However, recognising that little is known about how students from lower-income families fare when they do reach HE, and that even less is known about whether their graduate status really enables them to enter prestigious professional careers on an equal footing with better-off peers, Professor Harriet Bradley and her colleagues at the University of the West of England (UWE) and the University of Bristol (UoB) conducted a **longitudinal study which contrasted working- and middle-class students' experiences of HE and the graduate labour market**. To do this, they matched students by their degree subject, social class, gender and institution (UWE or UoB) and then interviewed or surveyed them at multiple timepoints from their entrance to HE to post-graduation seven years later. This allowed the researchers to capture similarities and differences in students' experiences of HE and what they gained from it.

Discoveries

Bradley and her colleagues identified inequalities in students' experiences of HE, with those from widening participation (WP) backgrounds being more likely to both drop out and experience fewer opportunities to engage in cultural events; join in clubs and societies; and take part in work experience or internships. The researchers also noted that, in addition to experiencing fewer opportunities to build their résumés, many WP students were less conscious of the need to participate in activities aimed at helping them to stand out in the graduate labour market. Subsequent research identified post-graduation inequalities, with WP students generally settling more slowly into careers and earning less, often because they lacked sufficient resources to live in expensive areas where there are more opportunities for career progression (such as London).

Impact

The research has informed WP-related policies and practices, for example, by influencing the Office for Students' 'strategic focus on access, retention and success'. Additionally, this research 'directly influenced' the Social Mobility Commission's decision to argue in favour of greater financial support for students from poorer backgrounds. The Chief Programmes Manager at the social mobility and youth development charity Villiers Park Educational Trust also stated that 'outcomes from Paired Peers continue to impact on the work of third-sector organisations', supporting practitioners and facilitating 'targeted evidence-informed interventions'.

The research has also intensified HE institutions' focus on supporting students, beyond UWE itself. It 'had a clear impact on working practices' at the University of Sheffield – for example, by increasing focus on a 'whole student lifecycle' approach to WP – while the UoB introduced: funded internships; a fee waiver and bursary scheme; an accommodation bursary encouraging greater social mixing in halls of residence; professional mentoring for undergraduates; and postgraduate bursaries.

“
The research has informed WP-related policies and practices, for example, by influencing the Office for Students' 'strategic focus on access, retention and success'. ”

Transforming modern foreign languages pedagogy in England



[Professor Emma Marsden](#)



[University of York](#)



[Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies \(OASIS\)](#)



[UK](#)

“
made an important contribution to the widespread adoption of evidence-informed practice in the teaching of modern foreign languages (MFL), and has helped to establish new ways in which pupils are examined and also influenced the inspection of curricula and pedagogy in England
”

Research undertaken by Professor Emma Marsden at the University of York has made **an important contribution to the widespread adoption of evidence-informed practice in the teaching of modern foreign languages** (MFL), and has helped to establish new ways in which pupils are examined and also influenced the inspection of curricula and pedagogy in England. Marsden’s research was central to the Teaching Schools Council-commissioned MFL Pedagogy Review in 2016, which recommended radical changes of government policy and teaching practice. This led the Department for Education to invest £3.6 million in establishing the [National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy](#) (NCELP) to implement these recommendations, which Marsden was appointed to lead.

“
One teacher commented: ‘We feel re-energised. I have had the most successful year 7 lessons ever (in my whole career).’”

The NCELP has held over 225 professional training events, reaching approximately 760 MFL teachers across more than 170 schools in England. After attending this training, one teacher commented: ‘We feel re-energised. I have had the most successful year 7 lessons ever (in my whole career).’ Marsden’s research has also informed a national review of GCSE subject content. Additionally, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the NCELP collaborated with the Oak National Academy to provide more than 312 evidence-based MFL lessons, which were accessed and completed more than 30,000 times by KS3 and KS4 pupils in 2020.

225 professional training events, reaching approximately 760 MFL teachers across more than 170 schools in England

In tandem with these activities, Marsden’s research has been key to fundamental changes in the working practices of international peer-reviewed journals. She has persuaded them to take part in two Open Science initiatives:

- [Instruments for Research into Second Languages](#) (IRIS): a collection of instruments, materials, stimuli and data coding and analysis tools for research into second languages – all freely available to anyone in the world.
- [Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies](#) (OASIS): a free, searchable collection of findings from research into language learning and use, offering practitioners non-technical one-page summaries of published papers – explaining the aims of the research, the methods used, and the results found.

In September 2019, Marsden also conducted a workshop for the BBC Bitesize development team. Drawing on what a BBC editor described as a ‘clear, well-evidenced framework for meaningful and accessible language learning’, the BBC team invested over £100,000 in producing new programmes of KS3 study in French, German and Spanish; a practice game for KS3 learners in each language; and BBC Teach videos exploring the teaching methods used in NCELP hub schools. Equivalent programmes for KS2 learners in French, Spanish and Mandarin were launched in October 2020. (BBC Bitesize reached 73 per cent of secondary school pupils in the year ending March 2020, with a considerable rise during the first Covid-19 lockdown, reaching an average of just under four million unique users per week in summer 2020).

Method: Shortlisting impact case studies

In 2021, the [REF 2021 website](#) published 230 education-related impact case studies (ICSs), which were awarded one of five quality ratings, ranging from unclassified to 4* (see table 1). However, REF 2021 does not report the classification of individual ICSs. Instead, it reports the percentage of each institution's ICSs that were awarded unclassified, 1*, 2*, 3* or 4*. For example, REF 2021 reports that Bath Spa University was awarded 4* for 33 per cent of its ICSs, 3* for 50 per cent of its ICSs and 2* for 17 per cent of its ICSs, but does not report how individual ICSs were awarded.

For the purposes of this report, BERA wanted to produce a snapshot of ICSs that were of high quality and that demonstrated the range of positive impacts educational research can deliver. In light of this, we engaged a research assistant whose job was to shortlist the institutions that: i) had been awarded 4* for at least 75 per cent of their ICSs; and ii) had not been awarded 2* or fewer for any of their ICSs (see table 2). This process resulted in 16 out of 83 institutions (19 per cent) being shortlisted. These institutions were from across all four jurisdictions of the UK; 14 belonged to the Russell Group. Across these institutions, 61 ICSs had been published on the REF 2021 website (REF 2021 does not publish all ICSs).

After reading all of the ICSs, the research assistant recorded information such as the names of the lead researchers, brief descriptions of the ICSs, which methodological approaches were used by the researchers, which geographical locations benefited from the research, as well as the protected characteristics of the lead researchers so that we could ensure a diverse range of lead researchers were represented.

Using this information and methodological approach, the research assistant produced a sample that contained two ICSs from each institution. Using the information provided, BERA's Leadership Committee selected one ICS from each of the 16 shortlisted institutions, with a view to attaining an overall balance in terms of types of research methods used, focuses of research, where it was most impactful, as well as the geography of the lead institution and the protected characteristics of the lead researchers.

The final selection included eight male and 11 female lead researchers; UK- and internationally focused research; research focused on primary, secondary and higher education; and research using qualitative (13 per cent), quantitative (31 per cent) and a combination of research methods (56 per cent). Lead researchers were then contacted via email to request confirmation that they were happy for their ICSs to be included in the showcase; all agreed and were subsequently offered an opportunity to comment on the summary of their work and its impact(s).

The case studies are presented as a snapshot of the many 4* case studies submitted by institutions. They are not the 'top' ones but a sample of them, selected to demonstrate the outstanding impact of educational research across a broad spectrum of settings and from a range of institutions and researchers recognising methodological and epistemological diversity.

Table 1: Quality of starred levels for impact

Quality level	Description
Four star	Outstanding impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
Three star	Very considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
Two star	Considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
One star	Recognised but modest impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
Unclassified	The impact is of little or no reach and significance; or the impact was not eligible; or the impact was not underpinned by excellent research produced by the submitted unit.

Source: <https://ref.ac.uk/guidance-on-results/guidance-on-ref-2021-results/#qualityRatings>

Table 2: Shortlisted institutions

Institution	Country	4* (%)	3* (%)
University of Birmingham	England	100	0
University of Cambridge	England	80	20
Cardiff University	Wales	100	0
Durham University	England	100	0
University of Glasgow	Scotland	75	25
King's College London	England	88	12
Lancaster University	England	100	0
University of Manchester	England	83	17
University of Oxford	England	100	0
Queen's University Belfast	Northern Ireland	83	17
University of Roehampton	England	75	25
University of Sheffield	England	100	0
University of Sussex	England	100	0
University College London	England	92	8
University of the West of England	England	75	25
University of York	England	100	0

Note: no shortlisted institutions were awarded 2* or fewer for any of their ICSs.

Figure 1: Shortlisting process



Notes: the REF 2021 website does not display all submitted ICSs; the final selection aimed to capture a range of different types of research.

In putting together this report, BERA engaged the services of a research assistant (RA), Joshua Stubbs. The RA played a leading role in identifying potential case studies to be included, analysing the key characteristics of those case studies, refining the selection and then drafting the text to be used. Without his work, this publication would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank David James, to whose work as the chair of the REF 2021 Education Sub-panel we are indebted. David's own analysis of the submissions and what they tell us about the health of education as a discipline helped shape the nature of this report. We should also acknowledge David's previous role representing BERA in the development of the Academy of Social Sciences' *Making the case for the social sciences: Education*, published in 2016. Indeed the model of that publication served as a starting point for this latest publication and we acknowledge the ongoing work of the academy in the promotion of the impact of the social sciences.

Thanks are also due to BERA's Leadership Committee who supported this report: Vivienne Baumfield, Mhairi Beaton, Gerry Czerniawski, Sean Hayes, Ros McLellan and Dominic Wyse.

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