



Appointment of Trustees

Candidate information

May 2025

Introduction from our Chair

The lives of children and young people worldwide are inextricably linked to the amount and quality of education they receive. At the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) our mission is to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere and to support positive change across education systems.

We do this by creating and sharing robust evidence and insights on education policy and practice, informing policymakers and other key decision makers on the issues that matter in education and strengthening practice in the classroom.

NFER is the UK's leading independent provider of education research and analysis. Our expertise, long history, vast experience and pioneering methods have established our reputation as an authoritative, trusted and respected voice in education.

Our research, assessments and other services are widely known, highly respected and used by key decision makers in the UK and internationally. Helping to improve the lives of children and young people is at the heart of everything we do.

We are seeking to appoint Trustees who can contribute to our strategy, inform our decisions and enable us to increase our visibility and impact.

This is an exciting opportunity to support NFER to develop and grow, helping to improve outcomes for children and young people. We are looking for experienced senior leaders who are passionate about our purpose and what we are working to achieve.

If you are motivated by our work and feel you could contribute, we would love to hear from you.

Best wishes,

Lorna Cocking
Chair of Trustees



About NFER

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is the UK's leading independent provider of education research and insights. It is a not-for-profit organisation with an income of over £20 million a year, 240 staff and over 1,000 associates.

Our work supports effective policy and practice in education in order to improve the lives of children and young people.

Through our extensive knowledge and expertise, we offer a unique perspective and provide insights which are relevant and accessible. Our clients are wide ranging and include government departments, agencies and grant funding bodies at international, national and local levels, which benefit from NFER's full range of expertise and professional services.

We undertake research on all aspects of education from early years to further and higher education. Our focus at present is on 8 key topics: accountability, assessment, classroom practice, education to employment, social mobility, school funding, school workforce and systems and structures.

NFER is a company limited by guarantee, and a registered charity. We are governed by an experienced Board of Trustees, chaired by Lorna Cocking.



We share the results of our work with a wide range of organisations and individuals, including education policymakers and professionals. We use our expertise to identify and develop practical solutions to bring about improvements for children and young people, often working in collaboration with partners. As a not-for-profit organisation, we reinvest any surplus funds into self-funded research and development to further contribute to the science and knowledge of education research.

We strongly believe that changes to education should be informed by evidence, and the impacts evaluated so that policymakers, leaders and practitioners can see whether their actions are really making a difference. We work with those who are genuinely interested in improving education, from major employers to government departments, from school and college leaders and teachers to parents.

Governance and management

NFER is governed by a Board of Trustees chaired by Lorna Cocking. The full list of NFER's current Trustees can be found [here](#).

Day to day management is delegated to the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team.

The Senior Management Team is composed of the following individuals:

- Carole Willis – Chief Executive
- Simon Tarr – Chief Financial Officer
- Dr Lesley Duff – Director of Research
- Maddie Wheeler – Director of Communications
- Greg Woodcock – Director of Operations
- Phil Spall – Chief Digital Officer

“Proud that Slough has the national headquarters of NFER – the UK's largest independent provider of educational research.

Fascinating to hear their research into the pandemic's impact on school, children's services, home learning effectiveness, teacher recruitment and training trends.”

Tan Dhesi MP



Research and assessment

NFER has a reputation for being professional, authoritative, trusted and rigorous.

We deliver high quality independent research and assessments to a wide range of clients, generating valuable insights and producing tailored outputs to inform policy and practice. Much of our work is won through competitive processes, but we also invest in a number of our own research projects, sometimes working with partners, where there are important and unmet research needs.

Our evidence is frequently cited in government reports, academic journals and the wider media, and successive governments have used it to inform policy thinking. Our team of qualified professional researchers, economists, statisticians, psychometricians, assessment experts and information specialists offer extensive experience in a wide range of research methodologies, combined with deep subject knowledge.

Our products and services

Schools and other education institutions are key partners in much of our work and we identify ways in which NFER's expertise and evidence can help them to improve teaching, learning and assessment through a range of products and services. NFER's research and psychometrics expertise underpin the design and development of our products and services, including our new digital assessments, NOA (NFER Online Assessments) for primary schools.

Our Strategic Goals

Our mission is to generate evidence and insights that can be used to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere and to support positive change across education systems.

We are influential in driving education policy and practice, providing new and creative insights based on robust evidence, and continually looking outwards to build relationships and ensure our insights are effectively utilised.

To increase our reach, impact and long-term sustainability, we have five VITAL strategic goals which guide our objectives and priorities:

- Visible – maximise the visibility and influence of our experts and robust insights
- International – expand the reach of our expertise to support other countries
- Transformed - transform our systems and processes to increase quality and security
- Aligned – nurture a high performing, skilled, flexible, happy and engaged team
- Leading – create leading experts and a sustainable business using our unique offer

Our strategic goals are supported by our values which underpin how we work:



NFER's Impact

The visibility and influence of our research and insights has grown significantly over the last 10 years. Our research is regularly reported in national and sector media, informing action and debate about the challenges facing education and the potential solutions. Our work also directly supports decisions taken by our clients which include government bodies, schools and international agencies.

We regularly engage with the government, parliamentarians, sector bodies and influencers to ensure that our insights have maximum impact. For example, we are considered leading experts on the education workforce - our extensive portfolio of research on this topic has shone a light on the challenges facing the school and college workforce and the potential solutions. We helped shape the Department for Education's (DfE) teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy and the introduction of the Early Career Framework; we inform decisions on teacher pay through our regular engagement with the School Teachers' Review Body (which makes formal recommendations to the DfE about teacher pay).

Our assessment expertise feeds directly into government accountability systems and decision making as well as teaching practice. We developed and deliver the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) for all children entering Reception in England every year on behalf of DfE. The RBA provides the baseline for DfE measures of children's progress through primary school. We also developed and deliver the National Reference Test every year for Ofqual, the regulatory body for qualifications in England. This large-scale assessment of year 11 pupils is used by Ofqual to help set GCSE grade boundaries each year.

Other examples of the impact of our recent work are set out in our 2024 [Impact Review](#).



The role of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is collectively responsible for the overall governance, aims and strategic direction of NFER. They provide a pool of expertise and advice to support the Foundation in delivering its charitable outcomes and purposes.

Trustees act as ambassadors for the organisation with wider stakeholders and act in accordance with NFER's values.

The Board of Trustees is accountable to a variety of stakeholders, including service users, funders and the Charity Commission. The Chief Executive and staff of NFER are accountable to the Board.

The Trustees act as custodians of the Foundation's assets, ensuring that they are used appropriately and contribute to NFER's long term sustainability.

The Board agrees the Foundation's budget and ensures that appropriate arrangements are in place to enable NFER to meet all its charitable and legal responsibilities. To facilitate this, the Board currently operates a number of Committees, including:

- Finance Committee
- Remuneration Committee
- Investment Committee

The primary responsibilities of Trustees are to:

- work with the Executive team to set a clear strategic direction for NFER, supporting the growth of the organisation and increasing its visibility and impact on education
- maintain careful oversight of any risks to the organisation, including to its reputation
- support the CEO, management and staff of NFER in discharging their responsibilities and achieving the Foundation's mission
- ensure that NFER and its representatives function within relevant legal and regulatory frameworks and in line with the Foundation's Articles of Association, continually striving for best practice in governance
- act lawfully, responsibly and reasonably and to uphold the fiduciary duty invested in the position, undertaking such duties in a way that adds to public confidence and trust in NFER
- ensure the sound and efficient administration of NFER and its resources
- take appropriate professional advice in all matters where there may be material risk to NFER
- make available their skills and experience to NFER and avoid any personal conflict of interest



- always act in the best interests of NFER and avoid bringing the organisation into disrepute
- maintain absolute confidentiality about all sensitive/confidential information received in the course of their duties
- be responsible for key decisions, as set out in the Articles of Association, including the approval of the Foundation's business plan and monitoring performance; setting the framework for the pay and conditions of staff
- approve the financial control systems and arrangements for external audit; and the approval of a material application of the Foundation's property and funds
- understand how NFER functions and the environment within which it operates
- regularly and collectively reflect on how the Board fulfils its responsibilities as Trustees of NFER and how it adds value to the achievement of the Foundation's objectives.

Person specification

We are looking for applicants who:

- have experience of working in senior leadership roles, at a strategic level
- have a strong interest in the contribution that research and assessment can make to improving the effectiveness of education and the outcomes of children and young people
- are committed to NFER's mission, vision and values as a not-for-profit organisation.

The successful candidates will be expected to demonstrate evidence of the following:

Key Qualities

The ability to:

- Offer key insights into the business and operate at a strategic level – avoiding engaging in operational detail
- Analyse information critically and provide constructive and positive challenge to help grow the business, encouraging the organisation to take carefully calculated risks when this is appropriate
- Apply sound, independent judgement and political impartiality
- Help NFER think in creative and innovative ways
- Help raise NFER's visibility
- Work effectively as a member of a team, respecting the views of others and being willing to reflect and learn
- Understand the complementary roles of the executive and non-executives
- Devote the time, effort and enthusiasm required to discharge the role of a Trustee effectively
- Act with empathy, honesty and openness
- Demonstrate a commitment to equality and inclusion, promoting diversity

Professional experience:

Applicants are likely to come from various backgrounds, each bringing a particular range of skills. Recent experience and expertise are sought from senior managers/Directors in one or more of the following areas:

- Finance (including qualified accountants)/Commercial
- Trust/school/college leadership
- Legal (especially charity law)
- Communications/PR
- Technology

Successful applicants will be expected to develop an understanding of the legal duties and responsibilities of Trusteeship and the respective roles of the Trustees, the Chief Executive and her staff.

Terms of Appointment

Trustees are expected to attend scheduled Board and Committee meetings regularly. Board meetings are held four times a year, and the Committees meet twice a year.

Trustees should ideally serve on at least one Committee. In addition, there is one Board/SMT Strategy Day a year and an Annual Reception.

There is no remuneration associated with the role, but reasonable travel and other expenses are reimbursed.

A Trustee is appointed for a three-year term and may serve up to three consecutive terms if re-appointed.

Appointed Trustees will be expected to follow NFER policies and codes of conduct as they relate to the Board of Trustees.

How to Apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to NFER on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code FBTTA. Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter.

Candidates should submit a CV and cover letter addressed to the Chair of Trustees, Lorna Cocking. The letter should outline your motivations for wanting to join NFER and be no more than two pages.

The closing date for applications is **9am on Friday 6th June 2025**.

Next steps: Longlisted candidates will be interviewed by Saxton Bampfylde between 16th June and 4th July. Interviews with NFER will take place during the week of 14th July.

Dates may be subject to change.

NFER places equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of our business, seeking to promote fair employment procedures and practices to ensure equal opportunities for all.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.

