EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

EVALUATION OF THE PRACTITIONER RESEARCH PROGRAMME

A Final Report to the Education and Training Foundation

SQW – NOVEMBER 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Practitioner Research Programme

The Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) is founded on the expectation that a research-literate and engaged Further, Adult and Vocational Education (FAVE) workforce will improve their skills and pedagogical practice to generate better learning experiences for themselves and their students. The effect of this could be amplified if an individual's research builds an understanding of the role of research in teaching across colleagues and managers such that they consider implementing learning arising from practitioner research. The ripples of impact spread even further if research findings and actions are shared across practitioner groups and between FAVE institutions.

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has supported staff across the FAVE sector to explore their research ideas and build research skills to inform practice. The PRP is one of a suite of ETF action research and research development programmes funded by the Department for Education[1]. This flagship ETF programme is delivered in partnership with the University of Sunderland Centre for Excellence in Teaching Training (SUNCETT).

In total, £520,000 has been awarded to SUNCETT over two academic years (2018-2020)[2] to deliver the Master of Arts (MA) short course and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) PRP programmes to approximately 50 practitioners per year, with £5,200 grant funding allocated to institutions for each learner, which covers the cost of the programme. SUNCETT summarise their programme as having three key aims[3]:

- to utilise the experiences of FE practitioners to integrate research into practice, and maintain this focus throughout all elements of the programme
- to offer a coherent interdisciplinary conceptual approach to the advancement of knowledge and the improvement of practice in FE
- to pioneer a new approach to supporting the development of research at MA/MPhil/PhD Level.

There are two strands to the current PRP, the MA short course and the MPhil programme. Both strands will accept applications from any region of England, any type of provider and any type of practitioner role, including those who lead curriculum development and delivery.

[1] Other opportunities include the Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) programme and Practice Development Groups (PDGs)
[2] The level of funding allocated by ETF to the PRP is determined by the funding available to ETF from the Department for Education (DfE), and therefore is subject to change
[3] Information provided in an email to SQW from SUNCETT in March 2019

- The **MA short course** is intended for practitioners who would like the opportunity to develop a research idea. It allows practitioners the opportunity to explore research into teaching practice over a single academic year, achieving a University Certificate in Post Graduate Study in Advancing Pedagogy in Post Compulsory Education and Training worth 30 Masters credits.
- The **MPhil programme** is based on the Research Development Fellowship (RDF) Programme which was offered from 2009. The programme offers the same first year experience as its forerunner[4]. Participants have the option to continue for a second year and gain a full MPhil research degree in Educational Research.

The Practitioner Research Programme has six guiding principles, as presented in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1: PRP Guiding Principles

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION
Principle 1:	Direct, practical, cooperative and mutual engagement in practice-focused research is a central principle in the SUNCETT-ETF PRP.
Principle 2:	Each PRP participant should have the support of a research-active mentor from a University who has previously worked as a teacher in the FAVE sector and who has maintained direct contact with the sector.
Principle 3:	Attending a number of research development workshops where practitioner-researchers work alongside a research-active mentor of the SUNCETT team helps practitioners to begin to engage in the research process by enabling them to talk openly about the "problem in practice" and to think about it more carefully in order to try to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of the problem and the extent to which the work of other researchers might contribute to helping to address the problem.
Principle 4:	The mentor (supervisor) and the practitioner-researcher embark on a process of cooperation and mutual engagement in identifying an intervention that may potentially address the problem in practice.
Principle 5:	Each workshop is designed to reflect relevant stages in the research process.
Principle 6:	Each practitioner-researcher is expected to prepare, present and justify the findings of their research.

Source: Gregson, M., & Spedding, T. (2018)[5].

[4] The RDF held three, three-day residential research development events and allocated a research mentor to each practitioner. Participants were eligible for MA credits from the University of Sunderland.

[5] Gregson, M., & Spedding, T. (2018)[5]. Learning together: Evaluating and improving further adult and vocational and education through practice-focused research. In C. Nägele & B. E. Stalder (Eds.), *Trends in vocational education and training research. Proceedings of the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER).* Vocational Education and Training Network (VETNET).

Programme structure

Each course is structured as a series of modules, with three compulsory residential workshops held in Sunderland[6]. Residentials bring participants on each course together and offer a blend of group and mentor support time, research sharing, development of research skills relevant to the area of enquiry, and discussion of key concepts and theories, with occasional sessions from visiting education researchers. Residentials were moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic, and were delivered as 'virtual development workshops', largely following the same structure as in-person residential workshops. Each practitioner has a named mentor (one of the three programme team members) from SUNCETT who deliver one-to-one tutorials remotely between workshops.

The PRP encourages practitioner-led research activity and builds research capacity by means of engagement in rigorous and robust collaborative educational research and Joint Practice Development. This was defined by Fielding et al. (2005)[7] as '*learning new ways of working through mutual* engagement *that opens up and shares practices with others'*. The underpinning philosophy of the PRP draws on a large body of evidence both in its design and its curriculum[8]. It emphasises the mutuality of research activity and the importance of the process and not just the research output.

Research outputs from the PRP are developed, owned, implemented and evaluated by practitioners based on their research evidence. They are not imposed upon practitioners from outside or above. According to SUNCETT[9], the programme provides a counterpoint to other approaches to practitioner-research which tend to be based individual research experiences by Higher Education Institutions or external consultants. The approach of peer-to-peer learning, generating parity of esteem between higher and further education, examining craft and the importance of practice, and shifting the focus from targets to teaching and learning, are all features of the PRP.

An annual ETF Practitioner Research Conference is held in July each year, to celebrate and disseminate the research undertaken on the programme. Attendance is not limited to course participants, but is open to all practitioners (including potential future applicants), employers and

[6] Residential workshops are spread across the academic year; three two-day workshops are undertaken on the MA short course and three three-day workshops are undertaken during each year of the MPhil programme.
[7] Fielding, M. et al. (2005) *Factors Influencing the Transfer of Good Practice.* DFES Publications, London, pp. 41-53.
[8] For example: Coffield, F. (2010) *Yes, but what has Semmelweis to do with my professional development as a tutor*? London: LSN (Learning and Skills Network), Hyland, T. (2019) *Embodied learning In Vocational Education and Training.* Journal of Vocational Education and Training. 71(1), Sennett, R. (2008) The Craftsman. London: Penguin.
[9] SUNCETT (2017) *Illustrative Examples: SUNCETT - RDF Impact Grids and Case Studies*. University of Sunderland (unpublished).

researchers.

Programme reach and retention

The combined enrolment for all PRP courses across two academic years (2018-19 and 2019-20) was 92 practitioners. The programme has a very high retention rate with 95% completing.

Table 1-2: Programme reach and in-year retention

	ENROLLED	WITHDREW	RETENTION RATE
2019-20	41	2	95%
MA short course	19	1	95%
MPhil year 1	13	0	100%
MPhil year 2	9	1	89%
2018-19	51	3	94%
MA short course	*22*	*2*	*90%*
MPhil year 1	*13*	*0*	*100%*
MPhil year 2	*16*	*1*	*94%*
Total	*92*	*5*	*95%*

Source: SUNCETT monitoring data

The evaluation

SQW were commissioned by ETF to undertake an evaluation of the impact of the PRP (2018-20). The evaluation was conducted between March 2019 and October 2020. The evaluation aimed to:

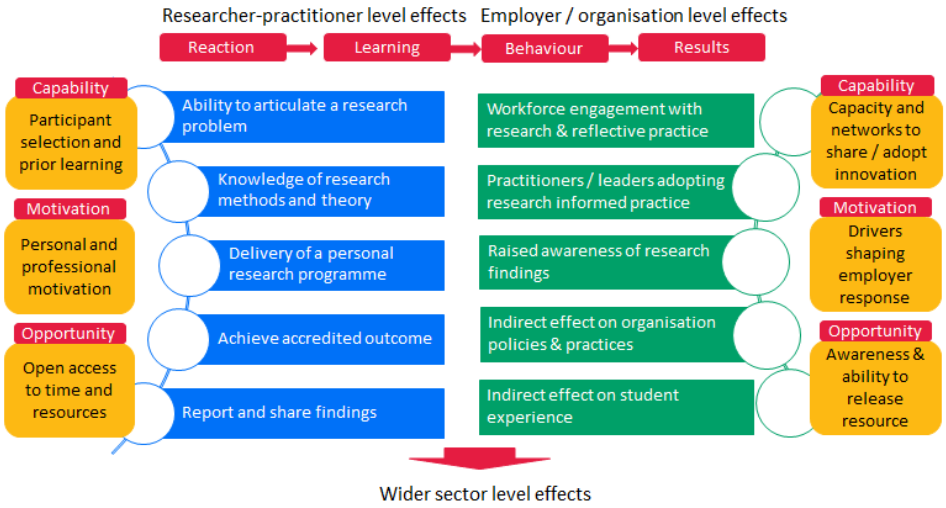
- Inform ongoing development of the programme, identifying the elements of the programme which work well and those that work less well. In doing so, the evaluation will help support the programme's future development.
- Generate evidence for ETF, the Department for Education (DfE) and wider sector of the impact of research, the professionalisation of the sector and the immediate impacts of changed behaviours on practitioner practice, organisational change and effect on student experience and outcomes.

Methodology

The evaluation was delivered through systematic collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, guided by the evaluation framework presented in Figure 1-1.

The evaluation framework identified the need to contextualise the impact of the programme for both individuals and their employer organisations. Those aspects of the evaluation that utilise the Kirkpatrick model, (satisfaction with the learning process, knowledge acquired and implemented and its direct effects) were sought alongside exploration of the drivers and influencers of participation and their effects on individual practitioners and employer organisations (the COM-B model that assesses Capability, Opportunity, Motivation and Behaviours).

Figure 1-1: Evaluation framework



Source: SQW

A three-phase approach has been used to undertake the evaluation.

- A scoping phase which involved stakeholder interviews, document review and baseline scoping, and the development of an evaluation framework and research tools to inform the duration of the evaluation study. The scoping phase was completed in April 2019, and a report was produced and submitted to ETF in May 2019.
- The second phase of the evaluation ran from May 2019 to March 2020 and involved qualitative and quantitative data collection to inform an interim report submitted to ETF in March 2020.
    - It also involved an analysis of 186 impact grids[10]. Impact grids were submitted to SUNCETT from cohorts studying between 2009-10 and 2018-19 to understand the longitudinal reach and impact of the PRP and previous RDF programme. A working paper of the analysis was submitted to ETF in March 2020 (see Annex B).
- The third and final phase of the evaluation ran from April 2020 to September 2020 and builds on interim findings from phase two of the evaluation. The final phase of the evaluation has involved additional qualitative and quantitative data collection, to inform this evaluation report.

Data collection methods across phase two and three involved:

- **Focus groups at PRP research development workshops** to explore motivations, opportunity to join, learning, dissemination and implementation. Eight focus groups were carried out at PRP research development workshops:

[10] Impact grids are short summaries of the impact that a research project has had both over time and across different stakeholders. Grids are completed by all practitioners at the end of their course.

    - two were undertaken at the third residential workshop for MPhil participants who enrolled in September 2017 and were therefore at the end of their second year of study (June 21st 2019)
    - two were undertaken at the first residential workshop for MA short course participants who enrolled in September 2019 (October 25th 2019)
    - one was undertaken at the first residential workshop for MPhil participants who enrolled in September 2018, beginning their second year of study (November 29th 2019)
    - Three were undertaken at the final online workshop for MPhil participants who enrolled in September 2019 and were therefore at the end of their first year of study (June 5th, 2020).
- **Case studies of individual research practitioners** to capture personal narratives of the experience and effect of undertaking the programme, alongside reflections of organisational impact. Twelve case studies have been developed. Each case study comprises an interview with the practitioner, an interview with their employer (i.e. a manager with the greatest involvement with the practitioner's participation), and an interview with their mentor from SUNCETT[11]. All twelve case studies are included in a separate Annex document.
- **Consultations with employers** to capture organisational engagement and changed behaviours. Seventeen consultations have been undertaken with employers of practitioners; 13 by phone, and four face to face. The term employer is used in this report to refer to line managers, heads of departments/faculties or senior leadership in the institution the practitioner works in.
- **Online surveys of 68 participants** to explore motivations, opportunity to participate, satisfaction, learning, sharing findings and implementation. Given that participants are at different stages of their study, three surveys were developed – a pre-survey for participants at the start of the course, an interim survey for MPhil participants who are surveyed at the end of their first year of study, and a post-survey for participants at the end of their course. All practitioners were invited to participate in at least one survey, with some invited to participate in a pre and a post survey. These respondents were treated separately as they related to different programmes. Survey responses from across the three surveys were therefore combined into one set, with an overall total of 68[12] unique respondents included in the survey analysis. As the surveys were adapted and changed over the course of the programme, some questions were not asked in certain surveys which has resulted in differing response numbers for

[11] One case study does not include an interview with a mentor.
[12] This figure of 68 includes the Post MA survey response and their Pre/Interim MPhil response as separate respondents.

certain questions. Annex A gives a more detailed overview of data considerations relating to the survey.

- **Consultations with sector stakeholders** to understand the contribution of the PRP to the sector. Consultations were undertaken with seven stakeholders from within the FAVE sector, including from SUNCETT, ETF and SET, and academics who have undertaken research in the sector.
- **Analysis of documents and data**.
    - Monitoring and progress data received from SUNCETT
    - Web analytics data received from ETF for the PRP webpage
    - Documentation including dissemination material and participant abstracts.

Data considerations

This report should be read with the following considerations in mind.

- **Timing**. The effect of participation in research on an individual is part of a lifelong journey of professional development. The effect of research findings in informing practice can also be part of a longer-term cultural shift aligning organisational policy with collective practice. The data captured by the evaluation should be seen within this context as a snapshot of early impact amongst practitioners. Many had not yet completed their research projects or disseminated their progress or final projects beyond their immediate teams. There was limited data from interviewees, impact grids, or surveys describing the scale of dissemination or the reach of research ideas. Partly this was due to timing, but it is also not something that FAVE practitioners are yet habituated to.
- **The impact of COVID-19 on data collection**. FAVE providers were closed to students in mid-March as a result of COVID-19. Practitioners and employers were required to adapt to the conditions of operating under the COVID-19 lockdown and preparing for delivery under social distancing guidelines and were therefore busier than usual. At this time evaluation data collection was still ongoing. The evaluation team sought to enable participation in the evaluation without it being perceived as a burden or a requirement. In practice this meant that requests for interview and survey participation were not followed up with regular reminders. Consequently, the response rate to surveys and employer interviews conducted between May and July 2020 was lower than anticipated. However, we do not believe that the reduction in sample sizes has affected the findings as these were quite consistent in previous survey iterations.
- **Self-selection of participants and self-reported data.** Feedback from practitioners (via surveys, focus groups and case study consultations), employers and mentors was self-reported and therefore is subject to bias. The evaluation mitigated this by stating that feedback would be anonymised and aggregated with other responses, however this does not eliminate all bias. Further,

participation in the evaluation was optional, people did not have to take part or provide insights if they did not want to. Consequently, the findings may not be fully representative of all practitioners and employers involved. However, given the scale of the programme and the reach of the evaluation, neither will they be atypical; the survey sample is largely representative of the population (in terms of provider type, academic qualification, etc.).

- **Survey responses.** As some respondents were invited to complete multiple surveys for each programme, a number of respondents were identified as duplicates in questions which were asked across multiple surveys. To avoid duplication, their most recent response has been included in the analysis, with the exception of those practitioners who completed the MA and MPhil. These respondents were treated separately as they related to different programmes. Annex A gives a more detailed overview of data considerations relating to the survey.

Report structure

This report is a draft final evaluation report of the Practitioner Research Programme (2018-20).

This report is structured to reflect the COM-B and Kirkpatrick models. The report includes the following sections:

- Reaction and learning
- Opportunity
- Motivation
- Capability
- Behaviour and outcomes
- Key findings and recommendations

This report is supported by three annexes. Annex A provides an overview of how the online survey was disseminated, and data considerations involved in analysis. Annex B contains an in-depth analysis of programme impact grids (2009-2019). Annex C contains the 12 case studies undertaken as part of this evaluation. Excerpts from these case studies have been included throughout this report.

2. REACTION AND LEARNING

Reaction and learning: summary

Participants enjoy and value their learning experiences. They particularly appreciate the programme delivery team feedback and mentoring, the opportunity to participate in residentials and being part of a cohort of peer learners.

The standards of learning were said to be challenging but achievable.

Some design changes were suggested including more tutor time, more facilitated networking of peers and better communication.

The cost of attending residentials (in terms of travel time and money) were burdensome to some but did not stop them from participating.

Participants learned about educational theory and the research process through developing and addressing their own research problem.

Most participants chose to explore aspects of curriculum design particularly as they relate to teaching maths and English.

There has been a 95% completion rate and a 100% pass rate.

This section summarises how practitioners react to the programme in terms of their satisfaction and what they value about the learning experience. It will also explore the areas of investigation that practitioners have undertaken, and describe the range of different studies undertaken and the types of methods that were adopted by practitioners in their research.

Reaction

Practitioners reflected on the strengths of the programme, and areas of improvement. This was supplemented by interviews with employers, mentors and stakeholders who provided their thoughts on practitioner experience. Almost all survey respondents (47 of 52) reported that the programme had met their expectations fully, whilst the remaining five reported it had partly met their expectations.

> “The level of knowledge of the lecturers on that course is high. And the standard of written and oral communication… they deserve an applause on their own. I was really impressed by them.”
>
> **CASE STUDY PARTICIPANT**

Programme strengths

Programme design and delivery

A key strength of the PRP reported by programme participants was the high-quality programme team at SUNCETT. All survey respondents (67[13]) stated that the quality of teaching at the residentials was very good or good. Practitioners commented that the knowledge of the programme team was excellent, both in terms of pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of the FE sector more widely and *“what it is like on the ground”*. The programme team were described as

[13] One respondent did not provide a response to this question.

"encouraging" and *"motivational"*, *"approachable"* and *"passionate"*, which in turn enthuses practitioners and acts as a catalyst for the development of a *"community of practitioners"*. Practitioners stated that the lecturing style at residentials was *"dynamic"* and felt that difficult concepts were made accessible. Practitioners also stated that they did not feel *"judged"* if they weren't sure of a concept, which made them feel comfortable asking questions.

The residentials were a key strength of the PRP as reported by participants. Focus group feedback suggested they considered them to be *"crucial",* noting that residentials gave them the time to *"immerse"* themselves in their research, and gave them a protected space to share ideas and to discuss their viewpoints with other participants. One practitioner reported that the residentials had allowed them to develop understanding and opinions in a short space of time, which enabled them to speak confidently about something they had no knowledge of prior to the residential.

Whilst COVID-19 meant that the final residential held for each cohort was unable to be delivered as usual, the programme team replaced them with 'virtual development workshops'. These were workshops held online, which broadly followed the same structure of the usual residentials. Generally, practitioners reflected that the virtual development workshops couldn't replace the experience of having the time and space away from professional and personal commitments. However, practitioners felt that given the unprecedented circumstances, the virtual workshop were a good alternative, professionally delivered.

Participants appreciated their engagement with their academic mentor. Practitioners valued one to one scheduled time with their mentor, and felt that they were able to contact their mentors at other times if they needed support, noting that mentors were *"very proactive and reactive"*. Some practitioners stated that the move to zoom as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic had enhanced the tutorials.

The programme is structured so that drafts of participants' work were required to be submitted prior to their tutorials, so mentors can review and comment on work which they can then discuss at the tutorial. One mentor stated that that this model is a *"huge part of what makes a difference"*, as they are able to discuss in-depth the strengths and weaknesses of participants' work and convey what 'success' should look like in terms of language and scholarship.

The PRP encourages joint practice development, facilitating practitioners to *"work horizontally rather than vertically"* and support each other through reviewing each other's work. Practitioners valued the time to interact with their peers in different geographical areas and with different research foci, and have *"critical, thought provoking discussion"*. The close-knit way of working was reported to contribute to a sense of community amongst practitioners, and the community feel of the

> "The course leaders responded quickly to COVID-19 restrictions and offered remote sessions via Zoom. This then led to our monthly tutorials also using Zoom which improved the quality of the remote tutorials. The most recent 'residential' closely mirrored what we would have had if in Sunderland and was extremely successful. The technology and the team delivering the training, using the technology efficiently, meant we had a highly successful course. Whilst I would prefer to be… studying in Sunderland, this was an excellent and very effective substitute and I am very grateful for all the effort that was put in so that we could continue with learning."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

programme enabled conversations to continue outside of residentials through social media.

The programme is at Level 7 and demands high academic standards. Practitioners valued the high level of challenge with one practitioner describing they felt *"stretched but not snapped"*. Practitioners felt that the level of challenge made the programme enjoyable. Peer support facilitated through the residential workshops was seen to manage the challenge.

> [The programme is] not pitched below or at – it is pitched above so you have to get to there, but it is a reachable target... it makes you think and work at it.
>
> **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

The fact that the programme is accredited was considered a key strength of the programme, with several stakeholders stating that this contributes to the *"uniqueness"* of the programme. One stakeholder reported that the accreditation has acted as a progression ladder for increased research in the sector, with several participants having moved to doctoral level study.

> It is incredibly forward thinking of the ETF to invest this amount of money in a smaller number of individuals when they could use the same funding to support a lot of much smaller day courses. Incredibly forward thinking of the ETF to build this capacity amongst people like me.
>
> **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Value for money

Practitioners and employers felt that the programme represented value for money for all parties involved (practitioners, employers and ETF), due to the variety of research going back into FE, particularly research that was FAVE practitioner-led rather than HE-led, and the increased profile for employers (through attendance at national/international conferences, featuring in peer reviewed articles and books, etc.). Practitioners considered the opportunity *"lifechanging"* and were very appreciative of the level of investment in them as individuals by ETF.

The fact that the PRP was fully funded and came with a bursary was also highlighted as a key strength of the programme by employers, as it allowed their staff the time to reap the benefits of the programme with a reduced burden on their employer organisation.

Areas of improvement

Programme scale

Stakeholders, employers and practitioners suggested that the programme should be scaled up. This was discussed at two levels;

- The first was to scale up the existing programme, potentially doubling the capacity of the programme. One stakeholder suggested that one way to do this could be to widen the programme team through calling on PRP alumni who have gone through the programme and completed PhDs to take on mentor roles, to increase the capacity of support available. This is currently being piloted with one PRP alumni who is acting as a mentor for a small number of participants.
  An alternative way to achieve scale of impact would be ensure that each institution propose participation from a practitioner and a manager to ensure that the effect of culture change was driven from multiple levels within participating organisations.
- The second was to develop additional programmes run by other universities, which are based on the guiding principles of the PRP, to increase capacity in the sector. It was reported that Stirling University

> I would recommend more programmes like this for the sector in general, there is a desperate need for them.
>
> **STAKEHOLDER**

are currently considering delivering a similar programme and are keen to learn from SUNCETT.

Programme design

Practitioners gave suggestions to improve programme design and content.

Time with mentors was highly valued, and therefore practitioners felt that additional timetabled mentor time would be beneficial. Practitioners commented that this would be particularly beneficial in between the first and second residential, as this is a time when practitioners are feeling motivated and encouraged, but still require reassurance that they are doing things correctly. It was also reported by practitioners affected that changing mentors during the programme was a challenging experience, as different mentors offer different directions and feedback. Practitioners felt this was a process that needs managing carefully, especially when this happens after the project has already been shaped, and time needs to be given to adjust.

Practitioners suggested there could be more opportunities to network and share learning with other practitioners in their cohort outside of residentials. Whilst this is done informally, it was suggested that the programme could provide more formalised ways in which practitioners could network and support each other, for example through an online platform. One practitioner commented that an opportunity to network with practitioners further ahead on the programme would also be valuable.

Practitioners found the duplication of enrolment paperwork undertaken at the beginning of courses onerous at times. It was acknowledged that it was a requirement, however practitioners reported that there was a lot of duplication between ETF and SUNCETT paperwork. It was suggested that this process could be better streamlined to free up more time at workshops to focus on their research.

Communication

Practitioner feedback included a requirement for a clearer sense of timeline for the PRP. While the programme team do discuss this at residentials, it was noted that the timeline needs to be *"more visible"* and consistently communicated, so that practitioners do not fall behind. One practitioner suggested a guidance document would be helpful which outlines what practitioners are expected to have completed by when.

> "For some people, at end of their first year of MPhil, it came as a shock to them that they needed to submit three chapters in draft."
>
> **MENTOR**

Some practitioners commented that programme-level communication could be last-minute, which made planning ahead difficult. Agendas for residentials were provided at quite short notice with tasks to complete, but practitioners did acknowledge that this could be in order to ensure it was actioned, as tasks may be forgotten about if given too early. Employers also recommended that there should be increased communication between the programme and the organisation to ensure mutual benefits, for example through a pre-programme meeting.

Residential location

SUNCETT hosts residentials at a Sunderland beach-side hotel. These residentials are mandatory; practitioner (and employer) agreement of attendance is a condition of a place on the course. The location was problematic for some participants for whom the distance from their homes required them to travel several hours. Some said they had to take an additional day to travel to the residential and/or leaving the residentials early to get home. Others said they used this time for preparation and reflection and enjoyed the sense of distance from their usual pre-occupations. Employers were also concerned about the impact of long travel times on the wellbeing of their employees, in addition to logistical issues around providing cover for practitioners with a high teaching timetable.

Practitioners' experience of the virtual development workshops led to some suggesting that a blended learning approach could be beneficial, to reduce time and costs associated with attending the residential. However, other practitioners were reluctant to support this, as they felt that attendance at residentials was an important and valued element of the programme.

Bursary reduction

In addition to having course fees covered by the PRP, employers can apply for a bursary in arrears to cover, or contribute to, the cost of travel and expenses. This was put in place to make access to residentials fair and affordable. However, as a result of a reduction in available funding to ETF within the financial year of 2019/20, this bursary pot was reduced from what it had been in previous years.

The reduction of the bursary allocated to institutions was reported to have caused challenges for some practitioners, but not to the extent that they discontinued their studies. Some organisations were reported to find it difficult to justify letting practitioners continue on the PRP (if they were in the middle of a two-year MPhil), particularly for those with higher travel costs. One practitioner from an organisation with a long history of involvement in the PRP noted that their institution is no longer supporting staff to apply, due to the cost of travel and cover. Another participant stated that they had to pay for their travel themselves, as they wanted to continue on the second year of their MPhil, but their organisation did not meet their travel costs. It was suggested that the PRP could implement a means tested bursary (e.g. based on geography or type of organisation, for example third sector organisations), to prevent this becoming a barrier for future participation. A move to a blended learning approach, supported by some practitioners, could also limit the effect of this issue.

Lack of institutional variety

Whist it is positive that the PRP has contributed to a 'culture change' in institutions, this has led to some institutions encouraging a large number of their staff to apply every year, with providers keen to have a *"critical*

mass" of practitioners on the PRP to continue the research culture within their institutions. ETF and SUNCETT have tried to mitigate against dominance from a small set of providers by encouraging applications from a range of participants based on sector profile and need during the application process. However, with a small number of institutions encouraging their staff to apply to the PRP, there is a danger that the programme could become dominated by a handful of active institutions.

> "The programme team asked me to choose some pieces of my own research and then got all of the learners to read them and then they invited me to come in for an hour to criticise the work and for me to defend it. It allowed them to evaluate research and examine other articles and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses together in a group and on their own."
>
> **STAKEHOLDER**

Practitioner learning

By the end of the programme, practitioners are expected have learnt to conceptualise and represent their experiences of pedagogy, explore these experiences with reference to literature[14] and analyse pedagogical concepts, models and strategies. Practitioners are also taught how to integrate and synthesise their findings, to inform their own practical or organisational response.

As a result of this learning, practitioners increased their knowledge of both educational theory and research methods. Mentors discussed how practitioners had developed their understanding of educational theory, reporting that some practitioners had drawn on more complex pedagogical theory. Stakeholders also recognised the impact of the PRP on practitioner learning of educational theory. This was illustrated by one academic stakeholder, who reported that practitioners *"become familiar with the best literature in education"* and can discuss theories and argue their strengths and weaknesses.

Practitioners also leave the programme with a stronger appreciation of the research process including data collection methods and interpreting findings. For example, participants had been able to shift their research focus after reflection and mentoring; over half of survey respondents who answered this question (33 of 55) reported that the focus of their research problem had changed from what they had planned when they applied. Practitioners stated that this was because they had been able to refine their research focus after learning and feedback at PRP residentials, where the programme team provided feedback and guidance for their research.

> "[At residentials] we are able to drill down and focus on our idea."
>
> **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Their familiarly with research approaches and methods was evident at the ETF Practitioner Research Conferences, where practitioners were able to explain the theory behind their research and justify the methods they used to collect their data.

[14] The SUNCETT team have produced an edited volume of key readings that inform the course philosophy and design: Gregson, M, Nixon, L, Pollard, A, and Spedding, P. (2015) Readings for Reflective Teaching in Further, Adult and Vocational Education. Reflective Teaching. Bloomsbury, London

Case Study A

Participant A's mentor identified their individual development as a researcher, with their practice *"adhering to the values of research and scholarship in professional ways"*. Particular skills which they were said to have developed included their understanding of literature, argument construction (conceptually and theoretically), and perception and analysis of data.

Mentors commented on practitioner learning of academic skills. They stated that practitioners had improved their level of scholarship and critical engagement with research, with practitioners also noting they had developed their academic writing skills. Practitioners reported that the high quality of written and oral communication and feedback from the programme team extended their vocabulary and academic style.

> "He now writes in a more flowing way and uses more scholarly resources… this style, combined with his passion, will no doubt increase his credibility as a researcher."
>
> **MENTOR**

Practitioners highlighted their learning around research outputs. The PRP taught them how to construct an abstract and develop an academic poster presentation which they felt was valuable learning.

As a result of the learning achieved, practitioners felt that they were better able to apply the research to their practice, which is further explored in Chapter 5 of this report.

Achievement of accredited outcomes

Practitioners on the PRP are expected to complete their studies and achieve accredited qualifications. According to SUNCETT monitoring data (Table 2-1), the pass rate for practitioners who completed the MA or MPhil was 100%. In the 2019-20 cohort, there was only one participant who was deemed at risk of failing. This is substantially higher than the proportion of enrolled students who achieved a qualification on a postgraduate taught degree across England (58%)[15]. Almost all participants therefore achieve course learning objectives:

- conceptualise and represent experiences of pedagogy in vocational education
- explore and evaluate these experiences with reference to the literature
- identify a range of key pedagogical concepts, models and strategies that are currently informing frontline and institutional practice
- analyse current pedagogical concepts, models and strategies, identifying framing principles and values

[15] Based on HESA 2018-19 data regarding student enrolment and qualifications achieved

- Integrate and synthesise findings about these paradigms into judgements that will inform a practical and/or organisational response to these pedagogical concepts, models and strategies.

For those practitioners who withdrew, reasons given for withdrawal were either based on extenuating personal circumstances or an inability to keep up with the demands of the course rather than a dislike of the programme itself.

Table 2-1: Programme pass rates

	ENROLLED	WITHDREW	PASSED/ON TRACK TO PASS	NOT PASSED/ AT RISK
2018-19	51	3	48	0
MA short course	*22*	*2*	*20*	*0*
MPhil year 1	*13*	*0*	*13*	*0*
MPhil year 2	*16*	*1*	*15*	*0*
2019-20	41	2	38	1
MA short course	19	1	18	0
MPhil year 1	13	0	12	1
MPhil year 2	9	1	8	0
Total	*92*	*5*	*86*	*1*

Source: SUNCETT monitoring data

Research projects undertaken

A wide range of research was undertaken by practitioners on the programme. The ETF identified four priority areas (influenced by the Department of Education's grant priorities) for which applications are particularly encouraged. In the event of the programme being over-subscribed, research which meets one of these criteria is prioritised:

- Developing learners' maths and English abilities, or supporting the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment in these subjects.
- The embedding of maths and English across all settings in the FE and training sector.
- Developing effective teaching methods; such as active learning, collaborative learning, joint curriculum planning, assessment theory and practice, curriculum design, development, implementation and evaluation.
- Using and evaluating new technologies and online learning and digital technologies.

Within this, there were several popular subject areas. Research projects

mainly fell under three broad headings; curriculum design, continuing professional development (CPD[16]) and assessment and feedback. Around two thirds of projects focused on curriculum design. Within these categories, projects focused on a range of themes, for example, digital technologies, improving maths and English GCSE, and vocational learning.

Table 2-2: Main subject area of research projects undertaken on the PRP per year

	2018-19	2019-20	TOTAL	%
Curriculum design	30	25	**55**	**68%**
CPD	8	8	**16**	**20%**
Assessment and feedback	5	2	**7**	**9%**
Other	1	2	**3**	**4%**
Total	*44*	*37*	***81***	

Source: Analysis of abstracts

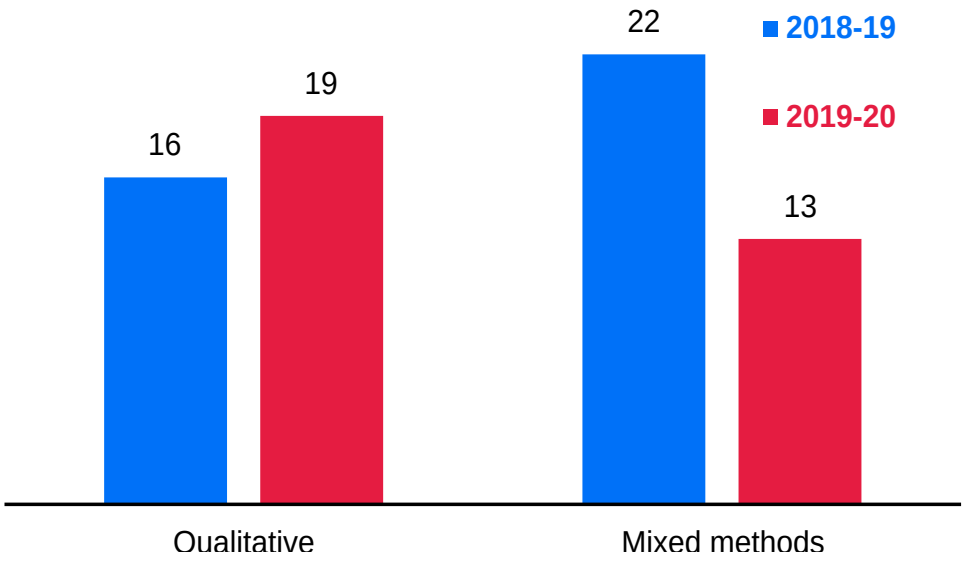
This generally follows the pattern seen in the analysis of impact grids. Between 2009-2019, over half (58%, 107) of research projects focused on curriculum design, most frequently how to improve teaching methods in maths and English. Digital technology was also a common research theme within impact grids, with research projects considering how digital technologies could be incorporated into the curriculum, how it could be used to improve assessment and feedback and the use of digital technologies in CPD.

Research methods used

According to project abstracts, practitioners predominantly used qualitative methods to collect their data, or a mixed methods approach. Qualitative data collection included focus groups, observations and interviews, with some research projects collecting data through reflective journals or storyboards. Where quantitative data was collected as part of a mixed methods approach, methods included questionnaire surveys of small sample populations, and some projects also used assessment data to quantify their impact. Again, this is consistent with longitudinal data collected through impact grids, with most practitioners using a purely qualitative or mixed methods approach.

Figure 2-1: Research methods of research projects undertaken on the PRP per year (n=70, 11 did not state their research methods)

[16] This is not related to ETF's CPD content.



Source: Analysis of abstracts

3. OPPORTUNITY

Opportunity: summary

Participants tend to find out about the PRP through their existing networks, such as research networks or colleagues who were alumni of the programme. Evidence suggests that practitioners rarely find out about the programme through the PRP webpage or other forms of information dissemination.

The application and selection processes were reported to give a range of practitioners the opportunity to apply and enrol. Practitioners who were not successful in their MPhil application were sometimes offered a place on the MA short course.

Institutions involved in the PRP range are distributed across all English regions and include a mix of institution types (general FE as well as independent training providers and other specialist providers). However, compared with the number of FAVE institutions nationally, the proportion of institutions engaging with the programme is modest.

Practitioners involved in the PRP are drawn from a wide range of job roles and teaching/academic experience, including some practitioners who have not engaged with research before.

PRP is considered to be very accessible. While, other opportunities for Level 7 study exist, they may also have both financial and cultural barriers to hinder widespread participation.

Employer support is integral to practitioners' ability to maximise their participation. Most practitioners enjoyed a good level of employer support; but this was not always the case and some practitioners were not given the same opportunities in terms of time, access, and support and encouragement.

This section explores the level of opportunity that practitioners had to participate in the programme by exploring the opportunities practitioners have to find out about the programme, the types of practitioners and employers who are given the opportunity to participate and how opportunities are created by employers.

Opportunity to find out about the programme

The programme is marketed through a range of routes including press (e.g. InTuition magazine), ETF emails and information flyers containing information about the programme. The programme also relies on awareness spread via word of mouth from former participants.

Participants who are already connected to research networks across the FAVE sector are those who are more aware of the programme. The most common route for practitioners to find out about the programme was via word of mouth. Nearly half (23 of 51) of survey respondents who were asked stated that they had heard about the programme through a colleague or their employer. This reflects feedback from

practitioners through focus groups and case studies, who were more likely to report that they had been enthused by colleagues who recommended it to them, or their employer had suggested that they apply.

Case Study B

Encouraged by their colleague (a PRP alumni), who told them that PRP was the *"best CPD they had ever done"*, Participant B applied to the PRP MA short course. They had already conducted a joint research project with a colleague from another department and their employer was keen for them to take this further, as it aligned with the institution's key strategic priorities. It was also felt that their involvement would providea good return on investment for their employer as their research would enable the participants to deliver cross-faculty training and implement innovative methods in the classroom. The employer was equally keen for the practitioner to progress an individual MPhil research project, following their experience of the MA short course.

Practitioners also found out about the programme through direct emails and updates from ETF (17 of 51) or from other promotional material available at conferences, or through promotions seen in the InTuition magazine.

A small number of practitioners also reported that they had found out about the programme as a result of undertaking other ETF research programmes. This included practitioners who had joined the MPhil programme following an MA, or practitioners who had previously undertaken an Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) project. This further indicates that those already involved with research networks are more likely to be aware of the programme, and could also suggest that practitioners who have been involved with research in the sector are motivated to continue their engagement. With the growth of research involvement in the sector (e.g. #FEResearchMeet), there is potential for the PRP to be promoted through these avenues to increase the programme's sector exposure

Case Study C

Practitioner C had considered undertaking a Masters level course, and when she heard about the MA Short Course through the Professional Exchange Network *"it sparked me to give it a go"*. The practitioner had no research experience prior to the MA short course, and therefore felt that this had been a suitable entry into the programme for her.

The webpage

Very few participants surveyed found out about the programme via an internet search (2 of 51). Some consulted practitioners mentioned that they had not come across it even though they were actively looking to undertake a postgraduate qualification. However, Google Analytics data indicates that a total of 266 unique application form downloads took place in the 2020 application window, which ran from July to September, with 1,348 unique page views recorded for this same period. This suggests that the web page is attracting some speculative traffic, albeit on a small scale[17].

Stakeholders reported that currently, unless you are in a college with PRP alumni, it is difficult to find out about the Practitioner Research Programme. It was noted that the ETF website could make the Programme's page more accessible, as it currently feels *"hidden"*. Further advertisement (e.g. through TES or direct to colleges) could support better promotion of the benefits of the Practitioner Research Programme to encourage practitioners to get involved in research as part of their professional development practice, and to encourage institution leaders to raise awareness of the opportunity amongst their staff.

Opportunity to participate in the programme

Employer characteristics

The opportunity to participate in the PRP is highly selective. The sector comprises of over 250 general FE colleges[18] and over 1,200 private and public training providers[19] (including independent training providers, adult and community learning providers and offender learning) in England. Analysis of abstracts of projects from 2018-19 and 2019-20 gives an indication of the number of institutions who were involved in the programme. Across the two years, 42 institutions had participants involved in the programme, with 10 of these institutions having staff participate in both 2018-19 and 2019-20. This illustrates the modest

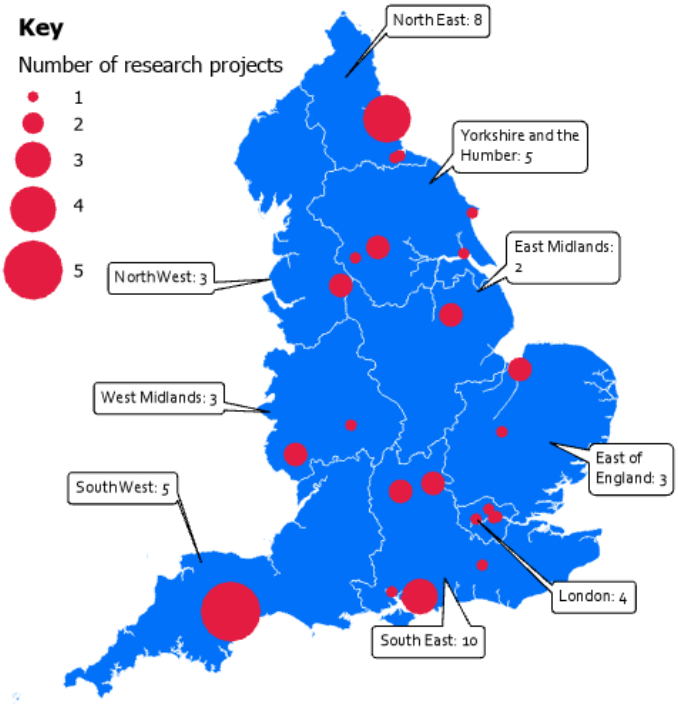
[17] The ETF site overall tends to reach over 100,000 unique page views per quarter.
[18] Education and Training Foundation (August, 2018). *So what is the FE sector? A guide to the Further Education System in England.* p.7 https://www.aoc-services.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/What-is-the-FE-Sector.pdf
[19] SET (2020) *FE Teaching and Training*. https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/professionalism/fe-teaching-and-training/

number of institutions that participate in the PRP.

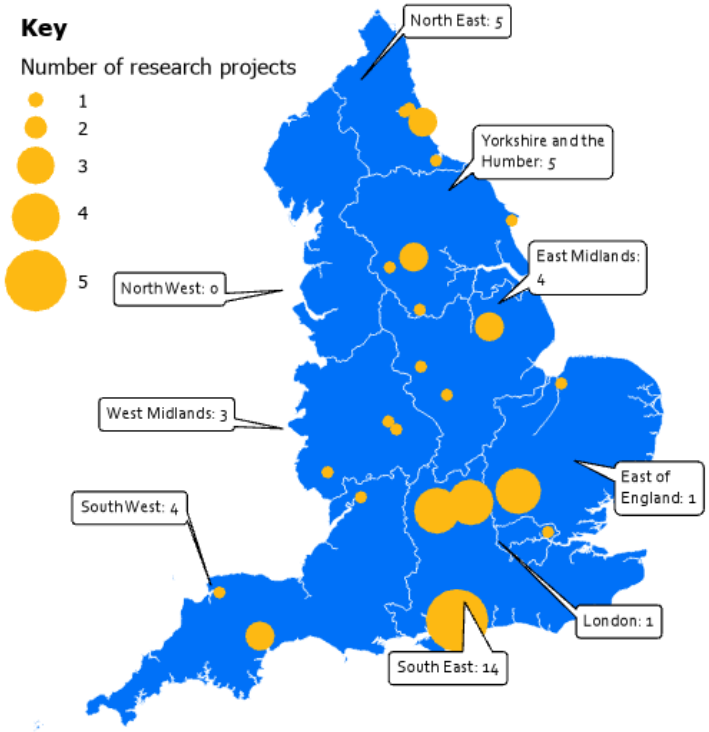
Practitioners worked at institutions across England, as illustrated in Figure 3-1. According to information reported in research project abstracts, each region in England was represented by at least two institutions, which suggests practitioners had lots of opportunity to network with FAVE practitioners they would not have met otherwise. However, the difference between the most and least represented areas across the two years (South East with eight institutions and 24 practitioners and North West with two institutions and three practitioners) is apparent. The regional pattern of engagement may be due to the word of mouth nature of recruitment.

Figure 3-1: Geographical spread of research projects

2018-2019



2019-2020



Source: Produced by SQW 2020. Licence 100030994. Contains OS data © Crown copyright [and database right] 2020. Contains Royal Mail data © Royal Mail copyright and Database right 2020.

Survey responses illustrate the range of institutions in which practitioners were based. Most worked at general further education colleges (45 of 62[20]). However, small numbers of practitioners also said they came from other types of institutions, including Art, Design and Performing Arts Colleges, franchised Higher Education Institutions, Adult Education Providers and Local Authority Training Providers.

Practitioner characteristics

Practitioners involved in the programme are drawn from a wide range of job roles and levels of teaching/academic experience. It should be noted that the evaluation is not able to comment on equality and diversity characteristics.

The data outlining the characteristics of practitioners is taken from the SQW participant survey which was completed by 63[21] unique participants across the MA and MPhil programmes. Whilst the data does not include responses from all practitioners it does give an indication of the characteristics of practitioners on the PRP. Overall, the data indicates that a broad range of practitioners have the opportunity to participate in the programme.

Over half of practitioners responding to the survey identified themselves to be in a student facing role, such as a teacher, tutor, trainer or lecturer (30). A smaller proportion (8) of practitioners stated they were in a

[20] For this question where survey respondents had completed both the MA post survey and an MPhil survey, only their most recent response was included.
[21] For this question where survey respondents had completed both the MA post survey and an MPhil survey, only their most recent response was included.

management role or a role of responsibility (manager, head of department or curriculum, or the head of the institution). An additional nine practitioners identified their role as 'other', which included job roles such as advanced practitioner, teaching and learning coach, and technician.

Table 3-1: Job role of practitioners (n=59, 4 did not respond)

	RESPONDENTS
Teacher/tutor/trainer/lecturer	30
Manager	8
Head of department/curriculum	9
CEO/Director/Principal/Head of Service	2
Support worker/staff	1
Other	9

Source: Practitioner survey

Most practitioners had over three years' experience in FAVE and many of those on the programme bring substantial experience to their research with over a third having worked in the sector for over fifteen years (Table 3-2).

Table 3-2: Years of FAVE practitioner experience held (n=59[22], 4 did not respond)

	RESPONDENTS
Less than 3 years	1
3-5 years	9
5-10 years	13
10-15 years	13
15-20 years	14
Over 20 years	9

Source: Practitioner survey

Almost all practitioners held a degree-level qualification at Level 6 or above with around two-thirds having a post-graduate qualification as well (Table 3-3). Those already holding a post-graduate qualification tended to be either on the MPhil programme, or were holding a PGCE or other Level 7 teaching qualification. The one Level 8 qualification holder had a subject specific PhD.

It is important to note, however, that a small proportion of practitioners did not hold a Level 6 qualification, demonstrating that the programme gives the opportunity for practitioners to access a MA or MPhil to people who may not have had such educational opportunities previously.

[22] For this question where survey respondents had completed both the MA post survey and an MPhil survey, only their most recent response was included.

Table 3-3: Highest academic qualification held by practitioners (n=59[23], 4 did not respond)

	RESPONDENTS
Level 8 (e.g. Doctorate)	1
Level 7 (e.g. Masters degree, PG Dip, PG Certificate)	39
Level 6 (e.g. Bachelors Degree)	19
Level 5 (e.g. HND, Foundation Degree)	3
Level 4 (e.g. HNC, Certificate of Higher Education)	1
Other	1

Source: Practitioner survey

Other opportunities open to participants

The programme exists among a range of other opportunities to study at Level 7 including courses on research methods and research programmes or taught doctorates at many other Higher Education Institutions. The programme does have key elements which are either unique or distinctive. These are that the programme is funded, it is offered by HE staff with strong roots in FAVE, it encourages peer learning and it is a structured process combining different modes of learning.

Stakeholders suggested that there was not a strong research culture within the sector. They suggested that the number of self-funded practitioner researchers is generally low, and sometimes leads to careers in academia, rather than retention in the sector. In addition, stakeholders thought that practitioners get much more input from the team and support is much more intensive on the PRP, whereas they suggested that students on standard MA/MPhil courses nationally are often *"left to do it themselves"* and therefore are more likely to drop out. In addition, MPhil courses do not often involve joint practice development and are usually solitary experiences, unlike the PRP which allows practitioners to share learning and develop their own research community.

Other, non-accredited, research opportunities open to participants are other ETF courses, for example the OTLA. In addition, #FEResearchMeet[24] has become more popular as a result of the rise of social media, which has also encouraged splinter groups to develop to undertake small-scale research projects.

Employer support

Participation is open to all and the removal of the financial barrier means that practitioners are given an opportunity that they otherwise might not have. However, the support of an employer was considered an essential

[23] For this question where survey respondents had completed both the MA post survey and an MPhil survey, only their most recent response was included.
[24] #FEResearchMeet is described as a free and democratic model for building & supporting engagement with research in FE, led by practitioners, for practitioners.

aspect of practitioners' opportunity to maximise their participation.

Most practitioners who responded to the survey reported that their employers were very (41 of 68) or somewhat (20 of 68) supportive of their participation with the programme. Some practitioners and employers reported that this had been clear from the outset, when employers actively encouraged practitioners to undertake the PRP or supported them with their application.

Practitioners with supportive employers said that this included practical support during the process, such as releasing practitioners from their teaching priorities to attend residentials and conferences, giving practitioners time off work to complete coursework and giving financial support in addition to the bursary. Additionally, survey respondents stated that their employer had provided them with encouragement and moral support, indicating their buy in to the process. Employers highlighted that they had facilitated opportunities for practitioners to access students and staff to undertake data collection.

> "From an institutional perspective, those that are then doing the research need to know they are supported to have space and time to do the research and that the research is important."
>
> **EMPLOYER**

Case Study D

Participant D had found their employer to be *"totally supportive"* of their involvement in the programme. Support came from both their line manager and the wider executive team in three different ways. First, to encourage staff buy-in to the research across the college as the project required cross-college teams (who may not have seen the focus as their priority), second with coaching from the practitioner's line manager, and finally time to prioritise the project within their working week.

Employer support, however, is not a universal experience. Some practitioners felt that their employers were neither hugely supportive nor unsupportive of their participation in the programme (5 of 68). One focus group participant expanded on this, stating that their employer was *"supportive but verging on indifferent"* because at least one colleague undertakes it each year. Another said that they felt their new manager was only allowing them to continue on the course because they had already started it – they felt the course was not a management priority. A small number of practitioners responding to the survey said that their employer was unsupportive or very unsupportive of their participation in the programme (2 of 68). This might create barriers for research engagement, dissemination and impact in due course.

Case Study E

On joining the PRP, Participant E's institution was undergoing a restructure and they were not sure whether they would continue to have a role at the college, and if they did, whether they would be supported in undertaking the course. In practice the practitioner continued to work full time and undertake the programme in their own time. They were permitted time out of work to attend residentials but has had no other time allowance from their employer.

However, many practitioners, regardless of the level of employer support they received, stated they would still value further support from their employer. Most commonly, practitioners would have appreciated dedicated time to complete their research. Overall, 33 of 68 practitioners responding to the survey stated that they did not have enough time to balance the demands of the programme alongside work. One participant described how they had not had any time off from work aside from residentials, and therefore they were having to do all their coursework in their own time.

4. MOTIVATION

Motivation: summary

Participants are generally research-aware and are motivated to improve their practice by learning about educational theory and research.

They commonly chose this programme because of its emphasis on peer learning and the potential to become (or remain) part of an active research community, and because they can chose their own research focus. Several participants consider participation to be a positive career development activity.

Institutional motivation varied. Those that were active and pro-active were motivated to ensure their staff participated because they saw research informed teaching as one way to improve teaching and learning. Where practitioners reported they felt less supported, employers were not sufficiently motivated to support their staff due to budget constraints or that it was not seen as a priority.

Sharing learning is integral to PRP and the programme seeks both to motivate and support research informed discussions. Most practitioners share the research process or its findings with both their colleagues and their managers.

The ETF Practitioner Research Conference is a popular mode of dissemination.

A smaller group (around 15% of participants) present their research at other conferences, and some of these also go on to write articles in peer-reviewed journals.

This section focuses on practitioner and employer drivers for initial engagement, and their ongoing motivation to share their learning and their experiences with their colleagues and peers across the sector.

Practitioner drivers for engagement

Practitioners were motivated to engage with the PRP by a range of professional and personal drivers. A range of different motivations were suggested to participants in the survey; their responses are aggregated in Table 4-1 and are explored below.

Table 4-1: Practitioner motivations to apply to the programme (n=51[25], N/A responses not included. Responses are not mutually exclusive)

	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
Become part of a community of research active practitioners	34	15	1

[25] Question not asked to those completing interim or post surveys in 2020

Develop research skills	31	17	3
Required support and thinking time to make a research idea happen	30	19	1
Deepen understanding of the relationship between educational research, theory and practice	30	18	1
Develop teaching skills by conducting research into practice[26]	27	21	1
Future career development	24	19	8
Employer encouragement	6	18	15

Source: Practitioner survey

According to survey respondents, a common motivation was the opportunity to become part of a community of research active practitioners. One survey participant expanded on this, reporting that the PRP seemed like a great opportunity to work collaboratively with other practitioners. Practitioners across focus groups and case studies also reflected that the opportunity to network with like-minded practitioners, to discuss and debate educational theory, and be part of the *"research movement"* were key drivers for their engagement.

Another common driver for engaging with the PRP was the desire to develop as both researchers and practitioners. Survey respondents stated that the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the relationship between educational research, theory and practice was a very important motivator. In addition, practitioners wanted to develop their research skills and their teaching skills by conducting research into their own practice.

> "I was motivated to apply as I wanted to try and make sense of the many, oftentimes conflicting, thoughts I had on education, reform and the role of CPD. I thought the programme might help me formalise my thinking, and give it structure and purpose."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Case Study F

Participant F's key motivation for undertaking the PRP was the opportunity to perform research and to learn. They have *"always been interested in research",* having previously gained a PhD in a Science discipline and as such they have the mindset whereby they *"want to find out what is going on, what is underlying things, how things work'* and PRP provided them with the opportunity to further this interest.

[26] Out of 49

Many practitioners were motivated by a desire to develop their own research and were keen to have the support and thinking time to make their research idea happen. One survey respondent reported that the option to decide what they wanted to focus on motivated them as they could research something that they were *"interested and passionate about"*, particularly as they would be spending a lot of their own time doing so. Some practitioners had already undertaken research programmes (e.g. the MA short course or an OTLA project) and were as a result motivated to continue to develop their existing research.

Case Study G

For Participant G, the opportunity to undertake an MA was appealing as it involved practice based research (*"you're living it and doing it"*), for which they could choose the research focus themself. It was also an opportunity for the practitioner to get out of their *"comfort zone"* and to network with other practitioners.

> "I completed the MA Short Course two years prior to starting the MPhil and I was extremely impressed by how it was run and what I got from it both personally and professionally from it. I found it inspiring and motivating and I knew that anything else led by [the SUNCETT delivery team] would be the same. I felt that if I was going to move to this level that these were the best people to learn from and guide me."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Practitioners stated that the fact that the PRP was a step towards their future career development was a very important motivator. As an accredited programme it was felt to hold more *"weight"*, giving practitioners and their research increased legitimacy within their institution and beyond. Others were motivated by the opportunities the PRP could have for their academic careers; one survey respondent stated that they were keen to move into education research as a career, and therefore the PRP was a good opportunity for them to gain relevant experience and qualifications.

> "I am now thinking what I want to do with my career as I don't think I want to be a middle manager and instead want to do more academic and teaching work. The programme is a way to satisfy this while still providing an income."
>
> **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Practitioner concerns

Several participants said that maintaining progress was challenging when time for study needed to be found within a busy timetable or diary. Practitioners responding to the pre-survey stated their main concerns were associated with their ability to fit study around work commitments (19 of 28) and being able to maintain a work/life balance (16). In practice, focus group participants said that this was indeed a challenge and that it was difficult to maintain motivation sometimes and to manage course delivery deadlines alongside work commitments.

Case Study H

Prior to starting the course, Participant H was concerned about juggling traveling to the residentials along with their teaching load. However, they found that the physical distance meant that they could mentally take themself away from their teaching and dedicate time to study. They were also concerned that they were "going to be exposed [intellectually]", and worried that they might not be able to do the course, but their fears were unfounded – "it is a really good idea as a practitioner to be a student on a regular basis".

Employer drivers for engagement

The majority of employers, regardless of their prior engagement with the programme, were motivated by the potential to improve teaching and learning in their institution. This was reported at two levels; firstly, the potential for practitioners to improve teaching and learning from the top down through disseminating their research findings, and secondly, the potential to improve teaching and learning at grassroots level, through empowering practitioners to take ownership of the curriculum and explore innovative ways of teaching and learning in their own practice.

Some employers, particularly those who were new to the programme, valued the fact that there was an element of choice in the research study, as the ETF priorities are broad ranging. This meant that they could encourage practitioners to explore issues that aligned with their institution's strategic priorities. It was noted that there were advantages in strategic priorities being driven by a *"prominent and respected member of the team"* in achieving buy-in from colleagues, rather than being implemented by leadership.

Some employers saw participation as part of a cultural shift for their organisation to empower and professionalise staff through research. Employer interviewees from these few organisations described their organisations as having *"pro-CPD culture"* and therefore wanted to support practitioners with their professional development and encourage them to cascade their learning by delivering CPD on their research. This was particularly notable amongst institutions who regularly provide a group of PRP participants.

Additionally, the majority of participating institutions offered higher education courses, including foundation degrees, professional courses and Higher National Diplomas. Therefore, engagement with the programme could be a driver for employers looking to strengthen their academic activity.

> "The college is supportive around this issue and value participants by given them opportunities to build external relationships and become innovative. The programme works to the benefit of everyone."
>
> **EMPLOYER**

> "[The practitioner] will be able to invest his development back into the organisation."
>
> **EMPLOYER**

Case Study A

Participant A's employer highlighted the value of the college being research active, with this being of benefit to the organisation and supporting them to work towards achieving Gold status on the Teaching Excellence Framework in the future. This was seen to be part of a *"strategic push… to become a research college"* which would benefit the college's externally-facing brand. The programme was reported to have raised awareness across the college of the need to become research active, and multiple practitioners had been engaged in and interested by the programme, spreading the impact more widely across the college.

Employer concerns

Like practitioners, employers did voice some concerns regarding practitioner involvement in the PRP. This included the practicalities around staff absences, and the need to cover lessons when practitioners were at residentials. Whilst the bursary supported the costs of this, concerns were still raised about the time it took to organise travel and other logistics. In addition, some employers stated they had some concerns around practitioner wellbeing. It was recognised that these concerns were exacerbated if the practitioner had a full teaching timetable, in comparison to managers, who had more control over how they allocated their time.

> "My employer had two people [who wanted to apply] and would only accept one… They won't get anyone to cover my workload when I'm gone, which is fine it's what I was expecting but they were quite resistant to it - they said the bursary would not cover it.
>
> **FOCUS GROUP**

However, it should be noted that several employers identified no concerns, instead stating they felt that participation would be a wholly positive experience for practitioners, with benefits for all parties involved.

Research dissemination

Practitioners have shared their research findings both within their institution and externally. Stakeholders reported that the confidence and skills that are developed on the PRP by practitioners has motivated them to disseminate their research.

Findings from the impact grids (2009-19) give an insight into research dissemination. Most practitioners had undertaken dissemination activity at the time their impact grids were written. They reported that 83% (155 of 186) of research projects had been disseminated in some way. This included dissemination at the ETF Practitioner Research Conference (74%, 114 of 155). Some practitioners were motivated to take their research further and other dissemination fora included 24 (15%) research projects that were presented at other conferences, and 60 (39%) research projects had been presented to colleagues or internally in the practitioners' own institutions at the time the impact grids were

written.

Furthermore, practitioners involved in 57 (31%) research projects still had plans to disseminate their findings further, predominantly to colleagues at their institution and through conferences, but also involved different types of activity, for example through journal articles.

Internal research dissemination

The majority of survey respondents reported that they had shared their research within their institution. Most survey respondents had disseminated research to their managers (48 of 55). The degree of engagement from managers varied with some having regular one to ones with the practitioner, or facilitating access to senior leadership team meetings. This was not however the universal experience.

> The PRP helps them see it's possible to have authentic, credible research outcomes they should feel proud to share – it doesn't just stay within a team, it has an identity it wouldn't have had otherwise. It gives people the opportunity to present to senior staff that they wouldn't have if they were just doing this independently/non-accredited.
>
> **STAKEHOLDER**

Survey respondents had also disseminated their research to teaching colleagues (49 of 55). Practitioners commented on how they had undertaken CPD sessions with colleagues in their department teams, across the faculty, or even across the institution, to share their findings with colleagues. One employer reported attending a workshop where the practitioner presented their work and encouraged their colleagues to consider the relevance of the research to their own practice. Wider workforce engagement with research findings was noted to often be facilitated by employers, through giving practitioners time at existing meetings or creating new meetings for practitioners to specifically share their research.

Case Study D

Participant D's mentor said how important it was that research findings were shared in a pragmatic, solution-focused way. This was because they needed to be framed in a way that would be relevant to staff working in a variety of roles across the college who would bring different understanding of its importance or relevance to their roles. In practice, this was achieved via virtual meetings delivered by the Vice Principal to all Heads of Schools and as many teaching staff as possible to reinforce the importance of the course (which the research evaluated the impact of) and the need for cross-college support to implement a clearer induction process.

Many practitioners also shared their findings with colleagues informally. One practitioner found that by having lots of informal conversations about their project, colleagues were more likely to buy in to the research and have their own *"lightbulb moment".* Given the reduction in opportunities for informal conversations as a result of COVID-19,

practitioners and employers may need to consider how best to facilitate these 'informal' learning opportunities.

External research dissemination

Practitioners also discussed disseminating their research externally. Most commonly, practitioners reported they had disseminated their research via the ETF Practitioner Research Conference, with practitioners reporting a sense of pride in doing so. Some practitioners had also shared their learning at other conferences, both within the UK and internationally.

> "Having joined SET I have attended the inaugural session in June and promoted the research course and briefly discussed my research with delegates."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Case Study I

Externally, Participant I has presented their research to date at the ETF Practitioner Research Programme Annual Conference and at an ESOL teachers' association (NATECLA) conference. As a result of their presentation at the latter conference, they were invited by another college to deliver further training to their ESOL team.

A minority of practitioners are motivated to share their research within the academic community. Stakeholders reported that this was crucial, as peer reviewed publications are credible and have a wide reach of dissemination across the sector. This has included chapters in books and journals that have been edited by the PRP programme team, aligning practitioners with renowned academics.

Practitioners also expressed their plans to disseminate their research in peer reviewed publications in the future. Feedback from impact grids (2009-19) illustrates this; at the time impact grids were written, 57 (31%) of research projects still had plans to disseminate their findings further. Of these 57, 17 were aiming to be published in peer reviewed journals.

Case Study J

Participant J is now developing an academic profile. They have published three outputs in the last year, including a journal article providing an auto-ethnological account of their experience as a practitioner–researcher related to their experiences of the Practitioner Research Programme. Their presentation at the 26th International Forum for Access to Continuing Education (FACE) Annual Conference 2019 on their research topic led to the opportunity for them to author a peer reviewed chapter for publication.

Many practitioners have contributed to articles in InTuition magazine and TES; one practitioner was published in TES twice in six weeks. The publication of research on the FAVE sector, undertaken by practitioners in the FAVE sector, would have been *"pretty unheard of"* a few years ago according to stakeholders.

A small number of practitioners had also joined research networks to disseminate their research. This included local or regional research networks with other colleges, or research networks facilitated by local universities. Some practitioners also referred to involvement in professional associations, for example the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the Association for Research in Compulsory Education (ARPCE), and one stated they were part of the Teaching and Education Research Association (TERA) which operates internationally. One stakeholder indicated that increasing network activity was as a result of practitioners having a greater sense of belonging in the research community, and ownership of their research.
Some practitioners have also used social media to disseminate their research, with twitter the main mode of virtual dissemination. One practitioner noted that they had been motivated to share their research online as a result of increased sense of empowerment and confidence in their research, because of the PRP.

The impact of COVID-19 on dissemination

Practitioners reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on their ability to disseminate their findings. Practitioners reported that COVID-19 had meant that internally, there were fewer opportunities to disseminate their research due to a lack of CPD and/or meetings and less space for informal discussions. Some practitioners also noted that they were due to disseminate their findings and conferences, which were postponed or cancelled.

In addition, COVID-19 impacted on practitioners' ability to collect some of their data, and therefore even if opportunities to disseminate were scheduled, they did not feel they were at an appropriate point in their research to do so.

> "I have had a couple of potential conference presentations and collaborative events postponed as a result of COVID-19 in which I would have otherwise been able to share my research."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

5. CAPABILITY

Capability: summary

The programme team at SUNCETT carefully consider the capabilities of applicants to the programme.

Course participation improves both research confidence and capability. This is evidenced by progression as over half of the MPhil participants who enrolled since 2017 had successfully completed the MA short course.

Employer capability to maximise the impact of their research-engaged staff was variable. It was dependent on having institutional leaders who valued and promoted research informed teaching, and who were able to provide time and space for staff to engage, reflect and experiment.

Barriers to full employer engagement included environmental factors such as budget constraints, competing priorities and more immediate issues (including dealing with the effects of COVID-19).

This section will focus on the effect of programme participation on participants' capability, defined in terms of the robustness of the selection process and their confidence and acquisition of research skills. It will assess the effects of changes to the capabilities of those who participate and those who manage networks that can magnify the effects of such changes.

Prior capability and selection

Applications are invited via the ETF website which has a page dedicated to the PRP. The formal application process for the upcoming academic year opens in July, coinciding with the ETF Practitioner Research Conference. Applications for the programme close in late September. The normal entry requirement for the MA short course is a 2:2 honours degree or above and the normal entry requirement for an MPhil is a 2:1 Honours Degree or an MA/MSc. The second MPhil year is also open to applicants who have undertaken the RDF in the past five years. However, in exceptional circumstances professional qualifications and/or experience may be considered for both pathways, enabling a wide range of applicants to apply.

Before joining the PRP, participants had variable levels of prior research experience. According to survey respondents, most practitioners had already undertaken research training, for example through an undergraduate or MA degree. A few practitioners reported that they had also undertaken pedagogical research as part of an unaccredited ETF programme (usually OTLA projects); practitioners consulted with who completed these projects stated they had begun their project and wanted to continue to research it in more depth.

The majority of survey respondents who rated the written application process stated it was very good or good (65 of 66). Participants considered the written application process *"detailed and stringent"*, noting that the word count for each question gave them an idea about the level of detail required.

Shortlisted applicants are invited to attend an interview and are selected based on an overall 'score', which is then moderated by both ETF and SUNCETT. At this stage, some practitioners who are not successful in their MPhil application are offered a place on the MA short course. The programme team reported that they considered each application carefully to ensure that practitioners were undertaking the most appropriate course for them. Practitioners who initially applied for the MPhil but were given a place on the MA were also grateful for the *"stepping stone"* that this provided and felt much more prepared for the MPhil as a result[27]. It was also noted that this benefits retention rates, with many practitioners in this position reporting that they would have struggled significantly if they had progressed straight to the MPhil.

Participant capability to undertake research and adopt research informed practice

Confidence in undertaking research

As a result of the PRP, mentors and practitioners reported that confidence levels in designing and conducting research increased. Mentors considered that practitioners became more reflective, using existing research and theory to support and enhance their practice. Practitioners stated they were using educational theory to develop their knowledge and use a more critical approach to research informed practice. Increased confidence levels support practitioners to continue to pursue evidence informed research objectives.

Stakeholders also said that the PRP has enabled practitioners to increase their confidence in designing and conducting research. One of the key mechanisms to support this was reported to be joint practice development. One stakeholder reported that practitioners gain confidence in working together, exploring themes in more detail than they are able to alone. Working together also allows practitioners to debate theory with each other, which they can translate to take on *"big arguments"* in the field with their research.

[27] The few (6 of 65) practitioners with no prior experience of research training were considered for the MA short course rather than the MPhil.

Case Study K

It was reported that the programme had enhanced ideas Participant K was already exploring, by allowing the space and opportunity to formalise their research and apply the underpinning academic theory and research base, which they may not have experienced without the programme. *"Now they have realised there is a framework and pre-existing body of knowledge underpinning this, it has become more successful, they are more aware of the drivers."* Collaboration opportunities with other practitioners was identified as a factor in enabling the practitioner's learning and upskilling.

The survey data does not fully reflect qualitative feedback. Practitioners on the MA who completed both the pre and post surveys (7), or on the MPhil who completed both the pre and interim surveys (8) outlined their confidence levels in specific research skills, by marking them out of 100. However, on average, the data shows no substantial changes in confidence levels between the two data points, and for some research skills (e.g. to understand a problem from different points of view), average practitioner confidence slightly decreased. The disconnect between qualitative and quantitative feedback could be due to a number of reasons, for example, practitioners having a greater understanding of the complexity and difficulty of research skills following their experience of the PRP, or it could be the fact that baseline confidence levels in specific research skills were high to begin with (70+ on average). In addition, the sample size is small, and therefore further monitoring of confidence levels could be undertaken by the programme team to get a better understanding of changes in research capability.

Progression to further studies

Participation in the MA Short Course both motivates and increases capability to participate in higher level study. Over half of the MPhil participants since 2017 were practitioners who had successfully completed the MA short course[28]. Some practitioners who have achieved their MPhil have also transitioned onto doctoral level study.

[28] Spedding, T. (2020) *Stories of Supervision*. Education Sciences, vol. 10, no. 93

Case Study J

Participant J began studying the MA Short Course (in its previous form of Research Development Fellowship) in 2016. They progressed to studying at MPhil level and have since transitioned to doctoral level study. They described their progression to this point, third year of PhD study, since then as an *"incremental, systematic, step-by-step development"* which has reduced their feelings of this level of research being *"overbearing"* or intimidating.

Evidence from impact grids (17%, 32) submitted by practitioners between 2009-19 also suggests that some practitioners planned to, or already had, enrolled on further research programmes, for example a PhD, MPhil, or Ed.D (17%, 32 out of 186 analysed). Some of these practitioners stated they had already undertaken additional research individually or with a colleague, and in one case their line manager. This suggests that the PRP has improved practitioners' motivation and confidence to continue to expand their professional and pedagogic knowledge.

Adoption of research informed practice

Practitioners have increased their capability to adopt research informed practice. Mentors reported that practitioners have a greater understanding of what research informed practice means, and that the PRP has given them the tools to be able to implement these practices.

The majority of projects undertaken on the programme are focused on curriculum design, which has resulted in practitioners developing their capability to be innovative in designing and developing a curriculum. Practitioners stated that they felt *"validated"* to trial new research informed methods in the classroom and felt more confident in being creative and innovative in their practice. Some practitioners gave evidence that these methods led to successful innovation, for example student engagement with technologies used in the classroom, or improved learner experience through the adoption of creative curriculum design. Given the current changes to vocational education (e.g. T-Levels) which can require a more innovative approach to curriculum delivery, this is likely to be a skill that could benefit both their own practice, and their institution, going forward.

> "My research is informing my teaching practice… The research has encouraged me to read texts that I wouldn't have looked at before and being able to talk to everyone at the residentials has extended my awareness and understanding. All this has fed back into the way I structure sessions, tailor information for individual students and made me rethink what is of value to the students at specific points in the year."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Case Study E

Prior to undertaking the MPhil, Participant E did not consider research informed practice because they were not aware of it. They came to work because they *"liked doing it and wanted to make a difference".* They did not initially think about research informed practices, except for reflecting upon how they could have performed better within the classroom. Now they understand research informed practice and realise that it is a continual process of learning and adapting. They *"think about what I am doing as an individual, with students, as part of a team, how that fits in with the college and how to work differently to make a difference".* They engage in discussion and seek out opportunities to become actively invested in the process. They feel like they are part of a community and that they have changed for the better.

By adopting research informed practice, some practitioners said they thought their teaching capability had improved. Practitioners were also able to express why they changed their teaching practices to managers, colleagues and students, which they reported gave their practice more credibility and validity amongst these different groups.

> "It feels like [the PRP] allows you to do your job better.
>
> **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**"

Case Study F

As a result of their involvement in the PRP, Participant F has developed a new appreciation for the emotional and social impacts of teaching. The PRP has provided them with the research skills needed to consider the way students view and tackle problems. The practitioner reported that as an individual they have been able to refocus the way they view things, changing their focus from a delivery viewpoint to one where they look from the students' point of view and use students' feedback to influence their teaching.

Practitioners also engaged their students in aspects of the research process to extend their teaching practice. Some practitioners were incorporating the development of students' own research skills into their teaching, for example through encouraging students to read more widely and reference accurately. Others have developed new teaching or assessment methods based on their experience of the PRP, for example, one participant implemented a 'research poster' exercise for their students to improve the method of assessment in one module that students found difficult.

Employer capability to adopt research

The capability of employers to adopt local research was dependent on a number of key factors.

Employers, practitioners and stakeholders said that institutional leadership was key. Institutions with senior leaders who empower their staff to take greater control of their teaching practices and curriculum development were said to enable their staff to question and to change practices in line with research findings. Some employers stated that they were careful to promote the benefits of research and innovation to their staff, and were keen to ensure that staff *"can see that we support this"*. Institutions where leaders had participated in the programme previously were particularly supportive of practitioner research being adopted, suggesting that the longitudinal impact of the programme on the culture of an institution influences its capability to adopt research.

The *"permission"* given by such leaders for staff to take the space and time to adopt research findings was recognised by practitioners. Where senior leaders engage with research and encourage all staff to do so, some stakeholders said that this would be more likely to encourage a research informed approach to be used in daily classroom practice. This indicates that employer engagement is required from the outset, and steps should be taken to support this.

Case Study G

Participant G's college is encouraging, and investing in, a culture of self-reflective practice and innovation. The supported experiments champions demonstrate how important this is to the college. Partly as a result of the practitioner's research, the culture change has been noticed within the department, and amongst some newer teachers across the college more widely. Whilst some of them are now using popular culture and music as a tool within their classroom, the practitioner's experience has also encouraged practitioners to try and test other new ideas in the classroom; it was noted by the practitioner's manager that they are a role model for innovation in the classroom for other teachers.

Some employers gave practitioners protected time to disseminate their research. This tacit approval encouraged colleagues to begin to adopt research findings. However, others were not given the same level of support. Stakeholders acknowledged that implementing research informed practice was not a priority for some institutions, noting that these employers have neither the time nor inclination to engage with the research undertaken through the programme. FAVE institutions are facing financial challenges, which was reported to exacerbate the lack of

> "Research is a luxury for some employers… they are focused on crisis management."
>
> **STAKEHOLDER**

engagement with research. One stakeholder voiced concern that there is a danger that if employers are not fully on board, and do not engage with research, their research-engaged practitioners may seek employment elsewhere.

COVID-19 has impacted on the extent to which employers have been able to facilitate the adoption of research findings. Changes to timetabling and courses as a result of the pandemic meant that some practitioners faced course closures and found adopting new practices digitally to be challenging. For example, one practitioner commented that their research project focused on the development of practical skills in a workshop environment, and therefore was not able to adopt new practices through remote learning. However, for some practitioners, the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of research findings by institutions. Some practitioners whose research focused on digital technologies reported that the rapid move to remote learning had meant that institutions had suddenly engaged more with the findings of their research.

Overall, the evidence suggests that where employers have 'bought in' to the benefits of practitioner research, it has a positive and sustainable effect on the adoption of research findings institutionally. However, it is important to note that across the institutions involved, the level and extent of 'buy in' at either departmental or institutional level is variable.

> "Hands have been forced with regard to the use of educational technology in light of remote teaching which will have an impact upon both teachers and students as a consequence as people are more readily and frequently adopting the technologies [that] I have helped deliver CPD on.
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

6. BEHAVIOUR AND OUTCOMES

Behaviour and outcomes: summary

Practitioners become more confident in their professional practice, and career progression opportunities were widely associated with participation in the programme. Practitioners gained a better sense of their professional identity as a result of the programme.

Practitioners modify their pedagogical behaviour as a result of their research. They have implemented new curriculum approaches, and innovative methods and assessment practices, and say that this has improved their teaching and their learners' experiences and in some cases, learner outcomes.

Institutions whose approach to professional development aligns with the values of the programme see enhanced benefits and they report that PRP has contributed to a culture change, with a greater cross-institutional focus on research informed practice.

More commonly, the effects are seen at an individual or at team / department level rather than institutionally. Practitioners' research is beginning to be adopted by their colleagues who are turning towards more innovative, creative and collaborative in their practice. Some colleagues have been encouraged to engage further with research themselves.

Instances were reported where research informed practice was contributing to an improved student experience, with reports of increased engagement, retention and some indications of improved attainment and learning outcomes. Widespread attribution of effect on learner experience was difficult for practitioners to evidence.

The programme is starting to have a small but notable impact on the wider FAVE sector, through increasing the volume of peer-reviewed research undertaken for the sector, by the sector, sharing research through popular publications and the annual conference. However, the impact of the programme is currently centred on a select few institutions and barriers remain to wider sector engagement.

This section will explore the effect of research participation on changing behaviours for practitioners, employers, colleagues, students and the wider sector.

Practitioner level outcomes

The programme has had a notable impact on practitioners' confidence. Practitioners, employers and mentors discussed improvements in research confidence as discussed earlier in this report. But they also noted improved professional confidence more generally. This includes more confidence in communicating with people within their institution in terms of verbal communication to colleagues and management, or through their more practiced presentation skills.

> The [impact] I think is most underplayed is resilience and what it demands to be taking responsibility or commitment.
>
> **EMPLOYER**

Practitioners also felt more confident in communicating externally, for example via social media or presenting at conferences. One practitioner also reported that the programme had given them the confidence to bid for research funding for their institution, which they would not have had the confidence to do prior to their participation.

Case Study J

Both Participant J, their employer and mentor highlighted a growth in confidence and self-belief that had resulted from the programme. The employer saw this evidenced *"in conversations they have with people, they are defending their own position… it is really good for allowing people to reassess what they can do and see their role with fresh eyes."* The practitioner identified an increased confidence in their writing through having been published which moved them away from their comfort zone of presenting verbally. Writing for academic publication and feeling confident about their work being publicly available has been *"a big development step".*

Effect on practitioner behaviours

At an individual level, practitioners reported changing their pedagogical behaviour. This can be illustrated through case study examples.

- Two case study practitioners who focused on the theory/practice divide reported that they had implemented new practices in the classroom, which aim to improve engagement and attainment.
    - One practitioner focused on implementing dialogic learning sessions within the curriculum to stimulate students' critical thinking and improve their engagement with the theory of drama.
    - The other practitioner explored best practice in linking theory and practice in vocational education, and their findings enabled them to devise action points which enable student progression and retention.
- Two case study practitioners implemented innovative methods within their classroom to support ESOL learners.
    - One practitioner reported applying 'integrated circles' (i.e. groups of six students who engage in structured discussions using allocated rotating roles) with their ESOL classes. The practitioner had used circles in the classroom previously, but following their research findings, is now being more creative and consistent in how this approach is used.
    - A blended learning approach was implemented by a case study practitioner as a result of their research, for which

> "I'm developing strategies to improve the quality of feedback on formative assessments. The aim is, for learners to make effective use of feedback by having a clear understanding of the progress they have made and their next steps."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

they designed a ten-week course of blended learning incorporating the use of mobile phones in an ESOL context in order to increase learning by around three hours a week.

- One practitioner's research project focused on the use of music in the classroom to engage GCSE maths learners. Whilst the practitioner was using these methods prior to their research, they now have the confidence to implement other innovative approaches, and now uses popular culture within their teaching in different ways.

While the above are a small set of examples of behaviour change, findings from the survey, focus groups, impact grids and an analysis of documentation indicate that this is happening on a larger scale across programme participants.

Effect on career progression

> "In time, we expect he will become a Director.
>
> **EMPLOYER**"

Many PRP participants are ambitious and looking for new career challenges. Of the 52 survey respondents who reported on the opportunities for development facilitated by the PRP, 22 stated that they have gained, or have the potential to gain, new career opportunities as a result of the programme. Others had participated on the programme as a result of a recent career move.

Some practitioners were able to report having achieved promotion or job changes which they attributed to PRP, for example promotion to Course Leader, or Head of Learning and Faculty Manager. One employer stated that as a result of the PRP, one practitioner researcher had gained an additional role as 'Coordinator for Postgraduate Study in Creative Practice' at their institution as their academic credentials meant they were now able to meet the role's criteria. Other practitioners and employers stated that they expected practitioners to progress in the future, due to their higher profile in their institution, improved skills and relevant experience.

Practitioners have also undertaken roles outside of their organisation. For example, one case study participant was appointed an External Quality Assurer for an awarding body and was also undertaking reviews of applications for Advanced Teacher Status and Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills reviews for the Society for Education and Training.

Case Study C

Participant C has developed their confidence as a researcher through participation in the programme which is directly linked to their professional development from an English teacher to Professional Development Manager. Due to their participation on the course, they were motivated to change role from teaching of students to professional development of staff. Additionally, their responsibilities have increased with a promotion from Coordinator to Manager role linked to their increased confidence and understanding due to the course: *"I wouldn't have been qualified or knowledgeable enough to do what I am doing now without having done the course"*. This was supported by their employer who reported that the practitioner's engagement in the programme had supported them to *"embrace a professional development role and really think about how they can work in wider, more varied ways to support others to develop".*

The PRP has enabled practitioners to change their professional identity, or develop their reputation, according to practitioners and employers, which could support career development in the future. Practitioners saw themselves more as 'practitioner researchers' rather than 'teacher' or 'tutor'. Some reported that their colleagues recognised this and respected them as such. Employers agreed with this, with some stating that practitioners' reputations as practitioner researchers were accepted across colleges and with senior leadership.

> "[The PRP] has made me realise I'm an academic and intellectual, a researcher."
>
> **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Case Study K

Professional progression within the college was an aspiration held by Participant K's employer for them, with the skills, knowledge and behaviours learnt from the programme an enabling factor in this. Their employer reported developments in the participant's confidence, particularly in presentation and communication, written abilities and resilience – *"[the programme] was a challenging undertaking… which demanded another set of skills… [including] taking responsibility and commitment"*. The practitioner was seen to have *"realised 'I can do this, I belong'"*. This growth in confidence and awareness of their own abilities was also recognised by the participant's mentor.

There were instances reported where the programme has supported employee retention. A few practitioners consulted as part of case studies and focus groups reported that prior to the PRP, they were *"disillusioned"* with their work, and were considering leaving the profession. Practitioners who felt this way stated that their involvement with the programme had given them new impetus to stay in the sector and continue their career.

> This experience changes you – there is a more for less approach in FE and it is easy to get ensconced in this and forget why you came into education in the first place, which is to help people. It reignites passions and reaffirms your position. Education is more than just managing business and meeting targets – this helps you remember this.
>
> **FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Case Study B

As a result of their involvement in the PRP, Participant B has become re-enthused with teaching, with a renewed commitment to their role. The practitioner has recently been given a new job role within the college on the Teacher Education team and noted that their research was highlighted as a specific strength of their application and interview. The teacher education courses that the practitioner will be delivering are accredited by the local university, which the practitioner reported could open up potential opportunities, connections and experiences in terms of her professional and academic career.

There were also instances where it has encouraged practitioners to develop their careers in research – in some ways being a *"victim of its own success".* For example, one practitioner left the sector to work as a lecturer in Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) at their local university. They thus continue to support the FAVE sector but from a different base.

Employer level outcomes

Changes in behaviour for employers as a result of practitioner research were discussed at three levels; the institution, the workforce and the students.

Effect on institutional policies and practices

As a result of the research undertaken by practitioners, case study evidence showed that some institutions had made changes to policies and practices across the institution.

- Two employers reported that the research had enabled a large-scale change in policy to be embedded across the institution. One reported changes in teaching and learning policies for level 2 and 3 learners across the college. The other reported that the research project facilitated a change in policy which adapted the role of all Advanced Practitioners across the institution, implementing a greater focus on action research.
- One case study participant's research on blended learning had informed their institution's investment in this area. It was recognised that this could not be wholly attributable to the programme, as

COVID-19 has accelerated the need for better blended learning. However, the participants research findings will support implementation across the institution.

Examples were given of research projects which had supported the implementation or development of existing large-scale initiatives, which had in turn changed behaviours across the workforce.

- One case study practitioner supported the implementation of an e-portfolio across their institution. Plans were in place to implement this tool anyway, however staff were reluctant to engage with it. By conducting and sharing their research, staff have focused more on *why* e-portfolios are being used, and according to the practitioner, the debate has become less polarised. This has encouraged changing behaviours across the institution, with staff beginning to assess their students more holistically using the e-portfolio and are creating innovative ways of doing so. It also made feedback more visible to managers who were better able to support students who were not making enough progress.
- Another case study practitioner developed 'Teachers Takeaway', a video-based social media platform to allow practitioners to share CPD resources and ideas which are accessible at any time. The platform was already being used in the institution, however their research across MA and MPhil level has supported a greater understanding of the impact of the platform, so it can be further improved to support the development of colleagues.

> "I am currently using my research to address practice across vocational, English and maths curriculums to provide a better approach to delivering study programmes. I have a deep understanding of practice development and I am using theory to better understand and manage the study programme so that it fulfils a greater number of aims and objectives for learners."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Other employers stated that they had made modest but locally significant changes to organisational policies and practices as a result of research undertaken; in one institution the teaching and learning strategy had been updated, and in another there was a change in policy around how mature students were defined in an effort to support widening participation.

Overall, evidence of large-scale changes to policy was limited, however, evidence indicates behaviour changes in practice at department or faculty level was more common; some research undertaken couldn't always feasibly be applied across the whole institution as it is specific to the subject area.

- One employer stated that the practitioner in their organisation investigated good curriculum design leading to high expectations in vocational learning. This organisation is now considering how they use the research to define what high expectations are across all programmes in that faculty.
- One case study participant's project evaluated their institution's self-directed study skills programme. As a result of their findings, the programme has been changed in terms of its timetabling and content, which is expected to improve student engagement and retention.

Case Study B

As a result of the research project, Participant B and their colleague have completely restructured the A-Level Drama curriculum, particularly in terms of the sequencing of teaching. They have also considered in depth teaching styles and habits and have challenged pre-conceived ideas. This has benefited the A-Level team more widely, as the restructured curriculum has given staff the space to take the research findings on board and deliver dialogic teaching. The practitioner has also shared ideas within the wider faculty, primarily within the performing arts, and there are now a number of colleagues who are trialling communities of enquiry.

Culture change

Some employers, practitioners and stakeholders recognised a behaviour change towards a culture of research informed practice, which the PRP has both contributed to and stimulated. Employers reported that the research undertaken had led to increased collaboration between colleagues in researching problems, and implementing findings, with more opportunities for practitioners to undertake CPD about research informed practice. Stakeholders reported that some institutions have supported a number of practitioners to participate in the PRP, which has enabled institutions to develop a research culture that would have been *"difficult to do on their own"*. Many of these institutions have sent both senior leaders, middle leaders and frontline teaching staff on the programme, which has supported a culture change towards research informed practice at all levels of the institution.

> "The Toolkit which was created prior to the PRP gave [the practitioner's] research project context has been formally introduced in observations of teaching. If the teacher needs to develop their skills, then they are directed to watch some of the resources. If they are particularly strong, they are asked to contribute some resources. This develops a collaborative culture. Staff feedback has been good, they feel like it has helped develop them, it is good motivation and they feel valued – particularly because it has come from the bottom up."
>
> **EMPLOYER**

Case Study A

The impact of Participant A's individual research project sits within their wider college context, and the impact of the college's engagement with SUNCETT. The researcher has been part of a movement of practitioners at the college who have been developing a culture of research and practice (including enhancing the use of technology), which has been recognised in the college being shortlisted for two TES awards. The college has successfully won five other bids on OTLA research projects, which mean more staff are becoming involved in research and working collaboratively (in line with the research project's initial findings on effective professional development processes). This is also upskilling staff, with seven practitioners from the practitioner's department being involved with the SUNCETT research programme. The practitioner attributed a significant part of the research-related impacts to SUNCETT through the Practitioner Research Programme and OTLA – they described the programme as having had a *"butterfly effect"*, or like *"a pebble in the lake causing nonstop ripples".*

More widely, employers commented that the PRP has been beneficial in improving institutions' reputations. As a result of improved profile, some employers suggested that they had widened their professional networks, with both other institutions and the research community. Another employer suggested this would have a beneficial effect on staff recruitment.

Effect on the workforce

Changes to teaching and learning

Evidence suggests that as a result of increasing awareness through dissemination of research findings, some colleagues have begun to change their behaviours and adopt research undertaken in PRP projects. This has been facilitated at two levels, depending on the role of the PRP practitioner.

Practitioners in management roles were reported to be able to influence and support changing practices for their staff. This was through developing new schemes of work, designing the curriculum differently, or through encouraging staff to change their practice at meetings.

> "As a cross-college manager, with responsibilities for staff development, I try to encourage others' adoption of similar approaches in order to enhance the student experience."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Case Study C

Participant C's research was reported to have changed the way the college delivers action research. The eight action research projects which were overseen by the practitioner and became the focus of their research were a pilot, as this was not something that the college had ever done before. Subsequently their employer noted there had been *"a lot of lessons learnt about how we can do this in our organisation"*, including learning from the research project on impact. This informed the delivery of action research projects in the next academic year. For example, staff conducting an action research project together are now all based on the same campus, rather than having multi-campus groups, due to time challenges in arranging meetings across sites. Seeing the full impact of these changes was expected to need further time, although both the practitioner and their employer were confident this would have a positive impact.

Practitioners in student-facing roles were able to support teaching colleagues, through speaking about their research in meetings, inviting staff to observe their use of different practices and through peer support. One employer gave an example of a colleague who was initially resistant to the practice the practitioner was researching and implementing regarding ESOL. However, through discussions and observations with the practitioner, the colleague began to implement some of the techniques, leading to improvements in student learning.

Case Study I

The timeliness of Participant I's research focus (blended learning and use of mobile phones to support this) and an enforced change to online learning in light of COVID-19 has given them a platform within the college to share good practice on a more regular, timely, targeted and relevant basis through good practice meetings. Additionally, their approach to disseminating findings to their colleagues in *a "confident, nurturing"* way, by sharing exemplars, has led to their peers feeling *"safe"* in trying a new, somewhat contentious approach to teaching and learning (with mobile phones traditionally not being allowed in the classroom or having been used for learning).

It should be noted that while there are a number of examples of changes to teaching and learning, several employers stated that at

present, there have been limited changes to teaching and learning behaviours resulting from the research findings, although they expected that changes to teaching practices would take place in the future.

Engagement with research and practice

The programme has also encouraged teams to develop their own research groups. Some practitioners reported that they were able to share some of their research skills with their colleagues, to improve the use of research informed practice in their organisation. Impact grid analysis reported (17%, 13) practitioners who stated that several colleagues were interested in supporting the existing research projects, and others who were encouraged to take on their own research projects.

> The programme has been so beneficial that three more staff have enrolled in the MA short course with another applying… four are interested in applying for the MPhil programme next year.
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Case Study H

There is scope for Participant H to help not just their learners, but staff within the college as well – to inspire them to undertake post graduate research themselves. Following their presentation at the HE staff development day at the college, they were approached by two colleagues who were inspired to apply for the MA Short course. It is hoped that the practitioner and their colleagues who are also undertaking research will become champions for change in the institution and inspire others to apply for the course too.

The PRP has uncovered colleagues' enthusiasm to better their practice and become more innovative. For example, one survey respondent, reported that the CPD in their institution had changed radically as a result of their research. They stated that practitioners were now expected to lead on the changes to practice that they feel will most benefit their learners. By instilling a sense of collaborative practice, the respondent stated that colleagues had begun creating and sharing materials with each other, facilitating ingenuity within the classroom.

Another reported being approached following CPD sessions or meetings by colleagues who were enthused by what they had learned, and were keen to understand how they could participate. Furthermore, practitioners in one focus group reported that by delivering CPD based on their research, staff felt empowered and reinvigorated to go back to their job and develop their practice.

Effect on students' learning experience and outcomes

Findings regarding students were discussed by practitioners who submitted impact grids. When discussing initial research findings of their research projects, practitioners predominantly reported improvements in students' learning experience, such as increased engagement, confidence and enjoyment. Research projects also reported findings

around improved analytical skills, improved knowledge of topics and improved comprehension skills. As a result, 32% (59) of impact grids reported tangible impacts on student learning outcomes and quality of work. Some practitioners reported an increase in pass rates and progress against baseline levels. Others stated that the quality of student work and students' engagement with learning had improved, evidenced through increased levels of participation and feedback from parents.

However, there was no systematic evidence of the *longer-term* effect of changes in practices and behaviours having effects on learner outcomes. This was not captured in impact grids nor in this evaluation evidence partly due to the timing of interventions and lag needed to observe changes in attainment, or due to the attribution problem. Nonetheless some practitioners did, as part of their research, report changes to the learner outcomes. For example, one case study practitioner noted that the average pass rate for reading rose from 45% to 77% following a 6-week ESOL course, and another practitioner stated that their most recent cohort of learners achieved a 100% pass rate at Functional Skills English level 1 and 95% pass rate at level 2. The national benchmark is 66% and 44% respectively.

> "Those students directly involved in the supported experiments should see a noticeable 'positive change' in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Early data results evidence students' growing confidence in being able to tackle more complex literacy activities, more frequently."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

> "It is difficult to quantify the impact, it could be just a few learners or many thousands if the guiding principles (still to be identified) are applied widely."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Case Study K

Participant K's research coincided with an improvement in student outcomes and destinations. The practitioner considered that the research had a role to play in this improvement, but it was attributed to a combination of factors.

While the research was not reported to have impacted directly on students and lessons, curriculum design, the tracking and monitoring of outcomes and implementing timely interventions had been affected by the linking of theory and practice, and how this can lead to a better student experience. Additionally, the research focused on defining high expectations and instilling an aspirational culture across vocational courses, which could be expected to have positive contributed to improvements in student outcomes and destinations.

Employers, practitioners and stakeholders affirmed that research projects undertaken on the programme had supported learner retention. One stakeholder provided the example of a research project focused on vocational learning for Level 1-3 students, where the research had led to the practitioner tripling progression rates in their department. Another stakeholder cited a research project focused on teaching English GCSE using popular culture references, and the ability for students to identify with these led to a better experience of learning, resulting in improved

retention rates when compared with previous cohorts.

Case Study F

Students have been able to develop technical skills associated with the virtual laboratories, for example learning to use the software itself. Participant F noted that from an employability perspective, virtual laboratories would have a positive impact and that from a learning skills point of view, the research will have benefitted students, for example developing their skills in terms of how to manipulate data and make observations. It was also highlighted that students will have developed softer skills such as resilience, with the idea that the virtual laboratory will have enabled students to develop problem solving skills, which will have further employability benefits.

There were also examples of enhanced engagement in learning. One survey respondent reported that their learners were more engaged with the feedback they received as a result of their research implemented into practice, and another noted that their learners took more pride in their assignments, and therefore were more motivated to do well. Some practitioners in focus groups and case studies also saw a notable increase in confidence in their learners, which had impacted positively on students' mental health and wellbeing.

> "The majority of students in the classes taking part in the research had excellent attendance."
>
> **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Case Study L

Due to the increased willingness of tutors to utilise the e-portfolio which has come as a result of Participant L's research, learners are using the portfolio more often. Anecdotal feedback confirmed that many learners are proud of their portfolio, which could lead to improved motivation and engagement with their learning. Additionally, the use of e-portfolios has been particularly beneficial for some learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as they are more able to "see it all coming to life".

Wider sector-level effects

The programme team at SUNCETT have been careful not to *"overclaim"* the programme's influence on the wider sector, considering the relatively small proportion of institutions engaging with the PRP. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the programme is improving the FAVE community's engagement with research;

- The programme is increasing the number of research-engaged or research active FAVE practitioners
- Programme alumni are publishing and sharing their work in popular publications such as InTuition or TES both of which have high readership among the FAVE community
- Programme alumni are active in building communities of practice within their institutions or more broadly through moderating and contributing to social media groups such as #FEResearchmeet.

A growth in practitioner networks has also facilitated wider sector-level adoption of research informed practice, albeit on a small scale. Practitioners reported presenting their findings to different colleges through social media or cross-college networks, and as a result, practitioners reported that other institutions were implementing recommendations from the research. One practitioner wrote that a Head of Mathematics within another organisation said he intended to pilot an approach in maths classes recommended by the research.

One of the key impacts on the sector has been the increase in evidenced, peer-reviewed research about the FAVE sector, undertaken by the sector. Stakeholders reported that the increase in both quality and quantity of research has widened the evidence base for the sector to draw on, increasing the potential for changes and innovations to be adopted more widely across the sector. One academic stakeholder reported that they had cited research from the PRP in their own work. This has given additional credibility to the research, in addition to spreading the research more broadly across both the HE and the FAVE sector.

Furthermore, the PRP has led to additional opportunities for practitioners to engage with research. Key to this is the annual ETF Practitioner Research Conference, where practitioners present their research. The conference is open to anyone in the sector, although is predominantly attended by programme participants. The conference has traditionally been a one-day domestic conference, however in 2020 a three-day international research event was scheduled to take place following the domestic event, which was reported to *"signal the extent to which the status of research into educational practice in the sector has been raised, and how the Practitioner Research Programme can begin to contribute to international debates in educational research"*. The three-day event was postponed due to the pandemic but plans to deliver the conference in the future are still in place.

There is also evidence to suggest that research from the PRP could have an impact on wider sector policy, as the case study excerpt presents below. It should be noted that this practitioner's employer also completed a MA on the PRP (formerly RDF) and a PhD, and has actively encouraged practitioners from their institution to undertake the PRP following their experience. This illustrates the longitudinal impact of participation in the PRP by institutions.

> "There are lots of things happening. ETF and SUNCETT is a real driver of it. They are connected to learning and skills research networks, etc. and are expanding the programme and having ambition for it… alongside that, there has been work around recognising research in FE. The fact we have skills gaps, lack of participation, etc. These things are worrying. FE is an important sector which needs to be thought about carefully."
>
> **EMPLOYER**

Case Study J

Participant J also believed externally their professional status and credibility had been enhanced, as they are contributing to the current widening participation discourse. This has included being part of an All-Party Parliamentary Group of Women Researchers in Parliament course, which was described as a *"key moment"* in their research and career.

However, stakeholders did report limiting factors regarding the extent to which the PRP could influence the change across the sector. These included:

- A perceived disconnect between research and teaching such that practitioners consider they need to choose between them. Time to participate then becomes a barrier for practitioners with significant teaching responsibilities.
- An attitude (reported by one stakeholder to be more prevalent among more experienced teachers) that teaching skills are *"completable"* and therefore there is no need to engage with research to continue developing their practice.
- Institutional cultures that are not open to research informed practice as an idea that could impact upon mainstream FAVE challenges.

> "What the PRP has done is generated practitioners who have as a group, published in peer reviewed journals, presented at conferences... it helps the dialogue out there that the HE sector can find expert partners [in the FAVE sector] to learn things from.
>
> **STAKEHOLDER**

Consequently, some stakeholders felt that the programme should be better connected the wider sector in order to help move minds and practice towards a more researchinformed joint practice development approach to improvement.

Relationship with the University sector

Stakeholder feedback indicates that the PRP has enabled a proportion of the FAVE sector to engage, and collaborate with, HE partners.

Stakeholders reported that traditionally, research undertaken in the FAVE sector was less extensive compared with research in other educational settings (e.g. primary schools). Additionally, stakeholders reported that research was traditionally *"done to"* the FAVE sector by the HE sector, rather than in collaboration. The PRP has helped to *"change the dynamic"* between sectors by demonstrating to the HE sector that research by practitioners can be both robust and effective; that they can *"hold their own"* at an academic level.

It was also reported that practitioners are gaining more experience of the HE sector. The PRP has allowed a small number of practitioners to access the HE sector, which they may not have done otherwise. One stakeholder noted that this was particularly important given that some practitioners teaching in the sector have not had any prior experience of

HE, and therefore it gives all practitioners the opportunity to improve their academic capability.

More widely, one stakeholder stated that the relationship between the HE sector and ETF has evolved. ETF now have an academic steering group, comprising leading academics in the field. The stakeholder felt that this was in part due to the PRP, as this has demonstrated that ETF are keen to develop research within the sector, and leading academics are willing to give their time and expertise to support this. Some employers also discussed the improved relationship between sectors, noting the positive contribution made by practitioners working with SUNCETT.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out evaluation conclusions against the COM-B and Kirkpatrick models. It also provides recommendations for ETF and SUNCETT consideration.

Conclusions

Reaction and learning

Overall, practitioner experience of the PRP was positive. This is indicated by the high retention and successful completion rates, and the number of practitioners who undertake further post-programme study, which suggests that practitioners enjoy the experience and are keen to continue. The programme team is particularly valued by practitioners, in the way that they deliver the programme, and the support and feedback offered by personal mentors. In fact, one area of improvement suggested was more time allocated with mentors, emphasising the value that practitioners place on this aspect of programme delivery. The effective delivery of the PRP has resulted in learning outcomes for practitioners, with high attainment rates experienced. Practitioners attributed the depth and richness of their learning to the support and expertise of the programme delivery team. In a spirit of continuous improvement, practitioners outlined areas of improvement across several aspects of programme design, to further elevate practitioner learning and experience.

Recommendation 1: *SUNCETT to improve communication with practitioners by providing clear expectations, milestones and timescales for research delivery in the handbook. 'Countdown' type communication to help participants understand the scale of time commitment they will need to commit to meeting each milestone might also help practitioners manage their time and maintain progress, improving the quality of their learning experience.*

Recommendation 2: *Review application paperwork that practitioners are required to do, to assess the extent to which there is duplication between ETF and SUNCETT paperwork.*

The programme's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was appreciated by its learners. While it is clear that practitioners consider the time and space they get on the residentials of key importance to their learning, generally practitioners felt that their learning was not affected by the move online. It was however recognised that the workshops which were delivered online replaced the final residential of each course, when practitioners had already developed relationships with other practitioners and the programme team at the beginning of the year. SUNCETT and ETF will need to carefully consider how they approach online workshop delivery for practitioners at the beginning of the 2020/21 year, to ensure that new cohorts still have opportunities to forge relationships with others and experience the peer support element

of the programme which has been highly valued by practitioners.

It is evident that virtual workshops work, and a blended learning approach could overcome some of the barriers cited by practitioners and employers, including the lengthy travel times for some practitioners to access residentials, and the associated financial costs to both practitioners and employers, exacerbated by bursary reductions.

Recommendation 3: *Consider implementing a blended learning approach using learning developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, to reduce the time and financial costs generated by residentials for some practitioners, whilst ensuring that practitioners still have the time, space and networking benefits associated with residentials. This could be achieved by delivering two residential workshops and one online workshop.*

Recommendation 4: *ETF to consider introduction of targeted bursaries to support participants from non-participating institutions, or who face higher travel costs to attend residentials (e.g. those from the South West/East).*

The programme is considered highly reputable and credible. But it also has limited numbers and is therefore selective in its recruitment and constrained in its impact. ETF and SUNCETT could consider scaling up the programme, either through increasing the capacity of the existing programme, or to support other universities to run similar programmes. Expanding the number of places available may also generate engagement from a greater number of institutions involved across all regions, ensuring that the programme is not primarily benefiting a small number of already research-active FAVE institutions.

Recommendation 5: *Consider scaling up the programme, either through providing increased capacity at SUNCETT or liaising with other universities across the country to deliver complementary programmes. Such programmes might have a different geographic focus, or they might be open only to senior leadership or advanced teacher practitioners to target individuals with greatest influence on improving pedagogic practice. Scaling up the programme would give the opportunity for non-participating institutions to apply.*

Recommendation 6: *Consider approaches to recruitment that encourage a wider range of institutions to sponsor staff to apply, either through more regional marketing campaigns (including via existing research opportunities like #FEResearchMeet) or a sub-programme tailored to college leaders and senior managers. Recruitment approaches should specifically target institutions who have not participated in the PRP previously, to increase the programme's exposure, reach and impact. The benefits of participation for employers should be marketed, to encourage engagement and support for the practitioner throughout their engagement with the programme and beyond.*

Opportunity

The programme gives a range of practitioners the opportunity to engage with research. The characteristics of practitioners and institutions indicate that PRP cohorts are diverse in terms of level of teaching experience, role and geography. There is however limited available information on the equality and diversity characteristics of the learner cohort. The PRP also gives practitioners who do not have academic qualifications, the opportunity to undertake a level of research they may not have had otherwise, yet most participants appear to already hold postgraduate degrees. More widely, it was recognised that opportunities to undertake accredited courses to inform research informed practice are limited across the sector, and so the PRP removes some barriers to practitioner engagement in research.

Recommendation 7: *SUNCETT and ETF should implement robust processes to collect, store and monitor equality and diversity data. ETF should require a report of the profile of applicants and registered learners each year to monitor equality and diversity within the programme.*

Recommendation 8: *Undertake an analysis of the equality and diversity and other access characteristics of the learner applicants and cohorts to ensure that opportunities for participation are transparently inclusive.*

Most practitioners learn about the programme through word of mouth. This is positive, as it indicates that good practitioner experience influences other practitioners to access the PRP. However, it is likely that most practitioners hear about the programme through people within their institution (e.g. other practitioners or their employers) or geographic area which could limit the range of institutions who have the opportunity to engage with the programme.

To encourage participation from a wider range of institutions, applicants for the MA short course currently working for institutions that had not participated in the previous two years might be given positive weighting in the application process.

Recommendation 9: *SUNCETT and ETF to review existing application processes, and consider if and how additional weighting criteria need to be applied. Guidance for submission of high-quality applications should also be developed.*

Recommendation 10: *ETF and SUNCETT develop a marketing and recruitment strategy designed to raise the profile of the course and its values. This could include measures such as placing banners on different parts of the website, cross-promotion at other ETF training programmes and inclusion of alumni on panels and platforms to raise their profile.*

Recommendation 11: *ETF to include evidence about a) the impact of the programme specifically and b) the effect that adopting a critical enquiry mindset has to general practice into its leadership development programmes.*

Employer support of practitioners on the course is variable, affecting practitioner opportunity to engage with the programme. Some employers are very supportive in terms of giving practitioners protected time and encouraging their research, allowing practitioners the opportunity to better balance the demands of the course with their teaching practice. However, there are some practitioners working for unsupportive employers, which could impact on their opportunity to engage with the programme and generate impact from it. It could be counterproductive to place certain mandated requirements of employers as a condition of offering a place to one of their staff. Nevertheless, the opportunity to participate should be seen as an Award, and one that employers should value.

Recommendation 12: *SUNCETT should ensure that employer sponsors (those who sign the application) are fully aware of the expectations associated with participation, for example through sharing 'best practice' guidance. ETF could consider ways to encourage senior leaders to perceive and recognise the value of participation, for example by writing personally to college principals to congratulate them on successful applications and again on graduation.*

Recommendation 13: *SUNCETT and ETF to consider developing a standard learning contract to be signed at application or enrolment stage. The learning contract could stipulate how the research project will support the institution and elaborate the contributions that ETF, SUNCETT, the employer and the participant will be expected to make.*

Motivation

Overall motivation to engage with the programme can be defined as dual-focused; on research and practice. Practitioners themselves were primarily motivated by the opportunity to improve as researchers. Employers were rather more enthused by the effect on pedagogic practice. These two motivations are mutually symbiotic with the PRP programme which is designed to support research into practice. The opportunity to improve particular aspects of practice that were chosen by the applicant was a motivator for engagement with the programme for both practitioners and employers. The fact that the programme was offered 'for free' further motivated engagement.

Practitioners have been motivated to disseminate their research, predominantly within their institutions. The extent to which their institutions engaged with the research seemed to depend on the role of employers to facilitate chances for dissemination and implementation to occur, some employers arranged CPD sessions or meetings with senior leadership for practitioners to share their findings. However, it is

important not to underestimate the value of informal conversations in sharing learning, with many colleagues motivated to adopt research findings as a result. A mix of formal and informal methods of dissemination could ensure that learning is occurring at all levels.

Recommendation 14: *Develop guidance for employers to help them support to their PRP research practitioners, including offering time at team meetings and an agenda item on a senior management board meeting to ensure proven practices are implemented at their institution.*

Recommendation 15: *There should be an expectation among participants that they will share the research purpose, process and /or findings with at least one group of staff. SUNCETT should consider approaches to embedding this into their programme either by requiring evidence as part of a final submission (as an un-marked component), dedicating a mentoring or workshop session to it, and / or requiring key information in the impact grid.*

A significant minority of participants have been motivated to extend their engagement with the research community through making presentations at conference and contribution of peer reviewed chapters and articles. This indicates high quality and credible research emerging from the programme, which may support advances in the sector. Research findings are also shared through more accessible modes such as social media and TES articles.

Evidence from impact grids also suggests that dissemination of research is occurring consistently year on year. However, inconsistencies in reporting through impact grids has meant that the reach of dissemination is unclear. When encouraged to share figures during consultations, practitioners were often not sure or unclear of the reach of dissemination, and most practitioners did not disclose this when prompted through the survey.

Recommendation 16: *SUNCETT should be required to maintain a directory of all publicly available research outputs that arise directly from PRP participation so that it is possible to track citations and reach.*

Recommendation 17: *Impact grids are a useful form of feedback but guidance accompanying their completion needs to be clearer in terms of the definition of impact and the importance of providing statistical evidence of reach (such as numbers of colleagues attending research meetings). A systematic annual analysis of grids could be introduced.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the extent to which practitioners this year have been able to disseminate their research. The programme may wish to provide practitioners with opportunities to share learning around innovative methods of dissemination and implementation they have undertaken, to motivate PRP cohorts to apply their research findings in different ways.

Recommendation 18: *Signpost opportunities for both alumni and*

current practitioners to share research outputs to inform practice. This could include providing opportunities for practitioners to discuss innovative ways that they have either conducted or shared research findings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Capability

Feedback indicated that practitioners have increased their professional capability as a result of participation in PRP. Practitioners have gained confidence in undertaking research, improving their academic capabilities. Qualitative evidence is strong, however there was little change in confidence levels indicated through quantitative feedback, therefore ETF and SUNCETT may wish to monitor this more closely to get a better understanding of changes in research capability.

Recommendation 19: *Consider implementing standard pre/post surveys of participants or participation in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey to monitor and benchmark satisfaction with and the effects of changes in capability. SUNCETT to aim for high response rates to gather clear and robust comparators.*

Many PRP participants have continued, or plan to continue, their research beyond the programme, which will further expand their confidence and capacity for research in addition to improving engagement in, and collaboration with, the HE sector. This could result in a greater proportion of academic research on the FAVE sector 'done with' practitioners, rather than 'done to', reducing tensions and improving relationships across the sectors.

Practitioners have also increased their capability to adopt research informed practice, particularly in terms of curriculum design, which could have positive implications given the requirements of qualifications such as T-Levels. The learning gained through the programme has given practitioners a greater understanding of what research informed practice is, allowing them to embed this approach into their role.

Behaviour and outcomes

It is clear that the PRP has led to changes in behaviour for practitioners, their colleagues and at an institutional level. Practitioners have benefited from increased confidence, resilience and a stronger professional identity, which has influenced practitioner behaviour. Practitioner research is also changing behaviours at a workforce level at some institutions.

The programme's impact on opportunities for career progression is impressive. Practitioners and employers have often attributed this, at least in part, to the skills and experience gained on the programme. Evidence suggests that the programme has enthused previously disaffected practitioners to stay in the profession, impacting the sector more widely. Others chose to leave practice to develop their own academic careers.

There has been a noticeable culture change in some institutions

involved that is associated with the programme although it is difficult to say that was solely a product of PRP. Engagement with the programme is associated with a change towards a culture of research informed practice in some institutions that send practitioners on the PRP year after year. There were examples of employers changing institution-wide policies and practices as a result of learning from practitioner research. However, evidence of large-scale change to policies and practice was limited.

There is also anecdotal evidence to indicate that students have been positively affected by the programme. Examples of students improving in confidence and skills were given, in addition to more tangible outcomes, including some examples of impacts on student attainment and retention. Many practitioners were reluctant to quantify outcomes for their colleagues and students, as they felt it was difficult to attribute the outcomes to a *"single intervention"* or thought it was too early to say.

Recommendation 20: *ETF and SUNCETT should strengthen their focus on demonstrating PRP contribution to learner outcomes and improving learner experience. This includes designing systems that can be reported by practitioners in their impact grids.*

Positively, the programme is beginning to influence the wider FAVE sector. Through dissemination of research by practitioners, alongside the growth of the ETF Practitioner Research Conference, the programme is engaging parts of the wider community with research. Given the scale of the programme compared with the scale of the sector and within the context of the whole FAVE workforce, the programme has had a modest effect, with most behaviour change happening within the small number of participating institutions rather than beyond. Whilst it is clear there is still some way to go in providing a *"ripple effect"* across the sector, the overall trend of engagement is encouraging.

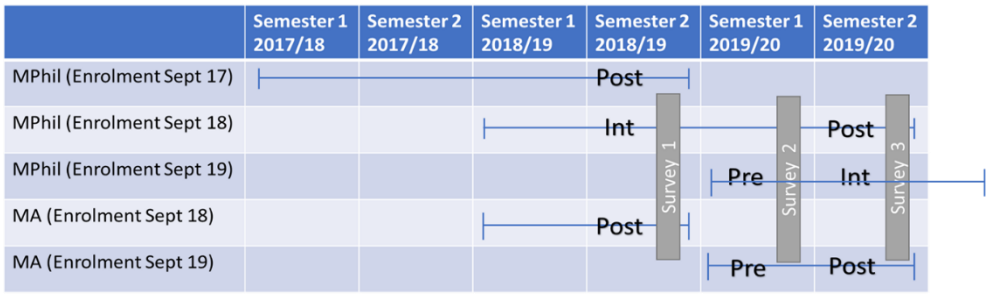
Recommendation 21: *Continue to find ways of connecting the programme with the wider practitioner research sector, both within the ETF (e.g. SET) and externally (e.g. #FEResearchMeet).*

ANNEX A: SURVEY DISSEMINATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Online surveys of participants were completed to explore motivations, opportunity to participate, satisfaction, learning, sharing findings and implementation. Given that participants are at different stages of their study, three surveys were developed – a pre-survey for participants at the start of the course, an interim survey for MPhil participants who are surveyed at the end of their first year of study, and a post-survey for participants at the end of their course. Eight online surveys were disseminated to five cohorts, with survey distribution timings shown in Figure A-1.

Figure A-1: Diagram of PRP survey distribution



Source: SQW

Survey responses

All participants were invited to participate in a survey at least once, with most invited to participate in either an interim and a post survey or a pre and a post survey:

- a post-survey in May 2019 to MPhil participants who enrolled in September 2017 (12 of 15 potential responses);
- a post-survey in May 2019 to MA participants who enrolled in September 2018 (14 of 20 potential responses);
- an interim survey in May 2019 to MPhil participants who enrolled in September 2018 (11 of 13 potential responses) and a follow up post survey to the same cohort in May 2020 (3 of 8[29] potential responses);
- a pre-survey in September 2019 to MPhil participants who enrolled in September 2019 (12 of 13 potential responses) and an interim follow up survey to the same cohort in May 2020 (9 of 13 potential responses);
- a pre-survey in September 2019 to MA participants who enrolled in September 2019 (16 of 19 potential responses) and a follow up post survey to the same cohort in May 2020 (8 of 18[30] potential responses).

[29] The total cohort differs between survey points as some practitioners do not continue into their second year of MPhil.
[30] The total cohort differs between survey points as one practitioner withdrew during the course.

Table A-1: Number of responses to each survey

SURVEY	RESPONDENTS
Pre 2019	28
Interim 2019	11
Post 2019	26
Interim 2020	9
Post 2020	11
Total	**85**

Source: Practitioner survey

Data considerations

As some respondents were invited to complete multiple surveys for each programme (e.g. the pre-2019 and interim 2020 survey), several respondents were identified as duplicates in questions which were asked across multiple surveys. Table A-2 shows the combination of surveys completed and the number of respondents who completed each combination.

Table A-2: Combination of survey responses

SURVEY	RESPONDENTS
Pre-2019 (MPhil) and Interim 2020 (MPhil)	4
Interim 2019 (MPhil) and Post 2020 (MPhil)	2
Pre-2019 (MA) and Post 20 (MA)	7
Post 2019 (MA) and Pre-2019 and Interim 20 (MPhil)	4
Post 2019 (MA) and Interim 2020 (MPhil)	1
Pre-2019 (MPhil) only	4
Pre-2019 (MA) only	9
Interim 2019 (MPhil) only	9
Post 2019 (MA) only	9
Post 2019 (MPhil) only	12
Post 2020 (MA) only	1
Post 2020 (MPhil) only	1

Source: Practitioner survey

In order to avoid the duplication of responses, several measures were taken:

- For those individuals who had completed two surveys for the same programme, for example the 2019 pre-survey (MA) and 2020 post survey (MA), their most recent response was included in the analysis[31].

[31] Where the question had not been asked in the most recent survey the respondent's other response was included.

- For the one respondent who completed the 2019 post survey (MA) and 2020 interim survey (MPhil), these responses were treated separately as they related to different programmes. Similarly, for the four respondents who completed the 2019 post survey (MA) and 2019 pre and 2020 interim (MPhil) surveys, the 2019 post (MA) and the 2020 interim[32] (MPhil) responses were treated separately. This resulted in the total number of respondents being 68.

Overall, there was a total of 68[33] unique respondents included in the survey analysis. The exception to this was for the questions relating to respondent characteristics (job role, years of FAVE practitioner experience and highest academic qualification held), where only one response was used for each of the respondents as these responses had not significantly changed between the two responses.

[32] Where the question had not been asked in the Interim 2020 survey the respondent's response to the Pre 2019 survey was included.
[33] This figure of 68 includes the Post MA survey response and their Pre/Interim MPhil response as separate respondents.

ANNEX B: IMPACT GRID ANALYSIS

Introduction

Impact grids are short summaries of the effects and impact that a research project has had both over time and across different stakeholders. SQW were commissioned by ETF to undertake an analysis of impact grids developed by practitioners on the Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) from 2009-10 to 2018-19. The PRP delivery partner, the University of Sunderland have been collecting impact grids from course participants since the beginning of the PRP (previously known as the RDF programme). Grids are completed by all practitioners at the end of their course.

The grids are designed to be a simple data capture exercise, asking practitioners to give an overview of their research project, evidence of immediate impact and evidence of wider impact in a single A4 sheet. Each impact grid contains information about one research project, rather than each individual practitioner's experience (see Figure A-1).

Figure A-1: Impact Grid format

Practitioner's Name(s) & Working Title	Project Overview	Evidence of Immediate Impact	Evidence of Wider Impact

Source: SUNCETT Impact Grid

Analysis approach

Qualitative analysis of impact grids was undertaken using MaxQDA, a qualitative analysis software package. A coding framework was developed based on SQWs existing knowledge of the PRP and impact grid formats. This framework was tested using 30 impact grids (15 from 2009-10 and 15 from 2018-19) and was reviewed by ETF and SUNCETT. The framework was then refined and adapted based on this review and further refined during the analysis. The coding framework was based on three Tiers of codes. Top level Tiers are outlined below. The full framework is elaborated in Annex B1.

- Project title
- Programme (this code was only used for impact grids completed after 2017-18)
- Participant role
- Theme of research project
- Literature quoted
- Number of researchers involved
- Methods used
- Initial research findings
- Dissemination activity
- Personal impact

- Professional impact

ETF shared 191 impact grids with SQW. In total, **186 impact grids (and therefore research projects) have been coded and analysed**. Four were discounted from 2017-18, as these were submitted by MPhil students after their first year but were resubmitted (with additional content) following the completion of their second year (2018-19). An additional impact grid was discounted from 2010-11, as it did not contain any information.

There are more participants than there are impact grids as each grid relates to a single research project and several projects were conducted by more than one research (see Table B-1).

Table B-1: Total number of impact grids received and coded

ACADEMIC YEAR	NUMBER OF GRIDS RECEIVED	NUMBER OF GRIDS CODED	NUMBER OF RESEARCHERS
2009-10	19	19	20
2010-11	23	22	32
2011-12	22	22	27
2012-13	10	10	15
2013-14	3	3	4
2014-15	15	15	22
2015-16	16	16	24
2016-17	32	32	47
2017-18	17	13	13
2018-19	34	34	37
Total	**191**	**186**	**241**

Source: SQW analysis of impact grids

Understanding the data

This annex should be read taking into account the following considerations:

- Over half of impact grids (113, 61%) did not contain information about practitioner roles. Therefore, this analysis does not provide a comparison between those in management roles and those in student facing roles.
- Some grids may have been completed by the same individual, who have completed different research projects at different times. For example, an individual may have undertaken an MA, and then completed a MPhil, but have submitted an impact grid for both. As the impact grids were shared with SQW in an anonymised format, it is not possible to determine which impact grids, or how many, are completed by the same individual. However, we have assumed that each research project will have delivered its own impacts, and therefore expect there is limited duplication.

- The number of grids received vary year by year, from three to 34, so differences between years have only been drawn out where there have been sufficient grids to make any comment appropriate and relevant.
- The grids include self-reported data, completed very shortly after completion of the PRP. Therefore, evidence of medium or long-term impact is limited as they predominantly focus on reach, outputs and outcomes of the research.
- The data presented here are self-reported by individuals. In these reports they can claim impacts on their own and their colleagues' professional practice but rarely provide corroboration of those effects or external verification. As such the grids offer a subjective assessment of impact and effect.

Robustness of the data

The table below depicts how many impacts and dissemination activities were coded on average per year. This gives an approximate indication of the scale of reporting within each individual impact grid over time. The average number of coded segments fluctuates year on year, and an increase can be seen from 2016-17 to 2018-19. This is particularly noticeable in how many dissemination activities are recorded. This may be due to the fact that practitioners were reporting more of their reach and impact, rather than them having a greater reach and impact than in previous years, suggesting recording of impact and activity is beginning to become more robust. However, it is important to also take into account the *quality* of what is recorded, which has improved from 2009-10 to 2018-19, with impacts grids including more specific activities and evidence of their impact.

Table B-2: Average number of impacts and dissemination activities coded per document

YEAR	AVERAGE IMPACTS	AVERAGE DISSEMINATION (ACTUAL AND PLANNED) ACTIVITIES
2009-10	5.7	2.0
2010-11	2.5	1.3
2011-12	6.5	3.0
2012-13	3.7	1.6
2013-14	3.3	1.7
2014-15	2.3	1.6
2015-16	1.4	1.6
2016-17	3.3	1.5
2017-18	2.1	2.4
2018-19	4.6	5.7
Total	3.8	2.6

Source: SQW impact grid analysis

Practitioners and research projects

This section outlines key findings about the practitioners who submitted impact grids and their research projects. This includes the role of the practitioner, the number of researchers involved, the theme of research projects, research methods used, and any initial research findings discussed. Percentages and frequencies are based on the number of documents coded (i.e. the number of impact grids coded), unless otherwise stated.

Practitioners

O**ver half of impact grids (61%, 113) did not state the role of participant(s)**. The proportion of those declaring their role decreased over time; from 2014/15, it was only possible to determine the role of the participant(s) if they had stated this inadvertently in their impact grid. Therefore, it cannot be determined if the types of roles have changed over time.

Practitioners who stated their role were more likely to be in a management role than a teaching or student facing role. Of those practitioners who reported their role (90 practitioners from 73 impact grids), 67% stated they were in a management role (60[34]). Within this cohort, the types of role varied. Many practitioners defined their role as course/curriculum leader, manager or head of department. Four practitioners specified their role as focused on teaching and learning. Three practitioners reported their role at the highest level of college management (FE principal, Chief Executive, Managing Director).

Those who were in a teaching or student facing role (32%, 27) predominantly defined their role as lecturer, tutor or teacher. Within this group two were student teachers.

Research projects

Number of researchers involved

Research projects were most likely to be delivered by one practitioner (73%, 135). However, there was a substantial minority of projects delivered by more than one practitioner. In total, 26% (49) of research projects were delivered by a paired practitioner team. Two were delivered by three practitioners, and one was delivered by four practitioners. The proportion of projects delivered by one practitioner fluctuated year by year, with no clear pattern, as shown in Table B-3.

Table B-3: Proportion of research projects with one researcher

YEAR	PROJECTS	%
2009-10	18	95%
2010-11	12	55%
2011-12	17	77%

[34] Based on the number of segments coded (i.e. number of practitioners) rather than the number of documents coded (i.e. number of projects reported in impact grids).

2012-13	7	70%
2013-14	2	67%
2014-15	9	60%
2015-16	9	56%
2016-17	17	53%
2017-18	13	100%
2018-19	31	88%
Total	**135**	**73%**

Source: SQW impact grid analysis

Theme of research projects

The majority of research projects were covered by three broad thematic areas; **curriculum design, assessment and feedback, and CPD**. These categories were not mutually exclusive, as some projects fell into more than one thematic area.

Over half (58%, 107) of research projects focused on curriculum design. Within this thematic area, research projects focused on a range of topics.

- Most commonly, curriculum design-based research projects centred around improving maths and English (32%, 34 of 107). Within this category, research projects focused on two areas particularly:
    - how curriculum design can support those undertaking ESOL learning, for example using different teaching approaches to improve writing skills (e.g. a genre-based teaching approach or writing circles).
    - research projects exploring maths interventions tended to consider curriculum design in improving the learner experience or improving confidence/motivation.
- Curriculum design-based research projects also focused on digital technologies (20%, 21 of 107). Many of these projects considered incorporating digital technology into curriculum design, using both hardware (e.g. iPads, digital recorders) and software (e.g. MOODLE), and others wanted to understand how curriculum design interventions can improve digital skills.
- Vocational learning was a key focus for 17 (16%, of 107) of research projects. Projects explored the nature of vocational learning, student experience of vocational pathways and the academic-vocational divide.

Research projects which focused on CPD (20%, 38) tended to centre around practitioner learning methods and digital technology. Projects which focused on practitioner learning methods (47%, 18 of 38) considered how specific interventions could be used to improve professional development, for example joint practice development, collaborative action research and supported experiments. Some research projects within this category also looked at mentoring or

coaching models in CPD, in particular for student teachers. CPD-based research projects considering digital technologies (24%, 9 of 38) were varied in focus, from developing websites specifically for CPD interventions, to improving digital skills.

Those who focused on assessment and feedback (13%, 24) most commonly looked at feedback and performance. Eight (33%) projects focused on improving feedback to improve learner performance, for example through peer assessment, or oral feedback. Five (21%) projects respectively considered assessment and feedback in maths and English, and the use of digital technology to deliver more effective feedback. These themes align closely with the topics focused on in curriculum design-based research projects.

It is important to note the **common thread of digital technology through the three predominant thematic areas**. Practitioner research was focused on more innovative ways to generate efficiencies, and to support staff development as well as ways to improve teaching practices.

Whilst many research projects broadly fit into one of the three categories described above, there were outlying themes that 14% (26) of research projects focused on.

- Nine research projects considered student engagement with education, which included identifying the barriers to student engagement, and understanding approaches to improve student engagement (e.g. the use of music, student forums).
- Seven research projects focused on learner support as a key theme, with some projects considering the impact of counselling or mentoring on students, and others researching strategies to improve additional learning support in their institution.
- Four projects focused specifically on improving mental health and wellbeing.

Other themes individual research projects focused on included techniques to improve work experience participation, the impact of safeguarding frameworks on teaching practices, and looking at changing learning cultures within institutions.

Research methods used

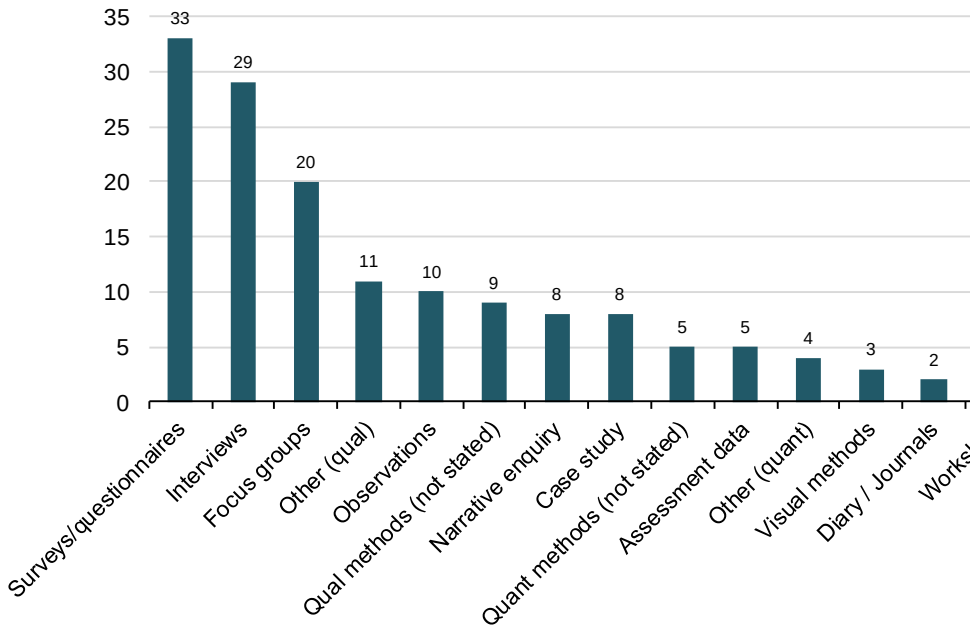
Fewer than half of impact grids discussed the research methods used during their project (42%, 79). When research methods were discussed, these were **predominantly qualitative research methods** (84%, 66 of 79), most commonly interviews (44%, 29 of 66) focus groups (30%, 20 of 66) and observations (15%, 10 of 66). Interviews ranged from informal conversations to semi-structured interviews, and were undertaken with a variety of individuals, for example students, staff and sometimes other learning providers. Some of the interviews and focus groups conducted went on to inform case studies. Where impact grids mentioned observations, they mainly highlighted lesson and lecture

observations. Some of the observations aimed to understand the success of the new strategies, reflect on the learning that had occurred, and detect any 'micro changes' in the behaviour of the learners.

A smaller proportion of research projects used quantitative methods (56%, 44 of 79). When quantitative data collection methods were used, it tended to be through surveys and questionnaires (75%, 33 of 44) rather than through assessment data (11%, 5 of 44); this could be due to difficulties in attribution and comparing with baseline data.

In terms of the mix of qualitative and quantitative research used in research projects, many used only qualitative methods (44%, 35 of 79). Many also used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (39%, 31 of 79). Fewer used quantitative methods alone (16%, 13 of 79).

Figure B-1: Research methods reported to be applied in PRP research projects



Source: SQW Impact Grid Analysis

Initial research findings

Approximately one third (36%, 67) of impact grids reported their initial research findings. Of these, 70% (47 of 67) reported research findings amongst learners, and 52% (35 of 67) reported research findings amongst other practitioners (these categories were not mutually exclusive).

Research findings reported by PRP practitioners related to their learners predominantly focussed on effects such as engagement, confidence and enjoyment. As a result of the action research, the impact grids suggest that learners involved became more engaged with their learning (with some citing evidence such as improved attendance),

were more confident in their learning, more motivated and had a more enjoyable learning experience. However not all research findings were discussed within impact grids, and therefore we cannot draw the conclusion that *all* research has led to positive outcomes for learners.

> *"Four out of 6 young people who were previously disengaged and were interviewed for the research are now engaged on a mentoring project run by the college – evidence that creating opportunity for face to face contact is an extremely effective way of engaging hard to reach young people." (2012-13)*

Research projects also reported findings around attainment for learners. However, how this was reported varied, some impact grids discussed tangible findings, for example improved analytical skills, improved knowledge of topics and improved comprehension skills. Other impact grids were more ambiguous, with one citing 'improved learner success'. Whilst no practitioner stated that their research project had a negative impact on attainment, two stated it had not made a difference to learner attainment.

Research effects reported amongst practitioners focused on the use of specific teaching practices and increases in curriculum/resource creation by those involved in the projects.

> *"The results suggest that many trainees felt that peer assessment had made them better classroom practitioners and more adept in assessment for learning." (2016-17)*

Reach and impact

This section outlines the actual and planned dissemination activities for the research projects, as well as the impacts of the research on practitioners' organisations, and on their own research and practice. It is important to be aware that not all dissemination activity and impacts will have been recorded on the impact grids due to the timing of their completion. Therefore, the findings presented in this chapter may understate the full range and scale of dissemination activities or impacts.

Reach

Completed dissemination activity

Practitioners had already undertaken a substantial amount of dissemination activity at the time their impact grids were written. They reported that 155 out of the 186 total research projects had been disseminated in some way.

Nearly three quarters of these projects (74%, 114 of 155) had been

disseminated at the ETF Practitioner Research Conference, as a presentation (36%, 56 of 155), as a poster (19%, 29 of 155), or as both (19%, 29 of 155). Twenty-four (15%, of 155) research projects were presented at other conferences, such as the European Educational Research Association (EERA) Conference, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Conference, and an International Conference on Critical Thinking. Conferences mainly took place across England, with some in Finland. Please see Annex A for the full list of conferences at which research findings were presented.

Sixty (39%, of 155), research projects had been **presented to colleagues or internally** in the practitioners' own institutions. This has involved practitioners delivering CPD sessions, workshops, and formal presentations to colleagues, other teams and departments. It also included speaking about their research during team meetings and informal conversations with colleagues. In one instance, research findings were made into a film and screened in the faculty.

The method of reporting dissemination activity varied. Some impact grids included numbers of individuals that the research had been shared with. This was more common in settings in which individuals could easily be counted (e.g. internal staff meetings). However, recording the number of individuals was rare in instances with larger groups of people, for example at conferences. Therefore, it is currently difficult to confidently estimate the reach of dissemination activity as a result of the PRP.

"Shared my research experience within English staff meetings (15 members) and staff conference (100)." (2018-19)

"I presented findings to the senior management team on how to develop CPD opportunities for staff across the college that would have direct impact on improving teaching, learning and assessment." (2016-17)

Planned dissemination activity

At the time impact grids were written**, 57 (31%) research projects still had plans to disseminate their findings further** (49 of these had already undertaken some form of dissemination). For twenty-four projects, practitioners had plans to present their research at conference, ten of which being at the ETF Practitioner Research Conference. The other conferences included the EERA Conference, the BERA conference and the LSRN Annual Research Event. Please see Annex A for the full list of conferences at which practitioners were planning to present their research.

Another common plan was to disseminate findings to colleagues or internally in the practitioners' own institutions (39%, 22 of 57). Some

practitioners had plans to disseminate findings to colleagues through written articles for internal newsletters and college intranets.

Just under one in ten of the research projects were aiming to be published in journals (30%, 17 of 57) such as the Journal of Educational Action Research, the Journal of Arts and Community, the Journal for Further and Higher Education, and Intuition.

> *"I will continue, in the future, to write articles that highlight the benefit of my research." (2018-19)*

Overall, 95% (177) of research projects had already disseminated their findings (155), or had plans to disseminate their findings (57).

Professional impact

A full breakdown of the proportion and frequency of research projects which reported any professional impact is presented in Table B-4. Please note, categories are not mutually exclusive. These are elaborated further in the next section.

Table B-4: Professional impacts achieved by research projects (n=186)

IMPACT	PROJECTS	%
Impact on colleagues' teaching practices	86	46%
Networks or collaborative working within college	65	35%
Impact on student learning	59	32%
Networks or collaborative working between different colleges	30	16%
Impact on management policy or practice	27	15%
General increase in network and collaborative working	20	11%
Impact on colleagues' interest in research	13	7%
Impact on institution's culture and attitude to research	9	5%
Learning tool adoption	7	4%
Extension of funding in the institution for the project	5	3%
Additional job role(s) created	5	3%
Institution's strategic objectives reached	3	2%
Networks or collaborative working internationally	3	2%
Application to funding	3	2%
Other	11	6%

Source: SQW analysis of impact grids

Impact on teaching practices

The majority of impact grids reported that the PRP had had a positive impact on the practitioners' organisations (70%, 131). Many (46%, 86) reported that their **colleagues' teaching practices improved** as a

result of the research. They stated that their research led to a range of different practices including colleagues changing the teaching strategies they use, the way their design their lessons, and feedback processes. One practitioner used an excerpt from their organisation's Ofsted report to evidence this change, noting that there had been a positive increase in the promotion of equality and diversity through the taught curriculum (which the research project focused on). For most however, external verification of such changes was not provided, and neither was the change quantified in terms of numbers of colleagues adopting change.

> *"There is improved quality of teaching (as evidenced by the use of various teaching strategies to ensure that all learners are challenged and engaged, receive feedback on their learning and given advice on how to make further progress)." (2010-11)*

The PRPs have **encouraged colleagues to take a greater interest in research**, as stated in 13 impact grids (17%). Several colleagues have been interested to join the existing research projects, and others have felt encouraged to take on their own research projects. Some have expressed an interest in applying for funding.

> *"Colleagues are being inspired by the possibility of research opportunities to enhance their practice and thus the experience of their learners.". (2009-10)*

Impact on organisations

Practitioners also stated that there had been an **increase in networks or collaborative working between colleagues within the college** (35%, 65). This has been as a direct result of the research, for example, tutors agreeing to participate in research. It has also happened indirectly, as staff have become interested in the research projects and keen to come together to discuss it and implement recommendations. For example, in one area, practitioners are collaborating in the use of new software to improve teaching and learning.

Some practitioners stated that there had been an impact on their institution more widely, in some cases **impacting on management policy or practice** (15%, 27). Examples given by practitioners included the implementation of protected time for CPD and changes to homework policies. Changes to observation strategies were also mentioned by some practitioners, which may subsequently improve teaching and learning in the organisation.

> *"The majority of lecturers found the coaching process to be supportive and believe it will positively impact their practice.*

The coaches also developed a wider picture of staff development needs and the impact of college observation strategy, all of which have resulted in a review of College policies." (2014-15)

In addition, practitioners noted an **increase in networks or collaborative working between institutions** (16%, 30). Cross-college groups, clusters, and networks were formed as part of the research projects in order for colleges to share learning and implement good practice. Practitioners are also presenting their findings to different colleges through existing groups and channels, and as a result, practitioners reported that other colleges implementing recommendations from the research. One practitioner wrote that a Head of Mathematics within another organisation said he intends to pilot an approach recommended by the research in maths classes.

"One real win from the project is that an ongoing network has formed between four small independent providers with the possibility of this increasing to eight in the future. They have made tangible plans to share expertise and collaborate on curriculum planning and resource design." (2016-17)

Impacts on students

As a result of the research projects, practitioners reported that they had begun to see **tangible impacts on student learning** (32%, 59). Practitioners demonstrated this in a variety of ways, related to the objectives of their research. However, generally the impact on student learning was evidenced through improved outcomes and quality of work. Some practitioners reported that learning outcomes had improved, citing an increase in pass rates and progress against baseline levels. Others stated that the quality of student work and their engagement with learning had improved, evidenced through increased levels of participation and feedback from parents.

"From the sample 58% of students made at least one grade of progress in the research period and 19% made two grades of progress." (2018-19)

"All learners (28) self-assessed themselves as making improvements in one or more areas in maths" (2016-17)

However, whilst some research projects evidenced the impact on student learning quantitatively where possible, others did not, citing more ambiguous impacts, such as 'increased progression of students'.

Personal impact

A summary of the proportion and frequency of research projects which

reported they had resulted in personal impact for the practitioner(s) involved is provided in Table B-5. Please note, categories are not mutually exclusive.

Table B-5: Personal impacts achieved by research projects (n=186)

IMPACT	PROJECTS	%
Qualification submitted/achieved	73	39%
Enrol on further research or learning	32	17%
Improved knowledge of research area	20	11%
Improved knowledge of the research process	12	6%
Improved research skills	12	6%
New job role (including promotion or move to another employer)	10	5%
Improved classroom skills	7	4%
Confidence in job role	7	4%
Additional responsibility in current role	4	2%
Increased media presence (e.g. twitter, web views)	3	2%
Satisfaction in job role	2	1%
Other	2	1%

Source: SQW analysis of impact grids

Over half of practitioners reported positive impacts on their own research and practice (57%, 106). Most commonly, **participants planned to enrol, or had already enrolled, on further research programmes**, for example, a PhD, MPhil, or Ed.D (17%, 32). Some of these practitioners stated they had already undertaken additional research individually or with a colleague, for example, one practitioner stated they were now conducting research with their line manager. This suggests that the PRP has stimulated participant interest in research, and research informed practice and are motivated to explore it further.

> *"I will be using the information gathered from this research to conduct further exploration of the key qualitative themes and may consider this as an approach to studying for a PhD in education." (2011-12)*

Ten participants (5%) stated they **achieved new job roles or had been promoted**. Roles have included Head of Research, Curriculum Leader, and Head of Teaching and Learning. However, it should be noted that whilst the PRP may have been a factor in promotions, the extent to which the PRP can be attributed will most likely vary substantially.

The impact grids show that practitioners believe taking part in the research projects directly helped **improve their knowledge of the research area (11%, 20), their knowledge of the research process (6%, 12) and their research skills (6%, 12)**. Practitioners wrote that the

projects gave them an opportunity to refine their skills, access academic resources, develop deeper insight into research topics, access a mentor through regular tutorials and improve in confidence as researchers and educators.

> *"The most valuable finding in our research project has been the difference it made to us as practitioners. It gave us real space to share our skills and knowledge, reflect on our teaching, become more creative with strategies, more open to feedback from learners and peers, and ultimately, more confident". (2016-17)*

Completing a research project earns participants a 30 Credit Master Module in Advancing Pedagogy, which was mentioned and valued by many practitioners (39%, 73).

Interestingly, practitioners were less likely to report through impact grids that the PRP had resulted in softer impacts, such as improved confidence in their job role (4%, 7), or improved satisfaction in their job (1%, 2). This is not to suggest that practitioners did not experience these benefits, but it just may not have occurred to them to record these impacts through the impact grid process.

Summary and recommendations

A qualitative analysis of PRP impact grids was undertaken by SQW. Using the coding framework set out in Annex A, 186 impact grids were coded and analysed to provide an overview of the types of research projects being undertaken, in addition to the reported reach and impact of the PRP.

Practitioners undertaking the PRP are more likely to be in a management role than a teaching or student facing role. This could be due to managers having more time to undertake additional qualifications than teachers with a full timetable and can be more flexible in how they use their time. However, 61% of impact grids did not state the role of the participant(s) undertaking the research project, and therefore more data is needed to affirm this conclusion.

Two thirds of research projects were undertaken by more than one researcher. Projects were most commonly undertaken by a pair of researchers working collaboratively on a shared objective. The impact grids did not state whether these colleagues were from the same or different institutions, but it is likely that there are examples of both.

Research projects addressed a range of different themes. Most could be broadly categorised into three thematic areas; **CPD, assessment and feedback and curriculum design** (with the latter being the most popular). The use of digital technology was a common strand cutting across these three areas, with practitioners' keen to generate efficiencies and improve teaching practices.

Whilst only 42% of impact grids included details about the methods they used, it can be inferred that **research projects were more likely to use qualitative methods** than quantitative methods. However, out of all the individual types of data collection methods mentioned in impact grids, surveys and/or questionnaires were the most commonly used method of data collection, possibly due to the ability to access a wider range of responses than undertaking just qualitative methods (e.g. interviews). Learner assessment data was not reported to be used often, potentially as a result of the short research timeframe.

Just over one third of impact grids provided information about their research findings. Where this centred on students, research findings focused on the softer benefits of the intervention, for example improved engagement, confidence and enjoyment. Where research projects presented findings regarding practitioners, these focused on the use of specific teaching practices by practitioners and others in their institution.

Many research projects had already been disseminated in some way at the time the impact grids were completed. **Predominantly, dissemination took place at the ETF conference** (through a presentation or poster). In addition, some research projects had been disseminated more widely through conferences in the sector or internally. This suggests that whilst changes to practice may be occurring within organisations, learning from the research may also be informing change in the wider sector (although the exact scale of either of these activities cannot be determined from the impact grids).

The majority of research projects reported their plans to begin to, or continue to, disseminate their findings. Most commonly, this was through similar types of activity than had already occurred. However, a greater proportion of projects also planned to publish findings in journals.

Reported impact for practitioners' organisations, colleagues and students included through **improved teaching practices for colleagues** as a result of changing teaching strategies, lesson design and feedback processes. In addition, impact grids noted the **increase in networks or collaborative working**, both within the college and more widely (e.g. through the development of cross-college groups). Within the organisation, practitioners started to see changes in management policy or practice as a result of their research. Some research projects also resulted in **improvements for student learning**, evidenced through improved outcomes and work quality, although the impact on student learning could be better evidenced (e.g. quantitatively, or through specific examples) by many practitioners.

The PRP has also had an impact on practitioners themselves. This included an ignited passion for research, evidenced by the motivation to **continue to undertake research**, either through a qualification or informally within their institution. Some participants also **achieved**

promotions throughout the course of the PRP, which they attributed (at least in part) to the programme. Practitioners were less likely to consider the softer impacts of their involvement, for example, improved confidence in their job role or improved satisfaction, although this does not suggest that these impacts were not achieved.

Recommendations

The impact grids provide an accessible and extensive record of the early effects of research undertaken by PRP participants. The value of emerging insights could be enhanced through a collection process that creates more consistent, systematic and numeric data. The following recommendations are made with a view to achieving greater value from the impact grids.

Recommendation 1: adapt the design of the impact grid.

A number of different adaptions could be made to the format of the grid itself:

- Space should be allocated within the impact grids for practitioners to include descriptors, for example practitioner role. Currently, this information is inconsistently reported.
- Consider changing the headings from 'immediate' and 'wider' effect to 'dissemination of findings', 'impact on students and practitioners', and 'impact on organisation and partnerships'.
- Where possible, practitioners should be encouraged to quantify the reach or impact of their project. Some practitioners provided this for example by stating the number of people they disseminated to in a staff meeting or CPD session, however this was not as common as expected and a separate space on the might encourage clearer reporting.

Recommendation 2: SUNCETT and ETF should develop additional guidance for filling in the impact grid

The quality of impact grids is currently inconsistent, some are detailed and contain all information required, whereas some have limited detail. Additional guidance such as a briefing sheet or prompts or core questions could result in more consistent data without losing its flexibility.

Recommendation 3: following the initial submission, SUNCETT should encourage practitioners to update their impact grids

Impact grids are completed towards the end of the programme or shortly after its completion in order to ensure a high response. The effect of this timing is that longer term effects are not captured. Whilst it is recognised that not all practitioners will contribute to their impact grids post-PRP, SUNCETT should consider following up with practitioners at +6 months to generate longer term impact data.

Annex B1: Final coding framework

Table B-6: Coding framework used for impact grid analysis

TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
Project title		
Programme	MA Short Course	
	MPhil	
Participant role	Management role (e.g. head of department, head of school, curriculum/teaching and learning lead, etc.)	
	Teaching/student facing role (e.g. tutor, lecturer, teacher, etc.)	
	Other	
Theme of research project	Curriculum design	Maths and English Vocational learning Leadership STEM Equality and diversity Digital technology Citizenship education Leaner journey Relationship between theory and practice Other
	Assessment and feedback	Maths and English Vocational learning Leadership STEM Equality and diversity Digital technology Feedback and performance Other
	CPD	Maths and English Vocational learning Leadership STEM Equality and diversity Digital technology Practitioner learning methods Other
	Other	Mental health and wellbeing Engagement with education Learner support Other
Literature quoted		
Number of researchers involved	One researcher	
	Two researchers	
	Three researchers or more	
Methods	Qualitative methods	Interviews Focus groups

TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
		Observations Diary / Journals Case study Narrative enquiry Visual methods Workshop Other
	Quantitative methods	Assessment data Surveys/questionnaires Other
Initial research findings	Research findings among learners	Meeting learner needs Engagement Attainment Enjoyment Confidence Communication Aspiration Motivation Attitude Other
	Research findings among practitioners	Teaching practices Assessment practices Curriculum / resource creation Innovation/creativity Motivation Other
	Other research findings	
Dissemination	Already completed	To colleagues/internally Poster at the ETF Practitioner Research Conference Presentation at the ETF Practitioner Research Conference Presentation at another Conference Presentation to another external audience Journal publication Published work with supervisors (co-authored) Other written output to another external audience Learning tool RDF case study ETF residential/to other participants Other
	Planned	To colleagues/internally Poster at the ETF Practitioner Research Conference Presentation at the ETF Practitioner Research Conference Presentation at another Conference Presentation to another external audience Journal publication Other written output to another external audience Learning tool

TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
		Other
Personal impact		
	New job role (including promotion or move to another employer)	
	Additional responsibility in current role	
	Satisfaction in job role	
	Enrol on further research or learning	
	Confidence in job role	
	Improved classroom skills	
	Improved knowledge of research area	
	Improved knowledge of the research process	
	Improved research skills	
	Increased media presence (e.g. twitter, web views)	
	Qualifications submitted/achieved	
	Other	
Professional impact	General increase in network and collaborative working	
	Networks or collaborative working within college	
	Networks or collaborative working between different colleges	
	Networks or collaborative working internationally	
	Impact on student learning	
	Impact on colleagues' teaching practices	
	Impact on colleagues' interest in research	
	Impact on institution's culture and attitude to research	
	Impact on management policy or practice	
	Institution's strategic objectives reached	
	Extension of funding in the institution for the project	
	Application for funding	
	Culture change	
	Additional job role(s) created	
	Other	

Annex B2: Conference list for actual/planned dissemination activity

Research projects were presented at the following conferences:

- European Educational Research Association (EERA) Conference
- British Educational Research Association (BERA) Conference
- 39th International Conference on Critical Thinking
- 3rd International ARPCE Conference at Oxford University
- EAPRIL Conference
- East Midlands Work Based Learning forum
- EDGE Conference
- European Society for Research on the Education of Adults Conference (ESREA)
- FACE Conference, Sheffield
- International Journal of Art and Design Research Conference
- Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN) Conference
- National Care Homes Conference
- Open University Widening Participation Conference 2018
- RSC-YH HE e-learning conference
- SET Conference
- TELL (Teacher Education in Lifelong Learning) Conference
- Association for Learning Technology International Conference
- Association of Colleges Scholarship Conference
- University of Portsmouth MICE Conference
- University of Sunderland Post Graduate Research Student Conference 2018

Researchers had planned to present projects at the following conferences:

- LSRN Annual Research Event
- Design Education Research Conference
- SCUTREA Conference
- National Conference for Advanced Practitioners
- SET Annual Conference
- National Conference for Advanced Practitioners
- FACE Conference
- Association for Research in Post Compulsory Education Conference (ARPCE) Conference
- Adults Learning Mathematics Conference
- The Open University Widening Participation Conference
- The University of Sunderland Post Graduate Research Student Conference
- International ARPCE Conference at Oxford University
- European Educational Research Association (EERA) Conference
- British Educational Research Association (BERA) Conference

ANNEX C: CASE STUDIES

Case study A

Research area: Standing on the shoulders of giants - the 'Teacher's Takeaway' case study - an exploration into the possibilities to effectively share 'good practice' over the internet in a bid to save time and improve the development of craft

Institution A: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Teaching and Learning Coach
Current level of study:	MPhil Year 2
Institution type:	Further education college based across three campuses. Offering A-levels, apprenticeships, vocational programmes, higher education, and online and part-time courses.

The researcher

The practitioner is both a Teaching and Learning Coach and teacher, with experience in teaching across levels 1 to 7. With a degree in Sports Sciences, he began his career at the further education college almost twenty years previously, studying for his PGCE whilst teaching. As a Teaching and Learning Coach for two days a week, he works with staff across the college, **supporting them to reflect on their practice**. This support is available to staff through a variety of pathways: facilitating the sharing of best practice with high performing staff, offering continuous professional development to all, and supporting underperforming staff on specific areas of focus or need. As part of this role, he also teaches second year PGCE trainee teachers who study at a university which the college is franchised to deliver the teacher training programme at.

The opportunity to study the MPhil arose from working with a colleague who was applying for the MPhil – this colleague had previously undertaken the MA short course with SUNCETT and was also undertaking an OTLA project. This was a positive working relationship and the colleague asked if the practitioner was interested in undertaking a project together. Alongside this, the practitioner felt that he had gaps in his knowledge and confidence to support learners on the PGCE course with the educational research aspect of their programme which he wished to address. The opportunity to undertake the research project with this colleague "*forced [his] hand to action*" and provided a framework and support mechanism to build the practitioner's confidence in studying the MPhil. The collaborative aspect of the project was essential as the practitioner acknowledged that he lacked sufficient motivation to undertake the course alone alongside other personal and professional commitments.

The practitioner stated that prior to beginning the course, he had concerns regarding the time required to undertake the course and his own confidence to do so. While confidence was a concern which had

continued throughout (with the practitioner feeling "*imposter syndrome*" at times), tutorials and one to one phone calls had **been impactful on stabilising his lack of confidence and were highly valued by the practitioner**.

The research project and practitioner's influence sits within a wider body of research projects and collaborations between practitioners at the college, which has reached a wide and varied audience. Currently, there are five practitioners studying across the two years of the MPhil programme and two are on the MA Short Course programme; all of these have had previous involvement in the college's ETF OTLA project.

The PRP research project

Standing on the shoulders of giants - the 'Teacher's Takeaway' case study - An exploration into the possibilities to effectively share 'good practice' over the internet in a bid to save time and improve the development of craft

Within the college, the number of staff members attending CPD events was decreasing, with the reason deemed to be a lack of time. In order to address this issue, 'Teachers Takeaway' was developed. This is a **video-based social media platform to allow practitioners to share CPD resources and ideas which would be accessible at any time**. The idea was based on the concept of joint practice development – teachers sharing practice with one another.

The project aims to **evaluate the impact of the Teachers Takeaway in relation to creating CPD opportunities for teachers to share and develop 'good' practice**. This has led to an exploration of the nature of practice and the process through which it develops (particularly in this case through collaborative processes), what is meant by 'good' practice in education, and how to use the internet to save time and share practice. The project focus was developed by practitioners with the support of the college, who have provided the time and space to explore and develop the work as it aligned with existing research and priorities.

The research process was designed to measure success through quantitative measures using Google analytics (number of webpage hits, website visits and length of visits) and a survey of users. This would then be complemented by qualitative research, using semi-structured interviews with practitioners to probe survey responses further and explore the impact of engaging with the platform.

A change in platform host has meant current figures on site visitors are not available. However, emerging themes from interviews highlighted **a trend for users to interact with resources that feature colleagues with whom they have previously developed rapport**.

As the project has progressed, the practitioner has **gained an appreciation of the complexities of evaluating the impact of practice development**. The research design

was originally driven by quantitative data, but qualitative questions have provided further insights and potential findings regarding the process of practice development and how impact is generated (rather than simply through watching a video, but through the collaborative process and having the time and space to engage with other practitioners). More detailed findings and recommendations can be expected at a later stage when the research is completed.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

Methods of dissemination of the research project's findings have included **speaking at local university education conferences**. The project has been featured in a TES article in March 2020, which the practitioner identified as a personal milestone.

More widely as a college, practitioners (including the researcher of focus) have attended local university education conferences which has allowed them to **build a larger culture of research** and "*think bigger*" by working with other institutions outside of the college. An audio-visual feedback project was also presented internationally.

The practitioner has used his project research to **impact on his role as Southern Universities Network (SUN) Coordinator, as part of the Office for Students Uni Connect Programme**. A SUN research bid which the practitioner has been part of, focusing on the decision-making process of vocational students based on case studies and narrative enquiry, has been informed by literature and findings from his project and enabled by the upskilling undergone by the practitioner and colleagues on the programme. It is hoped that this will ultimately be published in academic journals.

Impact on the practitioner

The practitioner identified sharing research at conferences with peers as an opportunity which has **built his confidence and developed his thinking and point of view as a research practitioner.** The practitioner's participation in presenting findings from another project (on raising students' aspirations and progression from Level 2 to Level 3) in Barcelona further helped to build his confidence. He also reported the **pride** he felt at the research he had conducted but also of being part of a wider movement within the college creating a culture of research underpinned by the key principles of working collaboratively from the ground up.

The practitioner's mentor also identified his **development at a researcher**, with his practice "*adhering to the values of research and scholarship in professional* ways". Particular skills which he was identified as developing include his understanding of literature, argument construction (conceptually and theoretically), and perception and analysis of data. In fact, he has been invited to co-author a chapter in a book which is being produced by the tutors.

The practitioner's role as SUN Coordinator has been impacted on by his involvement in research related to the MPhil project. For example, after finding that parental engagement was an important factor in student progression, he has taken steps to invite parents to student engagement events.

Impact on the institution and its employees

The practitioner felt that the project had a direct impact on his practice in his role as a Teaching and Learning Coach. Rather than feeling pressure to come up with his own ideas (or working in an "*insular*" way), he reported that his **practice was now more research informed**. In order to inform his work in this role, he would be more likely to use his own experience coupled with the research and ideas of his peers and other practitioners. The value to the college of the practitioners' involvement in the project was also recognised in this sense, as he "*will be able to invest his development back into the organisation*".

Staff feedback in relation to the value of Teachers Toolkit itself has also been positive, with them feeling like it **supports their development, engages them and makes them feel valued**. The employer reported that the resource was beneficial for staff development. It is also a demonstration internally and externally of how they value their employees and promote the development of staff, and care for their wellbeing.

The impact of this individual research project sits within the wider college context, and the impact of the college's engagement with SUNCETT. The researcher has been **part of a movement of practitioners at the college who have been developing a culture of research and practice** (including enhancing the use of technology), which has been recognised in the college being shortlisted for two TES awards. The college has successfully won five other bids on OTLA research projects, which mean more staff are becoming involved in research and working collaboratively (in line with the research project's initial findings on effective professional development processes). This is also upskilling staff, with seven practitioners from the practitioner's department being involved with the SUNCETT research programme. The practitioner attributed a significant part of the research-related impacts to SUNCETT through the Practitioner Research Programme and OTLA – he described the programme as having had a "*butterfly effect*", or like "*a pebble in the lake causing nonstop ripples*". The practitioner's employer highlighted the value of the college being research active, with this being of benefit to the organisation and supporting them to work towards achieving Gold status on the Teaching Excellence Framework in the future. This was seen to be part of a "*strategic push… to become a research college*" which would benefit the college's externally-facing brand. The programme was reported to **have raised awareness across the college of the need to become research active**, and multiple practitioners had been engaged in and

interested by the programme, spreading the impact more widely across the college.

A number of further opportunities have arisen for the college as a result of the collaborative research projects being undertaken at the college. A Memorandum of Understanding is being developed with a Spanish university to build a collaborative relationship based around research. The employer reported an **increase in the college's profile nationally and internationally through the research**, with the college being shown as "*innovative, promoting pedagogy and promoting staff doing research*".

The practitioner identified that the developing culture of research has coincided with a time where the college experienced challenges with staff motivation and engagement, which could potentially impact on their classroom practice. While it was not possible to directly attribute the impact on employees and students, potentially the portfolio of research taking place at the college has had a positive impact not only on staff members' **professional development practice**, but also their **engagement, motivation and energy** as practitioners.

Impact on students

The practitioner felt that the project had reinforced his confidence and energy as a teacher, which as a result had enhanced his **personal teaching and motivation.** He identified the potential for this to have a cascading effect on the PGCE students he was teaching, by **encouraging them to turn to research first** and developing their motivation, energy and passion for research informed practice.

The practitioner's employer reported that students have fed into the Teachers Takeaway videos by saying how the resources helped them. However, it was felt that it was more difficult to demonstrate a causative link between students' learning experience and the research project.

Case study B

Research area: It's All Just Talk: using narrative inquiry to explore the relationship between dialogue and critical thinking in A-Level Drama

Institution B: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Drama and Performing Arts Lecturer
Current level of study:	MPhil Year 2
Previous research qualifications:	Practitioner Research Programme MA short course
Institution type:	A large Tertiary College, offering A-Levels, BTECs, Apprenticeships and T-Levels.

The researcher

The practitioner teaches A-Level Drama and Performing Arts in the Faculty of Media and Performing Arts at a large Tertiary College. **She is an experienced practitioner**, who has been teaching at the college for 12 years. The practitioner was recently recruited for a new role within the college and will be transitioning to teach on the Teacher Education team, delivering on the PGCE, Cert. Ed. and Award in Education Courses. The practitioner also held a position of Learning Lead at the college, supporting teaching and learning within the faculty through mentoring and support for teaching staff and delivering CPD sessions.

Encouraged by her colleague (a PRP alumni), who told her that PRP was the *"best CPD they had ever done"*, the practitioner applied to the PRP MA short course. She had already conducted a joint research project with a colleague from another department and their employer was keen for them to take this further, as it aligned with the institution's key strategic priorities. It was also felt that their involvement would provide 'good value for money' as their research would **enable the practitioners to deliver cross-faculty training and implement innovative methods in the classroom**. The employer was equally keen for the practitioner to progress an individual MPhil research project, following their experience of the MA short course.

For the practitioner herself, the primary motivation for undertaking the PRP was the **desire to learn and develop her teaching practice**. She had previously considered undertaking an MA but felt that it may have been unmanageable on top of her teaching role. The PRP seemed a more appropriate opportunity, as it felt more **meaningful and relevant to the practitioner on a personal and professional level**, due to the action research focus of the programme. In addition, the MA offered a good opportunity to work with a colleague from a different department and learn from another subject area. Following completion of the MA short course she has enrolled on an individual research MPhil.

The practitioner had no major concerns prior to beginning the PRP,

although was nervous as she did not know what to expect. However, she noted that whilst there was not a culture of research in her institution, **her line manager was very supportive of her involvement**, which alleviated any concerns around lack of support.

The PRP research project

It's All Just Talk: using narrative inquiry to explore the relationship between dialogue and critical thinking in A-Level Drama

Learners undertaking A-Level Drama often opt for the course due to their passion for the practical elements of drama, and struggle to engage with the theoretical aspect. This can result in an imbalance between grades achieved on theory and practical modules. The practitioner's research project considered how to **'reframe the theoretical', through embedding meaningful and structured collective dialogue** into the A-Level Drama curriculum.

The project builds on the practitioner's work during the MA, in which she looked at the theory-practice divide within creative subjects, and how dialogic teaching using online technology can bridge this divide. Her MPhil focused more on Lipman's 'Philosophy for Children' model as a framework, looking at **how to make space to talk and develop critical thinking through dialogue, and whether this could improve critical writing**. The practitioner incorporated seminars into the A-Level Drama curriculum, designed to encourage learners to respond critically to stimuli whose purpose was to develop dialogue.

The research has **taken an interpretivist stance using narrative enquiry** as its primary methodology. The practitioner has undertaken focus groups, interviews and stories of experience. A key advantage of using narrative enquiry for the practitioner was its clear link with the subject, which enabled her to embed data collection into practice. Data collection has been undertaken with two separate year groups; approximately 80-90 students in their first year of college, and the same in their second year.

Initial results

Anecdotally, the practitioner has found that learners responded well to dialogic teaching. Emerging evidence suggested that the **seminars have supported learners to develop their critical thinking skills**. Students have also **valued being given the time and space to talk**. One learner involved in the seminars stated:

> *"I think the relationship between talking, writing and thinking is very messy. Talking helps develop answers and for questions when you are engaged with others who stimulate you, however, you have to explain your thoughts concisely enough for the other person to understand."*

However, due to the impact of COVID-19 on institution closures, the practitioner's data collection has been delayed. The practitioner will continue her research onto a PhD, and

therefore will extend her research, allowing her to continue her data collection and focus further on how to move dialogue online.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

Within the college, the practitioner has disseminated her research widely. She has **delivered a number of CPD sessions, both within her faculty and across the college more broadly**. She has also presented her research to the Senior Leadership Team as part of a subject review and has disseminated her research through **written articles** for the college journal. The practitioner and her employer were planning a faculty-wide CPD session towards the end of the academic year, to consider how her research could be put into practice in other areas. However, this is on hold due to the college closure as a result of COVID-19.

The practitioner has also disseminated her research more widely. For example, the practitioner has presented her work at **two ETF Practitioner Research Conferences**, and she has recently **written three articles for the TES website**. She has also been approached to contribute to an article on practitioner Research for InTuition. The practitioner reported that the closure of the college due to COVID-19 has given her more space to think about writing articles and has given her time to open up a conversation with a Vice Principal from another college to discuss her research.

Impact on the practitioner

As a result of her involvement in the PRP, the practitioner has become **re-enthused with teaching**, with a renewed commitment to her role. The practitioner has recently been given a new job role within the college on the Teacher Education team and noted that her research was highlighted as a specific strength of her application and interview. The teacher education courses that the practitioner will be delivering are accredited by the local university, which the practitioner reported could open up potential opportunities, connections and experiences in terms of her professional and academic career.

The PRP has given her the confidence to *"go for things"* she may not have had the opportunity to do previously, for example applying for her new role, in addition to delivering training and speaking out in meetings. Her employer and mentor agreed with this, noting that she has seen an impact on the practitioner's confidence and presentation skills. The practitioner's employer reported that **the practitioner is now seen as a role model in the faculty,** who staff can approach for support and sharing best practice. The practitioner stated that she expected her experience will impact positively on her future, as it has added *"another string to my bow"*.

The PRP has also had a positive impact on the practitioner's academic career. The **practitioner has transferred to a PhD**, on which she will continue her research project. Due to the COVID-19 closures, the practitioner has begun to focus more on how dialogic teaching can be taken on line, after noticing that some learners have been more receptive to talking online, and she plans to consider this further during her PhD. More widely, the practitioner considers herself to have **become a more reflective practitioner.** Their mentor reported that in particular the practitioner

has developed her *"scholarly voice"*, with her academic writing skills having advanced significantly.

Impact on the institution and its employees

As a result of the research project, **the practitioner and her colleague have completely restructured the A-Level Drama curriculum**, particularly in terms of the sequencing of teaching. They have also considered in depth teaching styles and habits and have challenged pre-conceived ideas. This has benefited the A-Level team more widely, as the restructured curriculum has given staff the space to take the research findings on board and deliver dialogic teaching. She has also shared ideas within the wider faculty, primarily within the performing arts, and there are **now a number of colleagues who are trialling communities of enquiry**.

According to her employer, the big impact of the practitioner's involvement has been their **ability to deliver CPD in the institution, giving colleagues the confidence to try out new teaching methods**, which the practitioner can support. The practitioner reported that members of SLT and other colleagues have taken an interest in her research, however there has not yet been enough time for meaningful conversations to enable her to support colleagues to take this forward.

Impact on students

Students have valued having the space and time to talk, and there is anecdotal evidence that **learners have developed critical thinking skills, and by extension, critical writing skills**. However, the impact of COVID-19 has meant that limited quantitative data is available to assess whether the research has had an impact on learner grades.

Students have been interested in the research themselves. They have appreciated the fact that their teacher is also learning, and that the research focuses on improving their experience and outcomes. This interest has **encouraged learners to become more engaged in the process** as they understand why they are learning in this way, and they feel like they have some influence on the outcomes; it is not being done to them, but for them.

Case study C

Research area: "Let's talk teaching": Mission impossible; what impact does action research have on professional development in a large further education organisation?

Institution C: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Professional Development Manager
Current level of study:	MPhil Year 2
Previous research qualifications:	Practitioner Research Programme MA short course
Institution type:	Large vocational further education college offering a wide range of courses across three campuses.

The researcher

Over the past three years, the practitioner has moved from a teaching role with no line management responsibilities to a quality role responsible for five members of staff in Advanced Practitioner roles (known as Teaching and Learning Coaches). The **practitioner's rapid professional development has been supported by her development as a researcher through the Practitioner Research programme**. She initially undertook the MA Short Course at another college and moved colleges (and roles) due to her development. She applied to undertake the MPhil alongside starting as an English teacher at her current employer institution where she was rapidly promoted to Course Leader for GCSE English with a team of staff with whom she could develop research collaborations. In her second year of the MPhil, she **secured the role of Professional Development Coordinator, overseeing eight action research groups part-time alongside her teaching role**. In this full time role she is also responsible for a team of five Teaching and Learning Coaches working across three campuses. Alongside this, she undertakes some teaching of trainee teachers.

Her original motivation for applying to the Practitioner Research Programme was to do *"something different and challenging as I had been teaching English for quite a while"* (around ten years). She had considered undertaking a Masters level course, and when she heard about the MA Short Course through the Professional Exchange Network *"it sparked me to give it a go"*. **The practitioner had no research experience prior to the MA Short Course, and therefore felt that this had been a suitable entry into the programme for her**. Enjoyment of the MA Short Course and feeling that it was *"really good"* CPD led her to apply for the MPhil – *"everything we were learning, not only from the tutors but from the time and space out of work… was such a valuable experience, the opportunity to have head space to think about how evidence informs your practice and education theory"*. She found that there was *"quite a big jump"* to the MPhil level of study but was prepared for the level of challenge at both stages. She has been

supported by her current employer by being given time to attend residentials and conferences, and having lessons covered for this where necessary.

The PRP research project

"Let's talk teaching": Mission impossible; what impact does action research have on professional development in a large further education organisation?

The focus of her MPhil research project has evolved to explore the impact of action research, addressing the problem of how to effectively deliver action research across a large further education college. Three action research groups which were run across the college over an academic year involving tutors from various vocational areas were used as case studies. The research sought to understand the outcomes and impact of practitioner-led action research at the college, and factors which impact upon its effectiveness.

The choice of research subject aligned closely with her new role at the college as it enabled her to explore prevailing practice and its effectiveness in ways that could enhance delivery of the organisation's priorities.

The research methodology has involved questionnaires of practitioners who participated in the action research groups, interviews with leaders of the groups, and interviews with college managers to investigate the impact of action research on individual practitioners, as well as the perception towards and undertaking of action research more widely across the college.

At this stage, findings relate to the key factors in conducting action research within a large, further education college which *"create the conditions for it to flourish"* and lead to impact:

- the enthusiasm of the action research leaders and their willingness to reflect on their own practice and change behaviours
- having all practitioners within an action research group based at one site increases effectiveness as the time demands to meet are reduced

enabling practitioners to bridge the gap between theory and practice is key to effective action research.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

The research is still at an early stage of dissemination internally, but the **practitioner has shared externally at the Practitioner Research Programme Conference and also delivered this presentation to her line manager and the college principal**. The participant's employer expected that future dissemination could include working with Curriculum Managers to enable them to better support their staff with action research as a professional development activity; while this could

come through formal presentation, it was anticipated that real benefits would come from the practitioner embedding the findings into her practice and delivery, *"applying it straight back into how we work*".

The findings of the action research groups themselves have been shared internally by practitioners with their own department, but also more widely through **posters and showcasing at college-wide professional development days** and a newsletter of findings.

Impact on the practitioner

The practitioner has **developed her confidence as a researcher** through participation in the programme which is directly linked to her **professional development from an English teacher to Professional Development Manager**. This has included a change in focus (from teaching of students to professional development of staff) and in responsibility (with a promotion from Coordinator to Manager role linked to her increased confidence and understanding due to the course): *"I wouldn't have been qualified or knowledgeable enough to do what I am doing now without having done the course".* This was supported by her employer who reported that her participation in the programme had supported her to *"embrace a professional development role and really think about how she can work in wider, more varied ways to support others to develop"*.

She highlighted the **structure of the course, with regular, monthly tutorial meetings and structured time to study and write at residentials, as being important in keeping her motivated and on track**, as well as the accredited qualification which she would attain. In the future, the participant suggested she would like to continue to develop her research through doctoral level study.

Impact on the institution and its employees

The college was developing its approach to CPD and use of action research prior to the practitioner's research, as evidenced by her role. The eight action research projects which were overseen by the practitioner and became the focus of her research were a pilot, as this was not something that the college had ever done before, and subsequently her employer noted there had been *"a lot of lessons learnt about how we can do this in our organisation"*, including learning from the research project on impact. The practitioner's research was reported to have **contributed to two distinct amendments to the structure** of the college's action research delivery:

- **Staff conducting an action research project together are now all based on the same campus**, rather than having multi-campus groups, due to time challenges in arranging meetings across sites.
- The **role of Teaching and Learning Coaches has changed** to allow them further time and scope to support action research, partly in response to the action research pilot groups (and the practitioner's research).

The full impact of these changes was expected to be seen in due course and both the practitioner and her employer were confident this would have a positive effect.

This is **part of a wider movement driven by senior leadership towards embedding research informed practice across the college**. The practitioner's employer reported that the college was encouraging staff to *"try something new and develop a real appetite for self-reflection"*; the research of the practitioner into the action research cycle is *"shaping how we do that"* by changing how the college thinks about action research and how it is used as a professional development tool. These benefits were **expected to grow as part of an overall professional development offer** as this work continues to be developed.

The practitioner's experience of undertaking the Practitioner Research Programme was also reported to have **influenced other staff members to engage with external courses**. Two colleagues in her department are currently undertaking their MA Short Course, with other members of staff undertaking Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) courses having been prompted to undertake external professional development opportunities. This was reported by both the practitioner and her employer, with the latter noting that with multiple opportunities available to staff, the practitioner's positive experience with the programme and ability to directly implement her research findings within the college meant that individual staff and the college were more likely to participate in the Practitioner Research Programme in the future.

Impact on students

The participant's employer reported that her research would *"absolutely"* benefit students at the college as through the action research groups, staff would be **trying new teaching and learning techniques**, reflecting and continually developing.

The practitioner also felt that the trainee teaching students she directly teaches would benefit, as conducting MPhil research has increased her confidence and understanding of pedagogical theories and thus improved her effectiveness in teaching. She noted that she was **able to supplement the traditional theoretical content of the teacher training course with current, relevant theory drawn from her own research**.

Case study D

Research area: Student voice illuminates the way forward

Institution D: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Digital learning supervisor
Current level of study:	MA Short Course
Previous research qualifications:	MSc Multimedia and eLearning
Institution type:	Further education college with three campuses offering a wide range of courses, including higher education.

The researcher

The practitioner is a Digital Learning Supervisor at a multi-campus further education college. **Her role is to help people embed digital techniques and strategies into their teaching** as part of the Teaching and Learning team, supported by three Digital Learning Coaches. The role also holds responsibility for the virtual learning environment and use of digital communication software (Microsoft Teams) within the college. While digital skills were already a high priority in relation to staff development for the college, their importance has grown significantly since March 2020 and the impact of COVID-19.

Prior to participating in the Practitioner Research Programme, the practitioner had taught for around 20 years in further education (literacy, Maths, access courses and functional skills) before moving into non-teaching roles as a Teaching and Learning Coach and then a Teaching and Learning Quality Assurance Manager. **Her expertise and experience of both teaching and learning and digital skills was valued by her employer** when starting the Digital Learning Supervisor role.

The practitioner had been aware of the PRP for a number of years. However, it was only when she started her Digital Learning Supervisor role at her current institution that she felt she had the support of her manager and college to participate. **She joined the programme because she had enjoyed her previous Masters-level study and also because she felt it would give her additional credibility in her new role.** Previous study at MA level also meant that the practitioner was prepared for the intensity of time and work involved and had minimal concerns about the course. Originally, the practitioner applied to the MPhil level of study but was awarded a place on the MA Short Course; she intended to reapply for the MPhil after completion of the short course.

The practitioner had **found her employer to be "*totally supportive*"** of her involvement in the programme. Support came from both her line manager and the wider executive team in three different ways. First, to

encourage staff buy-in to the research across the college as the project required cross-college teams (who may not have seen the focus as their priority), second with coaching from her line manager, and finally time to prioritise the project within her working week.

The PRP research project

Student Voice Illuminates the Way Forward

The research focused on evaluating the college's 'Next Steps' programme, an independent study skills course for Level 2 and 3 students which aims to develop students' wider skills such as employability, relationships and study skills to support them to be successful at college and in their next steps in life. Previously, self-directed study sessions were viewed by students as irrelevant to and unnecessary for their vocational study, resulting in low attendance and engagement. To address this, the college implemented an online self-study course called 'Next Steps' which included modules on topics such as money management, relationships, personal development and internet safety, to be completed independently within a supervised environment. Evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention was selected as the focus of the research as it was both a college priority and a key part of the practitioner's role.

Capturing student voice was integral to the research. The method used six focus groups (two per campus) of between four and six students, with four further one-to-one interviews with participants from the focus groups. An interview with a member of the Senior Management Team was also conducted to gain their perspective into the aims and objectives of the course. A third round of focus groups was initially planned to triangulate the research; this was not possible due to COVID-19 but as findings were clear and consistent by this stage this was not reported to have noticeably impacted the research.

Three main findings resulted from the research:

- Students did not receive an induction to the course and therefore did not understand why they should take the course and its purpose; this impacted on their motivation to engage
- Improvements to aspects of the content were needed to make them more suited to the learners' needs. Some modules had been covered previously in school (internet safety) or were not felt necessary (relationships), whereas more content was desired on finances/money management and how this applied to the real world
- Students preferred face-to-face delivery rather than online study without support.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

Findings were shared internally throughout the research with the

practitioner reporting to her line manager, who would subsequently disseminate learning to the senior management team. Findings were also disseminated with the Digital Learning Team through team meetings throughout the process.

The practitioner's mentor said **how important it was that research findings were shared in a pragmatic, solution-focused way**. This was because they needed to be framed in a way that would be relevant to staff working in a variety of roles across the college who would bring different understanding of its importance or relevance to their roles. In practice, this was achieved via virtual meetings delivered by the Vice Principal to all Heads of Schools and as many teaching staff as possible to reinforce the importance of the 'Next Steps' course and the need for cross-college support to implement a clearer induction process.

External dissemination has taken place with peers on the Practitioner Research Programme at events, but as yet wider dissemination has not been undertaken. However, **other colleges have expressed interest in the self-study course and therefore disseminating findings across institutions may take place in the future**.

Impact on the practitioner

The practitioner reported that the programme has **refreshed her research skills** as it has been eight years since her previous Masters-level study. She felt that **the MA Short Course had been a good way to build up to the MPhil course**, which she hoped to undertake immediately following completion of the research.

Undertaking the research project was an effective induction for her into the college and her role as it required her to work with many colleagues who she might not otherwise have encountered. This **raised her profile and that of her Digital Learning team across the college**. It also acted as a good mechanism to understand the Next Steps course and its purpose as part of her role.

The practitioner's mentor also reported that the programme has **improved her confidence and "*found her a voice*" within the college** where colleagues are listening to her ideas and engaging with her research.

Impact on the institution and its employees

At an organisational level, **the 'Next Steps' programme has been changed across the college as a result of the research in its timetabling and content**. Changes to the programme have been implemented based on the practitioner's research findings, which have been supported by more informal feedback and investigation conducted by the Student Support Services team. Implementation has involved a wider team as a "*college drive*" which required "*everyone's buy-in*", according to the practitioner's line manager. Other changes as a result of the research are that this academic year Level 2 students will have the course delivered face-to-face, and an alternative money

management module has been developed which reflects more of the real-world skills that learners said they valued.

The research has **impacted on staff buy-in to the course and good practice in delivery**, according to both the practitioner and her employer – "*previously staff knew it had to be on the timetable, but learners were not bought in so neither were they*". Being able to share clear plans for the course with more advanced notice as a result of the research was also seen to have a positive impact on staff buy-in, which it is anticipated will improve course induction and delivery.

The practitioner reported that the research has demonstrated to the senior management team the importance of a top-down approach and senior-level buy-in to effectively disseminate findings and implement changes at a college-wide level.

Impact on students

Improvements to the course as a result of research findings are anticipated to impact positively on students by **increasing their motivation to attend and engage with the course and increasing their understanding of how the modules are meaningful and beneficial to them, thus improving their employability skills**. However, as yet it is too early to see these as changes will be implemented from the start of the new academic year (September 2020) onwards. The practitioner's employer and mentor noted that changes have actually been supported by the impact of COVID-19 and enhanced implementation of distance learning, which has created additional space for the course and led to provision being implemented for disadvantaged learners who may not previously have had remote access to digital learning.

The practitioner also expected the research process to have a positive impact on students, as they see that "*we listen to them and what they say, this was not just a paper exercise, we listen to them and take action*".

The effects of the changes are expected to impact on students throughout the next academic year; the practitioner highlighted the importance of assessing the impact on students' motivation to attend and participate in sessions at the end of next year, although further evaluation will likely be conducted by the Student Services team.

Case study E

Research area: Read like a butterfly, write like a bee – discuss!: investigating the potential of an integrated circles pedagogy for the development of English language skills and shared understandings in an ESOL context

Institution E: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	ESOL Lecturer
Current level of study:	MPhil Year 2
Previous research qualifications:	None, but exploratory research programmes completed
Institution type:	A large college offering a wide range of opportunities, from vocational programmes for 14-16-year olds, to further education, to HE foundation degrees.

The researcher

The practitioner is an ESOL lecturer at a large college. She had previously taken part in other research programmes in 2012-13 and 2016-17. When she heard about the MPhil course she applied at the earliest opportunity.

The practitioner was motivated to undertake the MPhil by having an interest in reading and writing circles for ESOL learners. She thought that **undertaking the MPhil would be a good opportunity to delve deeper in to how circles could be of benefit for ESOL learners and would also be a CPD opportunity**. Her previous exploratory research programmes did not result in formal recognition, however, as this was an MPhil level programme she felt that **having a recognised qualification would give her and her work increased legitimacy in the workplace**, increasing her influence and making her research more *"real"* to others.

At the start of the programme the practitioner's main concerns were the availability of local support and whether she would have time to complete the course. Her institution was undergoing a restructure and she was not sure whether she would still have a role at the college, and if she did, whether she would be supported in undertaking the course. In practice she continued to work full time and undertake the programme in her own time. She was permitted time out of work to attend residentials but has had no other time allowance from her employer.

The PRP research project

Read like a butterfly, write like a bee – discuss!: investigating the potential of an integrated circles pedagogy for the development of English language skills and shared understandings in an ESOL context

This research was built on two previous ETF Practitioner Research Programme ESOL studies, undertaken by the practitioner, which focused on reading circles and writing

circles respectively. These projects were conducted in response to declining exam rates attributed to a narrowing curriculum. Circles involve groups of six students who engage in structured discussions using allocated rotating roles. The practitioner's research project expanded on the previous research undertaken, through considering the role of speaking and listening (in addition to reading and writing) in circles; more specifically, **how the four components could be blended together to form 'integrated circles'**.

The research focus was decided by the practitioner, who wanted to understand how blending all four components could enhance the learner experience and their attainment in coursework and exams. Furthermore, in ESOL 16-18-year olds tend to be prioritised over adults – **circles may help to redress this balance towards older learners**. Adult ESOL learners do not carry as much funding or statistical weight as their younger counterparts, who are supported with a range of enhancement and enrichment activities to achieve their qualifications. The circle project was one way to provide a support intervention specifically aimed at the older age group.

The research was undertaken using an **action research method**, through trialling blended circles with two cohorts of Entry 3 ESOL students, totalling 62 learners. The practitioner collected narrative accounts to understand student experience and also used assessment results to measure changes in attainment.

Initial findings suggest that **the use of integrated circles supports an increase in attainment**. The average pass rate for reading rose from 45% to 77.5% following a six-week course. For the writing circles there was a 21% increase in pass rate when compared to a previous cohort, however assessments are not usually undertaken in writing and therefore there was no baseline data for the learners involved.

In addition, there were improvements in learner experience. Students said they were **more willing to take personal responsibility for their own learning** also reported that the circles course was more relevant to real life, not just exams. As a result, they said they were better able to communicate with friends and colleagues.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

Within the college the practitioner has **shared findings with departmental team members** and provides updates after attending events and residentials.

There has been progress in embedding the learning from her research into level three ESOL courses. It has been embedded into a scheme of work and the practitioner ran a study development workshop for all staff to share the idea, her research and its findings. It remains the prerogative of individual tutors whether they want to adopt this approach.

There is also some interest in Circles from other departments in the college as colleagues from different curricular areas are planning to attend a session run by the practitioner about circles to learn more about how to incorporate it into their teaching.

Externally, the practitioner has **disseminated her research via the**

ETF's Research Excellence Gateway[35] and she has also **published a case study in Intuition magazine**[36]. She has made links with the Quality Manger for Adult and Community Learning at the Council and has spoken to a governor in a local school in a neighbouring Local Authority about her work.

She has approached the local council library about running a reading with conversation programme with a view to enabling students who speak and listen at a functional level to develop skills of teamwork and critical thinking. It is hoped that by attending such a programme at the college, people will be **able to share their own stories and feelings to reduce isolation** and promote positive mental health.

Impact on the practitioner

As a professional educator the practitioner is able to identify where students need more support and is developing training and coaching for staff. She **now notices where there are gaps in the provision of services to learners**. She **feels more empowered** in having conversations about how certain teaching strategies or policies will work and **has gained confidence** to express her thoughts and feelings and engage in discussion at a higher level.

The practitioner said **her own critical thinking skills have improved**. She questions practice and processes and as a result she has become a more reflective teacher. Prior to undertaking the PRP, she viewed the scheme of work as "*the Bible*" – although she would supplement lesson plans with her own materials, they were taken from recognised sources. Now she has the **confidence and freedom to develop her own resources**, to meet her students' needs in a more personalised way. She has also realised that as a teacher it is acceptable to get things wrong – before she would try to answer every question, but now she can use students' questions as a teaching tool or as a research or discussion point. This has **made her classroom more collaborative.**

The practitioner said that **she is being taken seriously as a teacher** who reflects and acts in the best interests of her students. She sees education as a service rather than a business and this is **increasing her enjoyment in her job**. Students also like to know that she is a student – that she can relate to their difficulties. This has added to her job satisfaction as it has given an added dimension to being in the classroom.

Prior to undertaking the MPhil she did not consider research informed practice because she was not aware of it. She came to work because she "*liked doing it and wanted to make a difference*". She did not initially think about research informed practices, except for reflecting upon how she could have performed better within the classroom. Now **she**

[35] https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/eg6613
[36] https://issuu.com/educationandtrainingfoundation/docs/english-supplement

understands research informed practice and she realises that it is a continual process of learning and adapting. She "*thinks about what I am doing as an individual, with students, as part of a team, how that fits in with the college and how to work differently to make a difference*". **She engages in discussion** and **seeks out opportunities to become actively invested in the process**. She feels like she is part of a community and that she has changed for the better.

As a researcher she is building on her previous experience, developing her knowledge and using a more rigorous approach. Although she was already following an action research process, **participation in the MPhil has allowed her to set up her research to get more robust findings** and to **make her more accountable** to colleagues. She feels that she has **gained more credibility** within her institution as she is following a serious programme. She is **building her capacity to explain herself, to communicate and to become more thoughtful** – using evidence more widely. Her mentor agreed with this, noting that the practitioner had become more confident in justifying and articulating her findings. The practitioner considers that the programme has made her into a researcher.

Impact on the institution and its employees

Two colleagues have shown an interest in the PRP as a result of the practitioner's involvement with the Programme. Research findings have also resulted in one colleague using circles with 16-18 year olds, and another using circles within Job Centre Plus for employability provision. The College's Head of Quality has asked her to deliver training to staff and to participate in the college coaching programme, on which she will be trained to be a peer coach for her colleagues. The practitioner has also attended the Teaching Squares pilot which will create a peer observation programme; she will speak at the launch event in July 2020 to share her experience.

From the perspective of the wider institution, the research findings have directly impacted upon the provision of appropriate resources. The college library has bought into the programme and has invested in ESOL resources. The practitioner now liaises with the subject librarian regarding useful materials to increase and update resources. In addition, until this work, the library's ESOL resources were not shelved in a way to help students self-access resources. Library staff have supported readers to access materials that are more appropriate for their needs, and students have been borrowing and valuing them. An ESOL stock list, mapped to topics & levels, has also been produced to help staff plan lessons.

As a result of the research, the institution has **increased their links to the research community** – wider than the ETF community. **The institution now has more contacts** they will hopefully be able to use in future.

Impact on students

Within six weeks of the programme, participating students had **increased their confidence and academic ability.** Because the Circles encourage students to speak to the rest of the class and to mix people up, the programme has **helped them build cross national friendships** and they say they feel **supported to go onto further study**. Students have discussed with her how they meet up to practice their conversational skills.

Case study F

Research area: Lockdown: experiments with virtual science laboratories in Further Education

Institution F: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Applied Science teacher, working with Level 1, 2 and 3 learners.
Current level of study:	MA Short Course
Previous research qualifications:	PhD in Chemistry
Institution type:	A large Further Education College, offering A-Levels, vocational diplomas, apprenticeships, access to higher education courses and university level courses.

The researcher

The practitioner teaches Applied Science at a large further education college, **working with Level 1, 2 and 3 learners all currently studying for BTEC Applied Science programmes.** He has been teaching at the college for nearly five years and is currently employed on a temporary contract working full time.

The practitioner originally heard about the PRP through SET and applied for the PRP MA short course. At the time he was unaware whether other practitioners at his college had completed the programme, however he subsequently learned that they had. The employer said that their college was keen to support staff on the PRP programme, noting that the research project aligned with institutional drivers around **digital learning, access to laboratories and improving student attainment, employability and motivation.**

For the practitioner himself, the key motivation behind undertaking the PRP was the **opportunity to perform research and to learn.** He has *"always been interested in research"*, having previously gained a PhD in Chemistry and as such he has the mindset whereby he *"wants to find out what is going on, what is underlying things, how things work"* and PRP provided him with the opportunity to further this interest.

The practitioner had some concerns prior to starting the PRP, particularly relating to employer support, such as time off or expenses, as a result of him being on a temporary contract. The practitioner also reported that work life balance was a concern due to the additional work required to undertake an MA. However, despite it being part of a different discipline, he had carried out research previously and **felt reasonably confident in conducting and writing up research.**

The PRP research project

Lockdown: experiments with virtual science laboratories in Further Education

Virtual laboratories increase the accessibility of learning experiences by removing economic or physical barriers such as the need for specialist equipment. Virtual laboratories have become increasingly sophisticated as the use of virtual reality becomes more widespread. The use of virtual laboratories is becoming widespread in higher education establishments but remains novel in FE. The practitioner's research project aimed to test virtual science laboratory methods in the FE sector, asking: 'Do students feel that the virtual laboratory provides them with the skills and knowledge, which have traditionally been developed in a physical laboratory?'. The practitioner's students used virtual laboratories as part of the research project, with the research then focusing on the impact on: students' skills and scientific understanding; students' feelings towards learning; and student employability.

The research utilised a mixed methods approach, collecting quantitative and qualitative feedback through a questionnaire. The questions were designed to reflect on the five outcomes for practical science[37], with two questions for each outcome (the first using the five-point Likert scale and the second being open text). Data collection involved students across six classes studying at Level 2 and Level 3 following BTEC Applied Science programmes, with a total of 34 questionnaire responses from students. It was reported that the Covid-19 college closure altered data collection, with the questionnaire distributed through Google Forms rather than in the intended classroom environment.

The practitioner drew limited conclusions from the study. Namely that while the students' response to Likert questions suggested that virtual were a 'useful tool', but with a preference for physical laboratories, their qualitative responses were more positive towards virtual laboratories.

The research found that students were excited and motivated by the use of new technology, but also identified several factors which could influence the implementation of virtual laboratories. For example, it was noted that the technology/software may be difficult to use thus limiting its effectiveness, while potential student language abilities/barriers may limit accessibility and a lack of student motivation may hinder success. Additionally, students indicated that the opportunities for social interaction and assistance from their teacher and other students provided by the physical laboratory may be more appealing.

The study therefore suggested that there needed to be better understanding in terms of the intellectual and emotional learning experiences from virtual laboratories, particularly relating to the factors outlined above, with the research indicating that these should be considered carefully and be used to inform the implementation of such tools.

[37] Holman ,J.2017) Good Practical Science, Gatsby Foundation: https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/good-practical-science-report.pdf

Dissemination and implementation of research findings
Within the college, the practitioner has disseminated his research widely. He has **shared the information (poster, abstract and presentation)** with his line manager and other members of staff (teachers and managers) both within his own and across other faculties at the institution. The practitioner's work has been received positively by colleagues, with his employer noting that a working group has been looking at how the work can be taken forward and applied in the future. He has also **taken part in cross-faculty meetings involving senior staff regarding the potential implementation of virtual laboratories.**

The practitioner has also disseminated his research more widely. For example, the participant produced a poster for the **ETF Practitioner Research Conference in 2020 and had written an article based on this study which has been submitted to the Intuition magazine for publication**. The practitioner reported that whilst attending the residential, **other PRP practitioners** have shown an interest in his research and he has **subsequently shared with them.**

The practitioner reported that it was likely he would have presented something at his college's development week had the focus not have been shifted as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. However, he did indicate that **Covid-19 had generated a lot of interest in virtual laboratories and aided the dissemination of his work internally** by showing that such laboratories are not just a 'like to have' option and instead will likely become a necessity. His employer reported that once the research is fully written up, there will be **a case both for the findings being built into the college's CPD activities** and for sharing his research more widely.

Impact on the practitioner
As a result of his involvement in the PRP, the practitioner has developed a new appreciation for **the emotional and social impacts of teaching.** The PRP has provided him with the research skills needed to consider the way students view and tackle problems. The practitioner reported that he has been able to refocus the way he views things, **changing his focus from a delivery viewpoint to one where he looks from the students' point of view and uses their feedback to influence his teaching**. As a professional educator, the PRP has **helped him to engage with the literature and broadened his educational experience**, which he considers will enhance his employability.

The PRP has also had a positive impact on the practitioner's career, with his employer reporting that the practitioner has **now applied successfully for a permanent role at the college**. His employer noted that the fact that he was able to present the work he has completed **proved that he can work cross-faculty and provided good evidence of character and how he values learning, bringing an "added dimension" to his application.**

According to his mentor, the practitioner's involvement in the PRP has provided him with the opportunity to develop skills in navigating FE, particularly in terms of refining how things should be presented and **how best to articulate his recommendations to the wider FE community.**

Impact on the institution and its employees

Following conversations and presentations to staff members the practitioner has explored how virtual laboratories would be useful for the various courses offered at the college. This process has been **particularly useful in the context of Covid-19 restrictions which will result in limited access to laboratories for physical experiments**. The practitioner reported that alongside other employees he has also been considering the different virtual laboratory options to determine which the college should use, with options ranging from free software packages to commercial operations. His employer noted that despite limiting data collection, Covid-19 has enabled the research to gain more traction, with the college now planning to implement virtual labs *"in a more significant way"*.

The employer commented that the research process aligned with their ambitions for student voice and for **students to be co-creators of their education**. The employer remarked that the participant had opened himself up to student feedback.

Impact on students

Students have been **able to develop technical skills** associated with the virtual laboratories, for example learning to use the software itself. The practitioner noted that **from an employability perspective, virtual laboratories would have a positive impact and that from** a learning skills point of view, the research will have benefitted students, for example **developing their skills in terms of how to manipulate data and make observations**. It was also highlighted that students will have developed softer skills such as resilience, with the idea that the virtual laboratory will have enabled students to develop problem solving skills, which will have further employability benefits**.**

Case study G

Research area: A supported experiments story: can popular culture enhance engagement? A simple 'try and feedback' campaign for teachers

Institution G: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Tutor & Teacher of Maths, Business, Money Management & Digital Technology
Current level of study:	MA Short Course
Institution type:	Further education college for young people age 16-19, offering A-levels, specialist pathways, vocational programmes, foundation level and ESOL programmes

The researcher

The practitioner teaches maths, business, money management and digital technology in the Foundation Learning department at a Sixth Form and Further Education College. The practitioner is an experienced practitioner, whose remit in the department is to **re-engage the most difficult to engage students**. The practitioner also creates digital educational content for students who find maths challenging.

The practitioner's Head of School at the college is a keen proponent of continuous improvement in teaching and learning practice. The college has a supported experiments initiative and the practitioner is one of twelve **Supported Experiments Ambassadors** in the college. Their role is to encourage colleagues to trial and test new initiatives in the classroom to improve teaching and learning, and to support staff to become more involved in the development of their practice. Their Head of School encouraged the practitioner to apply for the MA short course. The Head of School and the Head of Foundation Learning were both keen to facilitate the practitioner's engagement with the programme, as they felt he was well placed, as an **already innovative and creative practitioner**, to undertake research, develop professionally and enthuse other members of staff to *"do innovative things"*.

For the practitioner, the opportunity to undertake an MA was appealing as it involved practice based research (*"you're living it and doing it"*), for which he **could choose the research focus himself**. It was also an opportunity for the practitioner to get out of his *"comfort zone"* and to network with other practitioners.

The practitioner did not have any initial concerns or expectations prior to commencing the programme, which meant that the standard of work required for the programme was *"quite a shock"*, as the practitioner had not done anything similar before. He suggested that practitioners could be better prepared for the course, so they would *"know what was coming"*. However once on the course, the practitioner felt **well supported, encouraged, and effectively stretched and challenged**.

The PRP research project

A supported experiments story: can popular culture enhance engagement? A simple 'try and feedback' campaign for teachers

Foundation learners commonly struggle with engagement in the classroom, which negatively affects their attainment and enthusiasm for learning. The practitioner's research project considered how popular culture can be used to effect change in learner engagement, attendance and learning in a Foundation Learning Department. More specifically, the project focused on **how the use of music can develop positive engagement in lessons.**

The focus on music was decided on in collaboration with other colleagues. The research design saw the introduction of music in a range of different ways **Practitioners used a range of methods to include music in their lessons**, from allowing students to pick their own music on their phones and work independently, to the use of background music throughout the lesson, to music incorporated within activities.

The impact of this experiment was explored through a research process that adopted a **mixed method approach**. Teachers who incorporated music into their lessons participated in focus groups, observations were undertaken, and audio and video recordings were made and analysed. In addition, an online student survey was conducted.

Initial findings from the research indicated that **the use of music improved student engagement in the classroom**. In particular, the use of classical, jazz or ambient instrumental music in the background of classes was effective; music without lyrics was considered more conducive to student engagement. The research also noted that practitioners interpret the use of popular culture in the classroom in different ways but concluded that. further research is required to understand whether one method is more effective than others.

However, the research also unearthed challenges in undertaking practice-based research. Time constraints, along with structural changes within the institution made data collection difficult and **encouraging practitioners to adopt new and experimental teaching methods can be challenging**. It was concluded that the use of popular culture in the classroom was better embraced by those with fewer years' experience of teaching

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

The research findings have been **shared within the Foundation Learning department, and with the rest of the Supported Experiments Ambassadors team**, which could lead to the implementation of the music into the classroom more widely across the college in the future. The practitioner has shared his research findings externally, for example, through a Sharing Good Practice with Schools project, and through an interview with a local newspaper.

Impact on the practitioner

As a result of his participation on the programme, the practitioner says he has **improved his professional skills**. This includes presentation and communication skills, in addition to improvements in academic reading and writing. The practitioner's mentor noted that his writing style

has improved, stating *"he now writes in a more flowing way and uses more scholarly resources",* and this style, combined with his passion, will *"no doubt increase his credibility"* as a researcher.

The practitioner is now a **more reflective practitioner**. He is now more considered when thoughtful when conveying results, backing them up with evidence and *"letting the results speak for themselves"*. He considers himself to be more self-aware and measured when trying things out and has recognised the importance of working with colleagues to develop their ability to innovate.

A key impact for the practitioner has been **increased professional confidence**. The practitioner now feels validated to trial new methods in the classroom, and confident in *"being open minded, creative and innovative"*.

Impact on the institution and its employees

The College is encouraging, and investing in, a culture of self-reflective practice and innovation. The supported experiments champions demonstrate how important this is to the college. Nevertheless, partly, as a result of the practitioner's research, the **culture change** has been noticed within the department, and amongst some newer teachers across the college more widely. Whilst some of them are now using popular culture and music as a tool within their classroom, the practitioner's experience has also **encouraged practitioners to try and test other new ideas in the classroom**; it was noted by his manager that the practitioner is a role model for innovation in the classroom for other teachers. This was confirmed by his mentor, highlighting the practitioner's ability to *"inspire"* colleagues.

Whilst it was felt that there were opportunities for the research to impact on the college more widely, it was recognised that it needs to be orchestrated by senior leaders and managers. Otherwise, it is likely to be the *"same people"* implementing innovation in the classroom, with *"a group of people being left behind"*.

Impact on students

The study period coincides with **improved engagement of students in the classroom**. The practitioner has attributed an **improvement in student attainment** to the programme; last year he achieved the best Maths results to date (88% pass rate). He considers the reason for this to be twofold; the inclusion of popular culture and music has increased engagement with maths, but also an increase in the practitioner's own confidence in using creative and innovative teaching methods, leading to better outcomes for learners.

It was noted by the practitioner's line manager that all the *"building blocks"* were in place to achieve good student outcomes prior to the study, as the practitioner has always achieved strong results. However, the research has enabled the practitioner to more meaningfully consider how engagement can be better facilitated, impacting on improved

attainment.

Case study H

Research area: The value and impact of informal learning on the professional development of teachers

Institution H: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Course Leader for the Diploma, Certificate and Award in Education and Training programmes
Current level of study:	MPhil Year 2
Previous research qualifications:	Practitioner Research Programme MA short course
Institution type:	Further Education College, offering vocational and technical courses alongside apprenticeships, higher education and professional qualifications

The researcher

The practitioner is a course leader at a Further Education College, running the Diploma, Certificate and Award in Education and Training programmes. She also lectures on the Assessors and Verifiers Awards and the Level 7 CIPD Advanced Diploma. She is an experienced practitioner, with her previous roles at the college including being a teaching mentor on the Diploma, an Advanced Quality Practitioner, a Teaching Fellow and an ILT Blended Learning Adviser. The practitioner has recently taken on the role of Digital Innovator at the college, which has involved participation in ETF research to inform the introduction of EdTech teacher status. Prior to her roles at the college, the practitioner worked in training and development.

The practitioner completed the PRP MA short course (Research and Development Fellowship) prior to starting her MPhil. When the opportunity to study for the MPhil arose, the Quality Manager and the Assistant Principal at the college offered their support should she decide to apply. The college were actively developing their **culture of research informed teaching**, and therefore the timing of the PRP call was opportune. The practitioner was the first at the college to be involved with the PRP, however others have since begun the process. She also felt that the MPhil would enable her to **further develop teacher training programmes** in her institution and would enhance her own skills in action research.

Prior to starting the course, the practitioner was concerned about juggling traveling to the residentials along with her teaching load. However, she found that the physical distance meant that she could mentally take herself away from her teaching and **dedicate time to study**. She was also concerned that she was *"going to be exposed [intellectually]"*, and worried that she might not be able to do the course, however her fears were unfounded – *"it is a really good idea as a practitioner to be a student on a regular basis".*

The PRP research project

The value and impact of informal learning on the professional development of teachers

FE teachers struggle to find time to develop their skills and knowledge, and research shows that they consider that this impacts upon their learners' experience. Although there are fewer opportunities to undertake formal professional development, **teachers do manage their own self-development through informal learning**[38]. However, this is neither recognised nor rewarded. The practitioner's research project therefore focused on establishing the value and impact of informal learning on teachers' professional development.

The project built on her research undertaken as part of the MA short course. The MA research project considered how informal learning could be incorporated into a formal qualification, through developing a level 1 qualification for subject mentors at the college. The MPhil research is building on this by introducing a **level 4 qualification in digital skills** for teachers/lecturers, that exposes and attunes them to informal learning opportunities. The research also aims to consider alternative methods of recognising and measuring informal learning to see whether a qualification is the only way to achieve the same outcome. This was undertaken through an **online platform, and the creation of a curriculum tailored around informal learning** to allow learners to gain a level four award in digital skills.

The research process involved the collation of a detailed narrative of eight learners in a natural setting, through observations, reflective journals, structured interviews, group discussions, questionnaires and documentary research.

The practitioner has found that whilst there are lots of opportunities to use informal learning for the professional development of teachers, FE teachers are not yet doing so in a routine and reflective manner. The potential of informal learning is however significant. She found that for some teachers it offers **great opportunities for the development of teaching practice**; creativity, innovation and collaboration skills are increasingly important and therefore practitioners should be learning the way they should be teaching.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

Within the college, the **practitioner has presented her findings at a higher education staff development day**, with the Advanced Quality Practitioner team and the Blended Learning team.

The practitioner has also worked closely with other digital educators in the college, and they are beginning to **change their teaching and learning practices by incorporating more informal learning opportunities into their curriculum**. As part of putting her research into practice, the practitioner has developed and implemented the level

[38] Informal learning is the unscheduled and impromptu way people learn to do their jobs, generally taking place without much facilitation or structure.

four qualification in Digital Learning for Educators; a six-month informal training course for teachers or lecturers who want to improve their digital skills as part of their CPD. The course is accredited by Ascentis[39] as an Education and Training qualification.

The practitioner has also begun to disseminate her research more widely; her research project was presented at the Ascentis Education and Training Conference. She is also involved in the ETF Outstanding Teaching and Learning Assessment for digital skills and professional learning networks, where she has shared her research findings with practitioners from other colleges.

Impact on practitioner

The practitioner said that the experience has had three key effects. The first is that she is now **more externally engaged with her profession**. She is now undertaking reviews of applications for Advanced Teacher Status and Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills reviews for the Society for Education and Training. Prior to doing this she would not have met the criteria to be accepted, and she could not have put forward evidence in her application. She is now an External Quality Assurer for Ascentis – increasing her roles outside of the college.

The practitioner's mentor highlighted that prior to starting the MPhil the practitioner was reasonably confident because she had already done the MA short course, however her tutor described how she has become even more confident. A lot of this is down to having developed how she communicates her research. She is now more confident about approaching senior management in the college and is able to have a dialogue with them about what is working and what is not working in the college, and more specifically about the formalisation of learning. Her mentor feels that now the practitioner recognises she *"has a voice"* and is starting to see herself as a **researcher and an informed practitioner**. She felt that the programme has given her more professional credibility which in turn has raised her confidence. She says that she has started to push herself into areas that she wouldn't have done otherwise.

Finally, through networking, she has learned from other practitioners and trialled some of their ideas in her own practice, for example different ways of conducting observations or how to handle differentiation of work in the classroom.

Impact on employees and institution

As the practitioner has only just started her action research phase, she is yet to see any direct impact from her research findings on her colleagues and the wider institution. However, as she now has a background in research, she has been approached to **assist college digital innovators and accessibility champions with their action**

[39] Ascentis is an awarding organisation and an Access Validating Agency, creating qualifications for FE colleges, training providers and schools.

research. The practitioner has also used networking opportunities gained through the Programme to transfer initiatives she has seen elsewhere to her institution and she has added resources to the college intranet.

The practitioner's employer highlighted that she has become far more active in scholarly activity and has **added value to the overall scholarship of the college**. There is an appetite from the college for the practitioner to help develop core modules across its HE offer and become involved in cross-curricular development.

There is also scope for her to help not just her learners, but staff within the college as well – to **inspire them to undertake post graduate research themselves**. Following her presentation at the HE staff development day at the college, she was approached by two colleagues who were inspired to apply for the MA short course. It is hoped that the practitioner and her colleagues who are also undertaking research will become champions for change in the institution and inspire others to apply for the course too.

In addition, the practitioner's mentor noted how there are several teachers who have engaged with her and who, as a result of their engagement have had their courses rated as Gold within the Quality Audit that is completed as part of the Scheduled Online Learning Assessment initiative run by the college.

Impact on students

As a direct result of doing the MPhil, the practitioner has implemented an **academic poster exercise** in the level 5 Diploma in Education and Training, as the assignment for the course's Action Research module. Feedback from students about this module prior to the academic poster exercise was that it was *"difficult to cope with"* alongside the additional requirements of the course, since its introduction, the poster assignment has received initial positive feedback from course practitioners. The practitioner had the idea for this task because she had been required to do one as part of her MPhil course assessment and feels that she has been able to manage the process more effectively and signpost to relevant support materials, as a consequence. She hopes that students will continue to feel that this is **more meaningful and more accessible than the previous exercise.**

The practitioner's employer highlighted she already had good results, so there has been no change in students' results. She does however spend more time looking at **academic reading and writing with her learners**. Her employer also noted that as a result, learners are more **confident and happier** than they would have been when writing their first assignments.

Case study I

Research area: Using mobile phones to extend learning hours beyond the ESOL classroom

Institution I: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	ESOL Tutor
Current level of study:	MPhil Year 1
Previous research qualifications:	MA in Applied Linguistics
Institution type:	Small adult community learning provider as part of local authority's adult skills provision. Offer includes apprenticeships, English, Maths and ICT and ESOL.

The researcher

The practitioner started her career as a secondary Modern Foreign Languages teacher and moved to teach ESOL in Further Education in 2004. In the adult community learning provider where she is currently teaching part-time, ESOL is the largest department, reflecting the needs of the local community to learning English as an additional language.

Her engagement with research began with a taught MA in Applied Linguistics in 2009, with her dissertation focusing on writing and materials development through action research conducted at the adult learning provider. **Her interest in research stems from her love for problem solving**: *"that motivates me and is part of who I am"*. For around five years prior to starting the Practitioner Research Programme the practitioner had been actively researching informally through small, independent research projects with a focus on listening in ESOL. **Language learning and teaching, she reports, is an under-researched area of adult learning**, and therefore she was interested in developing this field alongside enhancing her understanding of teaching methodologies and improving her classroom practice. As the projects and her interest grew, she decided to take one day a week off work to focus on research which allowed more time to read, write materials, and disseminate her findings internally at her workplace and externally at conferences. Her current research interests focus on how **mobile phones can be used effectively in blended learning within ESOL**.

The practitioner had been actively exploring options for undertaking further research through different providers. The Practitioner Research Programme MPhil appealed to her due to **the support provided through residentials and guided research and study**, which she thought she would benefit from. This enhanced her confidence in undertaking the course, with the funded programme being a *"great opportunity"*. Already having one day a week set aside to focus on research alleviated any concerns about the demands of the course.

Her employer, the adult learning provider, was supportive of her

involvement and *"excited"* about being involved, as engaging in research for lower-level learners was something they were keen to explore more of. Blended learning was also an area they had been interested in developing for some time, but without someone to research and take this forward limited progress had been made. Indeed, progress had been particularly slow in most departments outside of ESOL before COVID-19. It also **aligned with their vision for the future to meet the local community's needs by widening traditional delivery methods**, enhancing reach to those who have limited access to other online learning, and increasing flexibility to meet the needs of people who have other commitments which may restrict their engagement with learning during teaching hours.

The PRP research project

Using mobile phones to extend learning hours beyond the ESOL classroom

The practitioner's research centres around whether mobile phones can be used in blended learning to extend guided learning hours in an ESOL setting. This centres around the problem of the widely acknowledged issue within ESOL that there are insufficient guided learning hours for ESOL learners to make the rapid progress they desire.

ESOL learners are a discrete group with specific needs, backgrounds and cultures. Over 80% are women, who may not be educated to a basic level in their own country and with a mixed range of digital skills and computer literacy. However, all learners have and can use their mobile phones to a greater extent than other forms of digital technology. Using mobile phones could extend learning time in a blended mode, with more learning taking place outside the classroom, at home and in daily life. Additionally, it could offer more flexibility in study, opportunities for personalisation, and on-the-go language acquisition and more exposure to English outside of the classroom. Blended delivery using mobile phones as a learning mode is in its infancy in many organisations and had not previously been used at the adult learning provider where the practitioner is teaching and conducting research. The research project will design a ten week course of blended learning incorporating the use of mobile phones in an ESOL context in order to increase learning by around three hours a week. The programme of learning will be a combination of learning connected to classwork, with some standalone learning.

An example of an activity which has been trialled by the practitioner has been providing idioms linked with a picture, which the learners had to research themselves (e.g. by asking a family member, looking in a dictionary or using the internet). The learners were given one idiom a week via padlet (an online content sharing platform) for eight weeks, and at the end completed a test using Google forms and the associated pictures to assess how much learning had taken place autonomously outside of the classroom.

Methodology

During the first year of the project, the practitioner has focused on using the existing research base to define the problem, understand what a solution could look like and relevant issues. The research plan is to:

- Conduct interviews and focus groups with learners and other ESOL teachers (at the practitioner's institution and potentially other providers) on learning experiences and preferences to inform design of ten week, blended learning course
- Design and deliver a programme of learning to 40 learners across two classes (one led by the practitioner and one led by a colleague)
- Conduct further qualitative research with learners and the other ESOL colleague to evaluate programme delivery and identify what worked
- Undertake quantitative data analysis to measure progress.

Following this the practitioner hopes that the course will be developed further and its findings used to inform other programmes offered by the department and college.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

Internally at the adult community learning provider, the practitioner has **shared her research progress with ESOL colleagues** at good practice meetings. As team meetings have moved online, she has now been chairing these good practice meetings. The college has encouraged CPD on online platforms and blended learning and the practitioner has contributed to this, for instance by teaching colleagues how to use online communication platforms and leading on exploring which systems will be best for their work.

A member of the senior management team has been researching how to meet the needs of learners and retain them while delivering remotely. The practitioner has working closely with them as their combined research is complementary. This has led to the **dissemination of some of her research, resources and exemplars from an ESOL perspective to the wider college**. Her employer noted that an internal, virtual, good practice conference would include the roll out of the practitioner's research and findings to the wider staff body.

The practitioner has set up a specific folder within the college's online system to invite all ESOL teachers to share resources which would benefit their blended delivery, such as links, courses and websites, in one shared place. She has led this sharing process by uploading her own resources and all colleagues are engaging with this. **Blended learning materials and resources the practitioner has developed are subsequently being used by some ESOL teachers** where this is appropriate for their learners. Some of these materials are also being

shared with other ESOL teachers outside her organisation through the online sharing portal 'skillsworkshop'.

The practitioner herself is also using **her research in her daily teaching practice by trialling ways to take advantage of the intrinsic features of mobile phones** – in that they are mobile rather than fixed, and have recording software for voices and photos. For instance, while teaching phrasal verbs as a grammar feature in the classroom, she asked learners to take photos of any phrasal verbs they could see in their daily life (e.g. a 'budge up' sign on a bus) and email them to her or upload them to padlet to be discussed in class.

Engagement with and prioritisation of this area of work by colleagues and the institution has been aided by the distance and online learning necessitated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the practitioner and her employer commented on the **beneficial nature of the collaborative, peer-support approach the practitioner had taken to sharing her research**, with the employer identifying the benefit of a *"prominent and respected member of the team sharing good practice, rather than the management team having to push this. [The researcher] being part of the team and being able to show them resources and ideas is probably a better approach than us telling them what to do."* Sharing of their experiences with online and blended delivery was reported to be taking place regularly in an informal way.

Externally, the practitioner has presented her research to date at the **ETF Practitioner Research Programme Annual Conference and at an ESOL teachers' association (NATECLA) conference**. As a result of her presentation at the latter conference, she was invited by another college to deliver further training to their ESOL team. The practitioner has written an article focusing on her listening research (rather than blended learning) which will be submitted to a journal over the summer. Further external dissemination activities have been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In relation to external dissemination of research findings, the practitioner identified the limitations of feeling ***"consciously incompetent"*** at this stage of her research project, **due to her awareness that while she has been immersed in the theory of blended learning**, people are keen to know more about how this was implemented in practice and associated learning. Further answers to this, and subsequent dissemination, will come at a later stage in the research project.

Impact on students

The impact of the practitioner's research on students were reported by her employer. Given the demographic of their ESOL learners, with challenges reaching and retaining them being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, her employer felt that **the college's successes in retaining and maintaining engagement with a high proportion and numbers of ESOL learners could be attributed to the college's**

approach to distance learning and the practitioner's research on blended learning as part of this. Using mobile phones and Zoom to engage with learners on their ESOL courses was reported to have led to more successful engagement with learners in comparison with other adult learning providers.

Impact on the institution and its employees

The practitioner hoped that having a member of staff on the ESOL team researching pedagogy and how to deliver blended learning effectively would impact on the quality of ESOL delivery in general, as well as blended and online delivery. This will be part of the college's direction of travel for the future in terms of being more responsive and reactive to learners' needs and engaging with more deprived wards in the area. Offering new approaches and moving away from set class times was expected to support the college to reach learners and community groups in need of more proactive support from the college. An example of this will be **the introduction of the first blended course that the college will run in the next academic year**, which will be *"a big change"*. The practitioner and her research have been a part of driving this shift, particularly within the ESOL department.

Her employer reported that the Practitioner Research Programme has enhanced her research. The timeliness of her research focus and an enforced change to online learners has **given her a platform within the college to share good practice on a more regular, timely, targeted and relevant basis** through good practice meetings. Additionally, her approach to disseminating her findings to her colleagues in a *"confident, nurturing"* way, by sharing exemplars, have led to her peers feeling *"safe"* in trying a new, somewhat contentious approach to teaching and learning (with mobile phones traditionally not being allowed in the classroom or having been used for learning). *"She has been a brilliant person to be part of changing that mindset with staff and learners, now I hope people see it as a brilliant tool to use for learning outside of the classroom."* Her mentor reported that she is acting as a *"critical friend"* to colleagues, which will enable them to become *"part of the research so they can pick up elements and develop their research skills through the community they are building"*.

Impact on the practitioner

The practitioner reported that she had **grown in confidence as a researcher able to practice research and contribute to her field**. Her employer also reported the practitioner had shown increased confidence in using digital tools for blended and online learning. As a result, the employer hoped that **the practitioner's role in mentoring and coaching other teachers would grow** due to her strengths in supporting others and helping them to use a range of different teaching tools. Her ability to listen to and use feedback and commitment to her research and students were highlighted as enabling factors by the practitioner's mentor.

Case study J

Research area: 'Their Defining Moments': critical influences upon progression into the Arts, considered through the lenses of Bernstein's Pedagogic Rights

Institution J: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Progression Manager, Widening Participation
Current level of study:	Third year of PhD (having transferred in the second year of the MPhil)
Previous research qualifications:	MA in Fine Arts Practitioner Research Programme MA short course
Institution type:	Small, specialist arts institution with around 2500 students. Offers further education (FE), post-16 extended diploma, foundation diploma and access to higher education (HE), as well as undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The researcher

The practitioner began working in the FE and HE sector following a previous career in diagnostic radiography. After undertaking BA and MA degrees in Fine Art as a mature student and working in galleries, museums and community arts, she joined a HE institution initially as a Programme Leader for Fine Art. While in this role, she found herself spending most time advocating for, and supporting students who were struggling on the course, and subsequently moved into a widening participation coordinator role to allow her to pursue her interest in working with these cohorts. This led to her current role as Progression Manager within the widening participation and outreach team at a relatively small institution offering FE and HE provision which specialises in the arts (in alignment with her academic background). This role involves working with external partners such as schools, colleges and community groups, as well as the Office for Students' Uni Connect programme as a regional collaborative partner, to support the transition of disadvantaged individuals from all age groups into the creative industries.

She has been a strong advocate for collaboration throughout her career. **Having moved into widening participation, she recognised the imperative of external collaboration, policy knowledge and evaluative thinking**. This led to her desire to want to undertake further research. The Head of Research at her institution suggested she apply for the Practitioner Research Programme to study the MA Short Course (in its previous form of Research Development Fellowship) in 2016. She has found **hearing from practitioners working across the whole spectrum of FE has broadened her perspective of education**. She described her progression to this point, the third year of her PhD study, since then as an ***"incremental, systematic, step-by-step development"*** which has reduced her feelings of this level of research being "*overbearing"* or intimidating.

The PRP research project

'Their Defining Moments' - Critical influences upon progression into the Arts, considered through the lenses of Bernstein's Pedagogic Rights

The research project is an interpretative study focusing on five highly engaged arts students (recent graduates or Level 5 or 6 students), their progression into the arts and how they are now contributing back to the institution. This aims to understand how the sector can make a difference to disadvantaged cohorts, and the *"scale, complexity and messiness"* of access to FE and HE in *"systematically marginalised"* arts subjects. Within widening participation, policy addresses groups of learners with singular labels (such as BAME, low socio-economic status, care leavers, mature students), but this research aims to **understand intersectionality alongside and positive influences that shape progression into the arts**.

Her research focus was supported by her employer who noted that practitioners *"are the ones working in the educational context day to day, they know what issues to explore"*. As a manager, she has had **autonomy and access to students to conduct the research**, within the ethical frameworks established by her institution.

The research **uses the voice of five widening participation students who have proved to become *"exemplar"* students** through being highly engaged beyond their course as ambassadors of the institution, activists in the student union or having won a commission. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each student, reflecting on their own study and exploring the factors that influenced their progression and their recommendations for actions that could make a difference to other students. Seven storytelling prompts were used to allow them to relate their real-life experiences and identify connected points (informed by particular places, objects and incidences).

Findings in the narratives revealed **predominant influences recognised by other researchers** (such as parents and teachers), but also **more nuanced influences of character and personal qualities** including *"determination, stubbornness and resistance"* which counter predominant influences

Students responses were thematically analysed against Bernstein's pedagogic rights to individual enhancement, inclusion and political participation to **reveal defining moments in the students' progression** and question what the institution brings to the individual. Recommendations from this research would be for solutions to the question of *"what can educators do to make a difference for an individual in overcoming barriers in the context of deprivation?"* to be long-term, holistic and work in combination with one another. One example from the research study of a 'defining moment' that emerged was a mature learner in established employment who saw a friend on the course at the institution. The insight was recalled as being influential to contribute to the decision to step away from employment to gain a Level 3 Access to Higher Education in Art and Design qualification before going on to become a full time Illustration degree student.

The practitioner has reflected on the importance of context and her interpretation in her findings: they are based on one encounter, relaying what the individuals recall at that point in time, but are informed by her contextual knowledge of their wider engagement with the institution.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

The practitioner's research is shared on the institution's research repository, which allows it to be internally disseminated as well as accessed publicly. Findings have also been disseminated at an internal event to raise the profile of mature students within the institution. The employer hoped that further internal dissemination opportunities could be developed.

The research and findings have been shared with **the Office for Students regional 'Uni Connect' collaborative programme; as a result, the practitioner is now chairing their regional access practitioner research group** and has published blogs about widening participation on their website. The research has also been disseminated through UKADIA (United Kingdom Art and Design Institutions Association) with other specialist arts education institutions.

The researcher is now **developing an academic profile. She has published three outputs in the last year**, including a journal article providing an auto-ethnological account of her experience as a practitioner–researcher related to her experiences of the Practitioner Research Programme. Her presentation at the 26th International Forum for Access to Continuing Education (FACE) Annual Conference 2019 on her research topic led to the opportunity for her to author a peer reviewed chapter for publication.

Impact on the practitioner

Initially, the practitioner was employed on a teaching contract, but this **was converted to an academic contract as her research developed momentum**. She feels that ETF support has lent her research credibility, *"because of their recognition, the institution have recognised it".* She credited the systematic support of ETF throughout her progression through the Practitioner Research Programme (MA Short Course, MPhil study and transfer to PhD) as having enabled her progression and the support and recognition of her institution.

Both the practitioner, her employer and mentor highlighted a **growth in confidence and self-belief** that had resulted from the programme. The employer saw this evidenced *"in conversations they have with people, they are defending their own position… it is really good for allowing people to reassess what they can do and see their role with fresh eyes."* The practitioner identified an **increased confidence in her writing through having been published** which moved her away from her comfort zone of presenting verbally. Writing for academic publication

and feeling confident about her work being publicly available has been "*a big development step"* and a key part of her experience of the PhD programme. The strong support of SUNCETT and her mentor was a key enabler in achieving this and helped her overcome self-doubt. The practitioner's mentor also commented on her progress, reporting that the quality and clarity of her writing, level of scholarship and critical engagement with research have developed since she began on the PRP.

The practitioner also believed **externally her professional status and credibility had been enhanced, as she was contributing to the current widening participation discourse.** This has included being part of an All-Party Parliamentary Group Women Researchers in Parliament course, which was described as a *"key moment"* in her research and career.

Impact on the institution and its employees

As a result of this research, the practitioner is **incorporating more student voice in the widening participation team's work and using students as role models more**, such as through their student ambassadors or a buddy scheme for pre-university cohorts. An area for further work she identified was increasing the levels of diversity within the student voices that are represented so that more students can see themselves reflected in this work.

The practitioner has also used her research to inform other research projects (for example, an Arts Council England funded project where she acts as a research observer). Her experience and learning have allowed her to inform other research practice and support colleagues with devising and undertaking their own research.

More widely, **participation in the programme by multiple practitioners has demonstrated and supported the ambitions of the institution**. The college has a well-established history as an FE college and gained taught degree awarding powers as a HEI in 2011 and became a named university in 2017. The programme aligns with an increased focus on their research goals in recent years and the growing community of this within the institution is *"giving it research credibility"*. The practitioner is regarded as part of this research community and her publications formed part of the current Research Excellence Framework submission. Consultation with the employer supported this, reporting that **the programme has *"been beneficial in raising research profile for the institution and getting connections with [research] organisations****… The networks we are aware of and we can collaborate with have widened."*

Impact on students

The practice of the practitioner and her team is being informed by the stories and narratives shared in her research. **The research findings are being used to inform curriculum design and pedagogy for widening participation students**, which will also benefit those less

advantaged than the “exemplar” students who participated in the study. For example, student voice is being used to convey students’ own experiences of their journey into higher education in short video pieces, used in online widening participation outreach activities.

Case study K

Research area: Stand like a boxer: in defence of vocational education

Institution K: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Faculty Manager for Technology
Current level of study:	MPhil Year 1
Previous research qualifications:	Practitioner Research Programme MA short course
Institution type:	Further education college primarily for young people age 16-19 (with some adult learners), offering A-levels, apprenticeships, specialist pathways, vocational programmes and online courses

The researcher

This case study reflects on a practitioner's development from undertaking the MA short course and progressing on to his first year of study on for the MPhil.

The practitioner started as a trainee plumbing lecturer in 2014 and progressed to become the Faculty Manager for Technology in 2017, a role which involves managing faculty staff, students and qualifications. The faculty includes construction, motor vehicle, engineering and IT departments. Prior to working in further education, the practitioner had a career in the plumbing trade before changing careers and undertaking a PGCE to allow him to share his knowledge with others. He had always had ambitions to do an MA, but financial and time constraints had restricted his ability to do this until the MA short course opportunity arose, with the sponsorship, bursary and support from both the college and course tutors making it a feasible and appealing option.

The initial opportunity to study the MA short course was suggested by their Director of the Faculty for Technology, who felt it would strengthen the practitioner's abilities and had seen the impact of the programme on another colleague. On completion of this course, the college were supportive of the practitioner's request to continue engagement with external research programmes through undertaking the MPhil. Following completion of the MA short course the practitioner was interested in researching a larger scale project. He also **enjoyed engaging with action research** in particular throughout his PGCE and MA as he felt that action research could be more *"individualised – you can decide the focus of something to really sink your teeth into"* compared to studying learning theories and principles of teaching. The practitioner was motivated to further **improve his own teaching practice in order to improve the student experience** and increase the quality of the service provided to students.

Prior to starting the MA course, the practitioner's only concern was in his

own ability to undertake the qualification due to his **vocational background** – *"I questioned whether I was capable of doing these kind of qualifications"*. While the course has been stretching and challenging, he felt that the support and guidance of course tutors had helped to overcome his concerns about academic writing by providing motivation, encouragement and reassurance of his abilities. He felt that pitching the course at a challenging, high level (although a reachable target), was a positive element of the course. Speaking at conferences was also a source of confidence *"that you're on the same level as other people".* A disciplined approach to dedicating time to study has **allowed him to balance the demands of the course alongside other professional and personal commitments**.

The PRP research project

'Stand Like a Boxer: In Defence of Vocational Education'

Within Further Education, there is a perceived difference between vocational and academic studies. The practitioner's research argues that this difference is reinforced with a separation of theory and practice, which is evident in both academic and vocational studies. The practitioner believes that showing vocational and academic pursuits actually operate on an *"equal playing field"* will benefit the wider FE sector. The research project therefore focuses on **challenging and exploring the existence of these divides, and understanding how and why they affect curriculum theory and design and assessment practice in programmes of vocational education for the construction industry**. What 'good practice' and 'good work' mean, and the relevance and coherence of study in vocational education are also explored through conceptual research and primary research with vocational students and staff.

The project built on the research undertaken by the practitioner as part of his MA short course, which found that engaging with employers could improve student attendance, retention and achievement. It was also constructed to align the practitioner's research interest with the strategic priorities of the organisation around student progression, as the academic/vocational aspect of the MPhil thesis enhances his understanding of learners' experiences, allowing him to devise action points which enable student progression. The practitioner felt it was **particularly important that this research was conducted from the perspective of a practitioner with a vocational background**, rather than from an academic perspective, in order to provide an "*insider['s]*" insights.

The research process involved questionnaires and focus groups with all staff involved in the construction and motor vehicle courses at three college campus sites (27 teachers). Case studies and interviews with Levels 1 and 2 construction craft students at the college (over 350 students across three campuses) have developed understanding of student experiences which has informed the both the practitioner's research.

Preliminary findings show that exploration of employer engagement has led to the **need to revisit underpinning principles of what is meant by good practice in this area and how this can be achieved**, but also our understanding of the nature of a practice, the processes through which a practice improves and the stages through which practice develops. The full research is due to be completed in December 2020, so more detailed findings and recommendations can be expected then.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

Within the college, the practitioner has presented his research project to his team, at a staff conference and displayed a poster in the college workshops and staff room to promote his work and the relevance of this to his colleagues' practice. The research has formed part of the Faculty team's self-assessment review and improvement planning. Across the wider college's network, he has presented his work at 'teach meets' to allow others to learn from his research and **acts as a "champion" of the college across the sector**. In the future, as his findings are developed, he would like to present to the Group Executive team, particularly as the CEO has fed into the research.

As a practitioner, the practitioner has **previously been featured in TES magazine** and there are plans for his research to be featured there when it is completed. The practitioner would also like to have the opportunity to present his findings at conferences and publications.

Impact on the practitioner

As Faculty manager the practitioner has changed curriculum design, courses and timetabling to reflect his learning from the programme. He also reported a **change in thinking and outlook of how to develop other staff** had developed over the course of his MA short course and MPhil research.

As a researcher, the practitioner felt that the programme had *"really opened up my learning and aspects of research that I had never thought of before"*. This had widened his awareness of the research base (for instance, considering epistemology and ontological approaches) as well as his research skills. His employer reported that *"**what he knows through this has morphed and changed and grown and sparkled**"*. It was reported that the programme had enhanced ideas the practitioner was already exploring, by allowing the space and opportunity to formalise his research and apply the underpinning academic theory and research base, which he may not have experienced without the programme. *"Now he has realised there is a framework and pre-existing body of knowledge underpinning this, it has become more successful, he's more aware of the drivers."* The opportunity to have space and time away from the organisation through the programme, intensive one-to-one tutor support, and collaboration opportunities with other practitioners was seen to have enabled this learning and upskilling.

Professional progression within the college was an aspiration held by the practitioner's employer for him, with the skills, knowledge and behaviours learnt from the programme an enabling factor in this. His employer reported developments in the practitioner's **confidence, particularly in presentation and communication, written abilities and resilience** – *"[the programme] was a challenging undertaking… which demanded another set of skills… [including] taking responsibility and commitment"*. He was seen to have *"realised, 'I can do this, I belong'"*. This growth in confidence and awareness of his own abilities was also recognised by his mentor.

Impact on the institution and its employees

The practitioner was already seen as having *"a reputation for contributing to thought leadership"* within the college, so his research as part of the programme *"contributed to that narrative"*.

For his colleagues, and particularly the Faculty team which he directly line manages, the programme experience was seen as having **fostered *"a more aspirational spirit"***, with other practitioners more willing to engage in dialogue around research and professional development within the college and externally on social media. His employer reported that the practitioner had ***"inspired"* his team and made them think differently** – but the next stage of disseminating and implementing his research findings would enable the changed practice. In order to do this, the employer anticipated the practitioner would train first the Faculty team, and subsequently the wider college where appropriate, in both the underpinning theory and reformed practice to embed learnings in delivery and practice across the team.

For the practitioner, his *"dream would be for this [research] to go towards policy makers and make them see the value of vocational courses"*. His mentor identified the beginnings of this as he was seen to have opened up discussions about the value of vocational education in 'real places', through his workplace and features in TES.

Impact on students

The research coincided with an improvement in **student outcomes and destinations.** The practitioner considered that the research had a role to play in this improvement, but it was attributed to a combination of approaches.

While the research was not reported to have impacted directly on students and lessons, **curriculum design, the tracking and monitoring of outcomes and implementing timely interventions** had been affected by the linking of theory and practice, and how this can lead to a better student experience. Additionally, the research focused on defining **high expectations** and instilling an **aspirational culture** across vocational courses, which could be expected to have positive contributed to improvements in student outcomes and destinations.

Case study L

Research area: Going digital whilst staying human: what are the barriers and benefits of using e-portfolios in the FE sector?

Institution L: Case study profile

Practitioner role:	Adult Learning and Skills Manager
Current level of study:	MA short course
Institution type:	Local Authority training provider, offering adult learning opportunities including ESOL, apprenticeships, vocational pathways and leisure courses.

The researcher

The practitioner manages the Adult Learning and Skills department at a Local Authority training provider in a large urban area. Specifically, the practitioner **manages vocational courses which lead to employment**, which includes counselling, supporting teaching and learning, accountancy, beauty therapy, interpreting, horticulture and social care. In addition, the practitioner teaches on these courses, although the extent to which his timetable incorporates teaching varies year on year depending on need; sometimes he is not required to teach at all. However, the practitioner does provide cover for his colleagues when needed and teaches an action research unit on the level 5 teaching diploma. The practitioner has been an educator for over 25 years. He has been at the training provider for five years; prior to this he worked in schools.

The practitioner found out about the PRP through the ETF website. He had not heard of the programme previously and he thought he was the first person working for his training provider to complete the programme. He knew he wanted to undertake a course or qualification as part of his CPD, and the PRP appeared a good opportunity as he could **tailor the research to his own interests, and to the need of the training provider**. The training provider has what he called a *"pro-CPD culture"* and managers were supportive his involvement. Furthermore, the research met a strategic need at the training provider, as they were in the process of rolling out the use of e-portfolios across the institution, which was met with mixed response from staff. Therefore, the research would support the roll out of e-portfolios through consideration of the barriers and benefits.

The supportive nature of the training provider in regard to CPD meant that the practitioner did not have any major concerns about undertaking the programme. Additionally, **as the practitioner was in a management role, he was able to manage his own timetable**, allowing for flexibility in conducting fieldwork, and he had access to colleagues and students when needed.

The PRP research project

Going digital whilst staying human: what are the barriers and benefits of using e-portfolios in the FE sector?

Whilst there is extensive research regarding the use and implementation of e-portfolios in higher education, there has been comparatively little research undertaken as to their value in the FE sector. The practitioner's research focused on **understanding the barriers and benefits of using e-portfolios, during the first year of e-portfolio implementation across the organisation**.

The training provider was already using e-portfolios for apprenticeships, which had improved performance in the department. Their performance improved as they could track progress more effectively, which meant both learners and assessors could pinpoint potential issues more accurately across all aspects of learning. Following an OFSTED inspection, **it was decided that the use of e-portfolios would be rolled out more widely across the training provider**, however this was 'met with resistance' by some staff members. It was therefore a timely opportunity to conduct research around the barriers and benefits of implementation within the organisation.

The practitioner used two main research methods; surveys and case studies formed through interviews and focus groups. Whilst the surveys were effective in collecting a wide range of data, the practitioner thought that the case studies provided better data; **richer, more meaningful and *"authentic"***. Both surveys and case studies were conducted with teachers and learners.

The research found that used correctly, **e-portfolios can be effective tools for assessment and learning**. The benefits reported in the research related to flexibility for students in uploading work, and for teachers in providing feedback (which *"fits better with modern living")*. They also present a collaborative learning space and allow teachers and learners to track progress in a more holistic manner.

However, key barriers to use were uncovered. There was **resistance to using technology amongst both tutors and learners**, particularly within such a diverse institution where the age range of learners is between 16-70, and courses and qualifications vary substantially. A small number of tutors who were not confident in using the technology used both paper and online methods, rather than resorting to full use of the e-portfolio. This often resulted in an increased workload. In addition, some tutors have struggled to assess holistically, instead preferring to assess unit by unit. This has meant that some learners look like they have not made as much progress on certain skills as they have. In contrast, others placed great importance on keeping on track (against a progress bar), which sometimes meant that the quality of assessment and feedback suffered.

Dissemination and implementation of research findings

The practitioner has **presented his findings at two internal CPD days**. The first focused on the advantages and disadvantages of using e-portfolios, based on the literature, and the second focused on the research findings on implementing e-portfolios across the training provider. The latter was particularly beneficial to management, as they were able to view a full picture of attitudes towards the implementation; and survey findings suggested that there was not as much resistance to

the process as first thought.

As a result of the practitioner's research findings, the **e-portfolio has been implemented as a tool for the institutions new staff development programme**. Feedback from their managers and mentors are submitted through the e-portfolio, for example through observations. This method has the additional benefit of getting new staff on board with using the e-portfolio with their own learners.

The practitioner has not yet undertaken any wider dissemination outside his institution, although hopes to do so in future.

Impact on the practitioner

Involvement with the programme has had an impact on the practitioner's **confidence as a researcher**. He has progressed from the MA short course to the MPhil programme, as he wants to further develop his research skills and inform his practice as a manager in FE. His MPhil will focus on 'fusion skills' (i.e. soft skills or employability skills), which will fit strategically with the changes to the OFSTED framework and the strategic direction of the training provider.

The practitioner stated that his involvement in the programme has made him more of a **reflective practitioner**. He now undertakes more research informed practice, reading research papers to inform this. This has made him more able to disseminate theory to his staff more effectively, generating internal CPD opportunities for colleagues. His mentor reported that the practitioner has become more innovative in his research methodology, as a result of increasing confidence as a researcher.

Overall, the practitioner feels the programme has given him *"fresh impetus"* to continue his work within the sector and has improved his motivation.

Impact on the institution and its employees

The practitioner's research has **informed the debate around e-portfolios and their impact on teaching and learning**. As a result of increased understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of implementing e-portfolios, staff have focused more on why it is being used, and according to the practitioner, the debate has become less polarised. Staff are better able to see the benefits of the technology, in addition to understanding the challenges involved, which has meant that these can be properly addressed.

More widely, the **focus on holistic assessment has begun to improve the quality of feedback and assessment**. Tutors are thinking more creatively around how skills or knowledge can be evidenced in a variety of ways, and don't have to be *"pigeonholed"* into one unit or another. The use of the e-portfolio has also made feedback more visible to managers, who are better able to intervene if there are issues with learner progress.

As a result of the research, the practitioner's employer stated that the **rollout of the e-portfolio has been less difficult than it would have been without the research**. This is due to the increased understanding of the e-portfolio amongst staff, but also the increased understanding of the barriers to using the e-portfolio for leadership, as this has made them better able to address the concerns voiced by staff through surveys and case studies.

Impact on students

It was maintained that the impact of the research on students is unlikely to be fully understood so soon following its completion and will only be realised longer term. However, there is emerging evidence to suggest the research will have an impact on students. Due to the increased willingness of tutors to utilise the e-portfolio which has come as a result of the research, learners are using the portfolio more often. Anecdotal feedback confirmed that **many learners are proud of their portfolio, which could lead to improved motivation and engagement with their learning**. Additionally, the use of e-portfolios has been particularly beneficial for some learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as they are more able to *"see it all coming to life"*.

In addition, the benefits experienced through the **use of the e-portfolio in apprenticeships** are likely to be experienced more widely (e.g. improved learner performance) if tutors are more open to using the e-portfolio as a result of the research findings.