

2024



# Social Impact Report 2024



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# Foreword by Deborah Jenkins

## (Chair of the Board of Trustees)

Everyone at NCFE is very much aware of the purpose of working for an education charity and deeply committed to improving the quality of learning. As we enter a new academic year, it's important for us to reflect on what we have achieved over the past 12 months and review our impact on learners, institutions and educators, the education system and wider society.

As a charitable organisation, any profits we make are invested into creating outstanding learning experiences and supporting initiatives that improve the education system for every learner rather than paid to shareholders. Each of our board members, whether trustee or executive, brings their skills, experience, and passion to ensuring that NCFE remains true to its charitable purpose – to promote and advance learning.

Part of the commitment to the standards we have set ourselves was the creation of our first Impact Report in 2022, designed to assess whether all of NCFE's activities are having the intended outcomes; from delivering learning and progression opportunities to tackling disadvantage and influencing wider education policy. I am pleased that we're continuing this important undertaking which helps us understand how and to what extent we are supporting our beneficiaries, many of whom feature in this report.

It's heartening to see some of the strengths of NCFE brought to life in this study, including the strong collaborative relationships we hold with stakeholders, our commitment to learners and our investments in innovative projects.

It's crucial that we use the report's valuable data and insights to improve our work – as the world changes, we must ensure that everything we do continues to be fit for purpose. This includes increasing the quality of our resources and further strengthening our reputation and visibility as a leading voice in the sector.

It's always a delight to hear from the learners themselves, no matter what age or stage they're at, about their reasons for choosing NCFE's products and services. Many point towards employability and the boost NCFE's qualifications have provided in enhancing their CV, building their confidence, or improving their service to customers. Others have more personal reasons, such as a sense of achievement or supporting family.

This Impact Report offers an opportunity to review NCFE's many collaborations, community initiatives, innovations, and investments – working with WorldSkills UK to develop educators through the Centre of Excellence, supporting autistic learners into apprenticeships with the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network, investing over £1million in assessment innovation and working with partners across the country. All our projects are designed to tackle disadvantage, drive forward positive change or champion further education. For the board, which sponsors and reviews each investment, this is a vital strand of our work at NCFE.

As we, at NCFE, continue our journey to being a leader in vocational and technical education, it's essential that we continue to take stock and measure our impact, so that we remain focused on our mission – that no learner is left behind.





# NCFE's impact in numbers

## Learners



of providers state that learners are well-prepared for further learning



of providers feel NCFE learners will have good employment opportunities

**453,000**

learners registered with NCFE in 2023/24

**Over 11,000**

NCFE learners applied for Higher Education helping drive future success in academic and professional pursuits

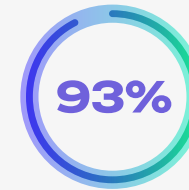
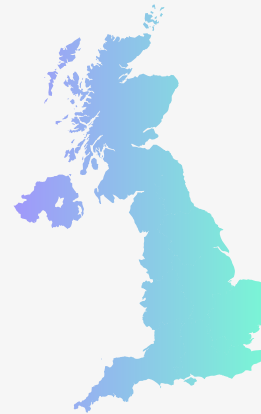


**89% of our CACHE Alumni members** who had studied an NCFE course in Child Development, had moved on into employment within Early Years or Education

## Institutions and educators

**Over 60%**

of our providers are located in the most deprived areas of the UK, meaning NCFE's reach directly impacts those most in need



of institutions report strong relationships with NCFE



Our partnership with WorldSkills UK is enhancing education delivery. **40 providers** are taking part in WorldSkillsUK Centre of Excellence with a potential to reach **51,000 learners**.

## Sector leadership

**£1 million**

invested in assessment innovation reshaping educational assessment



More than 75% of our staff feel proud to work for NCFE

**3,289 learners**

and

**206 educators**

across

**49 institutions**

took part in the Assessment Innovation Fund this year driving sector wide change



NCFE operates in **21 countries**, contributing to raising global education standards

## Society and economic



of our providers believe NCFE learners positively impact society



Over 76% of providers report that NCFE learners contribute to the economy



NCFE's Assessment Innovation Fund generates **£1.70 in Social Value for every £1 invested**



Our head office is based in the **North East** which is the most deprived region in England. We are a **Real Living Wage employer**, employing over **750 employees** who go on to contribute to the local economy.

## Executive summary and key takeaways

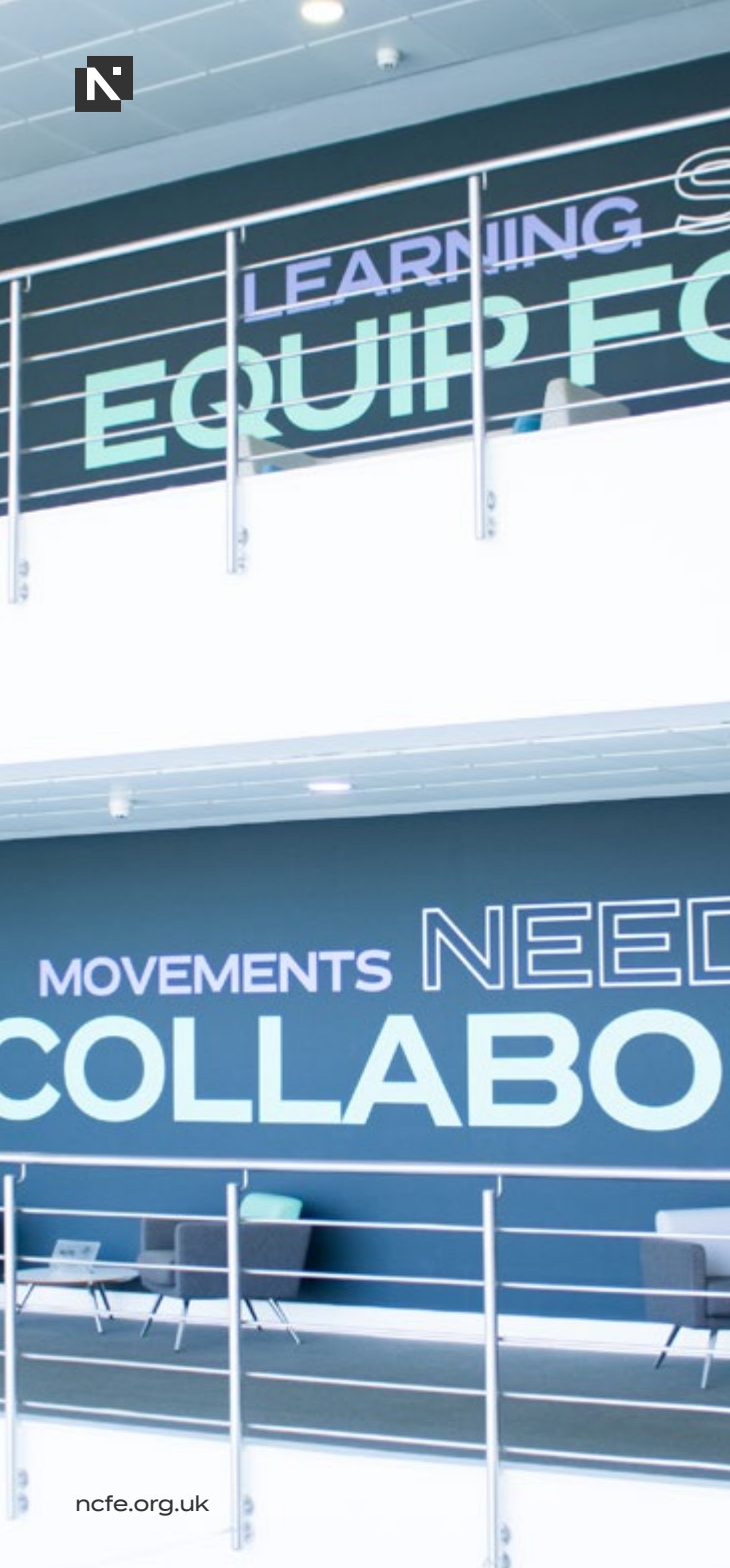
As we reflect on our performance and impact over the past year, it's clear that NCFE continues to play a pivotal role in the further education sector. While we are proud of the progress we have made, we also recognise the areas where we can sharpen our focus to drive even greater improvements. Below, we outline both our strengths and the opportunities we see for growth - ensuring that our influence is used not only to benefit learners but to advocate for meaningful, long-term change across the entire education landscape.

### Where we are strong

**Learner-centered focus:** NCFE is widely seen as being **deeply invested in learner outcomes**, with clear links between our strategic actions and the positive influence they have on the beneficiaries of our products and services. This **learner-centered approach** drives everything we do, ensuring that educational pathways remain relevant and beneficial to individuals and society.

**Creating opportunities for progression:** learners and providers recognise **qualifications as the currency** that learners attain to enable their future progression and that completing NCFE courses opens doors to employment and further learning opportunities. This demonstrates NCFE's commitment to not just awarding qualifications, but to **empowering learners for long-term success** and contributing to workforce readiness across key industries.

**Championing policy change:** over the past year, NCFE has used its voice to **influence crucial policy decisions**, such as working with the Department for Education to remove barriers that previously hindered workforce recruitment in the early years sector. Our successful advocacy in lifting the Level 2 maths requirement in staffing ratios is a clear example of how we can help shape policies that **remove obstacles and create opportunities** for learners and educators alike.



## Executive summary and key takeaways

**Innovating for the sector:** with a **£1million investment in the Assessment Innovation Fund**, NCFE is leading the charge in developing new assessment methods that better reflect the diverse skills of learners. Stakeholders value our **willingness to challenge the status quo**, and our commitment to innovation helps ensure that the sector remains responsive to the needs of learners, educators and employers, improving outcomes for everyone involved.

**Collaborating with key stakeholders:** we've built strong relationships across the education landscape, with **93% of providers reporting that NCFE is a trusted partner**. This collaboration is crucial to ensuring that our efforts are aligned with the needs of the sector and that we can continue to push for the highest standards in education delivery.





## Executive summary and key takeaways

### Where we can improve

**Collaborating to improve resource quality:** while our relationships with institutions are strong, there is an opportunity to work even more closely with educators to **improve the quality of learning resources**, reduce complexity and administrative burden, and to gather enhanced longitudinal data on impact. By co-developing resources with those on the frontlines, we can ensure they are practical, relevant, and better tailored to the needs of both learners and educators—further enhancing the educational experience.

**Increasing our presence in key debates:** while we've made progress, only 60% of providers currently view NCFE as a key voice in the FE sector. This highlights the **need for NCFE to be more visible and proactive in influencing policy** and sector-wide discussions. Our goal is not simply to be heard, but to ensure that our voice amplifies the needs of learners, providers and employers, and contributes to the broader movement for inclusive, fair and high-quality education for all.

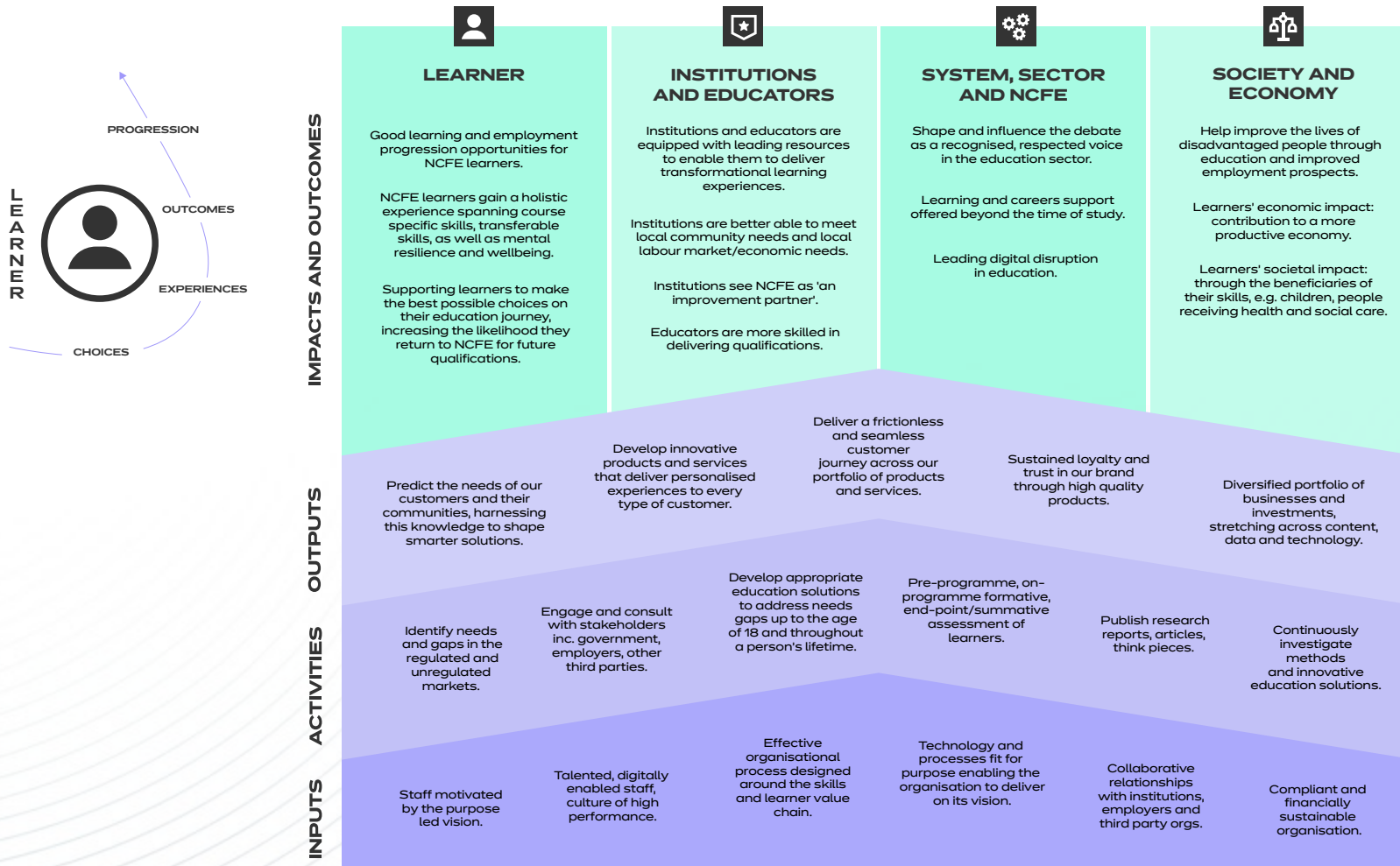
**Deepening our sector-wide impact:** to be truly impactful, **our focus must be on collaboration** with other key players in the sector. This includes working more closely with policymakers, institutions, and other awarding organisations to drive the changes needed for a more equitable and effective education system.

**Championing our investments in innovation:** NCFE has made significant investments in innovation, but we can do more to ensure these are communicated effectively. We need to **highlight our cutting-edge projects**, not just within the provider network, but across the wider education sector and beyond. By doing so, we can better demonstrate the real-world impact of our innovations and how they contribute to the advancement of educational policy and practices.



# NCFE's Theory of Change model

NCFE's Theory of Change (ToC) model traces a clear path from our purpose to its inputs, linking inputs, activities, and outputs in a coherent chain. Mapping these out helps us to define the mechanisms that need to be in place for impact to occur.





# NCFE's approach to our Social Impact Report 2024

**NCFE is an educational charity and awarding organisation with a core purpose to promote and advance learning, ensuring no learner is left behind. Established in 1848, we've provided high quality, vocational education to learners for more than 175 years and intend to continue to do so in the future. In order to ensure that our programmes and qualifications are fit for purpose for all our stakeholders, we set out to measure our impact, producing our first Social Impact Report in 2022. This report builds on the foundations set out in that inaugural report.**

Our 2022 Impact Report set out the vision we developed within our Theory of Change (ToC) model to make a positive impact on four pillars:

- **learners**
- **institutions and educators**
- **the education system**
- **wider society.**

We identified these areas as those we want to have the greatest influence on, and the model helped us recognise the inputs and activities we needed to conduct to achieve our overall vision.

Working with independent research company Launchpad, we have commissioned an extensive primary research study with providers, stakeholders, and learners to highlight the areas where we are

achieving our desired impact, and those where we need to make further improvements to achieve our goals. In order to gather rich insight from a range of our stakeholders, Launchpad used a mix of research methods, targeting our providers with an online survey to gather quantitative data from our large customer base, conducting qualitative focus groups with our learners and interviews with other stakeholders including those from other charitable organisations and education providers we partner with. This has provided broad and deep evidence from which we are able to make insightful and informed decisions to shape the future direction of the organisation.

Alongside this primary research, we have included case studies from projects and investments that NCFE has been involved with over the last two years to provide further insight into our larger, societal impact. These impacts vary significantly. They include improving outcomes for learners from diverse backgrounds, increasing the capabilities of educators through CPD, providing clear access to lifelong learning using platforms like CACHE Alumni, or accrediting qualifications for charities such as Save the Children. Our impact as an organisation is already extensive, but we've identified further areas for improvements and outlined a clear vision to make an even greater impact and improve lives through learning.

## Primary research methodology



Launchpad Research is a North East based agency with expertise ranging across market research with previous experience in drawing out insight within the education sector. Founded in 2002, the agency has a wealth of expertise and experience to bring to NCFE's Impact Report 2024. Specialising across a range of research and analysis methods, the agency was able to advise on designing a robust mixed methods approach and provide an independent view on the results of the programme.

To assess ongoing impact against the goals identified in the 2022 Theory of Change (ToC) model, Launchpad worked with NCFE's Research and Insight team, to design a holistic primary research programme, replicating elements of the previous study and engaging stakeholders from across the model. The survey and discussion guides were designed by the NCFE team, building upon those used in the 2022 Impact Report by retaining key trackable areas and adding new areas of evaluation where relevant.

### The study consisted of:

**169** responses to an online survey aimed at institutions and educators

**10** virtual interviews with employers, institutions and other stakeholders

**5** virtual focus groups engaging learners<sup>1</sup> to share their thoughts and experiences of studying with NCFE.

**Findings are aligned with the pillars of the ToC throughout the following sections.**

<sup>1</sup> The majority of learners were recruited from Learning Curve Group



## Learners: reach and impact

### Intended impacts

- **Good learning and employment progression opportunities for NCFE learners.**
- **NCFE learners gain a holistic experience, spanning course specific skills, transferable skills, as well as mental resilience and wellbeing.**
- **Supporting learners to make the best possible choices on their education journey, increasing the likelihood they return to NCFE for future qualifications.**

Learners are at the heart of all we do at NCFE. We feel that by offering a wide range of vocational qualifications and giving the learner a breadth of choices to carve out the path that is best for them, we will ensure no learner is left behind. In 2023-24, almost 12,000 apprentices completed their EPA, and more than 453,500 learners registered with NCFE.

We continue to reach a wide range of backgrounds and work with providers supporting disadvantaged learners to reach their career and progression goals. Some of these can be seen in our Aspiration Award winners, whose inspirational stories can encourage those who feel the odds are stacked against them.

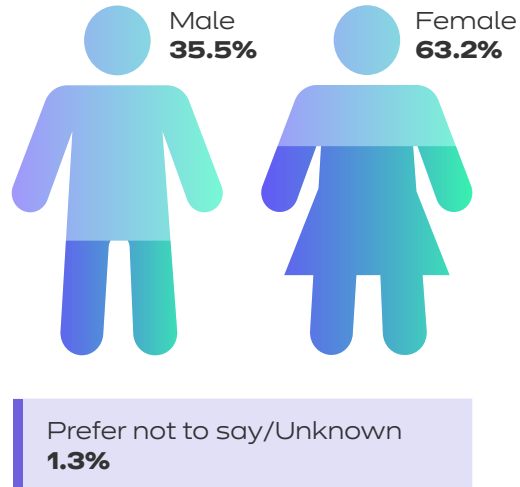




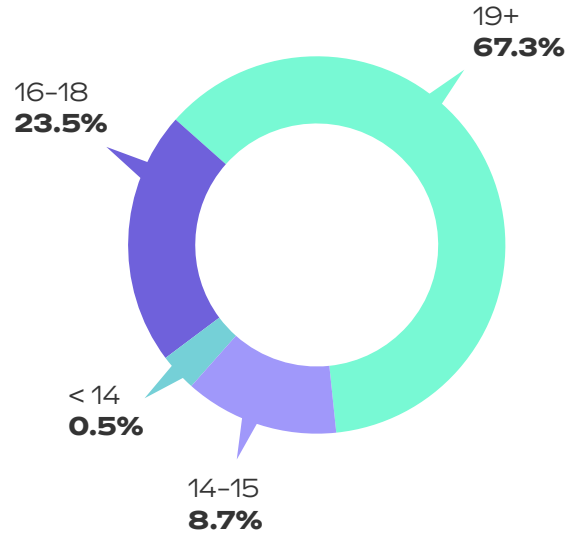
# Learners: reach and impact | awarding

Analysis of our learner data shows that over 60% of NCFE enrolments in 2023–24 were taught at providers in areas that fell in the 5 most deprived deciles in England.

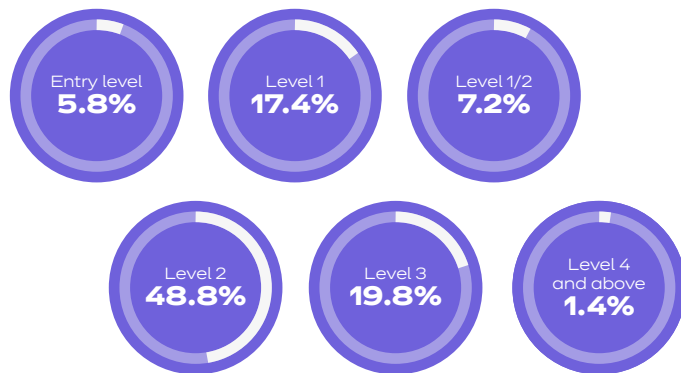
## Gender



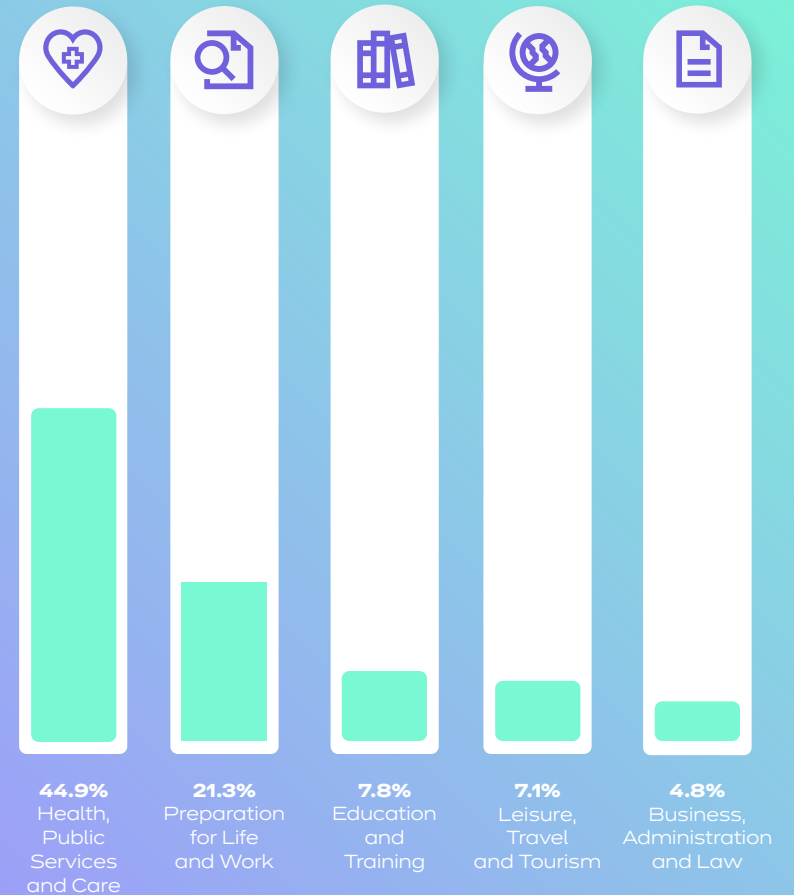
## Age



## Level



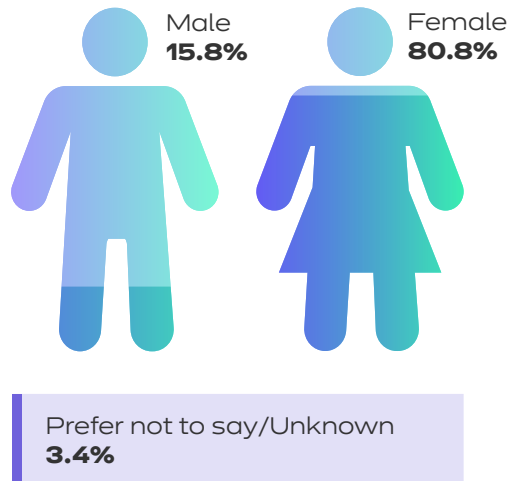
## Sector (Top 5)



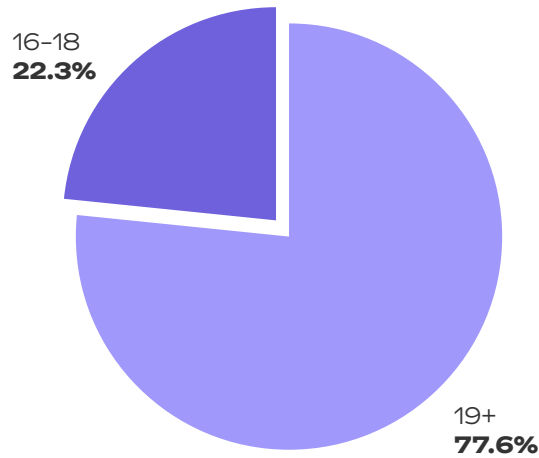
Total number of awarding learners: 453,520 registrations  
Source: NCFE learner registration data, 2023–24

# Learners: reach and impact | end-point assessment

## Gender



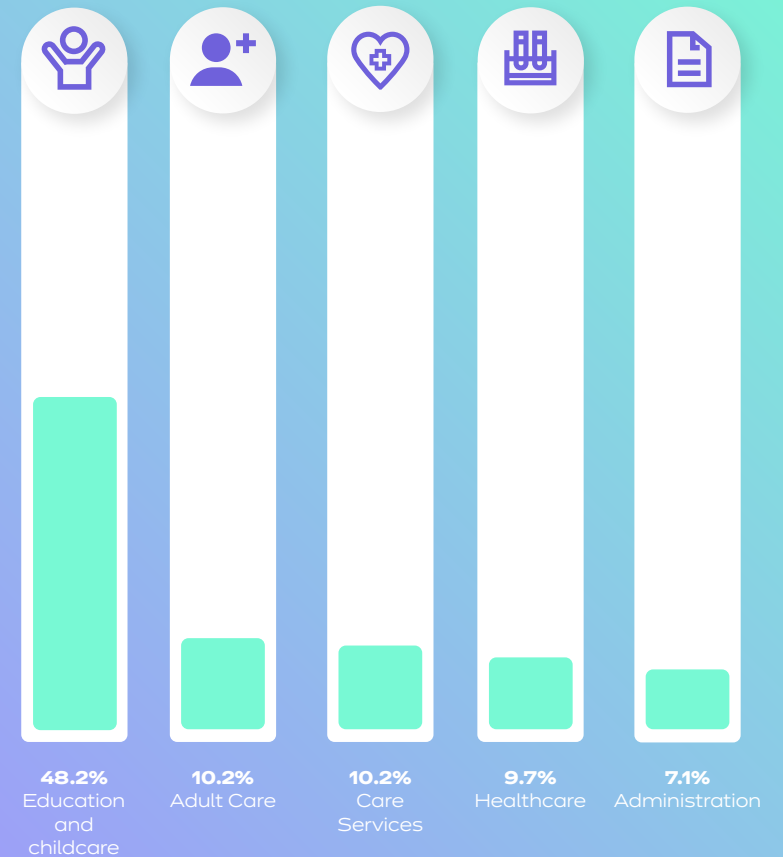
## Age



## Level



## Sector (Top 5)



Total number of EPA learners: 11,900 registrations  
Source: NCFE learner registration data, 2023-24

# In conversation with our learners

## Who did we speak to?

During the primary research phase, Launchpad spoke with a number of our learners during the focus group sessions. These learners represented a broad cross-section of our learner population.

- **Varied in age from 17 years old up to 66**
- **Mixture of backgrounds**
  - some were employed full-time
  - others were unemployed for various reasons including taking a career break to travel, re-evaluating career paths or raising children.
- **Qualifications**
  - Apprenticeships, V Certs, T Levels, Adult Education
  - Level 2 through to Level 5
  - Coding, Cyber Security, Mental Health, Health and Social Care, Information and Communication Technology, Nursing, Diabetes, Construction and Planning, Counselling, Housing and Property Management, Sustainability, Uniformed Services, Child Development and Wellbeing, Business Administration and Law, Principles of Team Leading.



# Why study with NCFE?

Along with a diverse learner profile, Launchpad found that our learners choose to study with us for a range of reasons. Along with general interest, these spanned:

## Employability reasons

“ CV building  
I just want to kind of add to my CV and learn lots of new things.”

“ a requirement of their employer  
I'm a local housing manager for a registered social landlord...We're now having to do a qualification to show that we are more skilled and able to basically give a better service and a better understanding about some of our residents' needs.”

“ supporting career change or progression  
Mine was a new career move, trying to go into something new...and some personal interest as I do like working with computers and stuff like that.”

“ learning to build credibility or confidence in an existing role  
I think the driver for me is this fear that probably comes from not having qualifications... the idea to get qualifications is sort of a built-in thing that somehow says you've got some credibility.”

## Personal reasons

“ to better understand and support family/friends with medical diagnoses  
I'm actually waiting on the diagnosis [autism] myself, so I just thought I would do the course, see if I could understand things a little bit more and see if I could help my boys a little bit more as well.”

“ mental stimulation and a sense of achievement  
I've been quite lazy with stuff over the years. I just needed easy life, coming to work, going home. But actually, I need this focus. I need this to motivate myself to do a bit more with my life now and just stop wasting it and being a couch potato or doing nothing else apart from socialising. I feel like I'm actually achieving something.”

The research showed that learners typically did not consider the awarding organisation (AO) when selecting their course. However, course fit and content were the primary considerations, showing learners do not consider these synonymous with an AO. Learners associate their chosen qualification with the institutions that administer them, rather than any other organisation.



# What is it like studying with NCFE?

All learners involved in the focus groups were positive about their learning journey with NCFE. Those who were motivated by personal interest seemed to comment on how much they enjoy the course and were passionate about their studies. Those who viewed their studies as a necessity for moving on in their career were less passionate about the course, however they mentioned they liked the course content and structure regardless.

Supporting these sentiments, within the survey phase of the primary research, over 80% of providers felt that learners have a high appreciation for the content of their course and almost 90% agreed that learners are prepared for further learning opportunities.

Perceived impacts of their study often reflected their motivations for completing the course, suggesting that NCFE courses are meeting learners' needs.

NCFE qualification benefits and outcomes	
Personal	Professional
Boosting confidence	Improved job prospects
Mental stimulation	Supporting career progression and or transition
Fulfillment/sense of achievement	Providing skills and knowledge to support in current roles



# What impact do we have on learners?

Launchpad found that the most cited outcome of studying an NCFE course was unexpected for learners: a boost in confidence. This aligns to our desired impact of supporting learners to gain a holistic learning experience and develop mental resilience and wellbeing. This notion was also supported by findings from the provider survey where 71% of providers felt NCFE learners have an increased sense of wellbeing due to their holistic learning experience. Confidence presented itself in different ways for different learners:

## Transforming self perceptions

Many mature learners felt they weren't capable of academic study, either because they hadn't studied for a number of years, felt they hadn't done well at school or simply believed they weren't particularly academic. NCFE courses have overturned these self-perceptions, helping people (and in some cases their loved ones) to think they're capable of achieving more than they thought.

"I thought I was going to do rubbish because I've never done anything like this for 30 years since I left school, and I went back, and I passed. I passed everything up to now, so I was absolutely over the moon."

## Improved mental health

A few learners spoke honestly about mental health struggles and how their course has helped them to cope.

"It's helped me come out of a very low point."

## A sense of achievement

A number of learners describe the satisfaction of completing the course and the 'buzz' of receiving a certificate. Many also acknowledge how challenging it can be to study which makes it even more rewarding and fulfilling.

"I'll feel brilliant when it's done, but then I might have to think about doing something else afterwards because you do get fulfilment from it, don't you?"

## Building credibility

Learners that were studying in their current field of employment felt that their course has given them confidence in what they were doing, reaffirming existing knowledge or updating with the latest knowledge in a constantly evolving field. For one learner, this reduced imposter syndrome and increased confidence when interacting with others in their industry. Another learner felt that their qualification demonstrated passion and expertise to colleagues.

"And I'm finding I'm feeling seriously out of my depth. So, any kind of certifications or anything give me a little bit of credibility."



# What impact do we have on learners?

Aligned with our Theory of Change (ToC) model, learners express confidence in their future progression, recognising how their choice of an NCFE course equips them with the skills and knowledge needed for that journey. Learners cited their next steps could include:

## Theory of Change: Impact

**Supporting learners to make the best choices on the education journey**

**Good learning and progression opportunities**

**Holistic experience spanning course specific skills and transferable skills**

**Increasing the likelihood they return to NCFE for future qualifications**

## Impact cited in focus groups

Continuing to study before making career moves or decisions.

Applying for jobs or pursuing a new career.

Continuing in their current role, now with an in-depth understanding on a new topic.

...and having felt the impact of doing one course, a few were eager to continue learning.

## Quotes

"I want to say it's given me the confidence to look into jobs, but it has given me the confidence to do Level three."

"Taking this course has really been an eye opener for me to actually know what's out there. I really think that right after this one I'll look out for any vacancies that come up in the cyber security area and then apply for them. I'm going to get my foot in there no matter how small it is."

"It's really going to help me addressing and talking to clients. Seeing into their minds and knowing if they have mental health issues that need to be resolved or assessed."

"There are a few other courses that I saw on your list related around mental health and mental health at work, awareness and safeguarding, which would be really relevant to this new job that I've got. So, I'll probably do those next. There's loads to do and yeah, I'll just keep doing it."

## Moving on from NCFE

Launchpad's research focused on our current learners and where they are now, asking them about their aspirations for the future, but what evidence do we have of the impact we've already made on learners' lives? We know from the provider survey that expected routes for NCFE learners are employment (66%), another Further Education qualification or course (53%), Higher Education (41%) or another NCFE qualification or course (31%).<sup>2</sup> Following our commitment in our last impact report, we've worked hard this year to find more robust ways to measure learner progression. Within our own data, we've been able to identify learners who have certificated with NCFE and have gone on to become members of CACHE Alumni, our award-winning membership network, offering an array of materials to support learners in their career progression and future learning journey.

<sup>2</sup> Providers were able to select more than one option for this question

## CACHE Alumni and progression

NCFE's largest sector specialisms are health and social care and early years education. To support these learners, CACHE Alumni was launched by NCFE in December 2017. The network is designed for learners to gain access to high quality articles, videos and e-learning content, alongside independent and reliable careers advice. The service offered by CACHE Alumni has won several awards, including a Nursery World Award in 2019 and an Ideas UK Award as Social Innovation of the Year.

Analysis of our CACHE Alumni data matched to NCFE learner data, shows that NCFE learners go on to work in a range of sectors and have a very varied range of job titles. **The Sankey chart below** demonstrates this, showing the flow from sector subject area (SSA) to sub-sector subject area (SSSA) to the self-reported sector within CACHE Alumni.

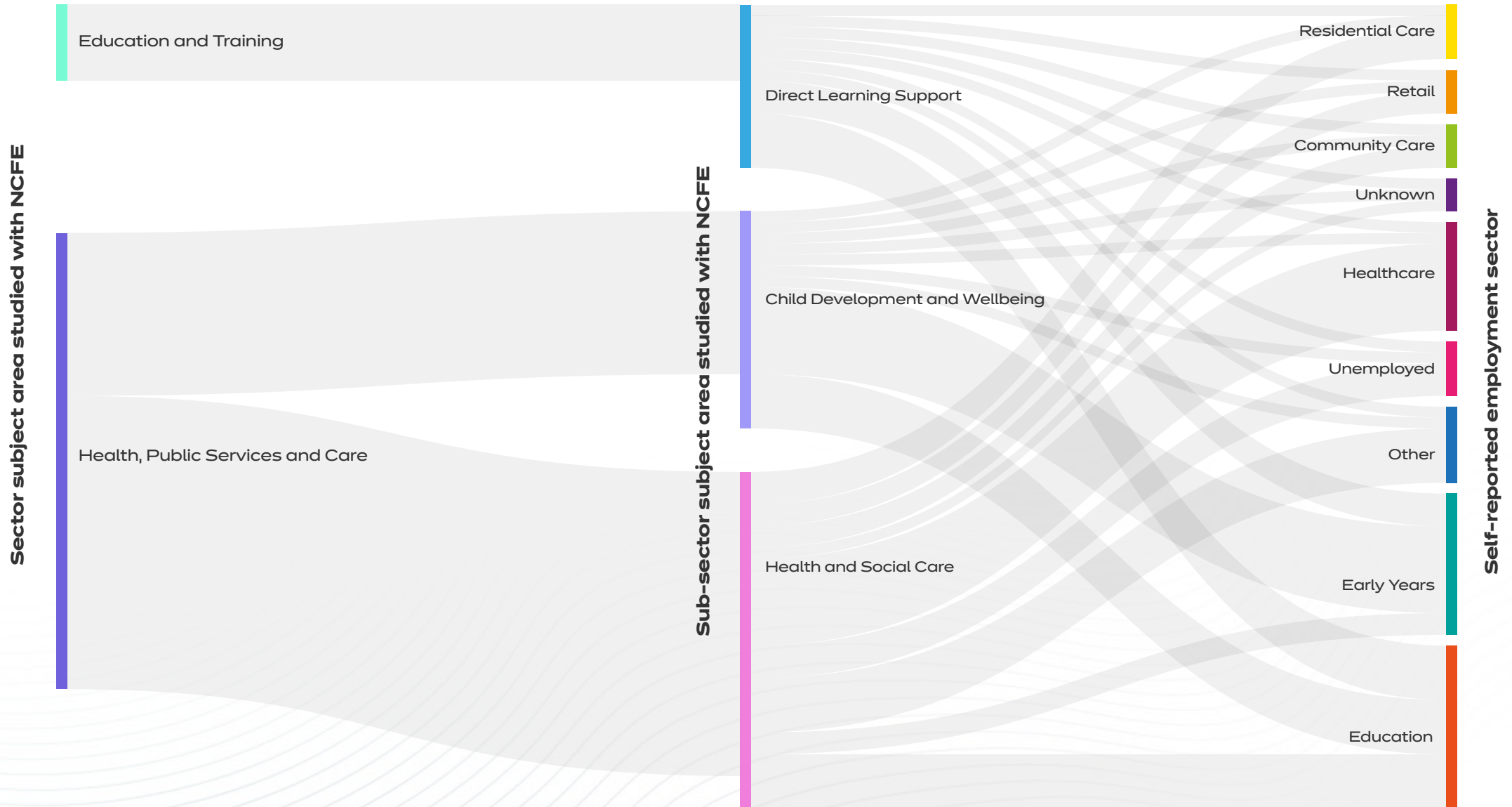
Almost a quarter (23%) of CACHE Alumni members matched to NCFE data had completed more than one NCFE course suggesting that there is some appetite for further learning amongst this group, however this only demonstrates the formal learning they have progressed into. Two thirds (66%) of members had completed NCFE qualifications at Level 2, suggesting there may be room to promote higher level learning to this cohort.

Over 500 matched learners had completed NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health Advocacy in the Workplace – this was our most popular course amongst this group. Job titles of those that have completed this course include Teaching Assistant (39), Healthcare Assistant (27) and Support Worker (18).





Chart 1: Sankey visualisation of top 3 qualification sector subject area and sub-sector area, by self-reported employment sector among CACHE Alumni members.



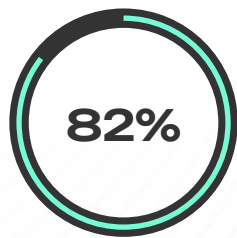
## Wellbeing survey and definitions of success

Whilst NCFE is committed to ensuring our courses are fit for purpose for learners entering the labour market, we're also aware that some of the sectors we specialise in are typically low paid careers. This year, we wanted to explore what success means to our learners and again, we used the CACHE Alumni network to tap into this mindset. We wanted to explore the motivations behind studying qualifications in particular sectors, therefore a mixed methods primary research approach was developed to look at the impact of employment outcomes on wellbeing. An online survey was sent out to all CACHE Alumni members to help us understand the broad views of the cohort and follow up interviews were conducted with some members to gather more in-depth, rich information.

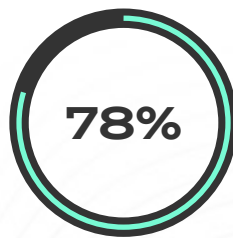
Results of the survey showed that 65% of respondents were satisfied with their current job. When asked how they feel about their job:



agreed they could see the value their work brings to people and society



agreed working in their sector gave them a strong sense of purpose



agreed their job was rewarding

In contrast to the high scores, only 41% agreed they were paid fairly for the work they do. When considering the sectors that respondents come from, we saw that two thirds of respondents were from education, healthcare or early years and childcare. Roles within all of these sectors are typically lower paid work and therefore this response is not surprising. Financial reward did not appear in the top motivating factors for choosing to work in the sector with 'suited to my skills and interests' and 'to make a difference' being the top cited reasons. Moreover, when asked what they valued most about their job, respondents rated 'having high financial income' as their lowest priority, whilst 'having a positive impact on someone's life' was the highest priority.

Qualitative findings supported key insights from the survey, giving a more personalised view of what it's like to work in the represented sectors. Feeling rewarded and having a passion for the sector means people remain in the jobs, however there are challenges. Low pay and lack of progression were cited as detrimental. Education and having high quality qualifications and learning opportunities are important as they paved the way to progress in the sectors.

This research project gives us pause for thought, to really rethink what success means for our learners. As many of the people we serve typically enter into sectors where the reward for the jobs is not only monetary, do we need to consider how we truly measure progression? Our courses and qualifications allow learners to enter into employment, and continued education does lead to career progression. However, is another measure of success how satisfied a learner is in their current role, rather than solely their salary?

Total number of respondents to survey: 50

## Other evidence of progression for NCFE learners

Providers are very positive about the progression opportunities for NCFE learners. 89% believe that NCFE learners will be prepared for further learning opportunities and 84% believe they will have good employment opportunities. Providers believed learners were likely to go on to employment or further study, whether this may be in further education (FE) or higher education (HE). Providers who delivered T Levels were more likely to say that their learners were expected to move into HE, along with those delivering subject areas such as Leisure or Travel and Tourism. Those providers who deliver Business Administration and Law, as well as Construction, Planning and the Built Environment said their learners were likely to move straight into employment.

As of 25 June 2024, 11,372 NCFE learners<sup>3</sup> had open applications for university courses through UCAS.

### T Level learners

Two reports released in 2023, one by the Department for Education (DfE)<sup>4</sup> and the other by the Gatsby Foundation<sup>5</sup>, explored the destinations of the first cohort of T Level learners. As the provider of the Education and Childcare T Level, it is interesting to look at these reports to see the progression of these learners.

Both reports use a similar approach to data collection, using survey tools to collect data on those who have completed the first wave of T Levels.

- DfE collected survey data from learners/graduates of a T Level course
- Gatsby collected data from providers who had collected destinations information from their learners. Providers were asked to transfer relevant data into a collection tool.

While the DfE report is holistic, covering many aspects of the T Level cohort including destinations, the Gatsby report focuses on destinations only.

Entering into higher education (HE) was the most commonly reported destination for the overall cohort, with 44% (DfE) / 46% (Gatsby) reporting this destination, followed by paid work or employment (27% reported by Gatsby and 40% reported by DfE). However, when looking at the destinations of the learners on the Education and Childcare T Level, although Gatsby found the pattern to be broadly similar to the overall cohort, DfE found this to be reversed, with the most likely destination being paid work or employment (52%) and HE (46%). Following study on a T Level, learners typically move on to work or further study within the 'general field of study'. For the Education and Childcare T Level, Gatsby reported that of those learners who reported they were in employment, 84% of progressed into employment that related to their area of study. For those that reported they had moved on to further study, 77% were studying a course related to their T Level. 75% reported their further study to be an undergraduate degree.

<sup>3</sup> This excludes T Level learners as T Levels are awarded by DfE

<sup>4</sup> Technical Education Learner Survey 2023: Progression of the first T Level cohort Research report, DfE (Progression / Destinations section starts at pg 17).

<sup>5</sup> Analysis of T Level students' destinations: First Cohort. A report to the Gatsby Foundation Richard Boniface and Graham Whalley (RCU)



## Learner case studies: Aspiration Award winners

As a leading awarding organisation, we want to celebrate the achievements of our learners - particularly those who have faced extraordinary challenges. Here, we highlight the impact of education on just three inspirational NCFE learners.

### Learner of the Year

Matthew McGrotty

Matthew has always had a passion for transport, so NCFE's Level 3 Extended Diploma in Travel and Tourism was the perfect choice to accelerate him onto his chosen career path. Although Matthew's learning journey has not been a traditional one, Matthew seamlessly integrated into his Level 3 course, consistently exceeding expectations with distinction grades in his modules and inspiring his classmates with his dedication and work ethic. His leadership qualities led to him being elected as class representative, where he actively supports his peers and advocates for their needs. Matthew is diagnosed with high-functioning autism and struggles processing information,

so assignments would take a long time for him to understand the ask. However, his college's Learning Link programme has supported him to develop his own strategies to overcome these difficulties. Matthew was given the opportunity of a week's work experience with Translink at Coleraine train station, where he thrived. "My ultimate long-term goal is to seek employment with Translink, Northern Ireland Railways. I have a huge passion and interest in our railway network, and I enjoy taking the train regularly and discovering places that I have never been to before. I've also applied for a Foundation Degree in Hospitality, Tourism and Events Management."

[Watch Matthew's video here](#)



## Learner case studies: Aspiration Award winners

### Apprentice of the Year

Ellie Burke

In 2022, Ellie was struggling and unsure of the direction she should take. Lacking confidence, partly due to struggles with alopecia and having to provide support to care for her brother at home who has Down's syndrome, Ellie was introduced to the Prince's Trust team in Rochdale. The 12-week course she completed following this introduction led to Ellie securing an apprenticeship in adult care with Rochdale

Training. Since beginning her apprenticeship, Ellie's confidence has soared and she's flourished academically and personally, with her tutor sharing: "Ellie is one of the best apprentices I've ever met. Ellie has been on a tough journey over the previous few years, but she's been determined to progress. She's stayed focused on the future and her dream of pursuing a career path to help others in the health and social care sector."

[Watch Ellie's video here](#)



## Learner case studies: Aspiration Award winners

### Against All Odds

#### Michael Wells

Growing up as one of five children in a Romany Gypsy community, Michael was limited to only attending school during the winter months. Leaving school at 14, Michael worked as a landscape gardener until physical health issues prevented him from being able to continue in this line of work any longer. Beset by severe mental health issues, Michael contacted the National Careers Service for advice on what he could do next

to get his life back on track when he was recommended an NCFE Skills Bootcamp in Digital Marketing. Since completing the course, Michael has been confident enough to pursue his creative talents which had been stifled by his position in the travelling community and now has a job as a Talent Assistant at a local theatre, utilising his skills by supporting with their social media and digital marketing.

[Watch Michael's video here](#)





## What will we do next to improve impact on learners?

At NCFE, our commitment to learner success goes beyond providing qualifications - it's about ensuring that each individual is equipped to achieve their full potential, both in their careers and personal growth. As we look toward the future, we remain focused on expanding our understanding of learner outcomes and enhancing the ways we support their progression. Below are the steps we'll take to amplify our impact on learners, ensuring that our qualifications continue to provide meaningful benefits that extend beyond the classroom.

- **Investing in learner progression:** we'll continue to invest in projects that support learners throughout their individual journeys. For example, networks such as CACHE Alumni provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and careers advice, ensuring learners have access to guidance and support long after they've completed their qualifications.
- **Delivering holistic learning support:** our qualifications do more than prepare learners for their careers. During focus groups, learners have highlighted how their NCFE courses have boosted their confidence and wellbeing, alongside their career aspirations. We'll continue to provide high-quality qualifications that support learners in a multitude of ways, helping them to thrive both professionally and personally.
- **Enhancing data and insights on learner progression:** our 2030 strategy outlines our aim to improve how we measure and understand our impact on learners. This year, we'll build on initial findings from colleges and training providers that already collect data around learner progression. By collaborating more closely with these institutions, we aim to create a comprehensive, aggregated view of learner outcomes, providing greater insight into their post-qualification success.
- **Broadening success metrics:** our research with CACHE Alumni shows that success is not always tied to salary alone. In order to measure success in a more holistic way, we'll explore incorporating longitudinal measures alongside wellbeing indicators into our interactions with learners. This will allow us to capture a more well-rounded picture of what success means to our learners, ensuring that our qualifications deliver value in all aspects of their lives - not just financial.



## Institutions and educators: building and diversifying

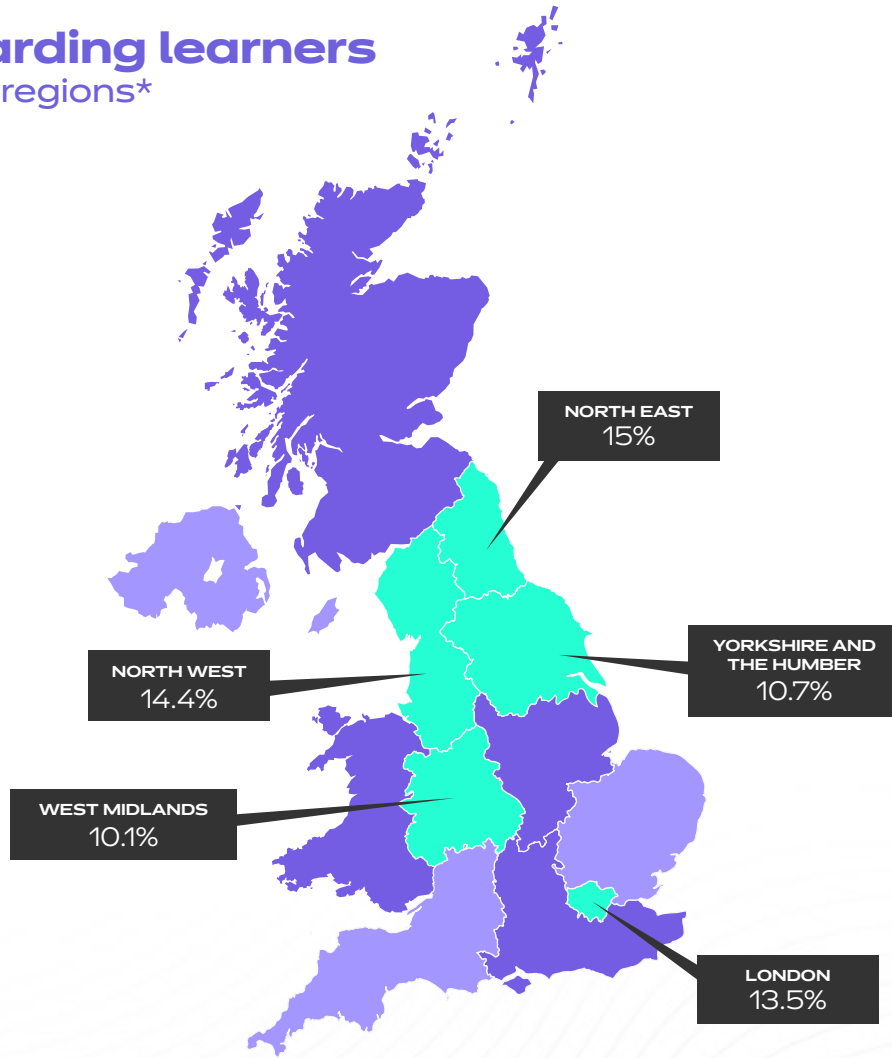
### Intended impacts

- **Institutions and educators are equipped with leading resources to enable them to deliver transformational learning experiences.**
- **Institutions are better able to meet local community needs and local labour market/economic needs.**
- **Institutions see NCFE as an 'improvement partner'.**
- **Educators are more skilled at delivering qualifications.**

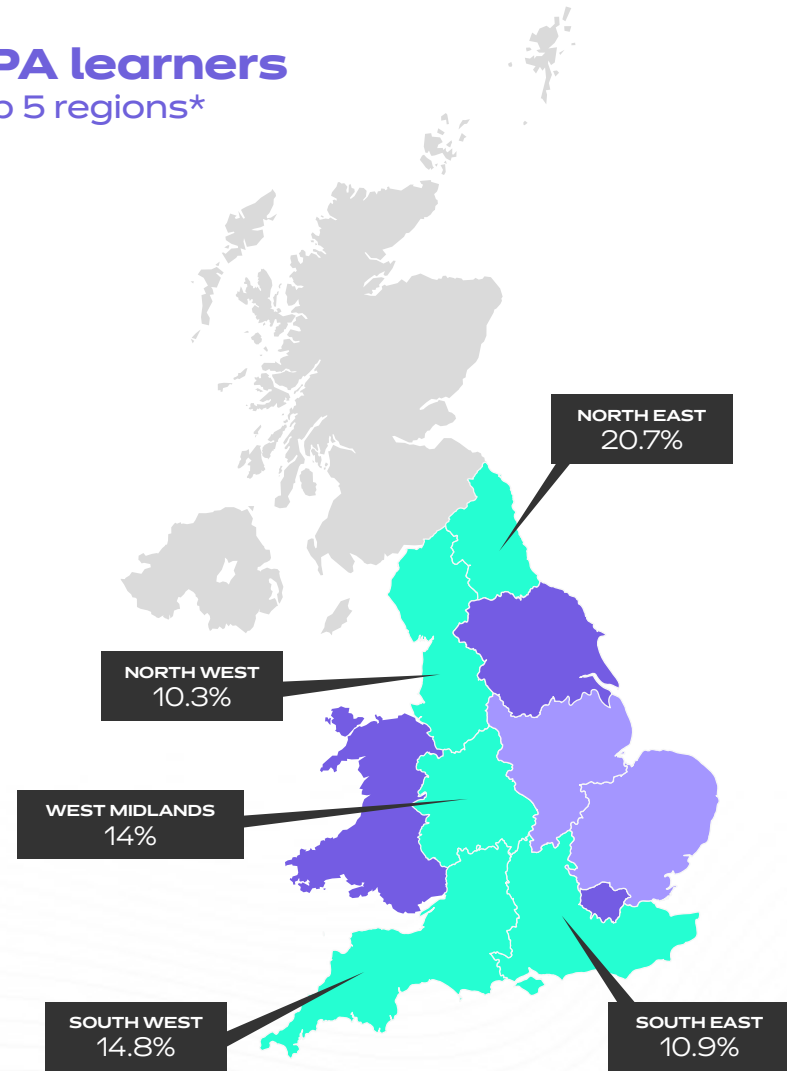
At NCFE, we hold the notion of collaboration in high esteem; we want to work with our providers to equip them with products and skills to enable them to deliver transformational learning experiences. The majority of respondents to Launchpad's provider survey (93%) felt they have a good relationship with NCFE, which is testament to how we work as an organisation. We have developed our Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer by enhancing our products with digital credentials and offering these as part of our package in particular areas. We have continued to invest in WorldSkills UK's Centre of Excellence, who continue to equip educators with high quality CPD opportunities. Although we recognise there is work to be done around providing the highest quality resources, we have a very strong foundation to build upon.



## Awarding learners Top 5 regions\*



## EPA learners Top 5 regions\*



Analysis of our provider data against Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD2019) shows just over one fifth of NCFE enrolments in 2022-23 were taught at providers situated in the most deprived deciles<sup>6</sup> in England. Over 60% of our providers are situated in the five most deprived deciles. Assuming that our learners live close to the location of their provider, this suggests that our learners are more likely to come from areas of deprivation.

<sup>6</sup> Based on Indices of Multiple Deprivation Deciles (IMD2019) calculated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

\* Region refers to the region of the provider rather than the learner

Total number of awarding learners: 435,520 registrations | Source: NCFE learner registration data, 2023-24

Total number of EPA learners: 11,900 registrations | Source: NCFE learner registration data, 2023-24



## NCFE's relationships with institutions and educators

Launchpad found our strong rapport with the institutions and education providers we work with was evident, with **93% of those surveyed agreeing they have a very good working relationship with NCFE**. Almost three quarters recognised NCFE's objective to equip learners for further learning and considered that objective aligned with their own.

Looking at the sub-groups completing the survey in more detail:

- Institutions offering T Levels, other 16-19 vocational education qualifications, non-loan funded adult education qualifications, loan-funded higher-level qualifications and apprenticeships reported the highest levels of agreement with this statement.
- Contrastingly, those offering V Certs were more likely to remain neutral about their relationship with NCFE.
- Exam Officers had a significantly higher mean score when compared to those in other roles.

**75% of providers felt NCFE helped them deliver transformational learning experiences** to students, an increase of 4% from the previous survey. The data indicates that **80% of surveyed educational providers and institutions are satisfied with NCFE's support and guidance**, maintaining the high satisfaction levels seen in 2022.

Launchpad also found that 72% of education providers respect NCFE as a solutions provider, demonstrating we can meet providers' needs and challenges. More work to understand the factors contributing to this slightly lower percentage of respect for NCFE as a solutions provider rather than as an awarding organisation (93%) will help us identify areas where we can improve to meet these needs to an even higher standard.

## NCFE's relationships with institutions and educators

Whilst most respondents to the survey said they trusted NCFE to deliver high quality products and services (86%), we recognise there is still room for improvement; less than 50% of providers felt NCFE's resources, provided to learners or educators were 'outstanding'. When looking further into open comments responses, areas for concentration around resources specifically are:

- **providing more resources**
- **providing further training and development**
- **providing more practice exam papers**
- **making materials more concise or streamlined**
- **review/change marking criteria.**

We'll be looking further into these responses and collaborating with providers to ensure any solutions we generate are fit for purpose and meet the needs of educators and ultimately, our learners.

Although we are hearing about issues with our resources, perceptions of NCFE as a trusted (or improvement) partner were found to be positive, with 93% of education providers surveyed agreeing that they respect NCFE as an awarding organisation. 86% of those surveyed trust NCFE to deliver high-quality products and services, suggesting it's highly important we focus on the resources we provide, as the overall impression of our products is considered high-quality.

We can use the findings from the Launchpad impact study to support the research we've conducted with our providers throughout the year. We're dedicated to working with our providers to deliver the highest quality provision and recognise that to do this, we need to be in conversation with those on the front line. To ensure that providers have a say in our product content and resources we've committed to a consistent approach to speaking to our providers in different areas of the business to continually improve and ensure we're providing the best service.







### Some of the customers we've spoken to include:

- **T Levels**

NCFE has conducted numerous surveys across the year to establish providers' readiness for various assessments, as well as aiming to collect information on how we can continually learn from challenges faced in the first cohorts of T Level learners. Provider satisfaction with NCFE and their confidence in delivering T Levels has increased across the year<sup>7</sup> and whilst we're pleased with this vote of confidence from the sector, we're committed to building on this to provide exceptional learning experiences.

- **English and maths Functional Skills**

Across a six-month period, NCFE conducted focus groups with English and maths Functional Skills providers to understand the learners who undertake these qualifications, their needs, and how we can better support providers in delivering these qualifications. Initial focus groups led to assessment-specific focus groups with select customers, product testing resources for implementation in the new academic year to improve outcomes for learners.

- **End-point assessment (EPA) tutors**

NCFE wanted to learn more about the end-to-end EPA journey for our customers - from onboarding through to Gateway - to explore where we're doing well and where we could improve this experience. To achieve this, we conducted a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with a wide range of our EPA customers. Although largely positive about our relationships and the support delivered by the EPA team, our customers were open and honest about their pain points, and findings from this research will therefore inform how we improve the service going forward.

- **Voice of the Customer programme**

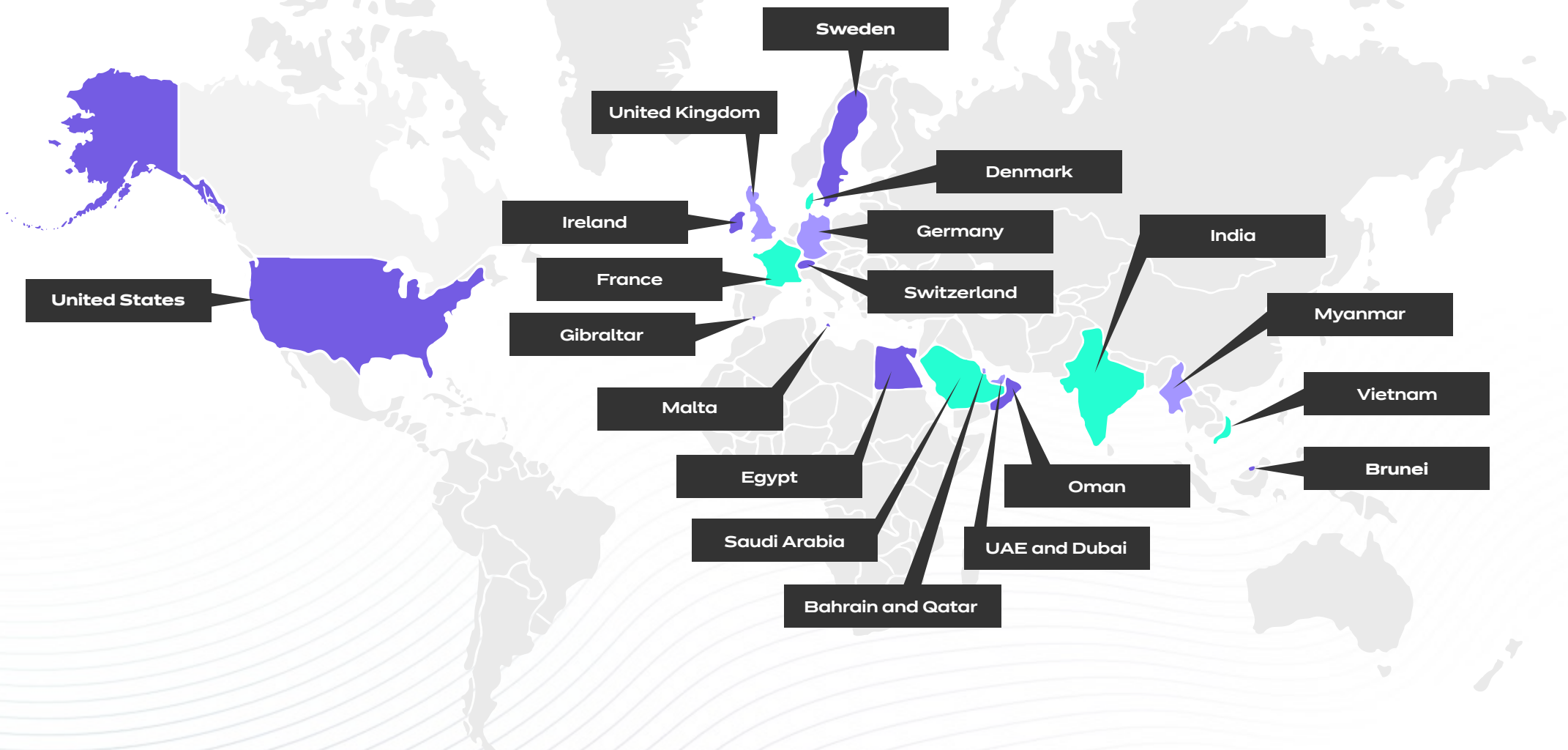
We've recently overhauled our Voice of the Customer programme, including a switch to a new survey software provider, which will ultimately make it easier for us to gather and act upon customer feedback in a timelier manner.

<sup>7</sup> Just over 40% of respondents to our September 2023 survey rated themselves as 7 out of 10 or above when asked to rate their confidence in delivering T Levels compared to our January 2024 survey where 92% of respondents stated they were quite/very prepared for the summer series.



# Global reach

Not only does NCFE reach learners based in the UK, we're also growing our presence globally. We're bringing our strong reputation across the world, with a particular presence in Asia and the Middle East specifically through our early years education courses and our acquisition of Active IQ.





CASE STUDY

## The National Institute of Childhood programmes - Oman

The National Institute of Childhood, Oman, is a training centre for childhood programmes. The Institute is the first in the country to be an approved NCFE CACHE centre and its aim is to improve the lives of children through education and to upskill those working with children to embed safe practice. NCFE was selected as the awarding organisation for the Institute based on our excellent reputation throughout the country and the quality of the programme was recognised as the best to be delivered. More than 90 learners received their Level 2 Certificate in Introducing Caring for Children and Young People, which led to the institute delivering the Level 3 Diploma for Early Years Workforce (Early Years Educator) and Level 5 Leader of Early Childhood Centres programmes to ensure learners have a good progression route to continue their education. Learners have gained confidence in their knowledge and skills working with children and families and the Institute is impressed with their progression in work and further study.





## Career Lab

### CASE STUDY

### Career Lab - UAE

Based in the United Arab Emirates, Career Lab offers six NCFE CACHE courses from Level 2 to 5, with the aim of raising standards in childcare across the region. Centre director, Bissan Fayad describes the impact on learners\*:

"Our learners have pursued various progression routes after completing their qualifications, each journey reflecting their unique aspirations and goals. For instance, with her Level 2 Certificate, Emily landed her first job as a nursery assistant, eager to begin nurturing children's growth and development. Meanwhile, Mark's career took a new trajectory following his completion of the Level 3 Award; transitioning from a corporate setting to a fulfilling role as a teaching assistant, he now helps children overcome communication challenges in a primary school environment. On a different path, Sarah's ambition to open her own childcare centre was realised after earning her Level 5 Diploma, enabling her to provide quality care and education to children within her community. These stories exemplify the diverse opportunities and profound impact that NCFE qualifications offer, empowering learners to embark on rewarding career journeys and make meaningful contributions to the lives of children and families."

\*Learner names have been anonymised







# Active iQ

## CASE STUDY

### Active IQ: Spectrum Wellness for Women - UAE

Active IQ works with a number of institutions across the United Arab Emirates.

Following recent political changes in Saudi Arabia, there has been a growing emphasis on health and fitness which has created new opportunities for public participation in sports and athletic activities. This evolution has also encouraged more women to exercise, overcoming cultural barriers that previously limited their involvement. Spectrum® Wellness for Women, operating since 1999, has been particularly well-positioned over the past four years to support women adopting healthier lifestyles. The organisation has actively worked to create an inclusive environment, recognising the importance of addressing and overcoming cultural diversity to provide women with accessible fitness opportunities.

To meet the demand for female instructors to lead women-only classes, Spectrum® Wellness for Women now offers Active IQ Level 2 in Group Training and Level 3 in Understanding the Principles and Practice of Assessment. They selected Active IQ as their awarding organisation due to its strong reputation for delivering high-quality and credible qualifications, ensuring learners have access to the best resources.

This partnership also contributed to Active IQ winning the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) 'Exporter of the Year' Award, recognising their exceptional success in international business and exports – especially in regions where cultural diversity posed unique challenges.



[activeiq.co.uk](https://activeiq.co.uk)



# Beyond regulated provision

Beyond our regulated qualifications, we've made significant contributions to supporting institutions and educators in their efforts to enhance teaching and learning practices.

Here we'll share a few examples of the impact we've achieved:





### CASE STUDY

## Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network (GMLPN)

In our 2022 impact report we outlined our burgeoning relationship with GMLPN, which has since gone from strength to strength. Our initial project involved supporting autistic people into employment and/or apprenticeships. Of those employers involved in the project that responded to a follow up feedback survey:

- 100% agreed that they developed a greater understanding of the needs of autistic individuals through the programme
- 100% felt confident that the support and training they received will help them make a positive impact on their employees.

This project has since set off a series of collaborative programmes between GMLPN and NCFE.

We've collaborated this year on the Government's initiative to increase adult skills in maths: the Multiply programme. This part of the programme was led by GMLPN and aims to enhance the skills and confidence of educators delivering maths programmes to adult learners. NCFE has accredited the programme, also awarding a digital credential to those who have participated.

To date, 78 providers have taken part in the programme, with a total of 194 participants. 45 digital credentials have been awarded to those taking part in the programme. Feedback showed an increase in confidence from all participants, with 92% valuing the digital credential awarded by NCFE.

NCFE and GMLPN are also working in partnership on a research project to support early years apprentices in achieving their Functional Skills maths qualification. The project is investigating the impact of using contextualised resources and assessment papers as part of the Functional Skills maths Level 2 delivery within the early years apprenticeship sector. The pilot project, commissioned as part of the Apprenticeship Workforce Development Project, is funded by the Education and Training Foundation.

As we've been working so closely with GMLPN, we've also become a member of the network, which gives us access to a network of 100 training providers, the GMLPN Provider Support Programme and updates from key agencies.







CASE STUDY

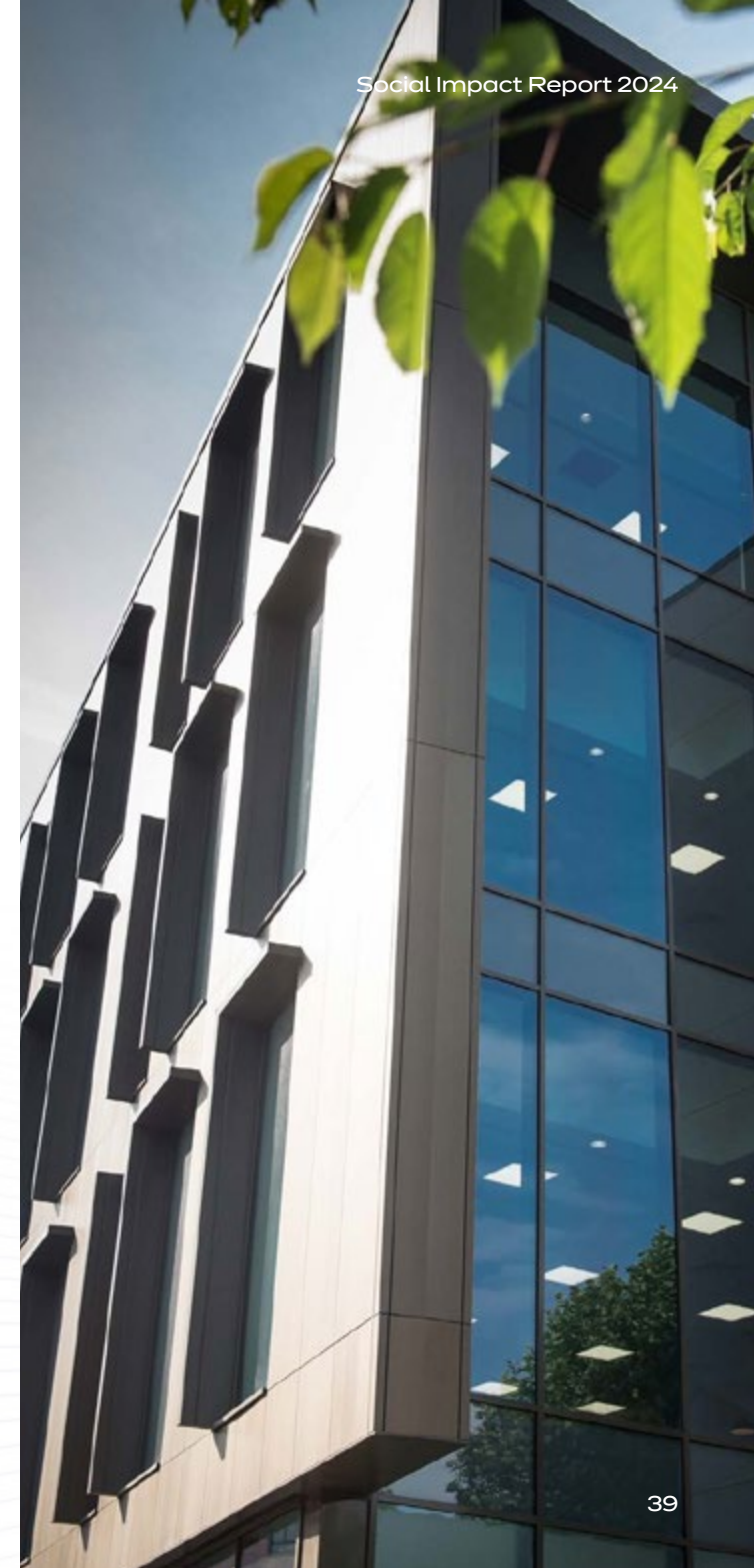
## Stockport Homes Housing Association

Our Accreditation team has worked closely this year with Stockport Homes and their charitable arm, SKYlight, to accredit their newly developed qualification.

With objectives and values aligned strongly to NCFE's, collaboration with the housing association meant providing opportunities for customers of the service to better their lives through education.

SKYlight created the Introduction to Housing course to provide opportunities for residents of the local community to start their journey towards employment. The aims of the programme are to develop understanding and prepare learners for the application process.

With five learners in the first cohort and six on the second, three learners have already secured work following the programme through Stockport Homes. This appears to be the only course of its kind, with most courses available through housing associations being geared towards people working within the sector, rather than service users. Christopher Hughes, Customer Training Officer at Stockport Homes, said of the course: "We feel that accreditation adds significant value to our programmes and enhances the achievements of our customers, many of whom are taking the first steps in their development pathway."





#### CASE STUDY

## The WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence

NCFE continues to invest in the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, which aims to equip institutions and educators with a training programme for technical education educators to drive change and enhance the quality of teaching within colleges and training providers. The result is that educators return to the classroom with a new sense of purpose, passion, and the skills to deliver transformative technical education qualifications.

The Centre of Excellence programme is funded by NCFE and the Department for Education, and consists of three main strands:

- train the trainer training
- support for providers to deliver the train the trainer training within their institutions
- learning lab (videos and resource packs accessible for all FE educators).

In the last three years, 40 providers have taken part in the Centre of Excellence initiative, with a potential reach of 51,000 learners.

An impact evaluation conducted by ICF on behalf of WorldSkills UK demonstrated that the first cohort of learners (whose educators took part in the programme) achieved on average 3.5 grade points higher than those who did not attend a World Skills UK provider.







CASE STUDY

## Research Further

The Research Further initiative was established collaboratively by the Association of Colleges (AoC) and NCFE to support, drive and encourage college-centred research that can help influence policy and practice. In early 2023, Research Further was joined by two additional funders - Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and the Edge Foundation.

To date, the programme has supported 16 FE practitioners to undertake post-graduate research in an area where evidence is currently lacking. Scholars are part of a supportive community of peers, and the topics that these scholars are investigating currently range from the regional impact of further education colleges to CPD and subject-specific pedagogy. The significance of this project is found in the fact that there is a perceived lack of practitioner-led, technical research which is, of course, crucial for the advancement of the sector and our purpose. Research Further aims to address this gap and elevate the work of practitioners in the technical and vocational sector.

In addition to Research Further, AoC and NCFE also run the Think Further partnership which is a thought-leadership initiative that offers a platform for the FE sector to provide deep insight and informed debate on a range of topics. It brings together research-led think pieces and blogs steeped in the experience and expertise of the further education and skills sector.





## What will we do next to improve our impact on institutions and educators?

- We'll continue to listen to providers to understand how we can improve our resources to ensure that educators and institutions have the best materials to deliver transformational learning experiences.
- We'll continue to look for new and innovative ways to reach learners through different educational routes, such as the GMLPN and housing associations.
- We'll diversify our offer to include new and innovative products including digital credentials.

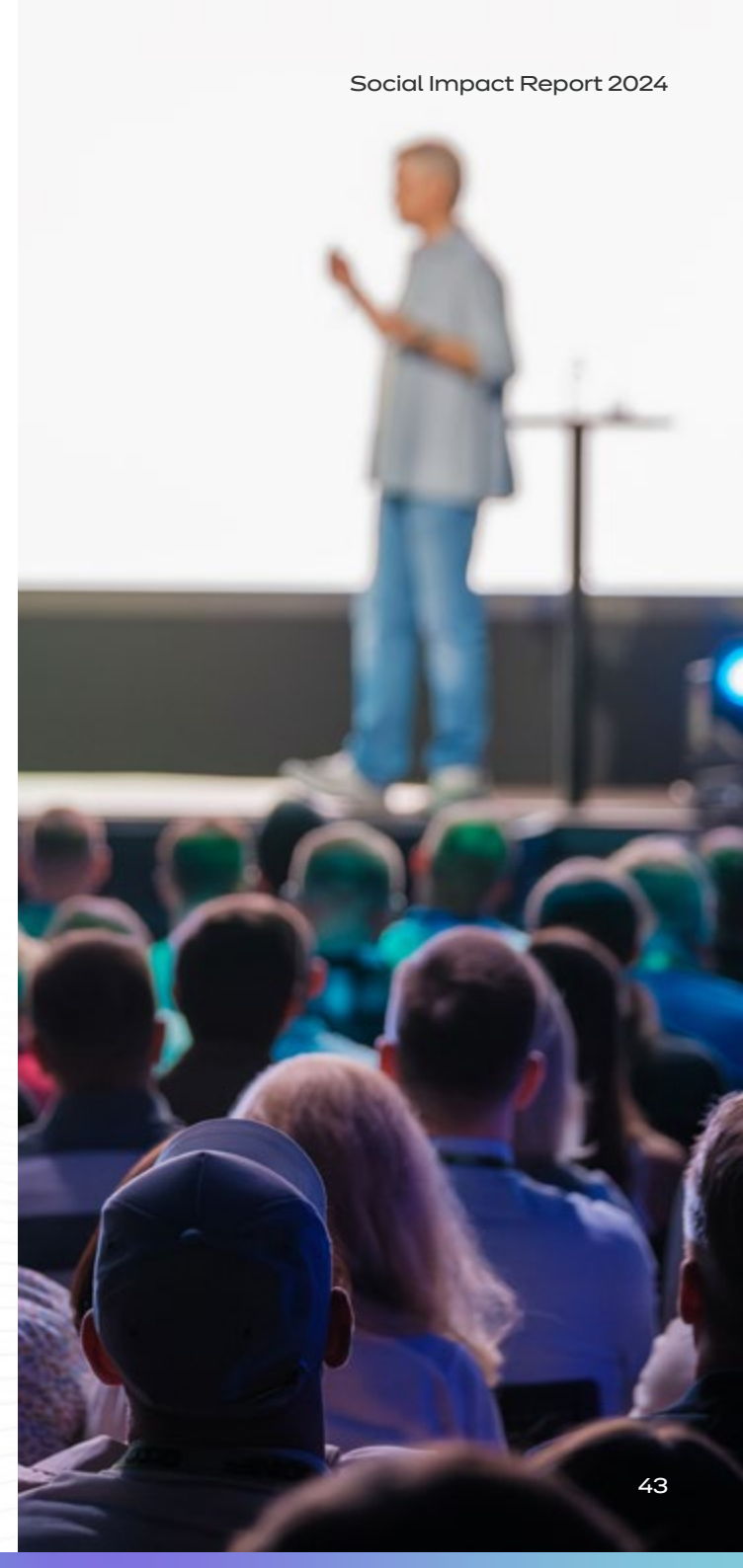


# Systems leadership, sector and NCFE: an influential voice for skills

## Intended impacts

- Shape and influence the debate as a recognised, respected voice in the sector.
- Learning and careers support offered beyond the time of study.
- Leading digital disruption in education.

As we enter a new era following the election of a Labour government, our stakeholders remind us of the importance of presenting a strong and influential voice to support the further education (FE) sector within the debate. We'll use our new strategy to 2030 to guide us to build our voice, leveraging our position as one of the largest vocational and technical awarding organisations to lead conversations with government audiences and build partnerships for the benefit of our beneficiaries and customers.



## NCFE's voice in the sector

Findings from in-depth interviews with stakeholders and results from the provider survey reveal that our stakeholders see a bigger role for us in sector debates and discussions. Only 56% of providers considered "Help shape the debate in the further education sector" as one of NCFE's primary objectives. 60% felt that NCFE have influence in the further education sector; however, this represented a decline from 2022 responses, where this was almost 80%. Stakeholders also suggested that NCFE should be more involved in influencing the debate and want to see us closer to the forefront of policy making. This may be partially explained by NCFE intentionally choosing to focus more resource looking inward to strengthen the organisation, and follows a particularly high profile year in 2022, when NCFE representatives were invited to speak at Education Select Committees.

We've advocated for change in areas where we know that issues exist. The work we conducted with the Department for Education (DfE) in 2022 reiterated the known issue in the early years and education sector around the requirement to have a Level 2 in maths to be included in the staff-to-child ratios. This resulted in a significant barrier to people entering the sector, as many people who wanted to pursue this career did not have this qualification. Following continuous work from members of NCFE's Education and Early Years team alongside other specialist bodies, this requirement has now been lifted - which in turn, should open doors for many people wishing to work in the sector, but who felt unable to do so in the past.





## Leaders in innovation

Although providers were less aware of NCFE's position in the innovation space, stakeholders were more so. This may be due to our relationships with the people we spoke to, as some of them were or had been recipients of NCFE funding themselves. The impact of this funding is significant to many of the stakeholders involved with several stating that projects 'would not have gone ahead or would have progressed at a much slower pace'<sup>8</sup> had NCFE not been able to financially support. The projects NCFE chooses to fund are seen as driving change in the sector by funding pilots which aim to change assessments digitally or for the good of learners. However, at a high level it is seen as going further than that, with investments such as Good For Me, Good For FE and the partnership with GMLPN championing societal change and impact.

The projects that NCFE chooses to fund demonstrates 'a passion for, and commitment to, sector disruption and change'<sup>9</sup> which is where our voice is seen to be powerful and we are seen to be 'comfortable challenging established thought, but keen to work in collaboration with others to drive impact and influence change'.<sup>10</sup> However, there is still work to be done in this area. Providers were less aware of the changes we're striving for, with overall awareness of investment in innovation being just 41%. Only 12% of provider respondents were aware of the Assessment Innovation Fund (AIF). This suggests we need to be more proactive in promoting the innovative investments we make to all of our stakeholders, from learners to providers and policymakers, to ensure our voice in this area is heard even more powerfully.

<sup>8</sup> Launchpad research, slide 41

<sup>9</sup> Launchpad research, slide 43

<sup>10</sup> Launchpad research, slide 43

## Assessment Innovation Fund

### CASE STUDY

## Assessment Innovation Fund (AIF)

The AIF was cited as evidence of NCFE's sector-wide impact by several stakeholders. They saw the AIF initiative as 'a cross-cutting one that speaks to NCFE's willingness to disrupt for the benefit and development of the sector, to drive innovation through trial, but also with the learner firmly at the heart of objectives.'<sup>11</sup>

"The Innovation Fund is all about digital. So, the fact that they have seed funded that and very much advocated the use. They're very keen to support innovation in that sense and artificial intelligence is something that they've engaged with, and I was very taken by."

### Stakeholder respondent

The AIF sees NCFE champion innovation in assessment and challenge traditional assessment methods which may not be suitable for all learners. The purpose of the fund is to lead innovation within assessment across the sector in a controlled process that fills a gap in the evidence base. To date, we've committed £1m of funding through our social investment strategy to support five windows of the AIF. The fund allows any organisation that has an innovative idea around the theme of assessment to apply for grant funding of up to £200,000.

<sup>11</sup> Launchpad research, slide 42





## CASE STUDY

# Assessment Innovation Fund (AIF)

**As of 2024:**

**3289** learners have participated in 12 funded pilot studies to date.

**206** educators across two continents and 49 institutions have participated in pilot studies to date.

**126** individuals have benefited from training linked to the AIF.

**114** applications have been received throughout all windows.

- The fund has contributed to free and accessible research that contributes to the creation of innovative assessment methodologies that recognise the individual skills of the learner, thus increasing the likelihood of employment and progression.
- It affirms NCFE's voice as respected and recognised in the education sector, for example through conference appearances such as The FE Collective, co-chairing the JCQ group for AI in assessment, and co-authoring future of assessment articles with JISC.

This year, NCFE undertook a social value analysis of the AIF using the National Themes, Outcomes, and Measures (TOMs) framework, and used this outcome to calculate a social return on investment ratio (SROI), to estimate the social value of the AIF. Social value is used to describe the added value of initiatives that deliver wider benefits to both the local community and wider society. Measuring the social value of the AIF allows NCFE to track and record the social benefits being contributed to the wider education community. To measure this impact robustly, NCFE has adopted the TOMs framework as its reporting methodology. The TOMs framework is a recognised reporting standard and Local Government Association endorsed tool that follows the principles in HM Treasury's Green book for monetising economic, environmental, and social impact. This process ascribes proxy financial values to project outputs that bring community benefit but are, on occasion, overlooked in evaluation reports. It is, of course, recognised that social value is not all about money, but this common language – the £ – is a powerful tool to ensure that the achievements of the AIF are not undervalued. NCFE's social value calculation focused on three primary strands:

- **Investment and matched funding:** the initial money given to pilots by NCFE and any matched funding secured by applicants due to the endorsement of the AIF.
- **Consultant hours:** the time given by industry experts to assess and assist with the pilot projects.
- **Job creation:** any roles created due to the AIF funding.

*Each of these strands have a direct proxy value within the TOMs.*

These proxy figures result in a financial value for the social benefits that communities and wider society gain because of the AIF initiatives.



## CASE STUDY

## Assessment Innovation Fund (AIF)

**£1,585,525**  AIF 21-23 social value

**£223,875**  Job creation

**£917,994**  NCFE investment

**£424,022**  Matched funding

**£19,644**  Consultant hours

The AIF generated £1,585,535 in social value and our SROI was 1 : 1.7. This means that for every £1 invested, £1.70 was generated in social value. As per Social Value UK instructions, social return on Investment (SROI) is calculated by dividing the proxy value generated by the total amount invested. In this instance, the amount generated as indicated above (£1,585,535) was divided by NCFE's initial investment (£917,994).



# CACHE ALUMNI

POWERED BY NCFE

## Future careers: CACHE Alumni

Careers support is an area in which we want to make an impact, and we've evidenced this through our continued support of those that have taken part in CACHE courses and entered into the health and social care and early years sectors. As mentioned in the learner section of this report, our online membership organisation, CACHE Alumni, is intended to provide continued support throughout career progression.

### Member survey

According to the 2024 CACHE Alumni annual members survey, respondents typically become members when they've finished studying and are working (37%) or during study (34%). Respondents to the survey were asked about the impact membership had on themselves and their careers. 97% of respondents recognised the positive impact their own education journey had on people they worked with, such as children or adults in care, who ultimately benefited from the skills acquired through learning. CACHE Alumni has contributed to this as 93% of respondents felt they were more equipped to perform their role because of the resources available through their membership. 87% of respondents felt that being a member of CACHE Alumni had supported them to make the best decisions about their future progression. Over three quarters (77%) of respondents felt that their CACHE Alumni membership had opened employment opportunities to them. All of these elements evidence the impact on learners' future progression through careers support and CPD, and the impact on wider society through the beneficiaries of our learners' skills.





## Skillzminer

As part of CACHE Alumni, members can access Skillzminer for on-demand careers advice. The platform uses artificial intelligence (AI) to match people to vacancies, based on their skills and experience. This makes it easier for people to find employment as jobs are matched based on their current situation, helping them to apply for jobs they are more likely to be suitable for, rather than having to trawl through hundreds of vacancies - many of which will not be suitable. This year, members have applied for 103 jobs through Skillzminer.

### Skillzminer in numbers:

**650** individual members supported

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**2780** advice sessions conducted

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**228** hours spent advising

Not only has Skillzminer supported members to apply for jobs, it has also supported some members to consider their education and learning journey. Over one hundred members made enquiries about qualifications (typically NCFE qualifications). This information can then be used in the future to signpost members to CPD e-modules, based on the sectors of qualifications in which members show the most interest.



## What we will do next to improve our impact on systems, sector and NCFE

- We'll engage with key debates across our areas of focus, advocating for change and innovation which will help us become a strong and influential voice in the sector.
- We'll continue to champion and invest in innovation through initiatives such as the Assessment Innovation Fund.
- We'll continue to offer support throughout the careers of our learners and educators by offering network opportunities such as CACHE Alumni, with a view to extend this to our other vertical sectors.





## Society and economy: reaching further to make an impact

### Intended impacts

- **Help improve the lives of disadvantaged people through education and improved employment prospects.**
- **Learners contribute to a more productive economy.**
- **Learners benefit society through the beneficiaries of their skills, including children and people receiving health and social care.**

One of NCFE's primary aims is to ensure no learner is left behind – this can be extended to the beneficiaries of the skills our learners develop. Whether learners complete one of our early years and education programmes, or a course in business administration, the benefits of the learning do not end with the individual. The skills developed go on to benefit a range of beneficiaries, from children, to colleagues, to the elderly.



## Provider and stakeholder perspective

Launchpad's provider survey demonstrated that providers believe NCFE learners will have a positive impact on society and the economy:

- Almost 80% of respondents believed that NCFE learners go on to make a positive impact on society through the application of their acquired skills.
- More than three-quarters of respondents believed that NCFE learners will progress to make a contribution to the economy.
- More than 7 in 10 respondents believed that NCFE helps improve the lives of disadvantaged people through learning.





## CASE STUDY

## Save the Children

NCFE is currently working with international charity Save the Children to raise the standards of child protection around the world. Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for child rights, who champion the rights and interests of children worldwide, putting the most vulnerable first. With over 25,000 staff across 116 countries responding to humanitarian emergencies, the charity delivers development programmes and amplify children's voices through campaigns.

Save the Children required NCFE's support to reinforce objective and consistent standards of excellence for technical expertise to contribute to the quality assurance of its programmes for children across the world. To do this, NCFE created a set of unique accreditation criteria based on Save the Children's technical competency framework. This collaborative approach resulted in the COMpetency-based Approach to Professional Qualifications and Training (COMPAQT) programme, which takes the approach of identifying, addressing and improving core competencies and knowledge within the learner's existing skillset. The intended impact of the programme is to enhance the lives of children and families in the communities in which Save the Children operates.

The programme was piloted in 2021 and 17 participants in Asia took part to develop their Child Protection skills. Following the success of this pilot, Save the Children rolled the programme out to further countries in 2022 and 56 participants were enrolled on the Child Protection programme. Formal accreditation was expanded to include two more areas – Social Protection and Child Rights Governance, and a further 54 participants were enrolled in 2023.

## Save the Children in numbers:

**3** technical areas accredited

**30** countries

**127** participants

**3** languages (English, French and Spanish)

**5** regions





We've exceeded our expectations in how quickly the programme has gone from being a pilot, to being onboarded, embedded and fully established globally!"

**Clare Allsopp,**  
**Learning Specialist at Save the Children**

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## CASE STUDY

## Social Impact Fund

In line with NCFE's core purpose, we've committed to our Social Impact Fund, which allows colleagues of NCFE to apply for up to £500 per quarter to support a charitable endeavour of their choice. To be eligible, the initiative should align to our purpose to promote and advance learning and reach one of the following primary targets:

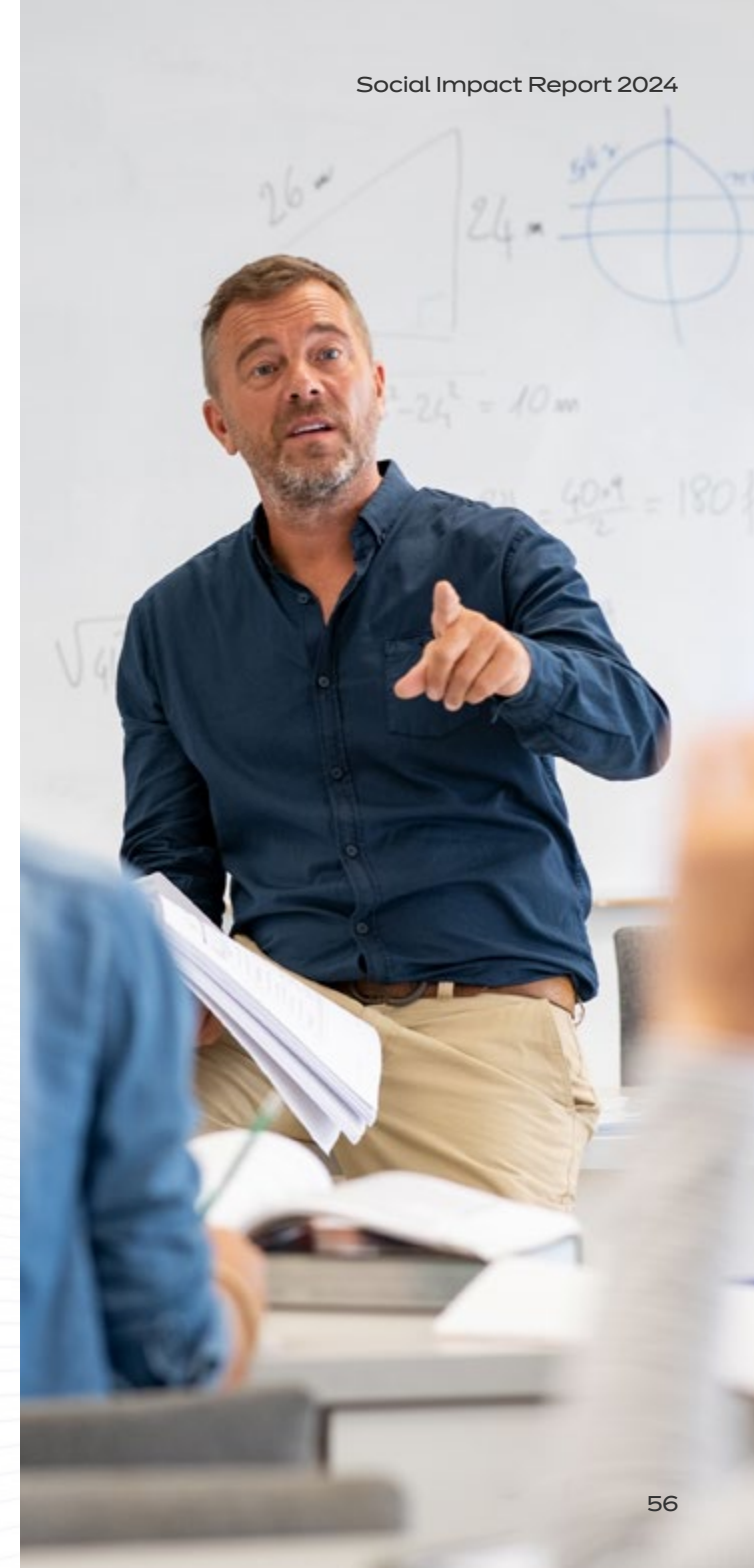
- disadvantaged learners
- supporting people with career guidance and transitions
- supporting not-for-profit organisations as well as helping improve literacy, numeracy, digital skills, essential skills and sustainability.

This year, the fund has supported the following initiatives:

### Newbiggin Boxing Club

Newbiggin Boxing Club supports children and young adults from very disadvantaged backgrounds, who tend to underperform in educational settings. The club, with the help, guidance and direction of the coaches, is supporting its members holistically, producing well-rounded individuals, which is being reflected in better attendance at school, more focus in lessons and better grades. The fund was used to update and refresh the club's boxing equipment, as well as enable more children to attend without the burden of expense to their families.

The values of the club align to NCFE's as it helps local communities through education and sports, and gives opportunities to children and young adults who may not have been able to do this previously.







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In early 2022, my stepson Jack, who was very interested in boxing, started to attend Newbiggin Boxing Club. He tried out a few places, but felt at home straight away as he was welcomed straight into the family.

Soon after, my son Dre also asked if he could join the boxing club too. I was anxious about this as Dre suffers from ADHD and autism and, at that time, he could be very reclusive and very socially awkward. His confidence and fitness was at an all-time low, but we thought we would give it a try. I went with him and spoke to the coaches and explained everything, and they seemed at ease and very enthusiastic about helping him out.

I can honestly say the change in Dre is nothing short of amazing! He rarely spends any time in his room anymore and socially, there is almost no awkwardness at all. This is not only because of the boxing skills he has developed, but also down to the opening of the diner - he always wants to be there earlier and see his friends, have a chat and a drink or even a game of pool before boxing starts. Attending has given him a new sense of self-worth.

**Davy Orr,  
Parent**

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## Wylam First School

Wylam and its surrounding area is rural, and the school wanted to make sure children in the local community had the opportunity to learn outdoors and connect to nature. The school's Parent Teacher Association wanted to ensure a level playing field for all the children, so purchased a stock of outdoor equipment, including clothing, to benefit those whose families struggled to afford additional items. This allowed the school to make its allotment club free to all so it could be enjoyed by everyone, no matter their circumstances. The outdoor equipment will remain at the school, benefitting all current and future pupils.

This initiative is a great fit for the Social Impact Fund as it teaches children about sustainability from a young age, how to work with the environment, and creates collaborative thinking and teamwork. The fund has supported a local school and enabled them to run the club free of charge, helping level the playing field for disadvantaged families.

## Millie's Trust

The charity Millie's Trust applied for funding to deliver two first aid courses that are specific to young carers. This allowed 24 young people in caring roles to access a full qualification that they otherwise wouldn't be able to afford. It provided them with essential skills and confidence to support them in their role as a carer and in their wider lives. As an awarding organisation with a history and background in healthcare qualifications, this was a brilliant way to give back to those young carers and students who give so much of their time to others.

This was a great fit for NCFE, as providing the funding allowed the beneficiaries the opportunity to gain essential skills which they are more likely to require in their lives as carers. It also enhances their career potential through education whilst taking away any financial burden they would have faced had they wanted to fund the qualification themselves.

## The North Tyneside Youth Project

The North Tyneside Youth Project was founded in June 2022 by two local residents who identified that there were very few provisions for children after school which were either free of charge or at a price that was affordable to low-income families. The grant was initially requested from the Social Impact Fund to assist with running costs and to supplement the cost of food and drinks for its members.

In the months prior to the awarding of the grant, the youth project had around 20 children per week using its services, which ran three times each week in the form of after-school youth clubs; one of which was exclusive to children with additional needs – the first of its kind in North Tyneside.

In December 2022, the remaining funds were used to run kids' clubs over Christmas, host a breakfast with Santa, and help local disadvantaged community members with toys and food hampers to ease the burden during the cost-of-living crisis. The breakfast with Santa sessions were completely free of charge for 20 children, with each being accompanied by a parent or guardian. Families enjoyed a morning of fun and games, a hot cooked breakfast, a meeting with Santa, and a gift.

After hearing about the sessions, Keith Pattinson Estate Agents chose the youth project to be one of its four partners for their Christmas toy appeal, where staff, customers, and local businesses donate presents and food. This partnership, along with the remaining funds from the Social Impact Fund, saw the youth project deliver:

- 1,169 gifts handed out to over 400 families in North Tyneside and Northumberland
- 300 food hampers, which helped feed approximately 565 people in the local community
- one week of free school holiday youth clubs to ease the burden on parents who had to work.

The funding provided by the Social Impact Fund kickstarted the Christmas programme and supported the project to help almost 1,000 families over the festive period. Along with this, in recognition for its hard work and dedication, the project was nominated for a BBC Make a Difference Award in 2023, finishing third and being awarded a Highly Commended trophy.



**CASE STUDY**

## The Helena Kennedy Foundation (HKF)

The Helena Kennedy Foundation supports disadvantaged students in education through financial bursaries, mentoring, and personal development. Since 1998, HKF has worked to overcome social injustice, a mission that aligns closely with NCFE's goal of promoting and advancing learning. Since 2019, NCFE has been supporting HKF by sponsoring two bursaries for disadvantaged learners to continue their journey in further or higher education.

- The HKF Award provides a package of financial, personal, and practical support to aid the transition into higher education (HE), enhance the university experience, and improve post-graduation employment prospects. The bursary is for those who demonstrate severe financial hardship but are moving into their first year of an undergraduate degree in HE.
- The DISCOVER Award is designed uniquely for NCFE. This bursary supports students currently in college and is for those in their first year of a two-year Level 3 study programme at a publicly funded further education institution.

To date, NCFE has funded **54 HKF Awards** and **68 DISCOVER Awards**.

### 2023 status of HKF Award winners

- 54 bursaries awarded
  - 67% are still studying
  - 20% have graduated or completed their studies
  - 9% withdrew from their course

### 2023 status of DISCOVER Award winners

- 68 bursaries awarded
- 53 known destinations in 2023
  - 66% are studying in further education or apprenticeships
  - 21% have gone on to HE
  - 13% have gone on to complete their programme or secure employment





## The Helena Kennedy Foundation (HKF)

The HKF Award and DISCOVER Award have had a profound impact on the lives of numerous students from 2019 to 2024. By providing essential financial support and reducing economic barriers, these bursaries have enabled students to focus on their studies, improve their mental health and wellbeing, and achieve their academic and personal goals.

"Thank you so much for giving people like me from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to succeed. This bursary helped me to overcome any financial obstacles that could stand in my way and set me apart from more privileged peers. It helped to level the playing field."

"This award has meant so much to me. When I first received it, I felt a massive boost of confidence. I felt seen and recognised. When I then started university, the bursary helped me out financially and provided a little more breathing space so I could focus more on studies with less financial worries. Thank you so much for this award, it has helped me so much both financially and mentally. It is honestly one of my biggest achievements ever, if not the biggest."





## CASE STUDY

# Campaign for Learning

In 2020, Campaign for Learning (CfL) joined with NCFE in our united core purpose and strong belief in the power of learning. Although CfL continues to operate independently from us, our partnership, support and investment means that they can reach a diverse range of individuals, families, employers and communities to support them on their learning journey. Just three of the projects that CfL has worked on this year include the following case studies, demonstrating the range of demographics we're able to reach working together.

## Chemistories

Chemistories is a continuing professional development (CPD) initiative for educators in Scotland to become more skilled in delivering and embedding chemistry and storytelling. With support from Newcastle University, CfL created a resource pack, hosted two events and a webinar, and developed recorded training sessions with the aim to create engagement with chemistry through stories.

### School initiative<sup>12</sup>:

54 schools took part, registering 2,278 children and 259 adults.

- 70% of schools attending the national events reported that the event has raised the profile of chemistry in their setting.
- 100% of schools who responded to the post-event survey said the event supported their curriculum delivery.

<sup>12</sup> The average Pupil Premium rate of schools registered was 40.7%, against a national average of 25% for primary schools.

<sup>13</sup> 13 out of 23 Scottish schools reported being in a Scottish Attainment Challenge Local Authority





## CASE STUDY

## Campaign for Learning

### Family learning initiative:

155 families registered, made up of 197 children and 240 adults. Of the families that provided feedback on their experience:

- 91% indicated an increase in confidence to embed chemistry concepts in storytelling activities aimed at families with children aged between 4-7
- 88% indicated increased confidence in using scientific language in storytelling activities aimed at families with children aged between 4-7\*
- 86% indicated increased confidence in delivering engaging storytelling activities aimed at families with children aged between 4-7\*
- 70% of families attending the national events report that they are inspired to learn more about chemistry
- 100% of families who responded to the post-event survey said they feel more confident about exploring chemistry with their child(ren).

The initiative has also gone on to form collaborations with others including engagement officers from high schools and Edinburgh BioQuarter. One nursery that took part is continuing with the Chemistories activities and has linked up with the museum in their area.

### Open University collaborations

CfL has collaborated with the Open University (OU) on an intergenerational learning project in the last year.

- The Intergenerational Learning Programme aimed to develop a toolkit to embed the five pillars of learning into a set of 15 family learning activities.
- There is a social benefit where families learn together and encourage healthier habits, leading to overall increase in wellbeing. CfL developed a toolkit for the use of Northamptonshire Carers to deliver interventions around the five pillars of learning. This increased the learning potential of the care delivery staff and long term support to the community. This could have the potential impact of improving health outcomes, freeing up time, and decreasing stress in carers, allowing some additional flex in their responsibilities.



## CASE STUDY

## Campaign for Learning

### Looking forward: Multiply

CfL's involvement in the Government-led Multiply project included an evidence-based and experience-led development of a product for a randomised control trial as part of the 'What Works?' Department for Education (DfE) piece.

- Multiply aims to increase adult numeracy skills and this transformational programme used links to children and child curriculum to encourage confidence, learning disposition, metacognition and self-efficacy to increase employability, as well as support child learning.
- The programme was person-centred and adaptable to cohort needs, being as flexible as possible in recognition of the fact that many adults would be unable to attend due to other commitments which may be considered more of a priority. Not only do adults benefit from the programme, but families also benefit from quality time and a change in disposition towards learning. The economy can benefit from more confident workers more able and open to tasks involving numeracy at work.
- Feedback from the DfE and Institute of Employment Studies was very positive. Around 120 staff will be trained from July 2024, with around 2,400 families in scope to be reached.





# Active IQ

## CASE STUDY

### Active IQ - going carbon neutral

In 2022, our new sport and leisure acquisition, Active IQ, developed its sustainability strategy to 2025. To achieve this they worked with Our Carbon<sup>13</sup> to identify the UN Sustainable Development goals that they wanted to influence in terms of the environment and sustainability. The three identified goals are Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, and Partnerships for the Goals. Together, Active IQ and Our Carbon assessed what they are doing now as well as what they could do in the future to make a more positive impact going forward.

Analysis of energy emissions demonstrated that some of Active IQ's key contributors to emissions include:

- production and purchase of materials
- road, rail and air travel
- energy consumption
- staff commuting
- delivery of physical products
- IT and data storage.

Having established baselines of emissions and processes which create the highest emissions, Active IQ is now on a journey to ensure those emissions can be reduced. The aim is to be fully carbon neutral by the close of 2024, with practices embedded within the company to ensure this sustainable practice continues in 2025 and beyond.

<sup>13</sup> [www.ourcarbon.com](http://www.ourcarbon.com)







## What we will do next to improve our impact on society and the economy

- We'll continue to fund impactful projects through our Social Impact Fund and make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged people outside of our business.
- We'll ensure that this is communicated through effective channels to increase our reach and raise awareness of this good work.
- We'll continue to champion and support the work of Campaign for Learning.
- We'll consider how NCFE can use Active IQ as best practice to look at emissions across the wider organisation.

## Inputs: our enablers

Our inputs, or enablers, are the cornerstone of our Theory of Change (ToC); we need these in place to ensure we make the impact we desire, and continue to do so in the future.

Staff motivated by the purpose-led vision.

Talented, digitally enabled staff, culture of high performance.

Effective organisational process designed around our business model.

Technology and processes fit for purpose enabling the organisation to deliver on its vision.

Collaborative relationships with institutions, employers and third party organisations.

Compliant and financially sustainable organisation.

## Our people: motivated and high-performing

Our people are our number one asset, and they are reflected in every impact highlighted in this report. Without our motivated, high-performing staff, we couldn't have achieved what we have this year. We currently employ over 750 colleagues and more than 700 flexible workers, with our Head Office and the roots of our organisation based in the North East – the most deprived region in England<sup>14</sup>. We've recognised the challenges our colleagues may be facing given the current economic climate, and revised our rewards and benefits package in collaboration with them to ensure they're getting the right support from the organisation. We are a Real Living Wage employer and we're proud that our gender pay gap sits below the UK average. We're recognising more ways to ensure we're an inclusive employer and in turn, ensuring no colleague is left behind. In 2023–24, we launched our disability confidence scheme, redeveloped our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) committee, and joined the Federation of Awarding Bodies' ED&I pledge.

Our colleagues choose to join and remain at NCFE as they're strongly connected to our core purpose as a charity. In our most recent colleague engagement survey, 84% of colleagues responded that they understood how their work contributed to our purpose, and 78% said they felt proud to work at NCFE. Our People Services team was shortlisted for team of the year in the North East Human Resources and Development Awards for organisational impact, and we're committed to creating a culture shift and including our colleagues in the development of the organisation. This year, our People Services team has co-created solutions packages alongside colleagues from across the business, including our Always Learning Loop framework to support colleagues on their own learning journey.

"A change in my own work focus has meant that I am much more closely aligned with business strategy and external organisations. As such I am feeling more closely aligned to the end impact of what NCFE is here to do and the impact we are having."

"I feel proud to be part of NCFE. The qualifications on offer are varied and reach out to all members of the community, very inclusive, fair organisation. I have progressed within my job role, skills, knowledge and qualifications and hopefully will continue to do so."

<sup>14</sup> Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019





## Our people: motivated and high-performing

We encourage our colleagues to promote and advance learning outside of NCFE through activities such as volunteering with organisations closely aligned with our values and behaviours, and we give them the time and opportunity to do this. This year, volunteering has included colleagues taking on positions as school governors, working with youth groups, and embarking on a trip to Zanzibar to work on building facilities within a school, as well as working with learners out there.

**"I'd strongly encourage everyone to think about volunteering. Not only does the charity benefit from your help and time, but you get so much out of it too - thanks to the experience we shared, the 10 of us are now not just colleagues but friends. We worked together as a team, learning what each other's strengths are and our mental and physical health are improved as a result too."**

We're committed to nurturing our talent through supporting their wellbeing and developing their skills. We support almost a quarter of our staff to work flexibly so they can enjoy a work-life balance that fits around family and home commitments. Colleagues can claim up to £200 a year to spend on advancing their knowledge and skills, or learning new ones, as well as being eligible for up to £400 towards an NCFE qualification to further develop their skills. As part of our commitment to developing and nurturing talent - a core pillar within our Vision for our People - in the last year alone, 40% of our vacant roles were offered to colleagues within the business, meaning colleagues were able to develop their career within NCFE.

Our commitment to our employees has helped us to develop a vibrant culture focused on high performance and progression. We provide all colleagues with a host of e-learning opportunities, including access to resources from external organisation, Coaching Culture. In addition, we have an internal coaching team that works with colleagues across the business to support them in achieving their goals and overcoming obstacles, using recognised coaching models. We have a commitment to encouraging colleagues to learn from each other, so have launched 'Communities of Best Practice' which encourage this type of collaborative learning. We also motivate colleagues through an internal rewards and recognition programme aligned to our values and behaviours, as well as through our annual Spotlight Awards.

## Our structure: compliant and financially sustainable

Over the last three years, we've challenged ourselves to utilise NCFE's knowledge, experience, expertise and charitable reserves to do even more to deliver on our charitable purpose. We're proud to have led on a range of initiatives and programmes, including:

- the Assessment Innovation Fund, where we have helped pilot, test and trial novel and innovative new approaches to assessment in our sector
- driving best practice and continuous improvement in teaching across further education through the Centre of Excellence, run by WorldSkills UK in partnership with NCFE
- partnering with Good for ME Good for FE, a unique social impact project looking to create a sustainable programme of community action by encouraging staff and students at colleges across the country to undertake a wide range of volunteering and fundraising activities
- continuing to support the fantastic work of the Helena Kennedy Foundation by offering bursaries to learners most in need of help with their education.





## Our structure: compliant and financially sustainable

In a sector which is facing significant financial pressure and a requirement to deliver more complex and robust assessments, we're increasingly looking to shape our awarding and end-point assessment organisations around the characteristics of technical expertise, strong governance, resilience and financial sustainability. We've made significant progress in embedding these characteristics internally through:

- the development of robust systems and processes that are efficient and support continuous improvement
- the implementation of a new risk management system to underpin improvements in our management of risks and provide opportunities to collaborate on effective risk controls
- the introduction of a decentralised Quality Management System (QMS) with the support of colleagues across the organisation
- beginning the implementation of our foundational transformation projects that will underpin business, financial and compliance improvements, including:
  - Business Central that will allow us to better understand the performance of our products and customers while also improving financial controls and procedures
  - Customer Management Transformation (CMT) which will provide us with better, more consistent and higher quality data and insight to allow us to better support our customers.
- stabilising and strengthening our awarding organisation and its capability and capacity through a series of targeted investments while continuing to ensure the charity's long-term financial sustainability through a clear, multi-year, phased plan that will see it return to generating surpluses in 2024-25. The financial sustainability of NCFE is critical in allowing us to reinvest in the charity and its social impact projects and at the end of 2023-24, we're pleased to report that we're tracking ahead of plan.





## Our relationships: collaboration

We've continued cultivating relationships with organisations across the sector, particularly with institutions whose values and purpose align with our own. For example, several projects have been delivered alongside the Greater Manchester Learner Provider Network (GMLPN), including the continuation of the 'Autism into Apprenticeships' initiative, which has evolved into supporting employers and educators to be more confident in their inclusivity of practice. We've also developed relationships with organisations such as Stockport Homes, diversifying our offer and delivering qualifications to learners outside of our previous remit.

We've increased our reach globally, for example working alongside Save the Children by accrediting their qualifications for safeguarding children which are now being delivered across the globe in more than 30 countries, in three languages. We've continued our investment in the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, fostering and promoting exceptional teaching practice in the FE teaching workforce, and we've also continued to invest in initiatives such as the Helena Kennedy Foundation, funding bursaries which to help learners progress into further and higher study.



## Conclusion

Our 2024 Impact Report has demonstrated that as an organisation, NCFE is making an impact in the areas we've identified as important; however, there's still work to be done to ensure that this continues and is measurable.

- Our learners report they have increased confidence to move into further study or employment following completion of an NCFE qualification, but we'd like to explore ways of measuring this impact in more meaningful ways.
- Our providers report they have a good relationship with NCFE, however there is some way to go to improve the resources we deliver to educators and learners.
- Our stakeholders report we have the potential to be a strong voice in the sector, but work must continue to ensure we are heard.
- Our wider reaching impact includes touching the lives of those who are disadvantaged, through initiatives such as the Social Impact Fund, however more work can be done to measure the impact of those beneficiaries.

We'll endeavour to take these commitments forward into 2025, and beyond.