

Engaging with Evidence

A survey of teachers and leaders

2024

Education
Endowment
Foundation

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About the Education Endowment Foundation

The Education Endowment Foundation is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. We do this by supporting schools, colleges, and early years settings to improve teaching and learning through better use of evidence.

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Contents

Report summary

The past decade or more has seen a growth in educational research in England, with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) alone having commissioned over one hundred and sixty randomised controlled trials in its first ten years of existence. Teachers are engaging with research in many ways, attending conferences, partaking in professional development programmes such as the National Professional Qualifications, and accessing resources like the **EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit.**

In February 2024, the EEF commissioned six questions that were asked of teachers and school leaders through the survey app Teacher Tapp. The questions related to research evidence, and its application in everyday teaching practice. This report summarises the findings from the questions, with some sub-group analyses looking into the roles and ages of respondents, and their answer responses.

Who is this report for?

This report offers insight into how teachers and school leaders report engaging with research evidence. It is aimed primarily at those who work in teacher professional development, although the contents may be of interest to all working in education.

Key findings

01 **An overwhelming majority of school leaders report having at least sometimes consulted research evidence before making changes to practice,** suggesting that such behaviour now constitutes a pro-social norm in the English education system.

02 **Those working in school consistently report finding it hard to apply educational research to their practice,** highlighting the need for improved support in translating research evidence into improvements in teaching and learning.

03 **Teachers and leaders report a range of preferred ways of engaging with educational research, including those involving social interaction.** Formats like conferences, events, and peer discussions were the most commonly selected methods for engagement, whereas email newsletters and top-down communications from senior leadership were less popular.

04 **Sources from outside of school may have greater influence over the practice of senior leaders and headteachers than that of classroom teachers.** This is particularly when it comes to improving the attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils, when senior staff are most likely to refer to guidance from the EEF.

05 **Those responsible for communicating research findings and other guidance to schools may need to work harder to inform the work of classroom teachers,** and develop clear theories for how their resources and products will meet the needs of both teachers and leaders.

> **"We know that using research evidence can help education professionals, not only by guiding them towards more effective interventions of approaches, but also away from those that might not be worth their time or efforts."**
>
> Professor Becky Francis, CEO, Education Endowment Foundation.

Methods

This survey investigated teacher and school leader attitudes to and self-reported use of research evidence. To access a large sample of teachers and leaders, the EEF commissioned six questions through the daily survey app Teacher Tapp, that were asked of users from 12-18 February 2024 (see page 10 for sample details and questions commissioned).

Most questions had been previously answered by Teacher Tapp users around a year or more ago. Asking recurring questions enables corroboration of trends across years, reducing the chances of being misled by outliers. This said, some questions or option responses were tweaked to ensure the data was relevant to our focus. Some questions were also newly commissioned.

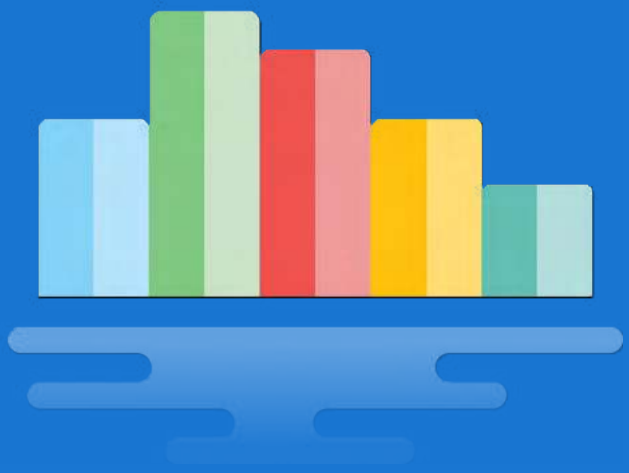
As part of the registration process for Teacher Tapp, users are asked to consent to the app's terms and conditions, which includes participation in research projects. Users also provide their school's name and postcode, and their role in the school. Due to the large average daily sample size (>8,000 responses), and the use of sample weights that ensure the data reflects the 'phase, funding-status, age, gender, job role and regional characteristics of the teacher workforce in England', the Teacher Tapp sample is representative according to observable characteristics (see here).

There is nonetheless a risk that teachers and leaders who complete surveys and use the app are not fully representative of the population as a whole.

Sample summary

For five of the six questions, the overall response rate ranged from 9,181 respondents to 9,313. One question was targeted at only school leaders (senior leadership team members, and headteachers), so this consisted of the smaller sample of 2,312.

For further detail on the sample, including median sample sizes for subgroups see 'sample details' on page 10.



Note: All findings described in this report fall outside of the maximum margin of error of the data collected, giving confidence that the reported percentage differences are precise. This is also the case for the reporting of sub-group differences (e.g., the difference between classroom teacher and headteacher responses).

Analysis



To what extent do school leaders engage with research evidence as part of their practice, and how do they do this?

When asked, 94% of school leaders reported 'trying to find research evidence before I ask teachers to make a practice change' either 'Always' (30%), 'Often' (40%), or 'Sometimes' (24%), with less than 5% saying they 'Never' try to find evidence (Fig. 1).

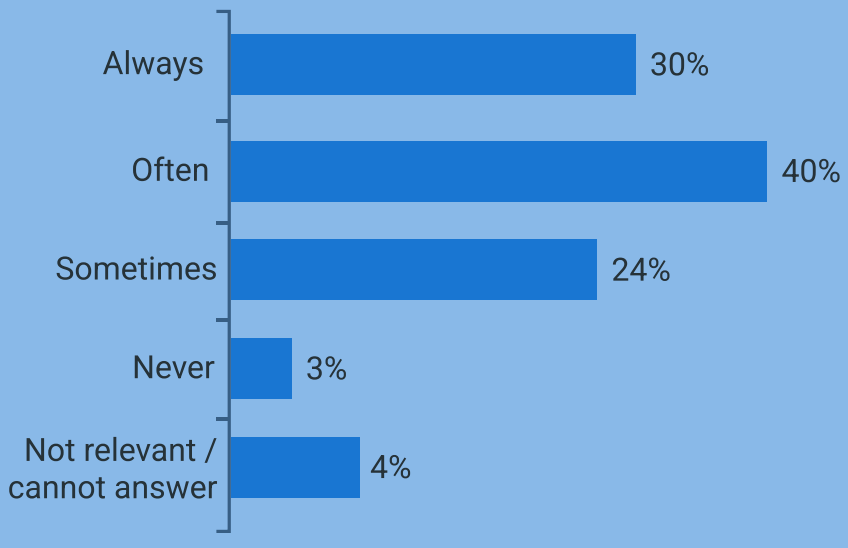
This suggests that an overwhelming majority of school leaders see engaging with research evidence as an important element of teaching and learning.

94%

of school leaders report using research evidence

Figure 1. I try to find research evidence before I ask teachers to make a practice change

n = 2,312.



Analysis

When asked about their preferred ways of engaging with education research, both school leaders and teachers reported wanting to engage in many ways, suggesting there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to accessing research evidence (Fig. 2).

'Social media activity', 'attending conferences and events', and 'sharing between peers' were the most selected preferences, suggesting that teachers and school leaders may enjoy engaging with educational research more when it involves social interaction and peer networking.

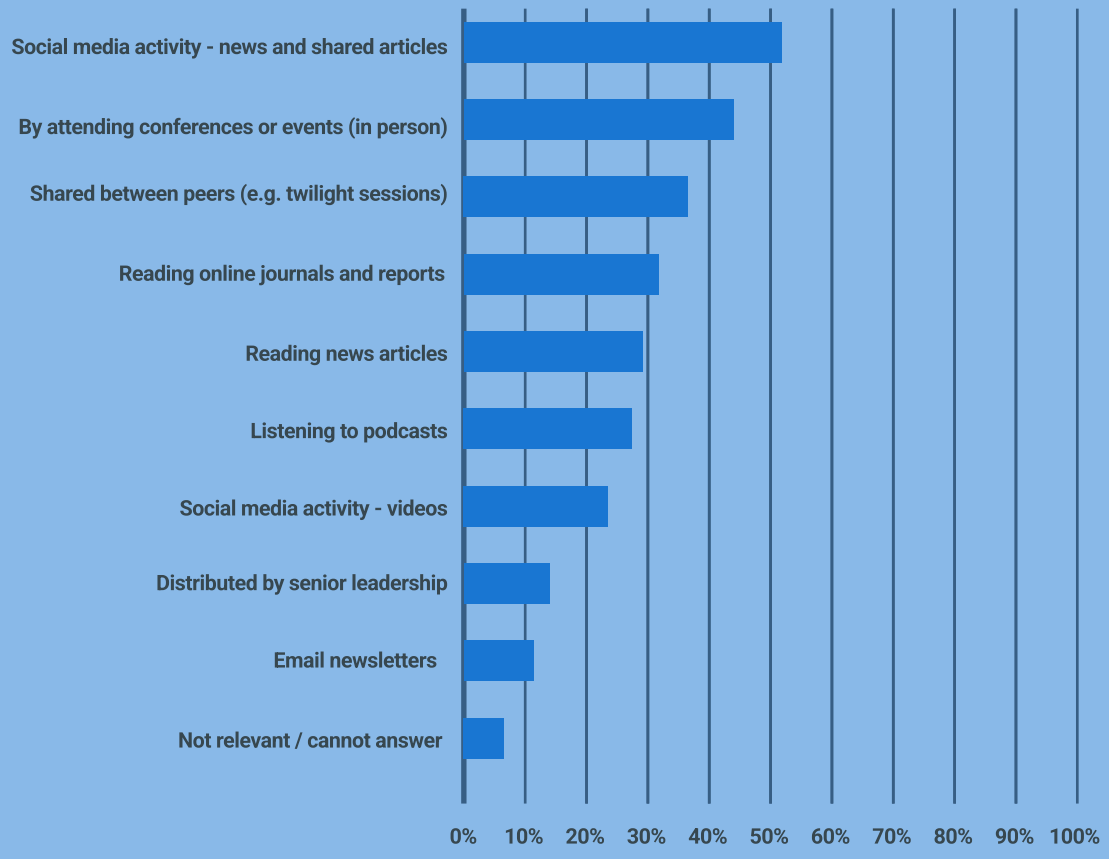
Conversely, engaging via 'email newsletters' and 'sources distributed by senior leadership' was consistently less popular than most other formats (only 11% and 14% preferred this overall, respectively). This could imply that passive dissemination of research evidence is a less effective strategy than more active approaches.

These preferences were largely consistent across different age groups, although respondents in their 20s were less likely than the over 50s group to report 'Reading online journals and reports' (24% vs. 36%) or 'Reading news articles' (23% vs. 33%) and more likely to prefer videos through social media (31% vs. 18%).

Certain modes for engagement were more popular with headteachers. For example, 'attending conferences or events (in person)' and 'reading online journals and reports' were only cited by 37% and 27% of classroom teachers, respectively, whereas 60% and 40% of headteachers cited these as preferred methods. Whilst this could be due to personal preferences, it is also possible that classroom teachers have fewer opportunities to attend conferences, or protected time to read journals and reports.

Figure 2. What is your preferred way to engage with education research?

n = 9,220



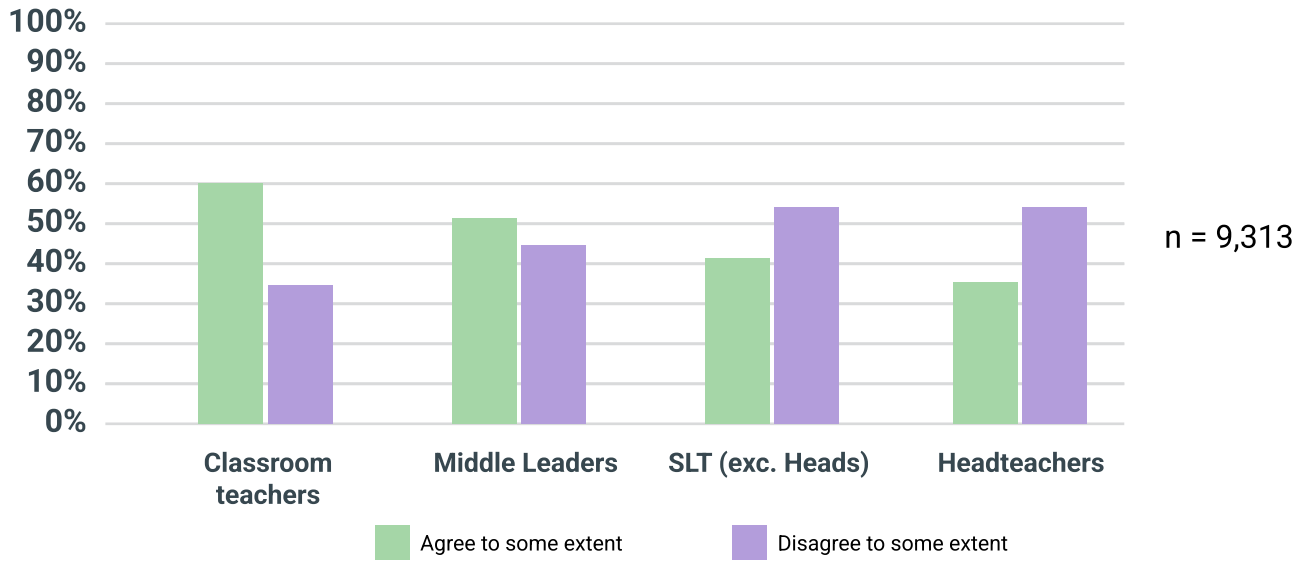
How does academic research influence school leader and teacher practice, compared to other sources of guidance and support?

Just over half of (54%) teachers and school leaders agree they find it 'hard to apply educational research to my practice' to a greater or lesser extent (4% said 'Strongly agree', 21% 'Somewhat agree', and 29% 'Slightly agree').

There was variation in responses to this question according to respondents' roles, with headteachers and senior leaders much less likely to report finding it hard to apply educational research (only 36% and 42% to a greater or lesser extent, respectively), compared to classroom teachers (60%), and middle leaders (52%).



Figure 3. I find it hard to apply educational research to my practice



Teachers and leaders reported finding the application of academic research difficult, particularly during the first five years of teaching: 60% of those with less than 5 years' experience compared to 49% of those with over 20 years' experience. This said, the proportion of experienced teachers reporting this as a challenge suggests more work could be done to support engagement with and application of research evidence for all teachers and leaders.

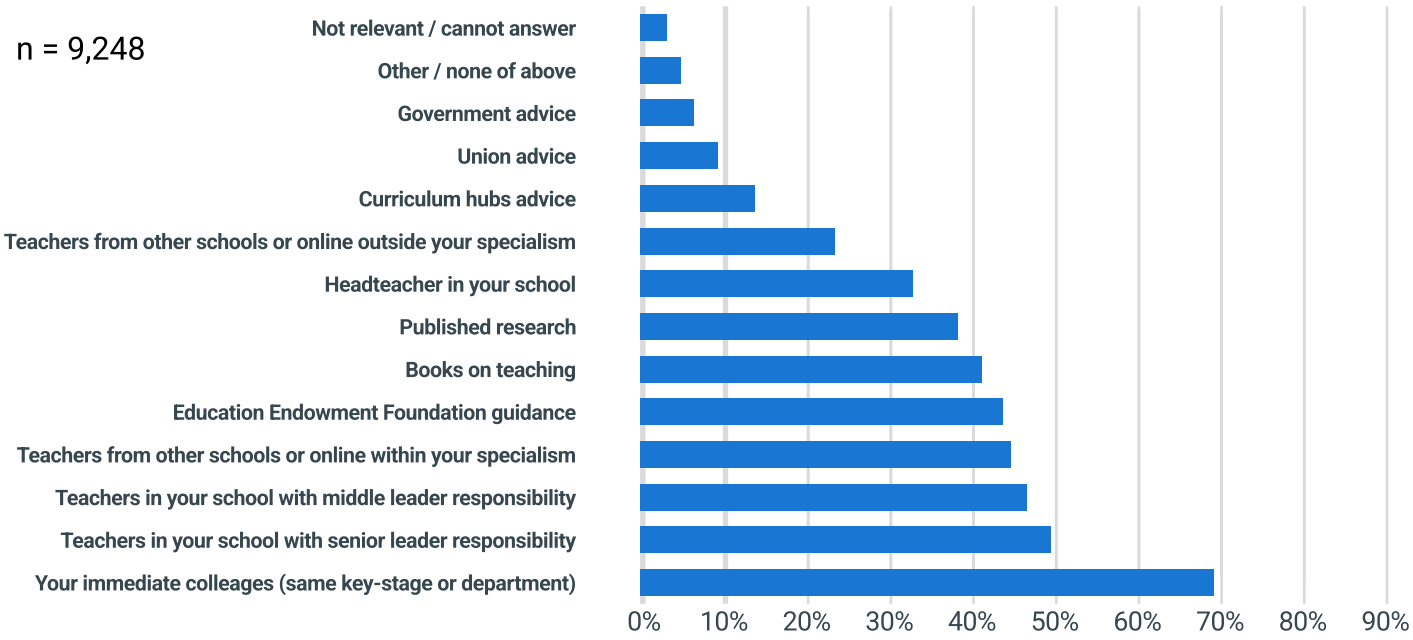
Analysis

Leaders and teachers report drawing on external advice to inform their work, though they rely more heavily on guidance from within their own schools.

When asked 'Whose advice do you regularly apply to your teaching practice', 'Published research' is cited by many (37%), but not as often as peers (68%), senior colleagues in one's own school (46% middle leaders, 48% senior leaders and 32% headteachers), teachers from similar schools (23%), or the EEF (42 %) (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Whose advice do you regularly apply to your teaching practice?



Like other question responses, the more senior the respondent the more likely they are to report applying 'Published research' to their practice (30% for Classroom teachers, 41% for Middle leaders, 50% for SLT, and 49% for Headteachers).

For SLT and headteachers, 'EEF guidance' was cited as the most trusted source of advice (65% & 57%, respectively), followed by 'Immediate colleagues' (55% & 41%), 'Books on teaching' (51% & 44%) and 'Published research' (50% & 49%).

The more senior the respondent the more likely they are to report applying 'Published research' to their practice.

Analysis

When asked which sources 'you trust when making decisions to improve your teaching practice', 'Academic researchers' were the third most frequently selected source, after 'school teachers in schools like mine' and 'Education Endowment Foundation guidance' (Fig. 5).

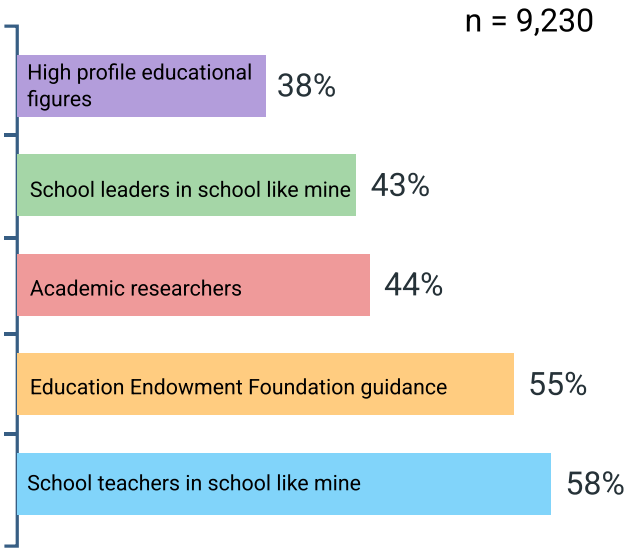
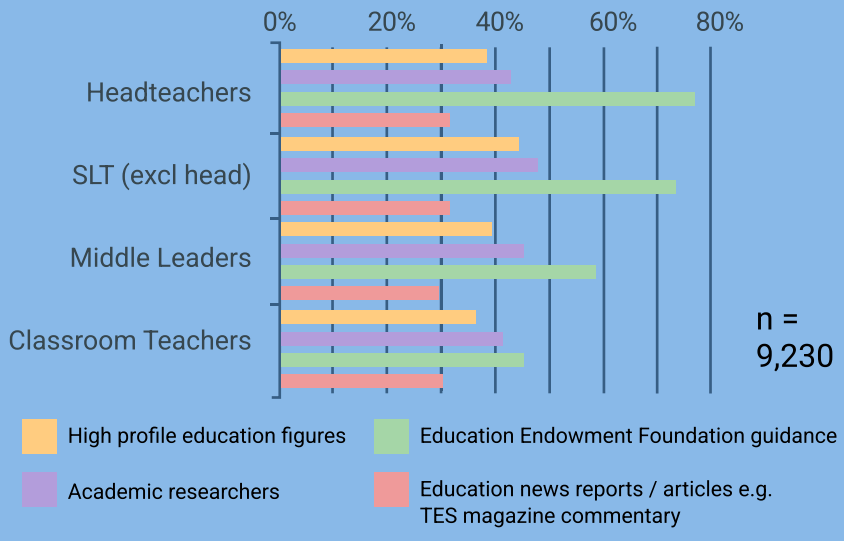


Figure 5. What sources do you trust when making decisions to improve your teaching

Answers varied according to respondent roles, however. Senior leaders and headteachers were more likely to report trusting fellow leaders, and the EEF (Figure. 6).

Figure 6. What sources do you trust when making decisions to improve your teaching practice



This may imply the value of peer networks in informing teaching practice: classroom teachers trust teachers in schools like their own more than any other source, and school leaders are more likely to trust leaders working in similar schools to theirs than academic researchers. It is noteworthy that levels of trust in academic researchers are relatively consistent across the different roles within school.

This said, the high levels of trust shown towards the EEF by leaders and headteachers does suggest that, when brokered for specific audiences, academic research, can garner high levels of trust amongst practitioners.

Which sources are most trusted when it comes to improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils?

When it comes to addressing the needs of more disadvantaged pupils, including those eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) and Free School Meals (FSM), school leaders are far less likely to refer to advice from academic researchers who were the third most cited source (see Fig. 7). They were far more likely to refer to the EEF, which is interesting given that the EEF's resources are founded upon academic research.

This may suggest that the EEF's brokerage of research evidence increases the accessibility and usability of research evidence, helping to bridge the evidence and practice gap. It may also be that the EEF's mission to break the link between socioeconomic background and educational attainment signals the relevance of its guidance to this specific school priority, or else the signposting to EEF in Department for Education guidance on spending Pupil Premium funding.



Figure 7. When seeking advice on how to improve the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (pupils in receipt of PP/FSM) I use...

n = 9,220

	Classroom teachers	SLT (exc. Heads)	Headteachers
EEF Guidance	34%	68%	78%
Advice from school leaders in schools like mine	49%	47%	54%
Academic researchers	15%	22%	22%
High profile educational figures (e.g., authors of education books)	13%	18%	19%

Conclusions and recommendations



This report summarises responses to six questions about how teachers and school leaders engage with research evidence, and other sources, as part of their daily practice. The report finds that:

01 **An overwhelming majority of school leaders report having at least sometimes consulted research evidence before making changes to practice,** suggesting that such behaviour now constitutes a pro-social norm in the English education system.

02 **Those working in school consistently report finding it hard to apply educational research to their practice,** highlighting the need for improved support in translating research evidence into improvements in teaching and learning.

03 **Teachers and leaders report a range of preferred ways of engaging with educational research, including those involving social interaction.** Formats like conferences, events, and peer discussions were the most commonly selected methods for engagement, whereas email newsletters and top-down communications from senior leadership were less popular.

04 **Sources from outside of school may have greater influence over the practice of senior leaders and headteachers than that of classroom teachers.** This is particularly when it comes to improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, when senior staff are most likely to refer to guidance from the EEF.

05 **Those responsible for communicating research findings and other guidance to schools may need to work harder to inform the work of classroom teachers,** and develop clear theories for how their resources and products will meet the needs of both teachers and leaders.

The EEF continues to listen to the experiences and needs of the profession, particularly around the use of research evidence. Further research is required to better understand how research evidence can support teaching practice, and the most impactful ways of going about this.

Sample details

These following two pages provide further detail of the data collection process, including information about the sample used to inform this report and the questions and option responses used by Teacher Tapp.

Sample description

For five of the six questions, the overall response rate ranged from 9,181 respondents to 9,313. One question was targeted at only school leaders (senior leadership team members, and headteachers), so this consisted of the smaller sample of 2,312. The median sample size across the seven questions for subgroups, including phase, region and role in school was as follows:

Phase	Region	Roles
Primary, 3,115	East of England, 1,089	Classroom teacher, 3,333
Secondary, 6105	London, 1,116	Middle leader. 3,619
	Midlands, 1,562	Senior Leadership Team, 1,776
	North West, 1,018	Headteacher, 520
	South East, 1,896	
	South West, 995	
	Yorkshire and North East, 1,139	

References and data sources

Question	Date asked	Unique responders	Option responses
What sources do you trust when making decisions to improve your teaching practice?	12/02/2024	9,230	School leaders in schools like mine; School teachers in schools like mine; High profile educational figures (e.g. authors of edu-books); Academic researchers; Education consultants; Initial teacher training colleagues; Local system leaders (e.g. Trust leads; local authority colleagues etc.); Ofsted guidance; Education Endowment Foundation guidance ; Educational news reports / articles e.g. TES magazine commentary; None of these sources; Not relevant / cannot answer.
Whose advice do you regularly apply to your teaching practice?	13/02/2024	9,248	Your immediate colleagues (same key-stage or department); Teachers in your school with middle leader responsibility; Teachers in your school with senior leader responsibility; Headteacher in your school; Teachers from other schools or online outside your specialism; Teachers from other schools or online within your specialism; Union advice; Government advice; Education Endowment Foundation guidance ; Curriculum Hubs advice ; Books on teaching; Published research; Other / none of the above; Not relevant / cannot answer.
I find it hard to apply educational research to my practice	14/02/2024	9,313	Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Slightly agree; Slightly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree; Not relevant / cannot answer.
I try to find research evidence before I ask teachers to make a practice change.	14/02/2024	2,312 Only asked of senior leaders and headteachers	Always; Often; ; Sometimes; Never; Not relevant / cannot answer.
What is your preferred way to engage with educational research?	16/02/2024	9,220	Shared between peers (e.g. twilight sessions); Distributed by senior leadership; By attending conferences or events (in person); Reading online journals and report; Reading news articles; Email newsletters; Social media activity – videos; Social media activity - news and shared articles; Listening to podcasts; Not relevant / cannot answer.
When seeking advice on how to improve the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (pupils in receipt of PP/ FSM) I use...	16/02/2024	9,181	Shared between peers (e.g. twilight sessions); Distributed by senior leadership; By attending conferences or events (in person); Reading online journals and report; Reading news articles; Email newsletters; Social media activity – videos; Social media activity - news and shared articles; Listening to podcasts; Not relevant / cannot answer.

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