

Education: **The State of the Discipline**

A survey of education researchers'
work, experiences and identities

MAY 2023

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ABOUT BERA

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

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

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

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

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EDUCATION: THE STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE

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

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

Two elements are central to the initiative:

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

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was subject to peer review from the steering group appointed by BERA to oversee the Education: The State of the Discipline initiative.

This report was published in May 2023 by the British Educational Research Association.

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Morris, R., Perry, T., Smith, E., & Pilgrim-Brown, J. (2023). *Education: The State of the Discipline. A survey of education researchers' work, experiences and identities*. British Educational Research Association. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/education-the-state-of-the-discipline-survey-of-education-researchers>

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Introduction from BERA: About this report

BERA has had a longstanding interest in the state of education: as an academic discipline in universities, as a field of practice, and as a significant and central element of social and political policy. In the last decade, the nature of work in universities has been subject to a range of significant changes. Some of these changes have been recognised by trade unions, for example, increased casualisation of the workforce and changes towards more teaching-only contracts. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) also continues to be an influence on the ways in which universities work. In 2019, mindful of the ongoing changes within many UK universities, with resultant impacts on BERA members, BERA Council approved the development of an initiative to examine the state of education as a discipline taking account of the four nations of the UK. The ultimate purpose of this initiative was to equip those interested in the development of education with the most objective and powerful information on which to base their advocacy for education.

In January 2020 BERA commissioned a systematic review (SR) which was designed to inform the State of the Discipline initiative. The SR reviewed the research on the structures and processes – both formal and informal – that influence research activities in the UK. Following an open tender, the review was awarded to a team from the Universities of Dundee and Exeter, and their final report was published in September 2021 (Boyle et al., 2021).

Once the report and its recommendations had been considered by BERA's leadership committee, the association commissioned additional projects to explore the state of education further. The first of these to be published was a commission to analyse existing data in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the profile of academic staff working in education departments in universities in the UK, with particular regard to equality and diversity and protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The report from this project was published in January 2023.

Alongside this, BERA commissioned a team to carry out a survey of education researchers' perceptions of their work and identities in relation to education research

in universities. The purposes of this survey were to a) provide robust data about the state of education as an academic discipline in universities in the UK; b) examine the structures and processes that influence opportunity for, and engagement in, research activity for staff working in university education departments.

Through both quantitative and qualitative data gathered as a result of this survey, BERA hopes to offer insight into the current situation within the discipline of education in relation to the experiences of individuals undertaking educational research across the UK.

BERA stipulated that the researchers should ensure a balance of participants at different stages of their career, including early career researchers, across all four nations of the UK, and ensure ethnic diversity in the respondents. BERA also intends the survey design to be replicable to enable this exercise to be repeated at regular intervals to monitor trends within education research so that it can contribute to a longitudinal study of the state of the discipline.

Forthcoming work as part of this wider initiative involves commissioned projects which analyse the outcomes of the most recent REF, including a quantitative assessment of the progress of education as an academic discipline in UK universities through the analysis of REF data, both in absolute terms and relative progress against other disciplines. Following all these reports, BERA Council will review the evidence gathered and decide on some recommended next steps.

Through an open tender, the commission for the survey was awarded to Rebecca Morris, Thomas Perry, Emma Smith and Jess Pilgrim-Brown, at the time all at the University of Warwick. In this report the research team set out their analysis and findings. BERA wishes to extend gratitude to the research team for the time, dedication and care they have put into this project. Their report contributes to a more detailed understanding of education researchers' perceptions of their work and identities and the wider climate for conducting and nurturing education as an academic discipline.

May 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank members of the advisory group for their valuable contributions and support throughout this project: Ibrar Bhatt, Fadia Dakka, Trevor Gale, Stephen Gorard, Nicola Ingram, Divya Jindal-Snape, Vini Lander, Uvanney Maylor, Alis Oancea, Una O'Connor-Bones, Sally Power, Enlli Thomas, Sam Twiselton, Paul Wakeling, Patrick White and Yuwei Xu. We are also grateful to Katy Vigurs for her contributions to the project.

We thank members of the BERA Leadership Committee who supported this study: Vivienne Baumfield, Mhairi Beaton, Gerry Czerniawski, Sean Hayes, Ros McLellan and Dominic Wyse.

Finally, we are grateful to all of the education researchers who kindly gave their time to respond to the survey. Your contributions have enabled a better understanding of our discipline, experiences and community. We hope that this project will promote positive change in the sector.

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(All author affiliations were correct at the time of writing this report.)

Executive summary

This study forms part of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ‘State of the Discipline’ (SOTD) initiative which seeks to develop high-quality evidence and debate to inform the ongoing strategic direction of the organisation and of the discipline of education. Its specific aim is to examine education as an academic research discipline, and to understand the experiences and perspectives of those working in education research. Building on other commissioned work within the SOTD initiative, we developed a survey to understand education researchers’ perceptions of their work and identities in relation to education research in universities in the UK. Questions focused on the following themes:

- identity and background
- employment, career and institutions
- research motivations, activities, experiences and expertise.

We also invited respondents to share their views about current issues and debates relating to education research.

We made the survey available to all education researchers working in UK university departments/schools of education (and associated research centres) for eight weeks during spring and summer 2022. We developed content for the survey around a conceptual map that drew from existing literature. We also used the formal and informal structures and processes highlighted in the BERA systematic scoping review (Boyle et al., 2021) as a framework for informing the survey sections and questions. An overview of these is in table 1.

Table 1
Themes relating to formal and informal structures/processes as identified by Boyle et al. (2021)

Formal structures/processes	Informal structures/processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultures of performativity and accountability• Research impact agenda• Research funding regime• Debates about the quality and purpose of education research• The ‘what works’ agenda• Professional bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic pressures• Career stages (early-, mid-, later-career)• Second-career researchers• Non-traditional academics• Departmental cultures• Affective issues

We disseminated the survey through a range of channels, including personalised emails to education academics; social media; contact with heads of university-based education departments; and the project advisory group, BERA networks, and other professional organisations. In total 1,623 people responded. Calculating an exact response rate is difficult given the complexity of defining the population of education researchers, as outlined in the main report, but nevertheless, we estimate it to be in the vicinity of 20 per cent. As we discuss further in the methods section, we believe our sample to be broadly representative of the overall population, with good alignment with population data such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data. Early career researchers (ECRs) and those in temporary or new contracts may, however, be under-represented.

KEY FINDINGS

As well as contributing to the SOTD initiative, this study makes a significant contribution to a body of literature about the nature and development of education research. We review key studies from this literature in section 1.2 of the full report. Here we summarise the main findings from the survey grouped by theme.

Identity and background

Education researchers held undergraduate and postgraduate degrees from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including the humanities and natural sciences. Nearly three-quarters held a doctoral degree while only a small proportion reported having studied education at undergraduate level. The vast majority had some form of teaching qualification. In our sample, most respondents identified as women, and most were aged between 40 and 59, with very few academics aged below 30. Most researchers surveyed came from a white ethnic background, a proportion which is substantially higher than figures for UK higher education (HE) in general (87 per cent in our survey compared with 74 per cent across UK HE generally). This reflects wider findings about the under-representation of minority ethnic education researchers (see Belluigi et al., 2023) and also points to some of the challenges and barriers to career progression faced by these academics (see for example Arday, 2021).

Some of these disparities between education researchers and the general HE population may be explained by the finding that over 80 per cent of survey respondents had a career or profession prior to being employed in HE, most of these in school teaching or other areas of education. This previous experience may, at least partially, explain why the education research community tends to be more female, white and older than the general HE population. The teaching workforce in schools is consistently predominantly female (DfE, 2022) and, until very recently, has been relatively ethnically homogeneous.

Employment, career and institutions

The majority of education researchers who completed the survey (84 per cent) reported being employed on permanent, open-ended contracts with the remainder working on a fixed-term or casual basis. Among researchers who worked part-time or in fixed-term or casual roles, just under half stated that they would prefer an open-ended or full-time role for reasons of job/financial security and opportunities for career progression. There was also a significant group of respondents who were uncertain about their future in HE, and unclear about whether they would still be working in education research in the relatively near future.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported being on teaching and research contracts, although less than half of all respondents indicated that they were entered in Research Excellence Framework (REF)2021. Just over a quarter were employed on teaching-only or teaching/scholarship contracts. While most positions below the level of professor were held by women (65 to 72 per cent), at professorial level, the gender split became more equal (46.1 per cent men; 50.9 per cent women). A lack of career security and progression were recurring themes in the survey. Just over a third of respondents (37.6 per cent) agreed that promotion procedures at their institution were fair, and less than half (44 per cent) felt there was a clear pathway to progression. The problems were more pronounced for women and respondents with a disability, impairment or condition. Only 29 per cent of respondents on research-only contracts agreed that their institution provided a clear pathway to career progression.

For opportunities and support for research and career progression, we noted some variation by type of institution. In this report, we have used Boliver's (2015) typology of elite, higher, middle and lower status universities to classify the different institutions where respondents work (described further in the methods

section (2.3.1)). Respondents at 'lower tier' (Boliver, 2015) universities reported less favourable experiences compared with their peers in middle or higher tier universities. In lower tier universities, less time and fewer resources were available for development and participation in research-related activities. In addition, respondents in 'higher tier' universities reported feeling a greater sense of clarity about their career trajectory. Findings such as these add to our understanding of inequalities between different types of university and the varying experiences of education researchers depending on where they work.

Workload was another important and prevalent issue, with respondents sharing experiences of how their time is used in their role; the pressures of workload; and the potentially negative impact on their role and wellbeing. The picture that emerged is one of a discipline where employees routinely reported working more than the hours for which they were paid (64.9 per cent reported working more than 40 hours a week), and where workload was often presented as a barrier to the type, quality or quantity of research work that they were able to do. For some, work (over)load was the biggest challenge they faced within their job role. Overall, it appears that respondents' attitudes, values and behaviours did seem to differ considerably both between and sometimes even within institutions: we received responses praising supportive institutions which had a positive developmental influence but were also told about institutions where some individuals were experiencing extreme pressure and, in some cases, exploitation and alienation. Just over half of respondents told us that they would recommend their university as a place to work with similar proportions reporting a strong sense of belonging to their environment. In addition, most respondents reported being treated with kindness and support by their colleagues. However, we also noted inequalities in the experiences of individual education researchers according to their background and personal characteristics, with women, minority ethnic staff, those who reported a disability and those who identified as members of a sexual minority reporting more negative experiences both in their professional interactions and in their relationships with colleagues.

Research motivations, activities, experiences and expertise

The survey gathered views on what motivated researchers. By far the most common motivating factors were related to respondents' personal and social values and ideals. Alongside these, respondents reported being strongly motivated by professional

and personal circumstances, often linked to previous and current work roles. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the most common topics of research were related to the teaching profession, teaching and learning as well as issues pertaining to social justice and inequality. Alongside these popular topic areas, researchers reported being interested in many other areas – from the theoretical to the highly practical – further underlining the diversity within the discipline.

The education research community uses an eclectic range of research methods. There is a breadth of expertise and knowledge covering many aspects of research design, data collection and analysis. Respondents reported using a broad range of skills, and there was little evidence of any obvious skills gap or deficit in expertise. While, on balance, more researchers reported that they used ‘qualitative’ approaches to data collection, there were, nevertheless, significant numbers who adopted ‘quantitative’ approaches. Mixed methods approaches and theoretical or philosophical approaches were also well embedded. One area that warrants further focus is research methods training. Two-thirds of respondents sought to improve their methodological skills, and half rated their formal methods training as limited/none or basic, suggesting further scope for responding to a clear need from the education research community to develop and enhance research methods skills.

Most respondents reported favourable experiences of undertaking research: it was a source of satisfaction; they found their role rewarding; they were generally well supported to undertake research; and did not feel under excessive pressure to secure external grant income or to publish their research. Other views were more mixed: a minority of respondents reported having effective mentoring support for their research and sufficient time to apply for research funding. Opinions varied about the need for education research to be useful and relevant for those outside academia – just over half agreed that this should be the case with a substantial minority disagreeing or holding a neutral position. The majority of respondents thought that education research should have some practical value, and some were concerned about the potential for it to be ‘too theoretical and detached from reality’. Some respondents thought that an emphasis on ‘what works’ research has been detrimental to other forms of scholarship, and has had a negative impact on aspects of academic freedom. Despite some differing views about the potential value and use of research findings, education researchers reported a significant appetite for disseminating and engaging with research both

with stakeholders, including fellow academics and policymakers, as well as the wider public.

When asked to reflect upon some of the wider issues associated with education research, many shared concerns about cultures of accountability and performativity. Only a small proportion of all respondents (13.1 per cent) agreed that the REF was a valid measure of the quality of education research in HE, although only 44.1 per cent were entered for REF2021. Concerns were also raised about the competitive environment in which funds for research were allocated with only a small proportion (10 per cent) believing that the system was fair.

CONCLUSION

Education research in the UK is concerned with myriad questions and challenges, including those relating to practice, policy, systems, theory and philosophy, and is carried out by people from a diverse range of educational and disciplinary backgrounds. Despite this diversity, our findings showed significant under-representation of various groups, in particular those from minority ethnic backgrounds and with non-UK nationality.

Within this diverse discipline there was evidence of a shared experience of being an ‘education researcher’: for many respondents this manifested most positively in being part of collaborative and collegial professional communities. There was belief in the value of education research and its potential value for society. However, there were also common negative experiences, especially in relation to workload, and institutional and HE cultures and employment conditions. Our findings also point to significant inequalities of experience which vary according to the status of an individual’s institution as well as their educational/career background and personal characteristics (for example ethnicity and disability status).

As the largest survey of its kind for HE-based education researchers in the UK, this study provides a comprehensive and wide-ranging picture of the SOTD. We have been in a privileged position to hear from education researchers from across the UK, from different backgrounds and institutions, and at different career stages. We have reported their perspectives and experiences throughout the report. Some of these have been uplifting. Some deeply troubling. As the SOTD initiative continues, a complex landscape is emerging. These results help build the picture, and we hope will contribute to its development and flourishing.

1. Introduction

Education research draws upon a range of knowledge traditions, accommodating principles and perspectives from multiple other disciplines and bringing together researchers from diverse academic and practice-related backgrounds (Whitty and Furlong, 2017). Like many other areas of university research, education in the UK faces serious challenges as it navigates an evolving and sometimes uncertain higher education (HE) policy context.

Based on a large-scale questionnaire survey, the study reported here examines the current ‘State of the Discipline’ (SOTD). It maps education research as a research topic, explores HE contexts in which education research takes place, and seeks to better understand the experiences and perspectives of those working in this evolving and dynamic area. The project forms part of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) SOTD initiative which aims to develop high-quality evidence to inform the ongoing strategic direction of the organisation and the discipline more broadly. BERA, along with other related organisations, has a sustained track record of facilitating and supporting research designed to map and understand education as a site of academic study and research, and the community involved with this work.

The focus of this study is on education research and scholarship as an academic discipline, and researchers working in education-related university departments. In this section we introduce previous research seeking to understand the status of education research; the development of the education research community; and the concerns and experiences of education researchers. It situates the study within wider debates and further clarifies the activities and community on which we focus.

1.1 UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1.1.1 BERA SOTD initiative and systematic scoping review

In response to the evolving context of HE and education research, BERA launched its ‘SOTD’ initiative in 2020. The initiative included a suite of research studies including the one presented here, and other

related activities (BERA, 2021). In setting the scene for this work, Wyse (2020a, 2020b) makes a case for framing education as an academic discipline (as opposed to solely a ‘field’ or ‘applied subject’) and for high-quality, ‘close-to-practice’ research which recognises the relationships between practical and academic knowledge. The first major strand of research activity from the initiative – a systematic scoping review of the literature on the structures and processes influencing education research in the UK – ‘provides insights into the academic debates on education research in universities, and addresses the effects of neoliberal reform, marketisation and competition on HE and the identities and experiences of academics’ (Boyle et al., 2021, p. 5). From the existing literature, the review identified six themes pertaining to formal structures/processes and six themes associated with informal structures/processes (see table 1.1).

Table 1.1
Themes relating to formal and informal structures/processes as identified by Boyle et al. (2021)

Formal structures/processes	Informal structures/processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultures of performativity and accountability• Research impact agenda• Research funding regime• Debates about the quality and purpose of education research• The ‘what works’ agenda• Professional bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic pressures• Career stages (early-, mid-, later-career)• Second-career researchers• Non-traditional academics• Departmental cultures• Affective issues

The study’s findings about the structures and processes influencing education research were informed by the analysis of 114 journal articles (71 narrative, 38 empirical), 21 BERA presidential addresses and one doctoral thesis. Boyle et al. (2021) provide a valuable outline of the type, kind and quality of published research evidence which is relevant to understanding the structures and processes described above. They note that the majority of studies were focused on the UK, and England specifically, with very little work on Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. Empirical studies were limited in number,

tended to be small-scale, and rarely engaged with ‘powerful’ stakeholders (for example senior HEI staff, policymakers, funding bodies) who have considerable influence over the discipline and its research.

In relation to the main themes relevant in the studies, Boyle et al. (2021) outline the formal structures evident in affecting education research. They define these as the ‘structures and processes associated with educational policy, government agendas, government and/or institutional authority structures, and funding resources and priorities’ (Boyle et al., 2021, p. 23). The six key areas (column 1 of table 1.1 above) were found across 109/114 journal articles, with ‘cultures of performativity and accountability’ being most prevalent (found in n=27 articles). The authors note the predominantly negative discourses found in relation to this theme, with some studies highlighting issues of competition and division due to performance and league tables, and unequal distribution of funding and reputation. Tensions and debates in relationships between research, practice and policy were also found to be at the heart of many publications in this area, raising questions about the nature and purpose of education research in different contexts and for different groups of researchers.

Boyle et al.’s (2021) informal structures and processes (column 2, table 1.1) are presented as closely connected to the cultures and contexts influenced by formal structures and processes. They found that the ‘identities of researchers and career stages are situated in a departmental culture that can lead to or produce affective issues and perceived academic pressures. Formal structures and processes were, in turn, seen to have an impact on these’ (Boyle et al., 2021, p. 39). Variation between departments and institutions appears to be a key issue here with those working in research-intensive universities and those in teaching-intensive institutions having different experiences. The negative effects of high workload emerged as a major concern for university staff across a number of studies, echoing perspectives from across the wider HE sector over the last decade (Kinman and Wray, 2013; UCU, 2022b). In terms of education researchers themselves, only five studies discussed the experiences of women academics and only one examined the experiences of those from minority ethnic backgrounds. No studies were located relating to the experiences of LGBTQ+ or disabled education academics. Several papers, however, did consider those who had had previous careers (for example schoolteachers) (n=15) and ECRs (n=7). These articles typically foregrounded the challenges academics were facing in relation to

their ‘social, self and professional identities which the authors related to the formal structures of accountability and research targets driven by funding agendas and the RAE/REF’ (Boyle et al., 2021, p. 39). This study sheds important light on the complex and intersecting issues affecting and influencing education research in the UK today. The six formal and informal processes and structures provide a helpful overview and framework for understanding many of the current factors influencing education research. In the next section we discuss how we have used these themes to inform the design of our survey and the analysis of our findings.

The Boyle et al. (2021) study represents an important advance in researching education as a discipline, addressing the ‘distinct lack of robust, large-scale studies probing the structures and processes governing education research across all four UK nations’ (Boyle et al., 2021, p. 40). Through the SOTD initiative and more widely, BERA has been addressing this gap in the research. This has included commissioning three further projects: the first, an analysis of equality and diversity issues in education research, using available large-scale secondary datasets (Belluigi et al., 2023); the second, a study examining the progress of education as an academic discipline through further analysis of recent REF data; and finally, the present project reported here: a UK-wide survey examining the experiences and perspectives of education researchers in HE.

1.1.2 Research Excellence Framework

In 2022, the outcomes of the most recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise were released (REF2021). As a key mechanism of accountability and quality appraisal within the UK HE sector, the REF – or its predecessor, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) – has a significant bearing on the processes and outputs associated with education research, the institutions involved, and the working lives of education researchers within HE (Boyle et al., 2021; Oancea et al., 2010). Given its importance to the contemporary context of the SOTD initiative, we summarise some of the key issues emerging from REF2021.

The Education Unit of Assessment (UoA) included submissions from 83 institutions across the four nations of the UK and included submissions from 2,367 academic staff (2,168 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff). There was considerable diversity in submissions from each institution, with the smallest submitting five FTE colleagues and the largest over 300. In terms of

sectors of educational provision (for example primary, secondary, HE) and substantive topics within the discipline, the REF2021 summary report highlighted the diversity of topics and methods used, and the highly interdisciplinary nature of education research. The panel noted some changes in the discipline compared with the previous REF exercise, including a decline in school effectiveness research, secondary-level teacher education, mathematics education, and research into primary literacy and secondary English. There was growth, however, in the field of HE research and an increase in technology-based methodological approaches. There were fewer than expected outputs focused on environmental education and sustainability education, and an under-representation of some other topics, including equalities, diversity and inclusion in the early years sector, secondary subject-specific curricula, and further and vocational education.

The REF panel noted an increase in the quality of submitted education research since the previous REF in 2014, and a greater proportion of work was deemed as having outstanding impact. Of concern, however, is the relatively low external research income across submissions – an annual average of £55 million compared with £58 million in 2014. Education research receives extremely low levels of investment compared with public expenditure on education more broadly (0.05 per cent). This is especially stark when compared with healthcare, for example, which receives around one per cent of expenditure for research (James, 2022). The panel also pointed to a decline in funding opportunities and uncertainty in future research collaborations due to Brexit (REF2021, 2022). A lack of investment, the panel argues, is a threat to the ‘health, sustainability and vibrancy of the discipline’ (REF2021, 2022, p. 169).

1.2 PREVIOUS STUDIES OF UNIVERSITY-BASED EDUCATION RESEARCH

In this background section, we introduce key studies of education research in the UK. These are significant for highlighting the development of the discipline and the contexts within HE which naturally influence the production of education research and the roles of university-based researchers.

What we believe to be the first survey-based study of education researchers across the UK was conducted over four decades ago, in the late 1970s (Dooley et al., 1981). This was a collaborative venture between the forerunner of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Social Sciences Research Council

(SSRC) and the newly established BERA. The project gathered data on those trained in and/or engaged in educational research to inform policy and practice on the role of research in universities and the training needs of the sector. Through a postal survey during 1978–79, the study collated data from 1,716 respondents, although just 593 of these were practising researchers (others had undertaken education PhDs or had previously worked in HE but did not work in the sector at this point). The survey found that those working in education research at the time came from a diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds, and many did not hold a higher degree.

This early survey drew attention to the sometimes ‘atypical’ nature of university-based education research, particularly highlighting the challenges and issues faced by many of those working in the area. It was noted, for instance, that it was often difficult for people to develop a sustained career in education research due to short-term contracting of roles, the lack of promotion opportunities, and a general lack of integration between research jobs and other parts of the education system. There was a very high turnover in the full-time research community, and many left or planned to leave their roles for teaching positions, often within HE. The findings also pointed to low morale and reduced work quality due to insufficient opportunities for training and because too much work was being completed by personnel working in poor and precarious working conditions. Respondents to the survey thought that education research had a poor image within and beyond the academy and that its impact on policy was limited. In short, the authors concluded that the discipline was underfunded and undervalued, noting that ‘as far as conditioning structural factors are concerned, we have demonstrated that education research in Britain is presently not well-served’ (Dooley et al., 1981, p. 84).

The issue of research capacity, skills and training needs was taken up 20 years later with another large-scale survey of HE-based education researchers. To our knowledge, this study – the Research Capacity Building Network (RCBN) project – is the most recent instance of such a survey being conducted with this group of researchers and across the four UK nations. The project formed part of the ESRC-funded Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) and was designed as ‘an extensive consultation exercise in order to identify the priorities for research capacity-building and to generate a database of expertise from across the UK educational research community’ (Gorard et al., 2004, p. 5). This comprised three strands: interviews with 25

key stakeholders from across the discipline (including policymakers, researchers, practitioners and funders); a review of the 'best' education research literature, as determined by publications returned to the 2001 RAE; and a survey of the education research community to establish current research expertise and future training needs. The RCBN survey received responses from 521 education researchers. While its focus was narrower than that of the present study, it nevertheless provides a useful and important comparison of the evolution of skills among the education research community over the past two decades. The findings indicate some similarities to those highlighted by Dooley et al. (1981), with some key stakeholders raising concerns about the general quality of research as well as its relevance and impact: 'education research in the UK needed to and could be, enhanced' (Taylor, 2002, p. 68). While some of these perceived 'weaknesses' were attributed to a lack of skills in quantitative methods, the survey of research skills contradicted this view somewhat, suggesting instead a wealth of expertise in this area. This led the research team to conclude that it was 'rather the type and quality of both quantitative and qualitative research along with unreasonable expectations by its users that leads to the poor public image of education research' (Gorard et al., 2004, p. 371).

An ESRC-commissioned demographic review of social sciences research (Mills et al., 2006) included some detailed insights on education research as a 'practice-linked' discipline. Findings were based on a national secondary dataset and a survey of heads of department. The review noted the ageing profile of education researchers, but also showed that many of those entering HE did so as a second career, often following practitioner roles (such as teaching). The authors also noted the large numbers of education researchers working in education departments, but the comparatively low proportion (approximately a third) who were classified as research-active in terms of the RAE. For education research topics, the study reported several new and emerging sub-fields of research including citizenship education, HE pedagogy, technology and widening participation. Again, training needs were highlighted as an important area for development within the discipline, and a way to improve the quality of research and influence on practice and policy.

The impact of the RAE on education research was examined in further detail by Oancea et al. (2010) using a staff survey across 30 universities and follow-up interviews. The study highlighted key issues and

influences relating to RAE, including how the exercise contributed to departmental positioning and focus of research, the effects on collegiality and an ethos of scholarship, and feelings about the fairness of judgments. The study pointed to a complex landscape where the impact of RAE was often mediated through a range of internal and external institutional factors. A BERA-UCET mapping review of the prospects for HE education research (Whitty et al., 2012) built on these earlier studies to highlight the 'multiple challenges' that the discipline faced in light of contemporary policy changes. These included significant changes to the provision of teacher education, changes to university student fees and funding for postgraduate courses and students, and a shift in funding availability and allocation. The study presented concerns about the contraction of the discipline and the potential threats from government policy. It concluded that new models needed to be considered for funding and education research.

BERA followed this study with its education observatory project (Oancea and Mills, 2015), using secondary datasets to examine the workforce and patterns of funding income across institutions. The findings showed a diverse picture, with research capacity and funding primarily located in pre-1950s universities, and in certain regions (for example London). The authors also noted that a decline in research staff numbers was a result of declining research funding – one of the key threats to the sector outlined in the earlier study by Whitty et al. (2012). Further work by Oancea et al. (Royal Society/British Academy, 2018) looked at research which focused on formal education in schools and colleges for young people up to the age of 18. This study was commissioned with a view to understanding the nature and quality of research in this area, and the extent to which it influences policy and practice. The study showed that while researchers, policymakers and practitioners often shared areas of concern or interest, they did not have shared priorities which caused 'disconnects between supply and demand and contributes to a lack of sustained research effort' (Royal Society/British Academy, 2018, p. 6). Echoing some of the concerns raised in earlier studies of the discipline, the authors outlined a series of recommendations with a view to promoting cohesion and collaboration across the broad and diverse education ecosystem; improving research and training capacity; providing more quality-related funding; and supporting research-informed teaching and learning in schools and colleges.

1.3 DEFINING EDUCATION RESEARCH IN THIS STUDY

The boundaries of education research overlap with other academic disciplines and fields, as well as with research taking place in policy and practice more broadly. While education research is shaped by cognate disciplines (for example psychology, sociology) and fields of practice such as early years provision, and the school and post-16 sectors, it is not predicated on or reducible to them. We see education research as being a distinctive entity – with its own character, practices, community, issues and identity – as opposed to the term nominally describing thematically related activity across or emerging from other disciplines or areas of research. Our targeting of university schools, departments and centres with a significant focus on education research reflects this aim. In sum, our study seeks to understand education research activity *per se* – as opposed to conceiving education research solely as a field of application for cognate disciplines, or an extension of professional practice.

Underlying this overall position are pragmatic as well as conceptual considerations. From a practical perspective, many questions investigated in this study are likely to differ across sectors in which education research takes place: the working conditions, experiences and characteristics of researchers are likely to vary across academic, practice-based, private, governmental and third sector research sectors. Many aspects of the survey questionnaire, for example, relate to academic practices such as peer review, securing funding from academic research councils, and the process and positioning of research within the wider disciplinary and institutional context of HE. More widely, we can expect education research, to some degree, to be shaped by different orientations, practices, cultures and contextual conditions across sectors. Such differences posed challenges for practicably disseminating the questionnaire, designing a questionnaire with general applicability, and conducting informative analysis across multiple groups.

In addition to these practical considerations, our focus was shaped by a conception of academic education research as a distinct area of research. In line with the programme of work to which this study contributes (the SOTD), education research is considered as an academic discipline. Education's disciplinary status has been the subject of ongoing debate surrounding the description of education as a 'discipline' or a 'field'. Wyse (2020b) brings this into focus, summarising the case for education being recognised as an academic

discipline and highlighting the significant implications of education research's portrayal as such. Education as either a 'discipline' or a 'field' is a discussion which has continued, including within BERA forums (for example Hammersley, 2021) and through fuller treatments of the issue in, for example, Furlong (2013) and Stentiford et al. (2021). In this report we describe education research as a 'discipline' throughout, and present evidence of its distinctive concerns, character and method. However, without comparative evidence across disciplines, required to ascribe either a distinctive or a disciplinary status to education research, we have designed this study to inform rather than address the debate. We acknowledge the varying perspectives on the status and nature of education research as well as the challenges of delineating education research from related disciplines, fields and areas of practice. We had these perspectives and challenges in mind as we designed, disseminated and analysed our survey. We refer readers to details of the sampling frame and targeted population given in the methods section to better understand the community and area of research we have targeted.

2. Method

2.1 SURVEY DESIGN AND QUESTIONS

2.1.1 Aims and content

The survey was developed to address the aim of developing an understanding of education researchers in HE institutions in the UK – their identities, work and experiences. In section 2.1.2 we describe how we developed and structured questions, drawing on the previous literature. To avoid the large number of areas being considered becoming disparate, overlapping or repetitive, we organised all questions into three broad survey areas:

1. Employment, career, and institutions – including questions about current employment, roles and responsibilities, terms and length of employment, career and its development, workload and conditions, and institutional working environment.
2. Identity and background – including demographic and personal characteristics such as gender, age and ethnicity; circumstances such as having a disability, impairment or limiting condition, or having caring responsibilities; and details of respondents' education and qualifications.
3. Your research – including research foci, motivations, experiences and activities, methodologies and methods, engagement and dissemination, and research support and conditions.

The survey was designed to explore a range of connected issues that shape the work and experiences of HE-based education researchers. Below we discuss the process of survey development further.

2.1.2 Survey development

Initial scoping for the survey centred on engagement with the existing literature to identify key areas and themes. Key sources included the BERA systematic scoping review and other studies of education research (as discussed in the previous section).

From this, we developed a concept and content map (see appendix 1), drawing on the formal and informal structures and processes in the BERA scoping review as an initial organising framework.

From this point, we developed preliminary questions which addressed the content areas identified in the map. We located possible items from other surveys

and, in many cases, developed several options for questions for each item in the survey map, including different question formats and wording. We also located categories for multiple-choice questions from HESA data and AdvanceHE guidance, notably for questions relating to personal identity and employment. We also drew on the RCBN survey (see section 1.2) to support development of the methods section. In summary, the survey development was an iterative process of question development cross-referenced with the concept map, organised into the survey sections listed above. A copy of the full questionnaire is in appendix 2.

This process was supported by an advisory group from whom we requested comments and feedback on the concept map and two drafts of the survey. We were also advised by, and received feedback from, BERA during the questionnaire development process. Once in final draft stage, we conducted a piloting exercise largely focused on the mechanics, timings and accessibility of the survey which we produced using the Qualtrics survey platform. In addition to testing by the advisory group and BERA, we invited a small group of individual researchers (n=6) from different universities and career circumstances who were personally known to us to pilot the survey.

A key consideration during the questionnaire development process was how to satisfactorily cover the large survey content area while maintaining an acceptable survey length in terms of completion time and quantity of data produced for analysis. Relatedly, there was a careful balance to be struck between the use of closed response items, which produce standardised data for comparable and efficient analysis, and open-response items, potentially providing richer data and allowing for unexpected responses. We were aware of the very large conceptual, experiential space that we were eliciting information about, and the diversity of the group we were surveying. We comment further on the design and treatment of open and closed response items in the analysis section (2.4).

2.2 SURVEY DISSEMINATION

The survey was hosted on the Qualtrics platform. We created a QR code and direct link through which respondents could access the survey. We also created a website (<https://edu-research.uk/>) and Twitter account (@EdRes_UK) which provided survey links and information. These were designed to have consistent branding and information that identified the research team and institutions, BERA as the funder, and the context of the survey in the SOTD initiative. We advertised the following eligibility criteria for the survey, including placing these immediately above the link to the survey on the website and in email communications containing the link (see below):

We would like to hear from you if you meet both criteria below:

- You engage in *any form of education research and/or scholarship*.
- You are a **paid employee of an HE institution in the UK** (on *any* contractual basis, inc. part-time, fixed-term, and teaching-only contracts).

During the early stages of the survey being open we carried out a range of awareness-raising activities. These involved a Twitter campaign; contacting BERA special interest groups (SIGs) and other research organisations (see below); BERA emails to members; and social media posts and engagement. The survey opened on Tuesday 24 May 2022. It remained open for eight weeks, closing on Tuesday 19 July. During this time, we used several channels for disseminating the survey, as listed below.

The primary dissemination channels were:

- Emails to heads of department (HoD) – prior to launching the survey we compiled a list of university education departments, schools or centres. This list contained 245 groups, for which we collected emails and first names for the group lead (for example HoD or centre director) from university websites. In the first week of the survey launch, we sent the survey link along with supporting information to all individuals in this database. We asked them to forward the information to all members of their department, school or centre and advised that their personal endorsement would be helpful for promoting participation. We also noted the importance of reaching early career and temporary staff. This dissemination route had the advantage of general reach across all institutions and staff, and

the potential to reach education researchers not listed on university websites (see next section). A disadvantage of this approach was that engagement and willingness to pass the email on to colleagues from department heads was variable.

- Emails to individuals – our second primary dissemination approach was to contact all HE-based education researchers individually. For this, we compiled a database of individuals connected to education departments, schools and centres. This included their institution, name and contact email address. This information was obtained from public-facing university and departmental websites. We obtained information for 7,119 individuals across 115 institutions. A limitation of this approach was that it is likely to under-represent temporary, more transient, peripheral or new researchers who are less likely to be listed on institutional websites. We sent the first individual email two weeks into the survey window, after the rate of completion from the HoDs' emails was slowing. Five weeks into the survey window, BERA President, Dominic Wyse, emailed all individual contacts to encourage survey participation. We sent a further reminder email from the research team with one week to go (week seven), and another with one day to go (week eight). In each of these emails we encouraged responses, stressing the inclusive nature of the survey, providing a link to the website for more details, encouraging promotion and discussion of the survey, and giving individuals an option to opt out of future emails.

Other approaches to survey dissemination were:

- Advisory group and personal contact promotion – the project advisory group and the BERA leadership committee and council shared the survey with their institutions and colleagues. The research team also emailed a small number of individual contacts to encourage promotion and survey sharing.
- Social media activities – in addition to regular posts on social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, we organised and invited a blog series posted on the project website and subsequently on the BERA Blog. As well as these being valuable contributions to debates about education research, they were designed to raise awareness of the survey, communicate its inclusive nature and the range of issues it engages with, and connect with harder-to-reach groups. See appendix 3 for a list of blog posts and contributors.
- BERA organisation, events and channels – BERA supported the dissemination of the survey in a range

of ways. These included contact with SIG leaders, promotion in SIG events, inclusion of the survey link and information in newsletters, direct emails to members and supporting the social media activities, as above.

- Educational organisations – we directly contacted individuals at a range of organisations related to education research. These included British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS), Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE), British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) and Teacher Education Advancement Network (TEAN). Many were able to share information about the survey at conferences and other events, or through regular newsletters.

We would like to thank all education research colleagues and organisations who supported the survey dissemination and this project.

2.3 SAMPLE

In this section we present summary data about the background characteristics of our respondents and the institutions where they work. This section can be read in conjunction with the ‘background and personal characteristics’ section (3.1). As a survey seeking to understand education researchers, our main results provide further detailed descriptive information about the survey sample. As well as introducing summary details of the sample, we comment on comparable administrative data, notably HESA data, to better understand the representativeness of our sample.

In total, 1,623 people responded to the survey. This includes several responses with incomplete data. We saw good rates of completion up to the final section, but some drop-out during this last stage (your research, Q29 to 38). Of the 1,623 records retained, 1,610 completed the final question of the *penultimate* section (Q28) and a total of 1,496 provided at least one response in the final question (Q38) and can be said to have completed all sections of the survey. We report the number of responses for each question along with the results in the main findings section. Here, we consider what proportion of the population of HE-based education researchers a sample of 1,623 represents. We have several sources of data that can be used as points of comparison for this.

- HESA data – there were 9,255 academic staff

affiliated to the ‘education’ cost centre in the UK in 2020–21 (HESA, 2022), rising to 10,110 when including ‘continuing education’.¹ However, this figure includes those with different academic employment functions: teaching only, teaching and research, research only, and ‘neither teaching nor research’.²

- University websites – our own web searches of university education departments, schools and centres for contact details (see details above) identified 7,119 individuals. Individual emails were the most comprehensive and effective survey distribution approach we used, as could be seen from ‘waves’ of responses following emails. However, a limitation of this approach was that it is likely to under-represent more transient, peripheral or new researchers who are less likely to be listed on institutional websites. Certainly, comparing this figure with the HESA figures above suggests that a significant number of education researchers are not ‘visible’ on university websites.
- REF submission data – REF2021 defined education research as a ‘large, diverse and interdisciplinary field of research’ (REF2021, 2022). In total, the REF sub-panel received submissions from 2,367 individual researchers (2,168.38 FTE) across 83 HE institutions (68 in England, nine in Scotland, three from Wales and three from Northern Ireland).

These points of comparison provide substantially different figures for the education research population. The highest figure, from the HESA data, records 10,110 academic staff associated with education cost centres in the UK. As a proportion of this figure, our sample of 1,623 is 16.1 per cent. There are several uncertainties to consider with this estimate of the HE-based education researcher population size: i) some are recorded as being ‘neither teaching nor research’; ii) it is not clear how many of those on teaching-only contracts are allocated time for research and/or are active education researchers; and iii) there may be additional individuals in other cost centres (for example humanities, language-based studies and archaeology; and social studies) who might consider themselves to be education researchers. On balance, we take 10,110 to be an over-estimate of the population.

The lowest estimate of the population comes from the REF2021 submission. We consider this figure to be an underestimate of the population we are

1 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/areas>

2 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/staff#academic-employment-function>

targeting. Many researchers were not entered for the REF, including many in our sample. As part of the survey, we asked colleagues to state whether they were entered for the 2021 REF, with a total of 667, or 44.3 per cent of 1,506 respondents answering this question saying that they were. This sub-sample of 667 represents 28.2 per cent of the 2,367 individuals included in the REF2021 figures. Our conjecture is that researchers included in the education REF sub-panel will identify more strongly with an education researcher identity and be proportionally more likely to respond to our survey than education researchers who are not included.

The estimate of the population obtained from the total number of individuals listed on university websites located in our searches (n=7,119) lies between the HESA and REF figures. This is likely to be an underestimate because i) we were not able to obtain staff contact details for two universities,³ ii) although we searched for all education-relevant departments and centres, there are likely to be individuals in cognate disciplines or related areas which we have missed, iii) not all staff, especially those on temporary or new contracts, are listed on institutional websites. On the other hand, there are likely to be many listed individuals who are not allocated research or scholarship time, and/or do not identify as education researchers or participate in education research activities. Based on the website data, our achieved sample represents 22.8 per cent of the total population.

In summary, we believe our achieved sample lies between these three figures of 16.1 per cent, 22.8 per cent and 28.2 per cent, and is likely to be in the vicinity of 20 per cent. We consider the representativeness of the sample further in sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, as we present summary details relating to institutional affiliations, and personal characteristics of survey respondents.

2.3.1 Region and institutional details

The primary institutions of work for our respondents were spread across the UK, approximately in line with population figures in each nation. For comparison, in our individual emails database, proportions by institution nation were as follows: England, 81.7 per cent; Northern Ireland, 1.1 per cent; Scotland, 11 per cent; and Wales, 6.2 per cent.

³ Canterbury Christ Church University and Wrexham Glyndŵr University.

Table 2.1
Institution region

Region of respondent institution	n	%
England – East Midlands	137	9.1
England – East of England	48	3.2
England – London	247	16.4
England – North East	66	4.4
England – North West	119	7.9
England – South East	233	15.4
England – South West	104	6.9
England – West Midlands	152	10.1
England – Yorkshire and Humber	145	9.6
England sub-total	1,251	82.9
Northern Ireland	31	2.1
Scotland	160	10.6
Wales	67	4.4
Total	1,509	100.0

We asked respondents for their university name. We explained that this was so we could source further data about the university region, type and other characteristics. After obtaining non-identifying data about individual institutions, we removed the university names from the database. One key additional variable was the university status. We used tier definitions provided in Boliver (2015) to categorise universities in one of four tiers. As explained by Boliver, other approaches to categorisation, such as Russell Group membership status, map only loosely onto pertinent characteristics of university focus and status such as research activity, teaching quality, economic resources, academic selectivity and socio-economic student mix (p. 612). We believe, therefore, that these categories based on multiple dimensions of university status, rather than university age or group membership, provide the best basis for comparison. Also, these tiers refer to institutions, and the teaching and research conditions in which education researchers operate, rather than being a characterisation of the education researchers working in different areas of the sector. For university status, our sample is shown in table 2.2.

Table 2.2
University tiers as per Boliver (2015)

University tier	n	%	% valid
Elite and higher tier	817	50.3	54.8
Middle tier	430	26.5	28.9
Lower tier	176	10.8	11.8
Unclassified	67	4.1	4.5
No data	133	8.2	
Total	1,623	100.00	n=1,490

Just over half were from the elite or higher tier universities. The corresponding figures from our individual email database were as follows: elite and higher tier, 49.4 per cent; middle tier, 30.6 per cent; lower tier, 13.1 per cent; and unclassified, 6.9 per cent. Some survey respondents were not comfortable sharing their institutional name (8.2 per cent). Excluding these (% valid) suggests a slight over-representation of elite and higher tier universities relative to the middle and lower tier in our achieved sample.

We asked respondents about the number of institutions they worked at for the purposes of education research. Most of the sample (95 per cent) worked at a single HE institution for educational research; four per cent worked in more than one institution, with the most common figure within these being two (3.2 per cent). A small number (one per cent) reported that they were not currently employed by a HE institution for education research. We looked at other responses for these individuals and found that they tended to be between jobs or had emeritus status but were not currently employed by an institution. As contributors to the research community, we have included these individuals in the data. We also asked whether respondents had been employed in a HEI outside the UK, finding that nearly one in five (18.9 per cent) had been at some point in their career.

Table 2.3
Number of HE institutions currently employed by for the purpose of education research

Institutions	n	%
0	16	1.0
1	1,540	95.0
2	52	3.2
3+	13	0.8
Total	1,621	100.0

Using the distribution strategy described above, we targeted researchers in education research departments, centres and schools. With the statement for survey eligibility (see section 2.2), we allowed anyone identifying as an education researcher based in HE to complete the survey. It is, therefore, possible that education researchers who were not placed in a department dedicated to education also responded. To explore this, we asked about the focus of respondents' department, centre or school in the survey. 85.5 per cent reported that the primary focus of their school, department or centre was education or education studies. Of the remainder, many were in departments or centres with a more general focus (for example social science); some were focused on cognate disciplines, especially psychology and sociology; some were in more specialist centres (for example focused on language and linguistics); and some had departments with a more vocational or social focus, such as youth work or widening participation.

2.3.2 Personal characteristics and employment terms

In this final sub-section about the sample, we give an overview of respondents' personal characteristics and employment terms, based upon their responses to the closed questions within the survey. Note that further items and details on these are provided in the main findings section in relation to questions on roles, qualifications, identity, and other background factors and experiences, such as caring responsibilities. This section and the identity, background and personal characteristics section (3.1) can be read in conjunction.

Table 2.4 provides data on respondent age, gender, ethnicity, disability or condition status, mode of employment, employment terms and contract status. We also provide the most comparable figures from HESA, as reported in the recent BERA project on workforce equality (Belluigi et al., 2023). Overall, these comparisons suggest that our data are broadly representative in relation to observable data. We think, however, that there are several items on which a small disproportion can be seen: namely, our sample seems to under-represent part-time, teaching-only respondents.

One aspect to note within the figures are the appreciable rates of respondents preferring not to provide responses for certain items. These rates varied by question, as follows: gender (2.2 per cent), age (2.6 per cent), ethnicity (3.1 per cent), sexuality (9.0 per cent), disability or impairment (4.4 per cent) and caring responsibility (2.1 per cent). We looked at how many of these non-responses came from the same individuals.

There were 226 individuals with active non-responses (that is selecting 'prefer not to say'). Most had just one (n=153) or two active non-responses (n=35), with the question about sexuality by far the most frequent item

of active non-response. There was a small group (n=38) who preferred not to give details for between three and six out of the six items listed above.

Table 2.4

Sample characteristics overview compared to HESA education cost centres

Gender	n	%	HESA (%) ^a
Man	512	31.8	31.0
Non-binary	supp ^b	supp	
Not listed above	10	0.6	
Prefer not to say	36	2.2	
Woman	1,047	65.0	69.0
Ethnicity	n	%	HESA (%) ^c
Asian	66	4.1	8.0 (BAME)
Black	28	1.7	
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	41	2.6	
Other	18	1.1	
Prefer not to say	50	3.1	
White	1,408	87.4	85.0
Disability, impairment, condition or difference status	n	%	HESA (%)
No	1,307	81.1	
Prefer not to say	70	4.4	
Yes	234	14.5	6.0 ^d
Mode of employment	n	%	HESA (%)
Full-time	1,230	76.2	72.9
Part-time	384	23.8	27.1

^a These items do not exactly correspond. HESA data asks for sex rather than self-reported gender and categorises as '(fe)male' rather than '(wo)man', without including other non-binary options. Our focus on gender followed the advice of the ethical review process and used the AdvanceHE (2022) recommended categories for gender (see <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/guidance-collection-diversity-monitoring-data>).

^b Figure suppressed for data security due to being below 10.

^c Regarding ethnicity, this aggregate figure for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff comes from the recent report by Belluigi et al. (2023).

^d NB: we have used a more expansive definition to include all disabilities, impairments, conditions and differences which substantially affect respondents' work.

Age	n	%	HESA (%) ^e
20-24	supp	supp	0.0
25-29	33	1.9	3.0
30-34	109	6.8	8.0
35-39	163	10.1	11.0
40-44	223	13.8	14.0
45-49	223	13.8	17.5
50-54	287	17.8	18.0
55-59	256	15.9	15.0
60-64	155	9.6	8.5
65 and over	120	7.5	4.0
Prefer not to say	42	2.6	
Employment terms	n	%	HESA (%)
Research only	180	11.2	6.5
Teaching and research	1,000	62.4	59.0
Teaching/teaching and scholarship	423	26.4	34.0
Contract status	n	%	HESA (%)
Open-ended role	1,362	84.2	85.0
Fixed-term role	231	14.3	15.0
Sessional, casual or zero hours	41	2.5	

^e HESA figures used age bands 26-30, 31-35, ..., 61-65, 66+. We have reported the figures for the closest band (that is offset by one year).

2.4 ANALYSIS

2.4.1 Data cleaning and preparation

Prior to the analysis we carried out data cleaning and preparatory activities. In all cases we created new variables within the dataset, retaining the original data. Details of data cleaning and preparation activities are below.

- Collection of additional data – in the questionnaire, we gathered institution names so that we could connect data about institution regions and tiers (such as reported in section 2.3.1). After collecting and matching these data we deleted the university name from the dataset.
- Treatment of ‘other’ responses – many multiple-choice items in the survey included either an ‘other’ or ‘not listed above’ option, with the option to give details in an open text box. The latter were typically phrased as follows: ‘You have indicated that <question focus (for example your ethnicity)> is not listed above. Please state this below if you wish.’ In the findings, we have generally reported the frequency of the ‘other/not listed’ responses with a brief comment about the typical content of these ‘please state’ follow-on responses as relevant. In a small number of cases, we coded open-response items or the ‘please state’ responses into ‘reverse engineered’ multiple-choice categories at the data preparation stage. This was to enable a more targeted analysis of responses which otherwise would have been in a heterogeneous ‘other/not listed’ category.
- Aggregating categories for quantitative analysis – for some items we collapsed categories for purposes of quantitative analysis. This was to avoid cell sizes becoming too small, especially in multivariate cross-tabulations. An example of this was the role/job title question which allowed respondents to select from 13 options including ‘not listed above (please specify)’. For analysis we reduced this to nine categories including an ‘other’ category.
- Coding of open-response items – many items were given as open-response and designed to be coded for quantitative analysis. This included items such as nationality, prior and concurrent career areas, and the subject areas of highest and undergraduate qualifications, which we categorised from the open responses. We also coded several open-response numerical items: for example, we asked for hours worked as an open numerical response and then coded the responses into bands. For all such items, the open responses allowed respondents to give

detailed and accurate responses in their own words: coding these into broader groups enabled quantitative analysis. The methodological trade-off here is between, on one hand, forcing respondents to select from pre-determined options but having their active assent to the specific response, versus allowing respondents to respond in their own terms, but having a researcher create and place this response into a standardised response item. Further details of the coding or grouping of responses are provided against relevant items as part of the main presentation of the results in section 3.

- Categorisation of research topics – one example of an open-response question requiring more extensive coding work was the question about the topic areas research respondents are working in (‘list up to 5 key words/phrases that describe the focus of your education research’). Analysis of respondents’ research topics involved creating and iteratively refining a set of broad topic-related themes which were used to categorise the responses against one or more theme. We sought to align our topic themes with the level of specificity and wording of the underlying data where possible, and to present these to give an indicative overview of the range and proportions of topics being researched. There are two points to make about our categorisation and analysis for this question: first, we note that the topic-related themes are overlapping and often imperfectly defined. Therefore, rather than being a categorisation exercise organising all researchers into one or more discrete areas, the results focus more on the prevalence of self-described, overlapping areas of interest around which researchers understand and direct their research activities. Moreover, the prevalence of each research topic is, to some extent, dependent on how broadly it is defined. Second is the related challenge of ‘double counting’ in how the responses were quantified – again relating to the level of specificity of responses. Most respondents listed five key words, sometimes connecting to a single theme, sometimes to many. Therefore, the sum of responses for each topic area counts individuals with more than one area of interest more than once. Individuals providing a single general area would receive fewer ‘votes’ than those reporting five topic areas, for example. Therefore, as well as providing the raw counts of responses by topic, we also provide weighted responses by individuals. This involved counting themes rather than the number of key words, and weighting by the number of themes reported. If an individual listed five key words, connecting to three topics, for example, we

recorded this as three counts against the topic areas, each weighted at a third. If two key words were listed against two topic areas, this would provide two counts of two areas, each weighted as half a count.

2.4.2 Quantitative analysis

We conducted the quantitative analyses in Stata. All syntax has been saved and can be shared on request. Our primary aim within this main report has been to present the results from this wide-ranging questionnaire as clearly and transparently as possible. Most analysis, therefore, consisted of producing tables, cross-tabulations and figures to present the data. We provide relevant analytical details alongside the main presentation of the results in section 3.

One aspect of the analysis which goes beyond presentation of univariate results are the cross-tabulations used to break down key results by relevant variables. Notably, we present sub-group analysis for questions pertaining to individuals broken down by role/title to identify any variation linked to career stage, and we present sub-group analysis by university tier (as described in section 2.3) for many institutional-level results. There are also other selected examples where we provide a breakdown (for example by age, gender or contract type). We included these for theoretical reasons if there was likely to be appreciable variation within the sample. We based our decisions about what sub-group analyses to conduct using the previous literature, discussed in section 1. We conducted sub-group analyses to better describe response variation across the sample and, therefore, better represent the data. We have focused on accessible presentation of the questionnaire data, relying on cross-tabulations to examine within-sample variation.

2.4.3 Qualitative analysis

The primary aim of the survey was to produce quantitative data about the SOTD. There were also, however, a small number of open-response items which produced data for qualitative analysis – that is, beyond those coded for quantitative analysis, as described above. Given the large number of responses, open-response items in the main survey were included sparingly and targeted at more exploratory items related to individual circumstances and experiences. Moreover, each qualitative analysis was conducted with feasibility considerations in mind, in which we planned and carried out a specific approach for each open-response item. This was done to best complement the quantitative results and to produce new insights from qualitative analysis where possible.

In general, and in overview, we have carried out thematic analyses of the qualitative data, recording relevant codes against responses in the database, and reporting themes with illustrative quotations in this report. We provide details of analysis for groups of qualitative questions below.

Open-response items requesting further details

There were two points in the survey when we asked respondents for further details, explanations or comments on a specific previous answer.

- First, there was an open-response item specifically for respondents without full-time and permanent employment at a single institution. A closed response question asked, ‘Ideally, would you like to have full-time, permanent employment at a single institution?’ giving ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as response options. Respondents were then given the option to explain their answer (‘please give further details and/or explain your response to the previous question if you wish’).
- Second, following a question asking respondents to provide a list of up to five key words/phrases that described the focus of their research we asked, ‘What are your motivations for doing education research in this/these area(s)?’ We also provided the following further explanation: ‘For example, you might tell us about the importance of your research, and/or influences such as your background, identity, aspirations, circumstances, community, institution, skills and/or interests. Please list several reasons, or provide a short reflection about your motivations’.

As these were requests for additional details about a previous response, typically responses were short, with only one or two reasons briefly given. For both items, we carried out a thematic coding. The process involved a researcher reading a sample of responses and producing initial (open, descriptive) codes summarising their content. From these open codes, more general codes were produced which identified types/categories of response. In an iterative process, the researchers then retrieved further samples of responses and coded these against the coding framework. When responses did not fit the framework, it was extended or reorganised (for example developing and/or regrouping codes) until a point of saturation – where new samples of responses could be coded using the framework without loss or distortion of their meaning. At this point, all responses in the dataset were coded using the framework, with one or more code recorded for each response.

For the first question, see above, we organised the responses into two groups: a) reasons provided for wanting, and b) for not wanting full-time, permanent employment at a single institution. We developed seven codes for the former and nine codes for the latter using the process described. In the relevant results section (3.2.1), we give the codes capturing the most common responses and their frequencies, along with some selected illustrative quotations. For the second question, we developed 16 codes (with the final one being 'other'). From these we identified four broad themes following discussion within the research team. These themes were not hierarchical and overlapped with the codes. They were designed to foreground recurrent ideas within the responses which we report in the relevant section (3.3.1).

Optional reflection questions at the end of the survey

We also included two optional open-response questions at the end of the survey for reflections about current debates and issues within educational research and experiences of being an education researcher. For the first of these, receiving 352 responses, we followed the thematic analysis process described above. The only difference was that we used the formal structures/processes themes identified by the BERA SOTD scoping report (Boyle et al., 2021) as our starting point for the coding framework. Retaining these original themes, we developed several additional codes to capture the responses not covered within these original themes (see table 1.1 in section 1.1.1). In total we used 10 codes to analyse responses to this question. As with the previous responses, we have recorded in the main database one or more relevant code(s) for each response and provide a summary of the themes with illustrative quotations in the relevant analysis section (3.4).

The second optional question, on experiences of being an education researcher, received 404 responses. This provided further elaboration, explanation or detail for areas across the survey. Given the optional, general nature of the question and wide-ranging content, our aim was to connect these data to other quantitative items for purposes of illustration. Therefore, we identified illustrative quotations for each theme and short illustrative quotations for potential inclusion in the most relevant sections of the report. Many connected to personal identities, backgrounds and characteristics. After reviewing the quantitative data, we decided whether or not to include details of these responses, selecting quotations and points that added depth, complexity or illustration to the picture provided by the quantitative results.

Option to provide further comments about workload

Following a bank of Likert rating scale items relating to workload, we provided the option for respondents to explain or elaborate on their responses with the following optional question: 'If you would like to share any further comments about your workload, and/or the items above, please use the space provided below'. For the purposes of this main survey analysis, this item was designed to provide a small amount of further detail, explanation and illustration to support reporting of the previous closed response items, and our interpretation in this section. We selected a few to illustrate our results in the relevant findings section (3.2.3).

2.4.4 Research ethics

Our project followed the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018). We also obtained ethical approval from the University of Warwick Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Of particular concern in this study were issues related to confidentiality, anonymity and representation of the diverse circumstances and experiences of researchers within the sector. We asked numerous questions which relate to individual circumstances and experiences. This helped to ensure that voices from across the discipline were heard. Yet many of these items, when taken separately or together, could collectively have identified individuals. Great care has been taken in reporting the results to ensure that individual researchers or institutions are not identifiable. We also designed our dissemination approach to seek a sample that is as representative as possible, and to highlight responses from potentially under-represented, harder-to-reach groups.

3. Findings

In this section we present the main results from the survey. We report survey responses as transparently and directly as possible, including sub-group analyses for selected, relevant items. This section is organised by four main areas: 1) identity, background and personal characteristics, 2) career and working conditions, 3) research foci, methods and activities, 4) current issues and debates. This section is followed by a discussion of the overall findings and what they reveal about the current SOTD.

3.1 IDENTITY, BACKGROUND AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

This section outlines the findings from the questions which asked respondents about their identity, background and personal characteristics. There is a brief overview of respondents' demographic and background characteristics in section 2.3. In light of findings from the systematic review (Boyle et al., 2021) about experiences of 'non-traditional' academics and the identities of under-represented groups, we give further detail and analysis of the experiences of these groups. This enables us to better understand the characteristics of the education research workforce in HE, and to situate these findings within other analyses of researchers' backgrounds and demographics (for example, Belluigi et al., 2023; Dooley et al., 1981; Mills et al., 2006).

This section has two parts. In the first part we look at the overall demographic characteristics of education researchers in terms of age distribution, representation by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, nationality, background and caring responsibilities. In the second part we report on qualifications and educational backgrounds across the sample.

We also present a small number of illustrative quotations and individualised reflections to voice the experiences of those who hold identities which are under-represented or disadvantaged in education research (see Boyle et al., 2021). These perspectives are drawn from the optional open reflection question at the end of the survey which asked about experiences of being an education researcher in the UK today. The question encouraged respondents to share experiences and perspectives relating to their 'background, identity, aspirations, circumstances, community, institution,

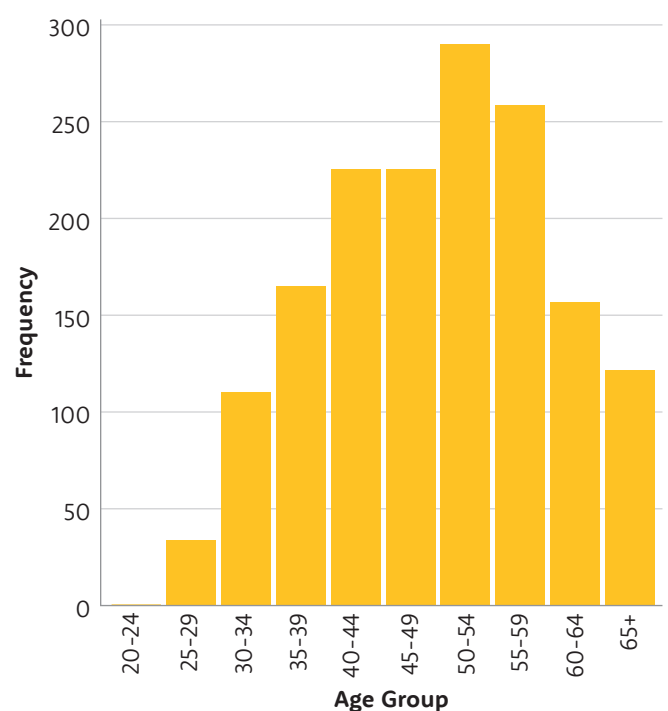
skills and/or interests'. A total of 404 respondents (approximately a quarter of the overall respondents) responded to this question, providing many detailed and thoughtful accounts. Many relate to negative, often poignant, experiences. While these insights do not necessarily form part of a generalisable analysis of the experiences of education researchers, including them ensures these perspectives are heard. Moreover, in the later sections of the report, we present quantitative evidence on a broader theme arising in the report, which identified that many common issues within the discipline are accentuated or felt more keenly by certain groups.

3.1.1 Personal characteristics

Age

The distribution of age is given in figure 3.1. Corresponding with the wider education-related academic workforce (Belluigi et al., 2023), this shows that the majority of respondents were from the higher age brackets (age 40 and over) with over three-fifths (61.4 per cent) between the ages of 40 and 59. A small proportion were under 30 (2.1 per cent) and 17.1 per cent were 60 or above.

Figure 3.1
Age distribution of survey respondents



Exploring the intersection of age and gender, we saw higher proportions of younger than older women, and higher proportions of older than younger men, again following the pattern from national datasets (Belluigi et al., 2023) (table 3.1). This shows that the gender proportion remained at about two-thirds to three-quarters in favour of women up to the 60+ category, when it became equal.

Table 3.1
Cross-tabulation of self-reported gender identity against age

Age		Man %	Woman %	Total n
20-29	%	24.2	69.7	33
30-39	%	23.5	73.9	272
40-49	%	32.5	65.5	446
50-59	%	27.8	70.0	543
60+	%	50.2	49.8	275
Total	n	506	1,033	1,569
	%	32.3	65.8	

For the types of universities where men and women were located, we found that the workforce in lower tier universities was more likely to have a higher proportion of women (71 per cent) compared with middle tier and elite/higher tier universities (64 per cent and 63.3 per cent respectively).

Gender

For gender, 65 per cent of education researchers self-identified as women, 31.8 per cent as men, 2.2 per cent preferred not to say, and one per cent identified as non-binary or an unlisted category. While in line with figures from recent HESA data analyses relating to the education cost centre, these data highlight the higher proportions of women working in education compared with university academic staff as a whole, of whom 47 per cent report as 'female' (Belluigi et al., 2023).

Ethnicity

The majority of educational researchers were of a white ethnic background (87.4 per cent), in line with Belluigi et al. (2023). When compared with wider data on academic researchers, this was a higher proportion than across academia more generally (where 74 per cent are reported as 'white'). Education, as an area of study, has proportionally fewer minority ethnic researchers than the rest of UK academia (see Belluigi et al., 2023) and these relatively low figures were

reflected in our survey sample. We saw approximately similar proportions of white respondents across university tiers, with a slightly lower figure in elite/higher institutions (86.3 per cent, compared to 88.6 per cent in the lower tier, and 90 per cent in the middle tier).

White ethnicity was a personal characteristic associated with more positive experiences and outcomes on many items within the survey, when compared to the experiences of other ethnic groups. There were many responses in the optional qualitative reflections. In line with recent research examining the experiences of minority ethnic women in academia, some respondents described feelings and experiences of invisibility and 'scholarly neglect' (Haynes et al., 2020, p. 772) and reported the challenges of struggling against disadvantages:

'[Being an education researcher] is difficult. Especially if you are a black, working class, woman ... I had to be more qualified and more experienced to get the same job as my white peers and then had to fight for a commensurate salary... when I provided evidence of racism, managers and HR simply focused on silencing me and covering up what had happened.'

Another Black woman academic provided a somewhat different perspective on visibility, explaining that rather than being ignored or silenced, she felt overly conspicuous in her role and setting:

'As a black woman, I feel hyper-visible as an education researcher. This is because there remains a particular focus across the education sector on how my blackness leads to success and failure in the education system... My identity as black means that I am called upon regularly to relay my lived experiences of racism and other injustices in the institution, without being supported with appropriate resources and avenues to shield me from their effects. I feel like a goldfish in a goldfish bowl.'

One respondent explained that tackling the racism faced by her minority ethnic teacher trainees was frustrated due to 'a level of silencing that exists and quickly comes into play when issues are challenged or raised'. This silencing extended to her research, with her reporting being warned by 'various staff' about 'the way the research [raising these issues] makes the university look'.

Disability, impairment or health conditions

A significant number of respondents reported having a disability, impairment or health condition that affected their day-to-day lives (14.5 per cent). This figure relating to disability status is higher than those reported elsewhere of six per cent in education workforce data and of 5.1 per cent for the wider academic workforce (see Belluigi et al., 2023). For this study, we were advised to ask, ‘Do you have an impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?’ (AdvanceHE, 2022). At this stage, the term ‘disability’ was not mentioned unless respondents then chose ‘yes’ and were asked to share the type of disability they had. This is different to other surveys where the terms ‘disability status’ or ‘known disability’ potentially suggest a less broad or inclusive approach to defining these characteristics. While we cannot draw firm conclusions about why the overall figures appear to be higher in our survey – and there is very little existing research specifically on the issue of academics with disabilities within which to situate these data – we believe it reflects the more inclusive definition used in our question. We also compared our impairment/disability figures across university types, finding a small amount of variation. In lower tier universities, 16.5 per cent of respondents reported having an impairment compared with 12.6 per cent in middle tier universities and 14.7 per cent in the elite/higher tier.

We saw several comments in the final reflection question about challenges associated with disability while working as an education researcher. These tended to emphasise feelings of invisibility or a lack of support or reasonable adjustments from institutions. One respondent, for example, reported feeling that the culture of their institution was so unsupportive that ‘disclosures around disability feel too risky’. Another colleague described the additional pressures she feels while undertaking a full-time academic role and studying for an EdD:

‘I find it difficult being a disabled researcher, and I think the issues are exacerbated by being a part-time distance [doctoral] student. I get pushed to do things in particular ways and there is a lack of recognition that I’m neurodiverse and so don’t see things the same way.’

As this individual explained, a particular frustration for her was the ‘compliance with tradition’ in relation to ‘research approaches, presentation methods and general ways of working’. Another respondent shared

similar concerns and emphasised that academics with disabilities should be entitled to ‘more protected time for research as we may take longer to complete tasks, process information and organise and manage our workload’. Other comments from colleagues with disabilities expressed the risk of being ‘passed over for promotion’.

Socio-economic background

We did not include many questions about the socio-economic background of the workforce. We did, however, ask whether respondents’ parents held HE qualifications. Just over half of our respondents (52.2 per cent) reported that their parents *did not* hold any HE qualifications, indicating that this group were likely to be the first generation of their family to attend university (45.3 per cent stated that their parents did, and the remainder did not know or preferred not to say). We do not have the data to situate this statistic within the wider context of academia and so it is difficult to know the extent to which this would be true of HE more generally. Other studies of socio-economic background have explored a richer range of indicators and have reported on the family backgrounds of academics, predominantly focusing on social class identity. Friedman and Laurison (2019), for example, estimate that approximately 15 per cent of academics are from working class backgrounds, whereas a recent UCU survey (2022a) reported that 40 per cent of its HE-based sample had a working class identity. Partly, this disparity is a result of the different metrics used to determine social class and how social class is perceived. While some, like Friedman and Laurison, focus on objective socio-economic factors as indicative of class identity, the UCU survey (and new studies, see Burnell, 2022) asks respondents to self-identify their perceived class identity. This difference is explored by Skeggs (2013), Crew (2020; 2021), and others who relate social class identity to factors beyond and inclusive of (but not limited to) socio-economic status, such as cultural preferences and hobbies, family experiences, personal history and social norms. The nuance between class and socio-economic status is one that was experienced by some of our respondents who, despite working in a profoundly traditional ‘middle class’ occupation, felt unable to integrate as a result of their working class identity. The disparity in these figures and the limited body of work shedding light on the numbers and experiences of working class academics in education (Boyle et al., 2021) suggests that this is an area which would benefit from future research (see Crew, 2021, for suggestions on this).

We examined parental HE qualifications by age, finding that older respondents were less likely to report having at least one parent with a university qualification. The proportions reporting that at least one parent held a university qualification by age bracket are reported in table 3.2. These figures are likely to reflect the changing context of university access over the last 50 to 60 years and the shift towards wider participation.

Table 3.2
Cross-tabulation of whether parents hold an HE qualification by age

Age		Yes	No	I don't know	Prefer not to say	Total n
20-29	%	51.5	42.4	3.0	3.0	33
30-39	%	52.6	43.4	2.2	1.8	272
40-49	%	49.3	48.2	1.1	1.4	446
50-59	%	43.0	55.4	0.9	0.7	542
60+	%	36.0	62.9	1.1	0.0	275
Total	n	712	820	20	16	1,568
	%	45.4	52.3	1.28	1.02	

One area in which social class was raised directly by respondents was in the optional final reflection question. A small number of our respondents spoke about how being working class or from a working class background was a key part of their academic and researcher identity, and that they wished to share experiences of the impact of this on their work. One respondent, for example, believed that, to succeed, working class academics need to adjust elements of their identity to assimilate with the middle class milieu of academic life:

'If you are from a working class background – be prepared to alter your speech, mannerisms, dress – most of your soul. Upper middle class white Anglo Saxon is the only way to succeed.'

This perspective connected to several other comments from other respondents who were of the view that 'if you are a white man, or you are middle class, you have a system designed for you'. As we did not directly ask questions about social class in the closed sections, it is hard to know how representative views about class are. The survey data presented in section 3.2 support the view that being white and male are associated with more positive experiences and outcomes in numerous respects.

Sexual orientation

Boyle et al. (2021) note that none of the included studies focused on the careers of LGBTQ+ academics, recommending that collecting data on the experiences of this group was important for understanding and tackling potential inequalities. This conclusion, and a recent report (Sundberg et al., 2021) pointing to the widespread and significant discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ staff in universities, confirmed the need to ask questions on this topic in order to better understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ colleagues within education specifically; something we do at various points within this report. With specific regards to sexual orientation, 81.3 per cent of respondents in our sample reported being heterosexual, nine per cent preferred not to say, 4.7 per cent were gay or lesbian, 2.9 per cent bisexual, 1.2 per cent queer, 0.6 per cent an unlisted category and 0.3 per cent asexual. By university type, our survey indicated that there was a slightly lower proportion of heterosexual respondents based in elite/higher tier universities: 79 per cent compared with 85.8 per cent in middle tier and 84.1 per cent in lower tier universities.

Caring responsibilities

A growing body of work points towards the influence of caring responsibilities on academics' experiences of their work and the impact on their research activities (Moreau and Robertson, 2017; Henderson and Moreau, 2020). Just under half of the respondents in this survey reported having a significant caring responsibility (45.3 per cent). Of these, approximately three-quarters were caring for a child or children under the age of 18; 5.5 per cent a child or children with a disability or health condition; 21 per cent were caring for an older person or people (age 65 or above) and 8.1 per cent were caring for a disabled adult or adults. Survey respondents were asked to select all that apply out of these options. So the figures above represent overlapping proportions of the total group of 45.3 per cent of respondents with caring responsibilities. Nearly 15 per cent of those involved with care provision reported that they had responsibilities for people in two or more of the above categories (for example caring for children *and* an older person, or for both children with and without a disability or health condition).

Nationality

Finally, we asked respondents about their nationality. This was an open question with respondents able to declare their national identity without being constrained by pre-determined categories. The majority of respondents reported having UK nationality (77.1 per cent). Within this, we included those who

identified as 'British' as well as those who associated their nationality with one of the four UK home nations (for example identifying as English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh). Smaller categories included respondents with dual nationality (including UK as part of this) (3.9 per cent); dual nationality (without UK) (1.5 per cent); those who specified a European country as their nationality (6.3 per cent) and those who specified countries from beyond Europe (6.7 per cent). We also included a category for the small number of respondents (3.2 per cent) who wrote 'European' but who did not confirm which country they were from or which nationality if any within this they identified with. We recognise that, for some, this is an important part of their identity, especially following the recent Brexit referendum and so have retained these responses as a separate category. A small percentage (1.4 per cent) either left this question blank or reported a nationality which did not fit with any of the above categories.

3.1.2 Qualifications

Nearly three-quarters of education researchers completing our survey had a doctoral-level qualification. Of these, the majority had a PhD (63.3 per cent), and a significant number (8.9 per cent) a professional doctorate. Nearly a quarter (23.6 per cent) reported having a Masters degree as their highest qualification. In elite/higher tier universities, respondents were more likely to hold a doctoral-level qualification (81.1 per cent) compared with considerably lower figures for middle tier (66.3 per cent) and lower tier universities (54.6 per cent). Alongside academic qualifications, nearly half of education researchers (49.3 per cent) had a school-based teacher training qualification (such as a PGCE or equivalent). A significant proportion had HE-focused teaching qualifications such as a PGCHE (15.4 per cent) or AdvanceHE (HEA) fellowship status (52.7 per cent). In addition to the qualifications that respondents already possessed, over one in five (21.7 per cent) were studying for a further qualification at the time of the survey. Of these, nearly two-thirds (63.8 per cent) were studying for a doctoral-level qualification, and 19 per cent were working towards teaching qualifications or a recognised teaching status (for example HEA fellowship).

These figures suggest that within the discipline of education, it is possible to be involved with research without having completed a doctoral qualification. Universities appear to be accepting of recruiting those without doctoral qualifications. However, while not necessarily a prerequisite to gaining a role in HE,

there does appear to be an aspiration to create a doctoral-level sector with a high number of staff working towards PhDs, EdDs or other doctoral-level qualifications alongside their roles.

For prior academic qualifications, the majority of education researchers working in UK universities had their highest qualification in education (58.9 per cent). There was some diversity within the discipline with 16 per cent completing their highest qualification in science, engineering or medicine, 12.9 per cent in the social sciences and 11.3 per cent in the arts and humanities. We can see a substantial difference between the number of colleagues who have specifically studied education as a subject at undergraduate level (just 16.2 per cent of education researchers in our sample) and for their highest qualification (58.9 per cent) (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3
Subject areas for undergraduate degree and highest qualification

	Subject area of undergraduate degree		Subject area of highest qualification	
	n	%	n	%
Arts	379	24.4	124	7.9
Education	252	16.2	924	58.9
Humanities	138	8.9	54	3.4
Science, engineering and medicine	504	32.4	265	16.0
Social sciences	268	17.2	202	12.9
Prefer not to say	1	0.1	1	0.1
n/a	14	0.9		
Total	1,556	100.0	1,570	100.0

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail the reasons for respondents' qualification and subject choices. For some, the choice to pursue an education qualification at MA or doctoral level may have come after some time working in education (for example, in teaching or teacher education), moving from a more vocational focus through to a more academic one as their careers and research interests develop. For others, there may have been a desire to specialise further following their undergraduate degree and pursuing an education-related qualification as part of this. In

some cases, the subject and disciplinary boundaries can be blurry: there may be overlap between some subject areas and the foci of people’s qualifications and work. One fruitful area for further research would be to examine whether researchers working at the intersections of disciplines identify as, for example, sociologists of education, or education researchers drawing on sociology, and the implications of this for their research practice and community.

3.2 CAREER AND WORKING CONDITIONS

3.2.1 Job role and employment terms

Roles

Respondents reported a range of different job titles and roles. For ease, we have collapsed these into nine categories (see table 3.4). Nearly a quarter (24.2 per cent) held a lecturer or assistant professor role; 37.1 per cent were at senior lecturer or associate professor level, a further 4.4 per cent were readers; and 14.3 per cent of respondents were professors. The job titles do not necessarily correspond with the employment function or contract type (for example teaching only, research only, or teaching and research). In many cases, for example, respondents on teaching-focused contracts had a job title of lecturer or senior lecturer (or assistant/associate professor). These details were captured in a separate question (reported below).

Table 3.4
Respondents’ job roles

Job role or title	n	%
Professor	232	14.3
Reader/principal lecturer	72	4.4
Principal/senior research associate/fellow/officer	35	2.2
Principal/senior teaching fellow/tutor	22	1.4
Senior lecturer/associate professor	601	37.1
Lecturer/assistant professor	392	24.2
Research assistant/associate/fellow/officer	134	8.3
Teaching assistant/fellow/tutor	85	5.3
Other	47	2.9
Total	1,620	100.0

When we examine job roles by gender, for most roles (including lecturers, senior lecturers, readers, teaching fellows and research assistants/fellows), there is a relatively stable split between the largest groups: men and women. Men tended to hold somewhere between 23 per cent and 30 per cent of these roles while women held between 65 per cent and 72 per cent. These figures are broadly in line with the gender split within the sector. At professorial level, however, there was a considerable shift, with nearly half of these roles being held by men (46.1 per cent) compared with 50.9 per cent of women.

For leadership responsibilities, 12.2 per cent of respondents reported having a significant leadership role, including head of department, school or centre (six per cent); deputy head of department, school or centre (1.8 per cent); director/head of research (4.4 per cent); or director/head of research ethics, impact or equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) (2.8 per cent). In addition, 36.1 per cent of respondents had a programme or course leadership role.

Employment terms

Nearly two-thirds of respondents were on teaching and research contracts (62.4 per cent). A quarter were on teaching or teaching/scholarship contracts (26.4 per cent); and just over 11 per cent were on research-only contracts (11.2 per cent). By institution type, researchers on research-only contracts were more likely to be based in elite/higher tier universities: 16.1 per cent compared with 6.3 per cent of respondents at middle tier universities and 1.7 per cent in the lower tier institutions. This is likely to reflect the research intensity at higher tier institutions and increased levels of funding and opportunities for research-focused positions. There were some regional differences in the research-only positions too. In Scotland, for example, there was a lower proportion of respondents with these roles (5.7 per cent), whereas in Wales the figure was 19.4 per cent. Across the regions of England, the proportions were much more similar (between 11 and 13 per cent). These differences could indicate regional variation with the types of contracts available or hiring policies/practices. Caution is urged when interpreting these figures due to the relatively small numbers of respondents in some regions and universities, and relatively small numbers of research-only respondents.

Contract status

The majority of respondents (84.2 per cent) were on permanent, open-ended contracts with the remainder being employed on a fixed-term or casual basis (15.8

per cent). This latter figure compares with 32.3 per cent of academics across all universities and subject areas in the UK. This may suggest that education is a less precarious subject area to work in than some others. However, it could reflect a sample bias, with the potential under-representation of early career researcher respondents in our sample (who are more likely to be working on temporary contracts) having skewed the figures downwards.

Nearly a quarter of respondents (n=384, 23.8 per cent) worked on a part-time basis for their main employer. There was considerable spread in the proportion of time worked by these part-time colleagues, with 49.5 per cent working between 51 and 80 per cent of a full-time role, and 46.1 per cent working at 50 per cent or below, with a spread of figures across these ranges. Women were more likely to be working part-time than men (26.3 per cent compared with 20.1 per cent). Gender differences in part-time working were particularly stark within certain age brackets: between age 40 and 49, just 6.9 per cent of men were working

part-time, compared with 23.8 per cent of women. This trend only really starts to even out for the 60+ age group.

Experiences relating to contract status

We asked respondents without full-time and permanent employment at a single institution (n=526) whether they would ideally prefer an open-ended, full-time role and for details and an explanation for their response. Of those with part-time and/or fixed-term contracts, 45.8 per cent stated that, contrary to their current employment status, they wanted a full-time, permanent role. Moreover, many who responded negatively to this (that is, they did not want a full-time, permanent role) reported wanting *either* full-time or permanent employment but not necessarily both.

We coded the open-response data to identify common reasons for wanting, and not wanting, a full-time, permanent role. A count of these codes is in table 3.5 which we follow with a narrative summary of the key ideas with selected examples.

Table 3.5
Reasons for wanting and not wanting a full-time permanent role

Reasons for wanting a full-time permanent role			
Code	Explanation	n	%
Financial security	Respondent described wanting role to provide better financial security (for example mortgages, reduced related anxiety connected to financial situation)	33	15.1
Other security	Respondent described wanting role to gain security in general terms (for example wanting 'security' or to feel 'more secure') or in another way beyond financial (for example wanting a full-time permanent role as a basis to start a family)	79	36.2
Career progression	Wanting role to progress with career (for example some described that being on short-term contracts did not enable them to progress in their career due to the need to be applying for new, short-term roles)	73	33.5
Fear of unemployment	Wanting full-time permanent roles due to a fear of being unemployed and/or the consequences of this	2	0.9
Research quality	Reasons related to research quality (for example role would afford dedicated time for research work, using time currently spent applying for other roles for research, having more availability)	16	7.3
Workload	Reasons related to workload (typically, workload high as a result of juggling multiple contracts/contract extensions/contract start and end dates)	2	0.9
No relevant explanation given		13	6.0
	Total	218	100.0

Table 3.5 continued

Reasons for not wanting a full-time permanent role			
Code	Explanation	n	%
Caring responsibilities	Respondent described not wanting full-time permanent role due to caring responsibilities. These were inclusive of caring responsibilities relating to childcare, care for elderly relatives, care for others with healthcare issues in immediate family and network	57	21.8
Additional role/work	Respondent described not wanting full-time permanent role due to other work commitments (including but not limited to professional practice in same field, work at another institution, work in another field or consultancy)	41	15.6
Additional study	Respondent described not wanting full-time permanent role for reasons relating to additional studies (for example, PhD study)	4	1.5
Workload/work-life balance	Now wanting role for reasons relating to workload or work-life balance (for example perceptions that 1.0 FTE was a significant increase in workload or reasons relating to enjoyment of life/spending time with family/other activities)	46	17.6
Personal choice	Stated that they had a personal preference to work part-time and/or on temporary contracts, with no further reason stated	26	9.9
Retirement/retiring	Respondent due to retire shortly or working part-time/temporary post prior to full retirement	64	24.4
Disability/impairment/health	Not wanting role due to personal health related restrictions (for example mental health reasons or other related health reasons)	9	3.4
Work culture	Not wanting role for reasons relating to institutional culture, workplace culture, co-workers or culture of research environment	11	4.2
No relevant explanation given		4	1.5
Total		262	100.0

Within the explanatory comments, several common points arose. Respondents varied as to whether they preferred full-time or part-time roles. Some respondents preferring a part-time role explained that their part-time contracts allowed for a better work-life balance and more flexibility in their work and other commitments. Two example comments are:

‘I would ideally like to hold a permanent part-time role (around 0.5) at a single institution – due to caring responsibilities, professional interests outside academia and my observations of the workload and pressure levels put on my full-time colleagues this feels like the ideal option for me.’

‘I have another role as the leader of a charity which means I cannot manage any more hours at present...I believe this duality of role is invaluable and so am not willing to relinquish my second role outside of HE.’

Comments relating to open-ended versus fixed-term contracts were less equivocal, with a strong preference for open-ended contracts. ‘Security’ and ‘stability’

were frequently mentioned by those seeking an open-ended contract. As well as comments about personal impacts of holding fixed-term roles, one respondent also commented on how not having a permanent position oriented their activities away from their institution:

‘If I was a permanent member of staff, I feel that I could focus more closely on building and developing change within my institution from the findings of my research. As I’m not employed permanently, it creates different pressures on my time and increases my likelihood of leaving whilst (or before) embedding long-term culture change.’

Job security (or insecurity) has become a growing concern within the university sector in recent years (see UCU, 2019). Putting these concerns into the context of the overall figures from our survey, 55.6 per cent of education researchers reported that their role was secure, with 21.4 per cent believing that their role was insecure. The latter includes those who were on permanent, open-ended contracts (n=1,359), of whom

12.6 per cent reported that their role was insecure, and on a fixed-term or casual basis (n=268), of whom 70.1 per cent reported that their role was insecure.

Insecurity varied by several characteristics. For example, reported job insecurity fell with age: agreement that their current job role was insecure was reported by 57.6 per cent of those in their 20s (n=33); 33.1 per cent in their 30s (n=269); 21.4 per cent in their 40s (n=444); 18.2 per cent in their 50s (n=541); and 12.4 per cent in their 60s or older (n=275). Age doesn't necessarily correspond to years of experience in HE given that many enter education research from other sectors (see section 3.2.2). We also saw variation in feelings about job insecurity by ethnicity: 20 per cent of white respondents felt that their job was insecure compared with 31.6 per cent of minority ethnic respondents. Men were less likely to agree that their job was insecure (16.8 per cent compared with 23.2 per cent of women), while 26.1 per cent of people with a condition or disability compared with 20.2 per cent without felt that their role was insecure. There was also a stark difference when we analysed this issue by respondents' sexuality, with 32.9 per cent of respondents from sexual minorities reporting insecurity compared with 18.8 per cent of those who identified as heterosexual. Respondents on research-only contracts were much more likely to feel that their job role was insecure (59.1 per cent) compared with 15 per cent on teaching and research tracks and 20.9 per cent of those on teaching-only contracts. It is likely that there is a degree of overlap between these factors, with intersections of characteristics accentuating or moderating the differences in level of security.

These findings highlight a sense of precarity and instability evident across a sizeable minority of the workforce (which our figures suggest affects around one in five education researchers, as reported above), and the unequal influence of these challenges on particular groups. Some of these respondents commented on the links between job security and their mental wellbeing and personal lives, with one commenting that the 'uncertainty of a fixed-term contract impacts decisions in personal life and relationships' and had become a 'source of anxiety', and another commenting that they were considering moving away from academia because they were not in a position to have children due to worries about financial security while on maternity leave. Another respondent linked their experience of insecure work with a wider comment on the status of the discipline:

'I have worked in four HEIs in five years due to temporary (fixed-term) contracts and have taken non-academic employment in between to cover gaps where I could not locate an academic role. It would be great if research could be seen as a permanent career path but it feels closer to employment patterns in the performing arts sector, where you get a "gig" then have to work an unrelated job in the interim to survive.'

Some employees also spoke extensively of attitudes, values and behaviour within institutions which affected how they felt about their working conditions and enjoyment. There was considerable variation in respondents' experiences within their departments and institutions. One respondent reported experiencing 'really supportive communities and networks' 'despite all the casualisation and precarity',⁴ while others, and particularly those on precarious contracts, reported feeling undervalued, pressured, and troubled by the culture within their organisation. Explicitly, respondents spoke about 'unfriendly departments', 'a climate of alienation', a 'lack of support for conducting research' and 'not [feeling] supported or mentored at all'. The variety of responses suggests that the experience of research environments and organisational culture in education departments differs widely between and within institutions. As we discuss in the final section, our overall results highlight stark variation in the experiences of education researchers, including highly positive and negative experiences. Experiences relating to insecurity and 'outsider' status within departments are not universally felt, but nonetheless represent a significant minority within the community for whom these troubling depictions of education researcher experience are the reality.

Perceptions relating to financial compensation

A mixed picture emerged when we asked respondents if they felt financially well compensated for the work they did. Just over a third of respondents (37.4 per cent) reported that they were financially well compensated, while 31.6 per cent disagreed with this statement and 30.3 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. These figures were similar across the geographical regions although there were some minor differences between university types. Those in elite/higher tier universities were slightly more likely to disagree that they were financially well compensated (33.2 per cent) compared with those in middle tier (30.1 per cent) or lower tier (28.4 per cent) universities.

⁴ We provide a fuller quotation of this near the end of section 3.2.4 in relation to institutional culture.

There was some variation by job role, presumably reflecting the differing pay scales that respondents were on and the amount or type of work that they did. We found that lecturers/assistant professors and those with teaching fellow/assistant roles were less likely to agree that they were financially well compensated (30 per cent and 31.8 per cent respectively) while more senior respondents such as readers and professors were more likely to agree (45.7 per cent and 51.7 per cent respectively). There was very little difference between respondents on teaching only, research only, or research/teaching contracts.

The analyses show some evidence of variation by individual characteristics. Minority ethnic respondents were less likely to report being financially well compensated for their work (30.1 per cent compared with 38.4 per cent of white respondents). By gender, the levels of agreement on this question were similar for men and women but for disagreement we saw a substantial difference: 34.5 per cent of women disagreed that they are financially well compensated, compared with 25.7 per cent of men. Those with disabilities were also more likely to disagree with this statement (40.6 per cent compared with 29.8 per cent of respondents without a disability) as were those who identify as being from a sexual minority (38.4 per cent compared with 30.7 per cent of heterosexual respondents).

3.2.2 Careers and career development

Over 80 per cent of respondents reported having a prior career or profession before joining HE. Of these, many worked in teaching and/or elsewhere in the education sector (70.8 per cent) before beginning their role in HE. Those in lower tier universities were more likely to have had a prior career (91.5 per cent) than those in middle or higher tier universities (86.1 per cent and 75.3 per cent respectively). Appreciable numbers of other prior careers were in healthcare, medical or social work (8.8 per cent); charity and third sector (3.7 per cent); and professional services and administration (3.5 per cent). There was, however, a highly diverse mix of prior careers (see table 3.6).

Table 3.6
Respondents' careers prior to joining HE and current, additional careers

	Prior career or profession		Additional career or profession	
	n	%	n	%
Business & finance	33	2.5	20	8.0
Charity & third sector	48	3.7	supp ^a	supp
Education & teaching	919	70.8	71	28.5
Engineering & technology	29	2.2	supp	supp
Healthcare, medical, & social work	114	8.8	38	15.3
Journalism, publishing & media	26	2.0	23	9.2
Law, policy, & government/civil service	26	2.0	supp	supp
Other	19	1.5	38	15.3
Professional services/administration	46	3.5	36	14.5
Research	28	2.2	10	4.0
Retail & catering	10	0.8	supp	supp
Total	1,298	100.0	249	100.0

^a Figure suppressed for data security due to being below 10.

In addition to finding that respondents' HE roles were often second (or even third, fourth...) careers following roles in other areas, we also found that approximately 15 per cent were undertaking another job role alongside their academic work. The most common additional roles were in the teaching and education sector (28.5 per cent), with respondents usually reporting work as teachers or education consultants. Other additional career roles included positions in healthcare, medical and social work; professional services or administration, and a range of other areas. Some respondents were working across multiple sectors beyond HE. For ease, we have summarised just the first or main additional careers, as stated by respondents, in the table above.

The survey also included attitudinal statements relating to career progression and development (see table 3.7).

Table 3.7
Respondents' views on career progression and development

Statement		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	n/a
My institution's academic promotion procedures are fair	n	609	541	408	61
	%	37.6	33.4	25.2	3.8
My institution provides a clear pathway to career progression	n	712	422	445	39
	%	44.0	26.1	27.5	2.4
I expect to be still working in education research in HE in five years' time	n	905	385	313	17
	%	55.9	23.8	19.3	1.1

The final statement asked whether respondents expected to be working in HE education research in five years' time. Just over half of respondents (55.9 per cent) agreed with this statement while about a fifth (19.3 per cent) disagreed. We examined responses against age to understand possible variation linked to early and late career stages and by contract type. For respondents under 60, 61.7 per cent expected to be working in HE in five years' time whereas for the 60+ group, this figure was just 27.4 per cent. The responses in the middle category (neither agree nor disagree) were at around 23 per cent, irrespective of age. This is a significant group of the workforce who do not feel certain either way about their future in HE, and

whether they will still be working in education research in the relatively near future.

These figures present a concerning picture of career (in)security and progression in education research. Only 37.6 per cent of respondents, for example, agreed that their institution's promotion procedures were fair and less than half (44 per cent) thought that there is a clear pathway to career progression in their institution. Those in elite/higher tier universities were more likely to report a clear career progression path (47.6 per cent) compared with respondents in middle or lower tier institutions (38.8 per cent and 36.6 per cent respectively). Those on research-only contracts were less likely to feel that their institution provided a clear career pathway for them (29.1 per cent compared with 47.8 per cent for those on teaching/research track and 41.7 per cent for those on teaching-only contracts), perhaps associated with the more precarious/temporary nature of their roles.

We also assessed whether there were associations between perceptions of fair and clear career pathways and personal characteristics of ethnicity, gender, disability and condition status, and sexual orientation. These results are in table 3.8. In summary, they suggest that women and those with a disability were less likely to view their institution's academic promotion procedures as fair or to think that their institution provided a clear pathway to career progression. Those with a disability or condition were also less likely to agree and more likely to disagree that they would be working in education research in HE in five years' time, with little difference by gender. The results for ethnicity were more mixed, with lower agreement but higher disagreement on the first two items and higher agreement but lower disagreement for the latter item. There were few differences in these items linked to sexual orientation. Care is needed when interpreting the data given that we know multiple factors are likely to interact, for example, higher proportions of women were employed at lower tier universities and both being a woman and being employed at a lower tier institution were, in turn, both related to having more negative career progression experiences.

Table 3.8

Agreement with views on career progression and development by respondent characteristics (%)

Statement	Response	All %	Ethnicity		Gender		Disability, impairment or condition status		Sexual orientation	
			White	Minority ethnic	Woman	Man	Reported	None reported	Heterosexual	Sexual minority (incl. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual)
My institution's academic promotion procedures are fair	Agree	37.6	38.6	32.2	35.1	44.1	27.8	39.6	38.4	36.3
	Neither ^a	32.8	32.8	40.8	34.8	31.6	33.8	33.6	33.7	34.3
	Disagree	25.2	25.0	21.1	26.8	19.6	35.0	22.9	24.2	24.7
My institution provides a clear pathway to career progression	Agree	44.0	44.9	40.8	42.0	50.1	35.6	45.4	45.1	43.2
	Neither ^a	26.1	24.7	35.5	25.7	26.2	25.8	26.2	26.3	25.3
	Disagree	27.5	27.9	21.7	30.2	20.6	36.1	26.0	26.3	28.8
I expect to be still working in education research in HE in five years' time	Agree	55.9	55.7	60.1	56.7	54.7	46.6	58.1	57.4	54.1
	Neither ^a	23.8	23.7	20.3	23.3	23.9	27.4	22.4	23.1	24.7
	Disagree	19.3	19.6	17.7	19.3	19.6	25.6	18.3	18.4	20.6

^a Neither agree nor disagree.

3.2.3 Workload

Workload figures and perspectives

Respondents were asked to report the number of hours that they worked in a typical week (table 3.9). Of the respondents who worked full-time, nearly 30 per cent reported working between 36 and 40 hours per week. A standard full-time contract usually states working hours at somewhere between 36 and 38 hours per week so we would consider these respondents to be

working broadly within that expectation. Concerningly, though, many respondents reported that they worked considerably more than this. Over 45 per cent reported working between 41 and 50 hours per week, and 15.6 per cent were working between 51 and 60 hours. A small but significant percentage (4.3 per cent) stated that they worked, on average, over 60 hours per week. The working time directive law (GOV.UK, 2023) states that employees should not be working over 48 hours per week.

Table 3.9

Number of hours of work reported in a typical week

Hours	All		FT only	
	n	%	n	%
0-5	18	1.1	18 ^a	1.5
6-10	25	1.6		
11-15	23	1.4		
16-20	40	2.5		
21-25	51	3.2		
26-30	80	5.0		
31-35	88	5.5	51	4.2
36-40	405	25.1	349	28.6
41-45	303	18.8	281	23.1
46-50	305	18.9	274	22.5
51-55	95	5.9	89	7.3
56-60	114	7.1	101	8.3
61-65	18	1.1	13	1.1
66-70	33	2.1	30	2.5
71+	13	0.8	13	0.8
Total	1,611	100.0	1,219	100.0

^a Bands grouped due to low numbers

When asked about their attitudes towards their current workload, nearly 40 per cent (39.7 per cent) reported feeling that their workload was unacceptable (table 3.10). There was very little difference in responses to this question by university tier. There was also a sense that actual workload was often not reflected in the workload models that were used for allocation of respondents' time. Just 28.5 per cent of respondents reported that their official workload model reflected the duties that they carried out in a typical week, and 56.1 per cent indicated they could not complete their assigned work during their contracted working hours.

Table 3.10

Attitudes towards workload

		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	n/a
My workload is unacceptable	n	642	545	418	14
	%	39.7	33.7	25.8	0.9
The duties I carry out in a typical week reflect my official workload model	n	461	265	884	9
	%	28.5	16.4	54.6	0.6
I cannot complete my assigned workload during my contracted working hours	n	908	302	390	18
	%	56.1	18.7	24.1	1.1
I achieve a good balance between my work life and my private life	n	579	387	652	3
	%	35.7	23.9	40.2	0.2
There is fair distribution of workload between colleagues	n	369	514	701	32
	%	22.8	31.8	43.4	2.0

Achieving a work-life balance appears challenging, with only a third of respondents (35.7 per cent) suggesting that this was possible in their current role. Four in ten (40.2 per cent) indicated that they did not achieve a good work-life balance. Many also reported feeling that the distribution of workload between colleagues was not fair: only 22.8 per cent agreed that workload was fairly distributed; with 43.4 per cent disagreeing. The workload questions were also interesting in relation to the number of respondents who selected the middle (neither agree nor disagree) option.

Those on research-only contracts were much more likely to report achieving a good work-life balance

(52.5 per cent agreed with this statement) compared with those on teaching/research tracks (31.9 per cent) and teaching-only contracts (36.4 per cent). Similarly, those in teaching/research and teaching-only roles were more likely to note that their workload was unacceptable (43.9 per cent and 39.8 per cent respectively) compared with their research-only colleagues (19 per cent). Despite the higher levels of precarity and less clarity around career progression, research-only respondents appeared to have more manageable workloads. This could be indicative of the more defined or project-specific roles that they carry out. It also perhaps underscores the considerable (and often unaccounted for) workload associated with teaching and learning in HE.

There was some variation when exploring some of the workload items by individual characteristics. White respondents were slightly more likely to report that they achieve a good work-life balance (36.4 per cent compared with 32 per cent of minority ethnic respondents). Men were also more likely to report achieving a good work-life balance (39.9 per cent compared with 34.9 per cent of women). Women were also more likely to report that their workload was unacceptable (42.9 per cent compared with 33.1 per cent of men). Those with disabilities were less likely to feel their work-life balance was good (26.1 per cent compared with 38.1 per cent of non-disabled respondents) and were more likely to report an unacceptable workload (47.1 per cent compared with 38.1 per cent of non-disabled respondents). A higher number of respondents who identify as being from a sexual minority felt that their workload was unacceptable (47.3 per cent versus 38.2 per cent of heterosexual respondents).

Workload experiences

Workload permeated the survey responses. Reflecting the figures above, workload was often a barrier to the type, quality or quantity of research work that respondents wanted to do. For some, it was the biggest challenge they faced within their job role. This was a strongly felt issue and attracted a large amount of comment, mostly negative. In each of the open sections, respondents shared experiences of their workload and its impact on their research. In this section we report selected comments to illustrate the key issues raised by researchers reporting negative workload experiences.

Workload models were mentioned frequently, with most responses suggesting that the models used were inaccurate, incomplete, unrealistic and rarely

accounted for the full range of activities that academics are expected to participate in:

‘Most institutions have workload models, but in reality they are not workable because there is more work to do than 37.5 hours per week permits. It is impossible to be a world-class researcher within such a model since quality work needs time. Most of us accept this where there is reciprocation institutionally by providing flexibility and autonomy.’

‘I actually have no idea how many hours I really work each week. What I do know is that my work has taken over my life.’

For ECRs and/or those on precarious contracts, the issue of workload was often a particular source of concern. The need to develop a research profile, build a strong CV and apply for jobs increased the pressure to take on additional roles and duties, leading to overwork and ongoing tensions between the work that was needed to secure a permanent post and the time available for pursuing other interests and research.

‘You are CONSTANTLY promised that underpaid and unpaid labour will “look good on your CV” – and yet, I cannot eat or pay rent or exorbitant visa costs with “experience”.’

‘I am an early career researcher so work I took on prior to starting a postdoc, which has run on, is now running alongside my current post. This means my workload is huge and I have to work weekends to keep on top of it. Activities I take on to advance my profile for job applications are preventing me from writing the book that is the focus on my postdoc, even though it is not technically part of my role and the institution does not require it of me technically. This is exacerbated by the fact that my institution has no development strategy for postdocs and so if I don’t do these activities, I will end up unemployed!’

Several researchers also shared detailed accounts of how work overload has put pressure on their home lives, mental and physical health, and ability to carry out caring responsibilities. For some, workload was also mentioned as a potential ‘push’ factor in encouraging them to leave their roles:

‘I spend little time with my toddler because I prioritise academic work.’

‘There is a home workload too that is absolutely necessary. There are simply not enough hours in the day to work full-time as well as deal with toddlers...’

'I am concerned about my mental health as I have struggled for the first time in my life to balance work/personal life.'

In some instances, respondents said that they were able to manage their workload. However, these comments were nearly all made within a context of compromise and a view that inevitably this would mean that some aspects of their roles did not get prioritised or completed with as much time or depth as they wished for.

3.2.4 Working conditions and institutional environment

To further our understanding of education researchers' experiences and perceptions of their work, we wanted to learn more about their thoughts about the institutional environments within which they worked. It is important to note here that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the way that university-based researchers have been working in recent years. Many had their time on campus reduced, and it is perhaps only this academic year (2022–2023) when the situation is returning to pre-Covid-19 levels of in-person/on campus activity. The variation of experiences across institutions and departments may have affected the responses given in this section, and we have been mindful of this when interpreting the findings.

When asked about safety in their working environment, 89.2 per cent of respondents reported that they did feel physically safe. While clearly a high proportion, this means that ten per cent of respondents did not feel safe. For those with disabilities, only three-quarters (76.9 per cent) reported feeling physically safe compared with 92 per cent of non-disabled respondents. Minority ethnic respondents were less likely to report feeling physically safe (85 per cent compared with 90.1 per cent of white respondents). Women were more likely to disagree that they felt physically safe in their institution (4.9 per cent compared with 1.1 per cent of men).

No respondents chose to elaborate on these issues in the open-comment sections of the survey and so it is difficult to understand what specific physical safety concerns these respondents had. While Covid-19 and the institutional measures used to manage the virus may have influenced these figures, it is also possible that other physical threats (such as campus security, safety of buildings/resources, risk of sexual harassment, lack of accessibility for those with disabilities, and so on) could have been in respondents' minds when completing this section.

Respondents' feelings of psychological and mental safety in their institution were more varied. Nearly 60 per cent (59.7 per cent) reported that they felt psychologically/mentally safe at their university with a fifth (19.1 per cent) disagreeing with this statement, and a further 20.7 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing. In lower tier universities, over a quarter of respondents disagreed that they felt mentally/psychologically safe (26.1 per cent) compared with lower figures in middle tier (19.3 per cent) and higher tier universities (16.9 per cent). White respondents appeared more likely to feel psychologically safe than minority ethnic respondents (60.8 per cent agreeing compared with 55.6 per cent). Men reported feeling safer than women (68.8 per cent compared with 56.7 per cent). Those on research contracts tended to feel more psychologically safe (70 per cent) compared to those on teaching/research (57.1 per cent) or teaching-only contracts (61 per cent). These findings, and the variation between different groups of respondents, are concerning, with a significant minority of respondents indicating that their work environment was not conducive to their mental health and wellbeing. There are likely to be many potentially complex explanations for these responses, including factors such as the psychosocial environment, workload pressures, availability of resources and support, Covid-19 measures, as well as relationships with colleagues and students (as discussed in more detail in a recent report by Wray and Kinman, 2021).

Nearly half of respondents (49 per cent) reported feeling a strong sense of belonging to their institution and 53.5 per cent would recommend their university as a place to work. Across institution tiers, this feeling of belonging was similar; however, we see some variation in whether respondents would recommend their institution as a place to work. In elite/higher universities, 58.1 per cent reported that they would, compared with 47.8 per cent in middle tier universities and 40.1 per cent in the lower tier. Regionally, a sense of belonging seemed to be higher in the south of England/London (56.2 per cent) and lower elsewhere, ranging from 41.9 per cent in Scotland and 46 per cent in the Midlands and east of England. In Northern Ireland, the figure was 54.8 per cent but the number of respondents there was relatively low.

Respondents on teaching-only or teaching and scholarship contracts were more likely than those on research-only or teaching and research contracts to feel a strong sense of belonging (57.9 per cent compared with 42.8 per cent and 46.1 per cent respectively). Those recommending the institution as a

place to work were more likely to be on research-only (60.6 per cent) or teaching-only contracts (60.8 per cent), compared with those on research and teaching track contracts (49.1 per cent). Senior lecturers and readers were the least likely to recommend their institution as a place to work (45.7 per cent and 37.5 per cent) whereas lecturers (54.7 per cent) and professors (59.9 per cent) were more likely to do so.

Minority ethnic respondents were less likely to report feeling a strong sense of belonging to their university (44.4 per cent) compared with 50.3 per cent of white respondents. For those with disabilities, this difference was more pronounced with 39.9 per cent reporting feeling that they belonged compared with 51.4 per cent of those without a disability. Both minority ethnic and disabled respondents were less likely to recommend their university as a place to work than their white or non-disabled peers. Respondents who identify as being from a sexual minority were less likely to feel that they belonged at their university (41.8 per cent compared with 51.5 per cent of heterosexual respondents). They were also less likely to recommend their institutions (50 per cent compared with 54.9 per cent for those identifying as heterosexual).

Respondents commented on their experiences of working with others at their institution. Nearly four-fifths (78.7 per cent) were treated with 'kindness and support' by their colleagues, although this figure decreased for being treated with 'fairness and respect', with 65 per cent reporting that this was their experience. Over 20 per cent chose the middle option (neither agree nor disagree) for this question, perhaps suggesting variation of experiences depending on the situation and/or who was involved. Respondents indicate there was no difference in reports of kindness and support from their colleagues across different job roles. However, for fairness and respect, there was some variation: 71.5 per cent of respondents on research-only contracts agreed with this statement compared with 62.5 per cent on teaching/research and 68.3 per cent in teaching-only roles.

Minority ethnic respondents were slightly less likely to feel that they were treated with kindness and support: 75.6 per cent agreed with this statement compared with 80.1 per cent of white respondents. Women indicated that they were less likely to be treated with fairness and respect than men (64.2 per cent compared with 70.2 per cent) with higher disagreement on this item too. Respondents with disabilities were considerably more likely to disagree that they were treated with fairness and respect (21.6

per cent disagreed with this statement compared with 9.9 per cent of non-disabled respondents). Similarly, fewer respondents from sexual minorities felt they were treated with fairness and respect (60 per cent compared with 67.3 per cent of heterosexual respondents).

We asked respondents about their experiences of their institutions' support of two specific groups: those with caring responsibilities and ECRs. In both instances, over 40 per cent (42.4 per cent and 44.6 per cent respectively) indicated that their institution did support these groups. There were substantial numbers of respondents who felt that their institutions were not supportive of these two groups, or who neither agreed nor disagreed with the question. For some respondents, these responses will be based on personal experience whereas for others, their response may be informed by the experiences of others or by a more general understanding and awareness of cultures of care and support. In the open-comment sections of the survey, several respondents shared their views of their institutional environment and the support available. Their comments reflect a broad range of experiences of institutional environment and support, and the impact of these on their research work. We saw responses alluding to supportive institutions which have a positive developmental influence as well as institutions where individuals were experiencing extreme pressure and, in some cases, exploitation and alienation, as illustrated by the short excerpts below:

'I have found, despite all the casualisation and precarity, really supportive communities and networks within education research. By and large many of the more aggressive and hostile behaviours you can hear about across academia are not things I have directly experienced in education studies.'

'I think there is no one experience of being an education researcher. There is a huge range of circumstances. Some occupy deeply entrenched pockets of privilege; some havens of sanity and productivity; some find themselves in terrible circumstances, under extreme pressure, in precarious work, in exploitative working arrangements and situations that are deeply injurious to their mental health.'

One respondent, who was 'serving out' their time until retirement regarded the HE sector as having become increasingly 'corporatised' and focused on 'mak[ing] money' and 'flashy capital spending projects'. They thought that administrative and corporate

priorities pervaded and undermined the academic institutional climate:

‘This creates a climate in which I feel alienated, silenced, and prevented from doing work that I consider valuable.’

This range of both positive and negative experiences, connected to myriad HE and educational research issues, was reflected throughout the open responses, and highlighted both the variation across universities as well as the diverse experiences that respondents had even within the same institution or department/centre. We explore some of the issues and debates affecting the discipline in section 3.4.

Table 3.11
Research topic areas

	Number of responses (raw count)	Number of responses (weighted)
Initial teacher education, teaching workforce, professional learning	327	118.8
Teaching and learning; pedagogy	322	110.1
Social justice, inequalities and diversity	296	105.9
School structures and systems	206	66.4
Methods/ethics	193	64.2
Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and inclusive education	170	67.5
Higher Education	160	57.4
Theory and philosophy	158	54.1
Assessment and curriculum	155	51.4
Technology, digital, media	154	58.0
Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM)	147	57.0
Language development, linguistics, English as an additional language (EAL)	141	53.5
Health and wellbeing (inc. medical and mental health)	131	51.2
Education policy	118	38.3
Child development and early childhood	117	40.3

3.3 FOCI, METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

3.3.1 Topic areas and motivations

Topic areas

The first question within the ‘your research’ section asked respondents to ‘list up to five key words/phrases that describe the focus of [their] education research’. This was an open-response item which created rich data about current areas of interest in education research. Here, we give an overview of the frequency of interests across a range of thematic areas (table 3.11).

	Number of responses (raw count)	Number of responses (weighted)
English, reading, literacy	105	39.1
International contexts and development	101	31.5
Gender, feminism, sexuality	89	28.1
Drama, arts, music, creativity	86	30.5
Race, ethnicity	75	23.9
Voices, rights, citizenship education	74	25.4
History of education, humanities (history, geography, RE)	72	28.4
Leadership and management	68	24.7
Sustainability, environment, outdoor education	62	19.9
Vocational education, adult and work-based learning and skills	60	19.3
Education psychology	58	23.6
Academic development, writing, skills	58	20.0
Behaviour, discipline, exclusion, bullying	28	10.0
Socially vulnerable and/or harder-to-reach groups	21	28.1
Other	257	99.3

The responses show that the most common single topic theme was related to initial teacher education (ITE), the teaching workforce and professional learning, closely followed by research into teaching and learning, including pedagogy, and research relating to social justice, inequality and diversity. From here, substantial proportions of researchers focused on topics relating to school structures and systems, methods or ethics, SEND and inclusive education, HE, theory and philosophy, assessment and curriculum, technology, STEM and maths as well as health and wellbeing. Other common areas of research included language acquisition and development, and linguistics, as well as research into mental and physical health and wellbeing. Another large group was research categorised as ‘other’. This comprised a large number of diverse and specialist topics including youth and community-based research, research with parents as well as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Motivations

Respondents were asked an open question about their motivations for carrying out education research on the topics described above. Nearly 75 per cent of respondents (n=1,204 of 1,624 respondents) completed this question. Following thematic analysis of these responses, we have identified the following key areas relating to motivation:

- values and ideals – including an interest in social justice, inequalities, belief in knowledge creation and sharing
- personal and professional interests – relating to the content/focus of their research and specialisms of their current or prior job roles
- processes and outcomes relating to education research and job role – comments about necessity, requirements of the role, enjoyment of doing research, and opportunity for self-development and collaboration
- personal identity and history – relating to upbringing, identity as an academic or educator.

These categories broadly capture the wide range of motivations and experiences that emerged. Many respondents shared multiple motivating factors for their research. These often overlap or are interconnected. For this reason, the themes above are not mutually exclusive, but offer a simple framework and overview for reporting the range of catalysts and factors which respondents told us influenced their engagement with education research.

Values and ideals

By far the most common set of motivating factors related to respondents’ personal and social values and ideals. A commitment to social justice and equity emerged across many of the contributions, with respondents indicating a belief that education research could and should contribute to a fairer, more equal and more peaceful society. The motivators for this were associated with a range of research topics. As we noted above, many researchers were engaged with work which deals directly with issues relating to social justice and (in)equalities. Unsurprisingly, this substantive focus was also noted as an important motivator for doing the work. An interest in and commitment to social justice issues were also evident for respondents engaged in work focusing on other topic areas (such as pedagogy, learning science, school improvement, teacher education, linguistics).

Researchers indicated different ways in which concern for social justice manifested as a motivating factor. Some noted that through the outcomes and outputs of their research they could raise awareness, share knowledge, and contribute to practice and policy development. For others, the emphasis was on the *process* of doing research for contributing to social justice. ‘Giving a voice’ to research respondents and collaborators, particularly those from marginalised groups, was a recurring phrase.

Some researchers reflected on how this interest in social justice changed or developed over their time in academia, or how they were uncertain about the extent to which their work could affect positive change.

‘I guess there might still be some faint sense of social justice in doing research – for the greater good, but I have always been pretty sceptical about the extent that that actually happens. I suppose there is a more intrinsic motivation about “doing a job properly”, actually creating a product (a book or article) that will outlast me, adding to scholarship and knowledge.’

Another important factor relates to researchers’ commitment to knowledge production and use. Many noted the gaps in various fields or topic areas within which they were working, and the need for more information, evidence and research. They often reported being motivated by the need to create and produce this knowledge as an important intermediary step in the development or improvement of education practice and policy. For a smaller number of respondents, there was a focus instead on more academic or theoretical contributions to knowledge.

Comments such as the following were indicative of the kinds of aims being described by this group: *'add to the knowledge pool'*, *'contribute to knowledge communities'* and *'look at the social edges of knowledge...and trouble or unsettle bodies of academic and professional knowledge'*.

Personal and professional interests

For many respondents, the motivation to carry out education research was influenced by their personal or professional interests. These included factors such as interests developed due to personal or family circumstances, through previous study, and through their current or previous job roles. Previous careers as teachers or other education practitioners came through strongly here. Interests developed while engaged in education practice tended to have influenced further study (for example doctoral work) and this had continued into respondents' research careers. Some also noted the lack of research available in their area of professional expertise and cited this as a motivating factor for exploring the area further, as illustrated by this colleague:

'I was an EAL teacher for many years and was frustrated by the lack of decent research in the field and the lack, generally, of research literacy among my teaching colleagues. I wanted to help address that.'

Existing professional roles were also an influencing factor, particularly for respondents working in ITE or HE teaching and learning-focused positions (such as English for academic purposes). The nature of these roles meant that several respondents commented on the potential for research to inform their practice as university teachers, and to support the development of their colleagues and the students they worked with. These respondents were motivated by a desire to better understand the professional, pedagogical role that they are involved in, often viewing this as part of their own ongoing professional development.

Processes and outcomes relating to education research and job role

This theme relates to some of the more practical or instrumental processes and outcomes which motivate education research. While many respondents reported their high levels of interest and commitment to research, there was also a clear sense that doing this work was 'part of the job' and a 'contractual requirement'. The necessity to complete research and/or scholarship to secure promotion was noted by a small number of respondents.

For some, research was motivated by professional development needs or interests. The process of doing research or scholarship was highlighted by some as important, as it allowed them to develop new skills and knowledge, potentially useful in their current roles or in future roles. For others, the findings or outputs from the research motivated this aspect of their work.

Many respondents noted 'enjoyment' as an important motivator. They often stated this alongside other factors, but it was clear that the 'intellectual challenge', 'discovery' or 'curiosity' associated with conducting research were a source of considerable satisfaction and pleasure. This theme also emerged in the value that respondents associated with their role and their research, discussed further in the sections below.

Personal identity and history

Another theme under motivations refers to people's personal identities and histories. Some respondents shared details about their childhood, upbringing and social background; others indicated the importance of their national, linguistic, ethnic, religious, gender or other identities as motivating factors. For some, these related to issues of social justice, inequalities and inclusion highlighted in the section above. These respondents often noted that their experiences had informed and motivated them to bring about change through their research. Others reported how their personal identity or history had influenced their choice of research topics or their journey into research more generally. A small number commented that being a researcher was a core element of their identity, often working alongside other aspects of how they conceived their role and contribution, as illustrated by this respondent:

'My research has become a very important part of my identity and the areas I focus on have stemmed from my own school experiences and teaching English as well as from working with international contacts.'

In addition to the open question about research motivation, we asked several Likert questions on this issue (table 3.12). Respondents reported that their research was a source of satisfaction for them – 86.4 per cent agreed with this statement, with just 2.3 per cent disagreeing. When asked about their job more generally, 74.3 per cent agreed that they found their role rewarding, and given the generally positive response to the question about research, it is likely that for many, this element of their work contributed substantially to their overall view of their role.

Table 3.12
Attitudes relating to research and motivation(s)

		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	n/a
My research is a source of satisfaction to me	n	1,306	131	34	40
	%	86.4	8.7	2.3	2.7
I find my job rewarding	n	1,201	295	113	8
	%	74.3	18.2	7.0	0.5
There's little incentive for me to do research	n	270	371	817	47
	%	17.9	24.7	54.3	3.1
Most education research should be directly relevant and useful for stakeholders	n	830	422	234	8
	%	55.6	28.3	15.7	0.5
Education academics have enough freedom to pursue their own research agendas	n	623	563	284	24
	%	41.7	37.7	19.0	1.6

We examined the first two items (research as a source of satisfaction and finding the job rewarding) across the university tiers, finding no difference in the levels of agreement/disagreement. This highlights how meaningful most education researchers find their work, irrespective of the particular institution (or type of institution) where they are based. For the question about research as a source of satisfaction, we also found high agreement when we analysed the data by individual characteristics (that is job role, gender, disability, sexuality). One noteworthy exception, however, is that white respondents were less likely than their minority ethnic peers to gain satisfaction from their research (86.1 per cent compared with 91.8 per cent respectively).

In Scotland and Wales, respondents were slightly less likely to report that they found their job rewarding (68 per cent compared with 73 to 77 per cent in the other regions of the UK), highlighting the generally positive responses on this issue. For job roles, those on teaching-only contracts were most likely to agree that their job was rewarding (80.6 per cent compared with 72.5 per cent of those on teaching/research contracts and 68.2 per cent in research-only roles). Respondents with disabilities were less likely to agree that their job was rewarding (65.5 per cent compared with 76.5 per cent of non-disabled respondents) and were more likely to disagree with this statement.

Most respondents felt that there was an incentive for them to do research (54.3 per cent) but a quarter (24.7 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, and nearly a fifth (17.9 per cent) felt that there is little incentive to do research. In line with the discussions above, many respondents (55.6 per cent) believed that education research should be relevant and useful to stakeholders beyond academia. However, a substantial proportion of respondents did not feel that this necessarily had to be the case (43.9 per cent) and, presumably, felt that there are a broader range of aims and purposes associated with education research. Finally, we asked respondents about the freedom to pursue their own research agenda. Personal and professional interests were key motivators noted in the open question. The quantitative responses, however, suggest that many researchers do not believe that researchers in education have enough freedom to choose their research foci. Only 41.7 per cent of respondents agreed that there was enough freedom compared with 19 per cent who disagreed with this statement and 37.7 per cent who responded with the middle option. Across institutional tiers, we found a fairly similar picture, although there is slightly more agreement in elite/higher tier universities (43.6 per cent), compared with 40.9 per cent and 41.1 per cent in lower and middle tiers, respectively. Respondents in middle tier universities were more likely to disagree with this statement (24.8 per cent) than those in higher or lower tiers (16 per cent and 20.1 per cent).

3.3.2 Research activities and community

Research activities and funding

We asked respondents about the kind of research and academic citizenship activities they engaged with. The frequencies for these are reported in table 3.13.

Table 3.13
Respondents' reports of research-related activities
(with time frame)

Activity ^a	n	%
Peer-reviewed for academic journals (1yr)	1,085	66.9
Delivered external invited/guest lecture (1yr)	917	56.5
Applied for external research funding (3yrs)	812	53.9
Advisory board/group membership for research project (1yr)	707	43.6
Entered for the 2021 REF	667	44.3
Board/committee membership for an external organisation (1yr)	662	40.8
Received internal funding from institution (3yrs)	662	44.0
Leadership of academic network or interest group (1yr)	618	38.1
Received external grant income (3yrs)	605	40.2
External examination of PhD/EdD thesis (1yr)	575	35.5
Membership of journal editorial board (1yr)	540	33.3
Reviewed grant applications (1yr)	492	30.3
I have applied for research funding from a UKRI scheme (3yrs)	431	28.6

^a Items combined from two questions with n=1,506 and n=1,622. Percentages calculated against respective question response rates.

Our findings show that over half of survey respondents (53.9 per cent) had applied for external research funding in the previous three years, including 28.6 per cent who applied for funding from a United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) scheme (such as those run by ESRC, AHRC or Research England) within that timeframe. Four in ten respondents (40.2 per cent) reported that they had successfully received external funding in the previous three years and 44 per cent had received internal research funding from their institution (overall, 21.6 per cent had received *both* internal and external funding, 40.8 per cent had received one of these, and 37.5 per cent had received neither). It is noteworthy that less than half of our respondents (44.3 per cent) were entered for the REF in 2021, especially given that 62.4 per cent of our overall

sample (see section 2.3) were on teaching and research track contracts and thus would typically be expected to be entered.

Research outputs and engagement

For research publications and outputs, we found that journal articles (73.2 per cent), conference papers (68.1 per cent) and books or book chapters (61.4 per cent) were the most popular ways in which education researchers disseminate the findings from their activities (table 3.14). There was also a notable number of researchers engaging in proactive ways of sharing their outcomes using digital means, such as blogs and podcasts.

Table 3.14
Research outputs completed in the last three years

Activity	n	%
Peer-reviewed journal article	1,103	73.2
Conference paper	1,026	68.1
Book or book chapter	925	61.4
Researcher-led dissemination output (for example blogging, podcasts)	619	41.1
Policy/practice briefing or report	563	37.4
Creative output (for example films, exhibitions)	164	10.9
Software, apps or data dashboards	66	4.4
Other	81	5.4

Table 3.15 gives an overview of the engagement and dissemination activities that respondents reported. The most common activities included presenting research to practitioners (72.8 per cent); sharing research via social media channels (53.5 per cent); co-construction and collaboration with practitioners (45.8 per cent); presenting research to policy-focused audiences (35.1 per cent); and presenting to community, social or charitable groups (32.5 per cent). These figures suggest considerable engagement across the education research community, and clear attempts to share research with relevant stakeholders and the wider public.

Table 3.15
Research engagement and dissemination activities (at any time)

Activity	n	%
Presented my research to practitioners or a practice-focused audience	1,097	72.8
Shared my research via social media (for example Twitter)	805	53.5
Co-constructed/collaborated on research with practitioners	690	45.8
Presented my research to policymakers or policy-focused audience	529	35.1
Presented my research to community, social or charitable organisations	489	32.5
Co-constructed/collaborated on research with students/children/young people	434	28.8
Featured in/produced news media content (for example TV/radio comment, quote, feature or appearance)	381	25.3
Co-constructed/collaborated on research with community, social or charitable organisations	352	23.4
Presented my research to the general public	335	22.2
Co-constructed/collaborated on research with policymakers	240	15.9
Other	18	1.2

Over half of respondents (56.7 per cent) reported that they regularly disseminate their research at academic conferences and events, although the pandemic and subsequent cancellation of many conferences over this period may have affected the responses to this question. Respondents were also asked if they had attended any BERA conferences, events or other activities in the previous two years: 21.9 per cent reported that they had.

Professional bodies

The education research community appears to engage with a wide range of networks and education-related organisations or associations. Two-thirds of respondents (66.3 per cent) told us that they were a member of at least one education-related professional body or organisation. Nearly a third (32 per cent) reported being BERA members. A range of other academic and research-focused organisations such as SRHE (9.2 per cent) BELMAS (3.4 per cent) and SERA

(2.7 per cent) were also relatively well represented. A proportion of respondents also reported membership of more practice-focused or teaching associations for example Chartered College of Teaching (7.9 per cent) and Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) (7.7 per cent). Nearly 500 respondents reported that they were also members of other organisations. We have not reported each of these individually, but they include a range of groups relating to respondents' disciplinary backgrounds or interests (such as the British Psychological Society, British Sociology Association, British Association for Applied Linguistics) and various subject-related associations (for example The History Association, National Association of Teachers of English). Several international organisations were represented (for example American Education Research Association, Southern African Association of Research in Mathematics).

3.3.3 Context and support for research

This section reports on contexts and support connected to respondents' research. The findings here are related to the discussions about working conditions and institutional environment (see section 3.2.4). Here, the focus is more specifically on conditions and institutional support for planning, conducting and publishing research.

Despite the concerns above about the freedom that academics (in general) have for selecting their research foci, two-thirds of our respondents (66.7 per cent) felt that they were able to research topics of their own choosing. Only 11.1 per cent disagreed with this statement. However, it would be valuable to learn more about this lack of freedom in practice, and the extent to which it restricts respondents' aims and interests.

Most respondents reported not feeling under excessive pressure to generate research income, with just 13.7 per cent stating that this was the case in their department. A relatively low proportion of respondents (31 per cent) reported receiving support to apply for research income, with a similar figure (27 per cent) reporting that they were not supported in this way. We noted some interesting regional differences with just 17.6 per cent of respondents in Scotland receiving this support compared with 30 to 35 per cent in the English regions and 40.9 per cent in Wales. There was also a feeling of inadequate time to apply for research funding: just 13.7 per cent of respondents stated that they had enough time for this activity and 60.2 per cent stated that they did not. In lower tier universities, those feeling they had enough time to apply for funding was even lower

(eight per cent compared with 12.6 per cent in middle tier and 16.5 per cent in higher tier universities). In line with other questions about time, respondents mostly reported that they did not have sufficient time for writing for publication (58.6 per cent). In the lower tier, this was even more pronounced with just 10.3 per cent agreeing they had sufficient time for writing compared with 22.5 per cent in the higher tier and 20.3 per cent in the middle tier.

For support within their department or centre, two-thirds of respondents (66.8 per cent) reported that their line manager was supportive of their research, although just 32.6 per cent reported that they received good mentoring support to develop their research. Just one-fifth (20.9 per cent) of respondents agreed that there was enough time for professional development activities, compared with 54.1 per cent who believed that there was not. There was some variation by tiers with just 14.9 per cent of lower tier respondents agreeing that there was time for professional development compared with 21 per cent for middle and higher tiers. This aligns with a more general sense of the time for research activities being limited: only 25.3 per cent felt that there was sufficient time for research overall (11.4 per cent for those in lower tier institutions compared with 22.8 per cent in middle tier and 30.8 per cent in higher tier universities). These findings, and others above, reinforce the sense of research intensity in higher/middle tier universities (compared with that in lower tier institutions), and highlight the increased infrastructure and expectations in place to enable research activity to occur. For those working in lower tier universities, there appears to be less in the way of support and resources available for research.

When asked about collegiality and collaboration, responses were relatively mixed. Just over half (52.6 per cent) of respondents reported a positive, supportive environment *for research* in their department, but nearly a fifth (18.8 per cent) stated that this was not their experience. As with networks, engagement and dissemination activities, education researchers appear to be involved in collaboration. Nearly half of respondents stated that they regularly collaborate with colleagues in their institution (48.5 per cent) and across the UK (45.8 per cent), and nearly 40 per cent regularly work with international colleagues on research (38.9 per cent). Looking at the overlap between these figures, we found that 17.5 per cent agreed that they regularly collaborated with colleagues in their own institution *and* the UK *and* beyond the UK; 23.7 per cent agreed with two of these; 24.4 per cent agreed with one of these; and 34.4 per cent did not agree with

any of these (this included a mixture of ‘disagree’ and ‘neither agree nor disagree’ responses).

Responses indicate some concerns about the level of administrative support available for research activity. Just 21 per cent of respondents agreed that they had good access to this kind of support for their research. Respondents were generally more content with the availability of resources and technology for their research, although over half (51.4 per cent) did not agree that they have good access to these. Finally, when asked whether they felt supported for producing research and outputs to be submitted to the REF, respondents were fairly evenly split on this matter with 29.7 per cent stating that they were supported with this and 30.5 per cent stating that they were not. A further 28.4 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

3.3.4 Research methods, approaches and training

The survey asked respondents about their experience of using different research methodologies and methods in their *own research*. Questions about methods were grouped into four categories: research design; methods of data collection; sources of data; and approaches to data analysis. Respondents were encouraged to tick as many options as applied to them and, where relevant, they could also add additional approaches not included in the original list using an ‘other’ option with follow-on open-response boxes.

Research design and approaches

Responses to this question illustrate the richness and diversity of approaches to research in the education research community. The most widely used approach was the general category of ‘qualitative research methodologies’ (64.8 per cent) with case studies (58.2 per cent) and mixed methods research designs (54.8 per cent) also in widespread use. In addition, 31 per cent of researchers reported using theoretical and/or philosophical approaches to answering research questions, further reflecting the breadth of work across the discipline. Even research approaches that were less common such as experimental designs, longitudinal designs and arts-based and/or creative approaches, are being used by significant minorities of the research community, at 16.6 per cent, 16 per cent and 19.1 per cent respectively.

Table 3.16
Research designs and approaches used by respondents

Activity	n	%
Qualitative research methodologies	976	64.8
Case studies	877	58.2
Mixed methods research	818	54.3
Action research or practitioner inquiry	586	38.9
Systematic literature review	554	36.8
Participatory approaches	502	33.3
Philosophical and/or theoretical study	461	30.6
Non-experimental evaluation	384	25.5
International comparative study	345	22.9
Arts-based and/or creative approaches	287	19.1
Experimental design	250	16.6
Longitudinal designs	241	16.0
Archival (that is curation, maintenance, and/or analysis)	119	7.9
Other	114	7.6

Methods of data collection and sources of data

The vast majority of respondents reported using interviews to collect their data (86.2 per cent) while just over 70 per cent used questionnaires. That additional methods such as diary methods (20.8 per cent) also appear to be relatively well embedded is further evidence of the variety of approaches in use (table 3.17).

Table 3.17
Data collection methods used by respondents

Activity	n	%
Interviews	1,298	86.2
Questionnaires	1,067	70.8
Focus groups	949	63.0
Observations	852	56.6
Diary method	314	20.8
Behaviour/performance tests	238	15.8
Other	280	18.6

There was a large ‘other’ response to this section. Partly this was pre-empting the next bank of items (which we described as data sources). Many

respondents, for example, reported in the open-response option accompanying the ‘other’ response that they collected administrative data.

Respondents were also asked about the sources of data that they used. The focus was on data from secondary sources, both ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’. The results show that existing data were widely used with about two-thirds of respondents reporting that they used some form of numeric secondary data and almost half indicating that they used one or more types of ‘qualitative’ secondary data including those from audio and/or visual sources (see table 3.18).

Table 3.18
Data collection sources used by respondents

Source	n	%
Administrative secondary data sources (for example National Pupil Database, School Workforce Census, HESA data, other government statistics)	517	34.3
Survey-based secondary data sources (for example cohort studies)	386	25.6
Qualitative secondary data (for example mass observation archives, life history data)	282	18.7
Text-based sources (for example documents)	928	61.6
Audio and/or visual sources (for example films, paintings, voice recordings, photos)	465	30.9
Big data (for example machine learning, social media interactions data)	92	6.1
Other	577	38.3

Methods of analysis

The final set of questions about methodological expertise focused on approaches to data analysis (table 3.19). The most widely used approach was thematic analysis (80 per cent of respondents reported using this technique) which is unsurprising given the widespread use of research designs that take a ‘qualitative’ approach to data collection and work with interviews and text. There was also a breadth of expertise in different forms of textual analysis with around one-third of respondents reporting expertise in each of discourse, narrative and content analysis. For numeric forms of data analysis, the findings appear to be reasonably consistent in the different levels of complexity of techniques that respondents use, suggesting that, in general, about one-third of

the sample used some form of ‘quantitative’ analysis. The proportion falls as one moves from basic to more advanced use of quantitative methods: descriptive univariate analysis, 36.2 per cent; descriptive bivariate analysis, 30.8 per cent; inferential statistical testing, 30.7 per cent; and multivariate statistical modelling, 20.5 per cent. A basic-advanced gradient in the application of qualitative approaches to analysis is harder to capture within a small number of defined categories in this way, but we would expect the levels of expertise and sophistication to vary within the approaches included in table 3.19.

Table 3.19
Approaches to data analysis used by respondents

Activity	n	%
Thematic analysis	1,205	80.0
Descriptive univariate analysis	545	36.2
Narrative analysis	506	33.6
Content analysis	504	33.5
Discourse analysis	478	31.7
Descriptive bivariate analysis	464	30.8
Inferential statistical testing	463	30.7
Grounded theory	346	23.0
Multivariate statistical modelling	309	20.5
Conversation analysis	167	11.1
Meta-analysis	135	9.0
Corpus linguistic analysis	61	4.0
Computation analysis	38	2.5
Other	89	5.9

Approaches that use different forms of computation analysis are represented but appear to be relatively uncommon. Similarly, only six per cent of respondents reported using ‘big data’ sources such as machine learning and social media interactions. One respondent shared their view about the limited engagement with these techniques:

‘I find it difficult to understand the current emphasis on qualitative research in education. The greater use of computing in data analysis means that it is now possible to undertake a quantitative analysis of qualitative, non-numeric, textual data (via topic modelling). It is disappointing to see that so few researchers seem to be engaging with these new techniques.’

The issue of the ‘quantitative/qualitative’ methodological divide hinted at above is an important one and we consider this in more detail in the sections below.

Comparison of research methods over time

In order to provide a context for the current findings and to offer some reflection on how research approaches may have changed over recent time, table 3.20 compares approaches reported by respondents to those who responded to the RCBN survey in 2002 (see section 1.2). While this is an imperfect comparison – the focus and reach of the two studies are different – there are some interesting variations in the data over time. For example, interviews and questionnaires remain popular instruments for data collection and the analysis of numeric secondary data and systematic reviews continue to be widely used. On the other hand, approaches that appear to be less widely reported now include case studies, observation, diary methods as well as experimental and evaluation research designs. The data do not tell us why there has been such variation over time but do suggest that developing a more detailed understanding of the distribution of research methods expertise, including the need for future skills development (see below), might be a future area of focus for BERA.

Table 3.20
Comparison of research method use between RCBN and BERA surveys (2002–2022)

	RCBN survey 2002* (%)	BERA survey 2022 (%)
Interview	92	86
Case study	81	58
Observation	80	57
Questionnaires	75	71
Secondary numeric sources	65	60
Group interview	65	63
Evaluation	56	25
Action research	51	39
Systematic reviews and meta-analysis	49	
Systematic reviews		36.8
Meta-analysis		9.0

	RCBN survey 2002* (%)	BERA survey 2022 (%)
Diaries	46	21
Experiment	41	17
Longitudinal study	39	16
Scales/psychometry	35	16
Visual/sound source	17	31
Historical/archive	13	8

* Gorard et al. (2004) n=514.

Developing research skills

The importance of methods in producing high-quality research was echoed by respondents, 87 per cent of whom agreed that knowledge and skills about method were at least as important as topic expertise. In addition, there was a strong appetite among researchers to develop their expertise in research design and/or methods: only six per cent of the sample disagreed that they would like to develop their skills in this area, while almost 1,000 respondents (67 per cent) agreed that they wanted to improve their methodological skills. When asked to reflect on the level of their own formal training in research design and methods, half rated their levels as ‘limited or none’ or ‘basic’, with only 12 per cent considering their training to be of ‘excellent’ quality. This suggests that a focus on providing ongoing support for researchers to develop their methodological skills might be a future area of development for BERA.

Respondents were asked about the areas where skills development would be welcome. Responses varied, ranging from an interest in developing skills in undertaking ethnographic research, systematic reviews, and arts-based methods, to being supported to develop expertise in using digital methodologies and social network analysis. A substantial proportion of respondents would welcome some form of ‘quantitative’ or statistical training, ranging from ‘quants for beginners’ to more advanced computational methods. Despite investment in developing expertise in ‘quantitative’ methods among social scientists, notably through the Q-Step initiative, there appears to be continuing demand for support to develop these skills.

The role of ‘method’ in education research

When asked whether education research has its own specific set of methods that go beyond those from cognate disciplines such as psychology and sociology, half (49.7 per cent) of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement while only 16 per cent disagreed. That around half of education researchers agreed with the statement invites further questions about what a discipline-specific set of research methodologies might be and where this might sit in relation to the interdisciplinary work central to much research in education. Also of interest are the implications that a specific set of education methods might have for developing and delivering research methods training at postgraduate level as well as for early- and later-career researchers. Considering the place of method in the discipline of education could be an area for BERA to explore, drawing for example on the work featured in Wyse et al. (2017).

A perennial methodological issue that preoccupied some respondents was the ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ divide in education research. While some (for example Bryman, 2006) have argued that the advent of mixed methods research has meant that the ‘paradigm wars’ are over and there is no longer any need to ‘pick sides’, some of the open responses to our questions indicated a continuation of a type of ‘paradigm war’, with researchers who position themselves both as substantially ‘quantitative’ or ‘qualitative’ feeling that their approach is undervalued. These quotations represent the connection of methods with professional, institutional and disciplinary identities and concerns respectively:

‘I am a quantitative researcher and I teach research methods at undergraduate and postgraduate level. I’m appalled by the limited importance attached to quantitative methods in education degrees. Education graduates are ignorant of quantitative methods and won’t be able to read the results of quantitative research in their lives as teachers.’

‘The more qualitative methodologies and approaches adopted are not always valued by those who undertake large-scale replicable studies. The push in Russell Group universities is for large-scale projects.’

‘I come from a psychology background and am primarily a quantitative researcher. This still puts me at odds with other education researchers in some situations. There have been times when I feel I’ve been really discriminated against because of my research approach – in some areas there is real hostility to quantitative research.’

Although acknowledging that research that is relevant to the field of education also takes place outside university education departments (within other disciplines, government departments, the National Foundation for Educational Research and so on), our findings provide data about the types of methods that education researchers use. An eclectic range of approaches is undertaken together with a breadth of expertise and knowledge that covers many aspects of research design, data collection and analysis. Researchers use a broad range of skills and there is little evidence of a skills gap or deficit in expertise. While more researchers reported that they adopted ‘qualitative’ approaches to data collection, significant numbers adopted ‘quantitative’ approaches, and mixed method research as well as theoretical and philosophical approaches are also well embedded. This reflects the diversity of the discipline.

3.4 CURRENT ISSUES AND DEBATES

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were presented with an optional section which invited them to reflect upon some of the important, complex issues associated with contemporary education research (and researchers). As a stimulus for this, we presented respondents with the six formal processes identified by Boyle et al. (2021):

1. Cultures of performativity and accountability.
2. Research impact agenda (including RAE and REF).
3. Research funding and its influence on the type of research that is conducted.
4. Debates about the quality and purpose of education research.
5. Evidence-informed policy and practice, and the ‘what works’ agenda.
6. Professional bodies (for example BERA, SERA) and how they shape the work of education researchers.

We asked respondents to write about any of these issues or debates, or others that they wanted to share their views on. Below we outline the findings and make links with closed survey questions on these topics.

In total 352 respondents answered the open question (a response rate of approximately 22 per cent from the overall survey sample). Although a relatively small and self-selecting group, the perspectives shared provide valuable insights into some of the key issues affecting UK education researchers and their work. The openness of this question also provided respondents with an opportunity to share richer, more detailed

responses on these topics than they had been able to do elsewhere in the survey.

Table 3.21 summarises the themes and the number of responses relating to each. In addition to the six formal structures (numbers one to six), we have also added further themes (seven to nine present in the data, and which are important to highlight). Themes and topics are discussed in conjunction, to recognise the often interconnected and overlapping nature of many of these issues.

Table 3.21
Current issues and debates: Themes and number of responses

Theme	No. responses	Formal structure/ process identified in Boyle et al. (2021) scoping review
Research impact agenda (inc. RAE and REF)	74	Yes
Debates about the quality and purpose of education research	63	Yes
Research funding and its influence on the type of research that is conducted	60	Yes
Working conditions (including workload, precarity, organisational and university cultures)	60	No
Cultures of performativity and accountability	54	Yes
Evidence-informed policy and practice, and the ‘what works’ agenda	35	Yes
Professional bodies (for example BERA) and how they shape the work of education researchers	18	Yes
Initial teacher education (ITE)	10	No
Society and systems	6	No
Other	36	n/a

3.4.1 Responses relating to prompted themes

Performativity, impact and research funding

First, we discuss the two themes of cultures of performativity and accountability and the research impact agenda and funding. For the first theme (cultures of performativity and accountability), the comments tended to focus on contemporary HE contexts in the UK rather than education research environments specifically. Nevertheless, these wider contexts appear to be significant for influencing how education researchers feel about their settings and about the work they (wish to) conduct. Comments about performativity, research impact and funding were predominantly couched in negative terms. Respondents reported concerns about institutional and national audit cultures and exercises, suggesting that these hampered academic freedoms, quality of research and opportunities for collegial working. These two excerpts illustrate this:

‘Performativity has been extremely damaging to the research environment. It feels like research has to be justified to those who have little understanding or interest in the area using an obscure (often irrelevant) set of metrics... While the RAE and REF have been useful in gaining a general understanding of education research, the UoA necessarily bring into question any other research which does not seem to align to these units.’

‘Cultures of performativity and accountability negatively impact educational research. The emphasis on individual achievement is a limiting factor which leads to a lack of progress in key areas. Collegiality is undervalued and fostering team work is nowhere near the top level of skills in our academic framework for promotion. The whole framework is built on individual strengths and an ill-defined concept of “leadership”. The institution as a whole is driven almost entirely by the bottom line and all decisions are related ultimately to the spreadsheet.’

Respondents noted competitive work environments as a negative consequence of performance and accountability measures and funding allocation processes. For some, this was associated with individual competition (that is the need to publish, gain funding, receive recognition for research within their departments) in order to build their reputations or secure promotion. Others were more troubled by competition across the sector, highlighting university rankings and league tables as particularly problematic.

Teaching was mentioned numerous times. The need to attract, satisfy and retain students in order to sustain or boost the department’s or university’s performance rankings was mentioned by a number of respondents. The pressures associated with this, and with performativity and accountability across the academy generally, were sometimes linked with reduced time and energy for research activities.

Overall, there were very few positive comments about accountability and impact agendas within HE. These aligned with some of the views in other parts of the section, and the response to a question about whether REF results are a valid measure of the quality of HE education research. Only 13.1 per cent of respondents agreed with this statement, with a further 44.3 per cent selecting neither agree/disagree, and 39.7 per cent disagreeing. In the open section, a small number of respondents, however, explained that, in their view, the REF has ‘raised the profile of educational research’. In their view, the relatively recent emphasis on impact has the potential to support researchers’ desire to make positive change in their field, and to increase the status of education research too:

‘I really do feel that many of us working in educational research are motivated by, even in a small way, making a difference in the world. The impact agenda rebalances priorities in that before it came along, the incentive was in the opposite direction. This also used to play into some of the more distasteful kinds of academic snobbery and hierarchy of disciplines, where education as a “soft applied” subject often falls low down the pecking order.’

Comments about the funding landscape referred to various different issues including the amount of funding available for education research; views about funding priorities; the complexity and challenges associated with applying for external funding grants; and concerns about inequalities and unfairness in gaining grant funding. For many, the current funding environment has contributed to a sense of competitiveness; that there is a very limited ‘pot’ of money available; and that this is likely to be allocated to those from more prestigious universities, with established research reputations and/or for certain types of research (for example ‘what works’). A few more experienced researchers noted the shift in the funding environment, including the reduction of some types of funding opportunities (for example fellowships from particular organisations, availability of EU grant schemes).

Some respondents commented on the prioritisation of certain research agendas or foci via available funding opportunities, while others are marginalised. There is overlap with the ‘what works’ agenda theme (discussed below) and there is a funding bias towards this kind of work. Some respondents felt strongly that the relatively recent emphasis on ‘what works’ has been detrimental to other kinds of research, and has made it harder for researchers to gain funding if they wish to pursue alternative topics or foci. This was supported by a closed question earlier in the survey that found that only 9.2 per cent of respondents thought that the process of allocating external research funding was fair.

Applying for research funding was seen as challenging and complex. One colleague wrote about the need to ‘demystify’ funding procedures, particularly for ECRs. Others criticised the amount of time needed for lengthy funding applications which have very low rates of success, often stating that they had to complete these proposals in addition to their standard workload allocation. A couple of potential solutions to some of the funding issues were suggested to promote fairer allocation of funding, including a call for ‘a basic research income for most research, allocated to each researcher’. Another respondent suggested a two-step approach with funding bodies first assessing grant applications for relevant eligibility/quality criteria, and then randomly allocating grants to the remaining applications. This is an approach currently being trialled by the British Academy on its Small Grants programme (Swain, 2022).

Quality and purpose of education, including ‘what works’ research

Boyle et al. (2021) refer to ‘heated debates’ about the quality and purpose of education research that emerged in the mid-to-late 1990s, and centred on relationships between research, policy and practice. The comments in our survey indicate that, for many in the discipline, these questions and issues are still relevant (see also section 3.3.4). Methodological schisms were frequently at the heart of these comments, echoing some of the ‘paradigm war’ discourses that have continued across the discipline in recent years. For some respondents, there were complaints of too much ‘quantitative research’ (often referred to in relation to the current development of ‘what works’ approaches); for others, ‘qualitative research’ was too prevalent, and was critiqued for its small scale and limited potential for impact on practice and policy.

‘...UK education research is often ideologically driven and irrationally averse to evidence-based policy or anything to do with the quantitative measurement of educational outcomes.’

‘I am concerned that larger-scale, quantitative studies are favoured over smaller-scale and qualitative research designs by funding bodies...’

While for some respondents, there appeared to be a relatively simple ‘qualitative/quantitative’ divide and a bias against one or the other, for others, there was a more complex inter-relationship between types of research, methods used and intended purposes. These were often connected with assumptions or perceptions relating to status and quality of research too. Some respondents commented on the perceived emphasis and prioritisation of larger-scale studies which involve collecting and analysing quantitative data. There is a sense that this research is viewed as more rigorous and ‘useful’ by funders, policymakers, practitioners and universities (in terms of REF quality and impact measurement) and yet it does not align with views about purpose and values associated with education research held by some researchers:

‘The representation of RCTs as the “gold standard” particularly for education research is concerning. Quite apart from whether or not RCTs have validity in the social sciences, representing (and funding) it as “the” way to do education research works to background and even eliminate other ways of thinking about and doing education research. Narrowing the field in this way means that we potentially miss out on other insights. Having only one way of legitimately doing things is always dangerous.’

‘As a researcher with a background in the arts and humanities, and who uses methodological approaches grounded in them, I feel there are limited audiences, output venues and possibilities for dialogue. Research which presents “findings” or appears to provide easy answers to complex questions seems to be valued above the kind of work that I do... I do not believe that the “what works” agenda, or approaches such as RCTs are useful or valid in a field such as ours.’

Another perspective on the debates around quality and purpose centres around the role of practitioner/practice-focused research in education. A small number of respondents believed that education research can be ‘too theoretical and detached from reality’ and that the applied nature of the subject means that it is important to engage closely with

approaches that not only inform practice generally, but that enables practitioners (for example teachers and teacher educators) to develop and improve their practice within their current settings. In this sense, research is perceived as a form of enquiry, an element of professional development which can have ‘real life’, practical implications, even if on a relatively small scale. These two respondents shared their experiences of working in this area, commenting on the lack of value that they think is afforded to practitioner enquiry research:

‘Practice and case studies are not valued...It has taken almost my whole career for my own practice-based research to finally be entered for the REF, although its outcomes have been used worldwide by practitioners for many years.’

‘We have set up a departmental group called PRAIS (PRActitioner Inquiry Support) because of our frustration that researching practice or pedagogies is not “real” research.’

The issue of research publication also emerged. This topic was also discussed in the early part of the survey where respondents were asked whether peer review is an effective process for quality-assuring educational research: 64.5 per cent agreed that it was. The survey did not explore the relationship between quality and quantity of education research. This rarely came up as an issue in the open reflections. In the open comments section, however, a few researchers focused on the quantity aspect of peer-review publications and commented that there is ‘too much’ research being published in academic journals and that its quality is not good enough. Some reflected that this might be connected to the accountability and performativity measures described above, while others suggested that the peer-review process does not necessarily guarantee quality:

‘HE education researchers, as well as the publishers of peer-review articles, should pay more attention to the quality of the papers they send for publication. Currently it is more about quantity, rather [than] quality.’

Further study would be of value to explore how the research community views, values and shares academic knowledge, and the extent to which ‘quantity’ and ‘quality’ may be in competition.

Professional bodies

A total of 61.7 per cent of respondents reported being a member of at least one professional body,

organisation or association, with approximately half being BERA members. There were relatively few comments about these professional bodies in the open section of the survey (n=18). Nevertheless, the reflections are helpful for understanding perspectives of the role of professional bodies and the directions that some researchers would like them to take. Three respondents noted the value of professional bodies in ‘providing networking, funding, education and publication opportunities’.

Some respondents were less positive, and described experiences and perspectives relating to: domination by certain groups or factions; the extent to which they are democratically led and organised; a lack of collaboration with other organisations such as professional or practitioner-focused groups; whether the organisations are modern and ‘relevant’ or ‘outdated’ and ‘inward looking’; and their reputation across the wider research community. There were a few suggestions for development including the need for professional organisations to have a more active, critical role and voice in policymaking; supporting practitioner collaboration; and offering professional development and training in research methods.

3.4.2 Other responses

Other topics included brief (and sometimes humorous or angry) comments about education research or individuals’ roles and detailed insights about other interests and foci (such as ethics or decolonisation). We do not have space here to discuss all of these in detail, but we have elected to discuss two of the more prominent themes in further depth (ITE, and society and systems). Both areas align closely with some of the broader issues described above, and also point to some important wider questions about our place in society as education researchers.

Working conditions

A key theme, which recurred across the survey, was working conditions. For some, the survey was an opportunity to reiterate, extend or present new comments about the challenges of their workloads, and the negative implications of these on their ability to conduct the research that they want to. The comments below echo the exhaustion and frustration felt by some respondents:

‘Honestly, I am too tired now to seriously engage with any of the themes listed here. My priority is getting through each day, and hopefully managing to write an article and a bid by the end of the year. I am finding working in HE exhausting.’

'If I had more time I would love to reflect on the state of the discipline. The increased workload has a detrimental impact on the much-needed reflexivity that ensures the quality of a discipline.'

For a group of ECRs (or those who had recently been ECRs) on precarious contracts, job insecurity was an issue. One respondent noted that 'I can't speak directly to many of the issues and debates' because she did not have a stable post within a single institution. For her, the topics relating to the wider sector and education research more generally were less concerning than the urgent need to secure a role. Another provided a slightly different perspective, noting how precarious work affects these other areas:

'...as an ECR on a series of casualised contracts the precarity of HE employment...feels like a major issue which intersects with many of the problems above. The lack of security is very destabilising for individual careers and the discipline altogether, with the separation and division of research work, either across institutions or into the researchers' own independent time in order to maintain a publication profile while on teaching-only contracts.'

Some respondents commented about the organisational culture of HE and the influence of this on their research. These reinforced discussions above relating to inequalities and the lack of diversity and opportunities for some groups of academics, including women and those from minority ethnic backgrounds (see section 3.1.1).

Initial teacher education (ITE)

Ten respondents used this section of the survey to reflect on the role and status of ITE and its evolving place within universities. Some thought that the development of the 'what works' field in England and recent UK government reforms within ITE have reduced their freedoms in terms of the research that they are able to share and use with trainee teachers. Some also felt that these shifts in policy and practice do not adequately recognise the role or value of research conducted by ITE professionals. This colleague, for example, wanted to highlight the:

'...very specific situation of those of us involved in ITE, where the new curriculum and regulatory powers, including the new re-accreditation process, [are] being used to severely limit the curriculum in ITE and teacher development per se... this will have dire consequences both for the content of research relevant to ITE in the widest sense (and possibly also funding streams), but also in terms of the inclination of research-active HE colleagues involved in ITE to carry out research in this hostile environment. In turn, of course, this will impact on the quality of training on offer to those new teachers entering the profession and to teachers within the profession in their ongoing development.'

These ten respondents point to the particular circumstances which affect their roles and opportunities for engaging with and conducting research. While they acknowledge the other issues and debates presented as part of this question, there are also distinct challenges that are affecting the provision of ITE, and in turn, the role of education research within this.

Society and systems

Comments relating to this theme placed education research within a broader international or national context, and tended to refer to political and societal issues such as globalisation, poverty, climate change, democracy and the purposes or state of education systems. Respondents emphasised the need to conduct education research that can make positive change within society and that takes place in university settings where promoting citizenship and human flourishing are core aims. These colleagues called for a resistance of some of the performativity and accountability measures discussed above, with some arguing for much more robust action on the challenges facing our world today:

'The topics listed above pale into insignificance in light of the serious global and societal challenges facing the world and yet we are content to worry about immediate albeit minor matters rather than galvanising to act on more monumental issues.'

'This can be changed if the educational research community (which really contains fine, caring professionals) can find some solidarity to support research for greater environmental, racial and gender justice. This IS educational research too, and spills into schools, HEIs, communities and informal learning events.'

When asked whether they felt that HE education research makes a valuable contribution to society, over three-quarters (78.7 per cent) of respondents agreed with this statement. Only 2.4 per cent disagreed. This suggests that, despite the challenges faced by individuals, departments and universities, nationally and internationally, the majority of education researchers believe that the work they and their colleagues undertake is worthwhile and contributes positively to wider society. How we harness and develop these contributions further (while also retaining the personal and professional satisfaction and value discussed above) is an important topic for consideration and debate.

4. Discussion

The findings above provide a detailed picture of the experiences and perspectives of education researchers and the HE landscape(s) in which they work. The survey has captured the diverse and dynamic nature of the discipline, providing new insights at individual, institutional, sectoral and national levels. Our findings extend our understanding of some of the complex factors and contexts that influence the identities of education researchers in HE and their work. They contribute to our developing knowledge of the state of the education discipline today. Reading these results alongside earlier survey-based studies (sections 1.1 and 1.2) our findings point to several important characteristics of education research. Some of these appear to be perennial characteristics and problems for the discipline; some suggest areas and potential for positive change; and some present an urgent moral case for significant reform. In this section we discuss the findings and their implications, alongside relevant work in this area.

4.1 EDUCATION RESEARCHERS – AN ‘ATYPICAL’ HE WORKFORCE?

University-based education research is characterised by a workforce who have entered HE from a diverse range of backgrounds. The majority of researchers have had previous careers, such as in school teaching or health/social care, and have sometimes started their current role in the middle or later stages of their working life. There is a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds and qualifications among education researchers. Most do not hold an undergraduate degree in education (or the social sciences) and many (42 per cent) have their highest qualification – usually a Masters or doctoral qualification – from subject areas other than education. Our findings suggest that there is not a single, linear route for becoming an education researcher. They have different entry points to the profession; they undertake varied roles within HE; and they belong to, or move into, a range of specialisms within the discipline and beyond it.

There is variation in the amount of time and resources that researchers have allocated for research, with some engaged on teaching-focused contracts, some on teaching and research tracks, and others working primarily on research. Many have additional

administration, leadership and management roles, and a significant proportion are studying for further qualifications while engaged with their academic positions. The educational and career trajectories of researchers are diverse and often non-linear, and this is reflected in the vast range of topic areas and issues being examined, and the inter/multidisciplinary nature of the work being carried out. Education research is concerned with myriad questions and challenges, including those relating to practice, policy, systems, theory and philosophy, and people from a range of educational and disciplinary backgrounds work in the discipline.

This diversity of interests and focus suggests an array of expertise and specialisms, and a richness in the range of voices, skills and experiences to be drawn upon. It also, however, raises questions about whether there is a sense of unity across the discipline and whether those working in the various areas or subdisciplines can connect and cohere in order to achieve shared aims and interests, and to foster a shared sense of identity. Over 40 years ago, Dooley et al. (1981) wrote about the ‘hybrid’ and ‘cumulative’ nature of the education research workforce, arguing that ‘without some greater level of academic coherence and comparability, the implication that almost any intelligent person can swiftly turn his hands to educational research is...likely to undermine the quality, esteem and influence of the research, and hence its “political” strength to attract resources’ (Dooley et al., 1981, p. 75). The extent to which such unity is possible, necessary or desirable in today’s context is an important area to consider, and may have implications for the future shape and status of the discipline.

Despite diversity across some aspects of the education research workforce, our findings also show the under-representation of various groups. In line with recent work by Belluigi et al. (2023) our survey highlighted relatively low numbers of researchers from ethnic minority backgrounds and with non-UK nationality, compared with the wider HE sector in the UK. Our study is not able to provide comprehensive answers as to why these groups are under-represented within education although some experiences of marginalisation and exclusion were reported in the open-response sections of the questionnaire, pointing

to unfavourable working conditions that may influence the decision to continue working in those roles or settings.

It is also possible that the common ‘pipeline’ between school teaching and working in university education departments is, at least in part, a determining factor of this under-representation. Our findings show that 71 per cent of respondents previously worked in school teaching or other roles within the education sector before beginning their career in HE. Recent research by Tereschenko et al. (2020) has documented the disproportionately low numbers of minority ethnic school teachers in the UK (nine per cent (DfE, 2023)) and the limited success in recruiting and retaining them. A smaller proportion of minority ethnic teachers working in the sector is likely to result in fewer participating in doctoral programmes and/or entering university-based roles in education departments.

University education departments tend to include higher proportions of women than men, compared with the HE sector more generally (Belluigi et al., 2023; Mills et al., 2006), reiterated in our survey with 65 per cent of respondents identifying as women. Again, this may partly reflect the school teaching workforce, in which in England, for example, 75.5 per cent of teachers are women (DfE, 2022). However, echoing Belluigi et al.’s (2023) study, we found evidence of proportionally fewer women progressing to the highest academic positions in education (professors). Across the other job roles, the gender split is approximately two-thirds women and one-third men. At the level of professor, this gap is substantially reduced with 46.1 per cent of roles occupied by men and 50.9 per cent occupied by women. Women in education (as in other sectors and disciplines) are more likely to be working part-time and to have significant caring responsibilities. Our qualitative findings indicate the significant barriers and challenges to progression that these factors can create.

Age also emerges as an important characteristic for consideration. Education tends to be an ‘older’ discipline in relation to the age of its workforce, reflecting the second-career nature of education-related work in HE. This experience should be recognised and valued, but it also brings challenges, particularly for those who have not engaged with research activities prior to joining HE. Our findings indicate that further support and development could be valuable for those wishing to enter education research without having prior professional roles in the field. There may also be scope for expanding and

extending the pipeline for younger research-focused education academics through dedicated education ‘pathways’ (such as education-specific doctoral opportunities or postgraduate education research internships) from wider academic disciplines studied at undergraduate or Masters level (for example economics, sociology, philosophy, psychology).

Our survey findings suggest that the HE education research workforce is, for some characteristics, inclusive and representative of the wider HE sector. This includes higher proportions of those who are women, who have disabilities or caring responsibilities, who were first in their family to attend university, who have entered HE later in life, and who do not hold doctoral qualifications. While this representation can be seen as positive, there is also evidence that the experiences of working within university-based education can be very challenging for these groups, and that there are concerns and barriers which may prevent them flourishing. Our findings also indicate that many education researchers do not fit the stereotype of the ‘traditional’ or ‘proper’ academic (Boyle et al., 2021; Skelton, 2004). Yet, there is limited research relating to the experiences and trajectories of those from non-traditional backgrounds or who are working in HE as a second career (Boyle et al., 2021). This is despite the important implications that these characteristics are likely to have on individual, institutional and sectoral levels in the type, quality, and foci of research conducted. For demographic factors such as ethnicity, there is significant under-representation within the workforce. This requires urgent attention along with closer analyses of the experiences of these researchers, and improved development and evaluation of sectoral approaches to tackling marginalisation and exclusion.

4.2 A COMMON HE EXPERIENCE?

A key element of our analysis has been the extent to which experiences vary by institution, in personal characteristics, and between education research and the wider HE sector. Our results suggest that there are both common and contrasting experiences.

Our findings indicate that across the sector and regions of the UK, there appear to be many ‘common’ aspects to the experiences of education researchers in HE. From a positive perspective, we found that education researchers tend to find their work rewarding and gain considerable satisfaction from their research. They tend to feel supported and respected by their

colleagues, and most feel that they have enough freedom to research the issues and topics that they are interested in and care about. Around half of respondents feel a strong sense of belonging to their institution and would recommend it as a place to work. We also identified common concerns relating to challenges and pressures of workload, performative cultures and accountability measures, and uncertainty in HE. A substantial minority of respondents reported that they did not feel mentally/psychologically safe in their institution.

There was variation in experience within the sector. For opportunities and support for research and career progression, respondents at lower tier universities reported less favourable experiences compared with their peers in middle or higher tier institutions. In lower tier universities (Boliver, 2015), there generally appears to be less time and fewer resources and support available for development and participation in research-related activities (such as writing, publishing, applying for funding, mentoring). But respondents also reported that there was also less pressure to publish and gain external funding in these universities. Respondents thought that there was more likely to be a clear research strategy in higher tier institutions, with a declining gradient for middle through to lower tier universities. Respondents in higher tier institutions were clearer about their career trajectory. These findings reinforce our understanding of inequalities between different types of university within the UK and the varying experiences of education researchers depending on where they work.

The experiences of individual education researchers in our survey varied according to their background and personal characteristics. Other research from the SOTD initiative (Boyle et al., 2021; Belluigi et al., 2023) has highlighted concerns about inequalities experienced by some groups of education researchers, and a number of these are reflected in the survey data too. On several issues, our findings point to concerning large proportions of respondents who were having negative experiences of working and researching in HE. Women, minority ethnic staff, those who identify as being from a sexual minority and those with disabilities or impairments were less likely to feel that they achieve a good work-life balance or are supported and respected by colleagues. Those from minority ethnic backgrounds or from sexual minorities were less likely to feel a sense of belonging in their institution, and those with disabilities reported feeling considerably less physically and psychologically safe than other respondents. A lack of job security was a significant concern for

those on research-only contracts, who also felt much less certain about their future career trajectories and opportunities. This variation in the sector highlights the fact that some academics appear to have a very positive experience of their work while for others, it is much more challenging.

These findings are perhaps not surprising given what we already know from the growing literature surrounding inequalities within the UK HE workforce (see for example Arday, 2022a; Arday 2022b; Bhopal, 2016; Brown, 2020; Crew, 2021; Rollock, 2021). There is an important question about the extent to which these issues are more or less prominent in education in relation to other subjects or disciplines, or take on a different complexion due to the nature of education research and its workforce. The disparities in experience by gender and ethnicity reported in section 3.1.1, for example, are likely to connect with compositional aspects of the workforce. As noted above, many people who work in education in universities join as a second career after holding teaching or other practice-focused roles. The teaching workforce in schools is consistently predominantly female and, until very recently, has been relatively ethnically homogeneous too (DfE, 2022, 2023). It is unclear how these factors feed into inequalities in the education research workforce and the experiences of those within. To our knowledge, there have not been any studies which have examined these issues within the specific subject of education or as a comparison across subject areas. Further research in this area is likely to be valuable. In education, as in many other disciplinary areas, we are seeing evidence of societal and structural features that present considerable barriers for many in the workforce, and that often appear to reinforce and exacerbate existing inequalities for particular (often under-represented) groups. The challenges and inequalities highlighted by our survey are concerning and emphasise the need for sector-wide and institutional change, and a concerted effort to facilitate and implement positive change.

4.3 METHODOLOGICAL SPECIALISMS, EXPERTISE AND DEVELOPMENT

The education research workforce possesses a range of methodological specialisms and expertise. We see evidence of considerable methodological diversity, reflecting the breadth of aims, topics and contexts being examined, and the often 'atypical' routes taken into the various research roles. As a discipline, there exists a rich 'toolkit' of designs, approaches and

methods. There are those who specialise in specific approaches or methods alongside those who draw upon mixed or multiple methods. The majority of respondents in this survey have used traditional social sciences techniques (such as interviews, questionnaires, case studies), while a substantial minority have engaged with practice-focused approaches (such as action research or participatory methods) or philosophical/theoretical approaches.

This diversity is one of the defining features of the education research discipline and reflects the variation seen historically across the subject. This does not mean that there is an equal distribution of different methods across the workforce, as illustrated by the higher proportions of respondents drawing upon more 'qualitative' approaches than 'quantitative' approaches. 'Quantitative' approaches (such as randomised control trials, advanced statistical analyses) are less common overall. This finding resonates with a similar exercise conducted nearly two decades ago (Gorard et al., 2004) and suggests that approaches using quantitative data are still in the minority, despite there being significant interest in capacity development in this area. This is not to suggest that there is a dearth of quantitative skills within education research. On the contrary, where these skills exist, they appear to be relatively well embedded. Nor does this downplay the need for support in all areas of research methods, as we discuss further below. What our results do suggest is that, despite quantitative approaches remaining in the minority, there is an appetite from many researchers to receive training on them (from basic to advanced) even if, as their responses suggest, there may currently be limited opportunities for them to do so. These results perhaps also point to more pragmatic attitudes to methods, and a further shift away from unhelpful methodological divisions that have been challenged in earlier work (see for example Bryman, 2006; Gorard, 2002).

To what extent is this an issue for the discipline and its identity as well as a question of meeting training needs? Arguably, the perceived need for additional knowledge and skills in quantitative approaches, if not addressed, limits the kinds of questions and the scope and quality of work that can be carried out, and leads funders to look outside the discipline, and even outside the HE sector, to meet the demand for quantitative education research. This is not to make a case that quantitative research is 'better' or 'more important' than qualitative work. Given the significant policy and practice-related problems and issues that education research intends to tackle

(often on local, regional, national and international levels), it is vital that the education community has access to the methodological tools which may be helpful for addressing education questions about scale, proportion and statistical relation across larger population groups and areas.

Recent discussions and debates about the status of education as a discipline have raised questions about the development and use of education-specific methods or methodologies (for example Wyse, 2020a, 2020b; Wyse et al., 2020). Half of our sample believed that education has its own set of methods, beyond those aligned with the cognate disciplines such as psychology and sociology. This is an interesting and potentially valuable finding, but unfortunately, there were no follow-up questions about this issue in the survey. Clearly, further exploration of how these specialist methods are being defined, conceived and used would be helpful for further understanding of the approaches used within the discipline. There is an opportunity for more in-depth analysis to establish whether there are education-specific methods, and if so, what these 'look like', and their potential implications for research and practice.

A final concern relates to respondents' views of their research methods training and skills. The existing offer of training in this area is not of the highest quality, and this has potentially significant implications for the type and quality of work which individuals are able to do. There are multiple reasons for these perceptions of quality, including varying views about the topics and approaches that research methods training should cover and the pedagogical approaches used to teach these; insufficient access to high-quality training for doctoral students and staff; a lack of prioritisation of research methods and ongoing development in this area; limited availability of expert staff to provide in-house training to others; and a lack of time to engage with the training and opportunities to explore and put this learning into practice. The perception of a training deficit also translates into respondents wanting more professional development in this area. Reports of these training needs and interests highlight the appetite for expanding research skills, and provides an important source of information for targeting future training and development. The issue of training needs could be explored and addressed both at departmental and disciplinary level. A training needs analysis could form a valuable focus for staff appraisals, perhaps with a view to researchers developing their own bespoke training plans. Supporting, co-ordinating and facilitating further methods training is an area where

education subject associations, such as BERA, could make a meaningful contribution.

We observed an interest in developing research methods capabilities across researchers at all different stages in their careers. Rightly, considerable emphasis is placed on training and support for doctoral students. We also suggest that further training and capacity-building are encouraged for the substantial numbers of researchers who are more experienced and/or who are joining the sector as a second career and who might have had less formal access to programmes of research methods training (such as those included in doctoral programmes). Instilling this expectation of *continuing* professional development in this area could have valuable knock-on effects for the quality of research, the capacity and expertise of researchers, and the wider status of the discipline.

As we note above, there is significant diversity and expertise in research methods across the discipline. However, this is not distributed equally across regions, universities or sub-areas within education. Determining how this methodological expertise can be better accessed and shared is an important next step in supporting and upskilling researchers. This would require some co-ordination, plus perhaps incentives for staff to contribute to delivering training and sharing expertise. A similar model to the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) could be adopted, potentially with an education-focused ‘branch’ of the provision on offer.

4.4 ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION – WITH WHOM AND WHY?

Unlike many previous surveys examining the working lives of education researchers, this study explored the kinds of research collaborations, and engagement and impact activities, that they participate in. We observed a relatively ‘outward’ facing discipline, where many researchers are collaborating and researching with non-academic partners and are engaging with policymakers, practitioners and the public to disseminate their findings. The applied nature of education as a discipline is reflected in the varied engagement, knowledge exchange and impact activities that researchers contribute to, reinforced by the majority perspective that education research makes a valuable contribution to society, and that it should be relevant and useful for non-academic stakeholders.

Despite the findings above, and the many collaborations and activities that do exist, our survey

also indicates that some engagement/dissemination approaches – such as sharing research with policymakers and the public, co-construction with young people and policymakers – are undertaken by only a minority of education researchers. While there has been increased emphasis on knowledge exchange and impact since the introduction of the RAE and REF (Boyle et al., 2021), not all researchers are active in such engagement with non-academic stakeholders. For those not entered for REF (56 per cent of our sample), there may be less interest or incentive to participate in this kind of activity.

In terms of collaboration *between* academic colleagues, we observed that less than half of respondents reported regularly collaborating with colleagues in their own institutions and other UK or international institutions. Previous studies have highlighted the potential benefits of collaborative models for developing and expanding educational research capacity, particularly at national or regional levels (Christie and Menter, 2009; Munn, 2008; Watkins et al., 2019) and for supporting personal agency and job satisfaction (Wilson and Holligan, 2013). Our findings suggest that further strategy and investment could be particularly valuable within the UK context. Strengthening ‘scholarly socialisation’ (Dooley et al., 1981) and coherence could likely have a positive impact on the quality, depth, scale and impact of research and on the identity of the education research workforce. Professional bodies have an important role in facilitating and supporting such network development, and the examples from the above-mentioned studies point to further possibilities for national and international partnership, potentially working in conjunction with research councils, policy and practice-related bodies in addition to academic partners (in education departments and beyond).

4.5 A CHALLENGING POLICY CONTEXT FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH

Education researchers are aware of a changing and often challenging policy landscape. Developments in HE, and broader social and educational policy across the UK, have resulted in a university sector in flux and considerable uncertainty for the education discipline. Over the years, concerns have existed about the influence of formal structures and processes (Boyle et al., 2021), many of which are embedded within a shift towards neoliberal policy reforms in UK HE. The majority of our respondents indicated a lack of trust in the validity and reliability of ‘quality’ assessment

measures such as the REF, and were sceptical of the impact agenda. These perceptions are important to unpick, particularly following a REF sub-panel report which was generally positive about the quality and impact of education research (REF2021, 2022). A key issue is the relatively low proportion of education academics who are entered for REF (a minority of our sample were included in REF2021). This contributes to a sense of a divided discipline. With limited engagement or experience of this high-status system of quality evaluation, it is perhaps not surprising that many education academics feel uncertain about its value or validity. It is not clear whether encouraging a more inclusive approach to REF entry would help in this regard, nor whether it is necessary or desirable to have more researchers entered. Universities are incentivised to submit higher quality work, so one approach to widening participation is to develop the capacity of researchers to deliver stronger, more impactful research. Whether policy levers such as the REF are needed to contribute to such an aim, or whether it could be better achieved through other mechanisms such as improved institutional support and resources, warrants further exploration.

Closely associated with the REF system are issues related to the funding of education research. Previous commentaries have highlighted the reduced and shifting priorities for supporting research in the discipline, particularly over the last decade. Funding from the UK government, research councils and charities has decreased considerably and, in more recent years – and as a result of Brexit – there has also been reduced funding available from European Union sources (Oancea and Mills, 2015; Whitty et al., 2012; REF2021, 2022). Where there have been newer introductions to the funding environment (for example the Education Endowment Foundation), these are also open to non-academic organisations, many of which have more resources for research and can offer more financially competitive bids. This overall reduction in external funding necessarily means a ‘smaller pot’ for HE researchers (and universities/regions) and increased competition to win grants. While funding contests run by the UKRI, government and charitable organisations are intended to be based on the quality of the proposed research and researchers, less than 10 per cent of our respondents thought that allocation of external research funding was fair. The availability, scale and stability of external funding in education have significant implications for the status, visibility and development of the discipline and its researchers, and for impact on the lives of learners, practitioners

and wider society. Attracting new sources of funding is likely to be vital in order to continue building a dynamic, secure and sustainable research discipline.

The potential challenges that ITE reforms could present for the viability of university education departments and the research taking in place within them were highlighted a decade ago by Whitty et al. (2012). Within the current study, however, there was little indication of these reforms having a significant effect on education research. While a small number of respondents (n=10) raised the distinct challenges and contexts faced by initial teacher educators in HE, there was less emphasis on the policy changes that have occurred in the sector in recent years.

Wider national policy focused on migration and Brexit has led to concerns that the UK is now viewed as a more hostile environment for international academics (for example Courtois and Sautier, 2022). The discipline of education includes particularly high proportions of staff with UK nationalities, compared with the sector as a whole: just 12 per cent of education staff have non-UK nationality compared with 32 per cent across universities generally (Belluigi et al., 2023). Our survey points to similarly low numbers of non-UK education research staff. While we cannot attribute these figures solely to recent immigration policy in the UK, awareness of the current context and its potential future implications on diversity and inclusion of the education research workforce is important. Others have highlighted the myriad benefits that increased national diversity and internationalisation could bring to research within the discipline, particularly if those from the majority world or Global South are more proactively included (see Belluigi et al., 2023). Universities have a significant role to play in urging policymakers to take a more inclusive and welcoming approach to non-UK academics, and facilitating and supporting the mobility of non-UK researchers who are interested in bringing their research expertise to UK institutions.

In the context of the current study, institutional policy is perhaps as significant as the national policy context. Many of the issues raised by researchers as being challenges or barriers for their research or general academic work (for example workload, feelings of inclusion, professional development and career progression, precarious contracts) could be addressed through changes to university or departmental policies. Universities have the autonomy and power to do this: they are not reliant on national governments to instigate such developments. Recent industrial

action, culminating in repeated University and College Union strikes in November 2022, February 2023 and set to continue through 2023, has highlighted that there is considerable awareness and interest from the academic workforce in improving working conditions (including pay, workload, inequalities and casualisation of staff). Whether institutional policy shifts of this nature will be made in the coming months and years remains to be seen. If they are introduced, however, observing these and their impact on the research environment and workforce will be important, and particularly pertinent for those interested in the development, health and status of research disciplines.

4.6 A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE AND VALUE

Despite the challenges outlined above, our study highlights a strong sense of purpose among education researchers and a commitment to the value of undertaking education research. There has been relatively little research which has examined the motivations of HE staff (Daumiller et al., 2020) and even less which considers this issue from a disciplinary perspective. The current study is, therefore, useful for highlighting the perceptions of this specific group of education researchers, the majority of whom believe that their research is important and that it has potential to have a positive impact on education and society. Wanting to ‘make a difference’ seems to be a key motivating factor (as highlighted via the research topics and motivation sections), whether it is in relation to highlighting and tackling inequalities, supporting or improving practice, contributing to policy discussions, or making meaningful contributions to knowledge production and dissemination. Even when research is not particularly well supported, funded or valued, respondents reported gaining considerable satisfaction from their work. Literature has illustrated the connection between intrinsic motivating factors and feelings of agency as well as the desire and opportunity to learn and increase skills and knowledge (Blackmore and Kandiko, 2011).

While extrinsic motivators, such as pay, promotion and indicators of prestige, appeared less important to education researchers in our study, the role of the university, department and disciplinary communities seems significant. This aligns with existing theoretical and empirical work which emphasises the relevance of context for enabling and stimulating individuals’ academic motivation (Daumiller et al., 2020). Given the diversity of pathways into university-based academic roles for UK education researchers, it is belonging to a

university and discipline that provides the ‘intellectual warrant’ or approval (Blackmore and Kandiko, 2011) for an academic identity.

Research is an activity which has the potential to promote individual and collective flourishing, both for those conducting the work and those who benefit from its outcomes. As evidenced by the responses to our survey, education researchers are aware of these benefits. It is important for the discipline to harness these benefits and to support the inclusion of those who wish to participate in such endeavours. Despite recognising the value of research, there are concerns about the environment and conditions in which it is conducted. The relatively low levels of income and investment in education are particularly troubling, and serve to undermine the status and health of the discipline and its potential to deliver excellent research. Tackling the issues described above will require input from researchers as well as leadership and commitment from the departments and institutions in which they work. There are also positive measures which the discipline (perhaps through contributions from subject associations and organisations) could develop and co-ordinate, and which could provide constructive models for progressive work at institution and sector levels.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 CONCLUSION

This report presents findings from a large-scale survey of HE-based education researchers across the UK. It is one of the largest surveys to take place within the discipline, and our analyses provide timely and important insights into the current health, nature and status of university-based education research. Covering a wide range of pertinent issues – including workforce characteristics, identities, and experiences of researching and working in HE and attitudes towards roles – we add to the knowledge base informing BERA’s ongoing SOTD initiative. Our findings highlight challenges that are significant both within the discipline of education, but also the wider HE sector in the UK.

As we have outlined in the sections above, some areas of this study support and extend findings from earlier projects that have examined various facets of the education discipline. Debates and discussions about the purpose and quality of education research, the methods being used, the contexts within which research is carried out, and the impact of research on policy and practice, continue to be pertinent. The study has raised further concerns about inequalities within the discipline, and particularly the lack of diversity, support and progression for some groups of researchers. Working conditions (particularly workload) and the institutional environment are shown as influential for the development and production of high-quality research. The study sheds some light on issues that have not typically been considered in earlier surveys of education researchers, including motivations for research, as well as collaboration, engagement and dissemination activities across the discipline.

While education researchers are generally very positive about their work, there are many who report challenging or negative experiences. We hope that the programme of work on the SOTD will be a catalyst for future initiatives designed to support more researchers to flourish within their roles and to make meaningful contributions to the discipline. To this end, we conclude this report by recommending

areas and posing questions for research, policy and practice. These are based on themes from the report and bring into focus areas that we believe would most benefit from attention and action. While we do not underestimate the challenges these represent, we are confident that the education research community possesses the moral, practical and intellectual resources to address them.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1 Recommended areas for further research

Based on our findings, we make recommendations for further research and development. These relate to areas of the survey that arose as themes within the results yet raised key questions about the SOTD.

- 1. The experiences of under-represented or ‘non-traditional’ groups of academics:** We agree with recommendations from recent SOTD projects (Belluigi et al., 2023; Boyle et al., 2021) that more in-depth research is needed on the experiences and intersections of under-represented or ‘non-traditional’ academics within the discipline. This could examine issues relating to access to the academic profession (including both via the doctoral ‘pipeline’ route and for those entering academia as a second or other career); the roles available for ‘under-represented’ researchers; experiences, barriers and challenges when in post; and the impact of policy and practices designed to improve inequalities. We also echo the view that more precise, accurate and detailed large-scale data on the academic workforce would be beneficial for identifying trends across different groups (see Belluigi et al., 2023). Our study has highlighted the need for better data about socio-economic status and/or social class background, nationality and movement between job roles and institutions over time.
- 2. Early career and/or younger researchers in education:** Linked to the issues above, we believe that further work is needed to understand the trajectories and experiences of ECRs. This group

was not well-represented in this survey (despite the efforts described), and yet we are aware that there are very specific challenges relevant to them and their careers. Further research could examine these issues, with a view to understanding access to academic life and the development of research capacity within the discipline.

- 3. Methods for education research:** We need to better understand whether there are research methods that are specific to the education discipline, and if so, what these are and how they are used. There are also questions about the methods and research skills that are most needed, and the optimal proportion and blend of expertise required at present and as the discipline develops. Further steps also need to be taken to support researchers who are keen to develop their knowledge and skills in research methods, including understanding how research training can be configured to reflect variation in the career and academic backgrounds of those entering the sector. Identification of the development needs and interests across the discipline, and understanding how training can be made accessible and responsive to needs, would be a valuable exercise in planning and implementing such opportunities.
- 4. Time use and workload in HE:** Workload is an issue that pervaded this study where it was highlighted as a particular barrier or challenge for the development and production of high-quality research. More in-depth research on workload within HE settings would be valuable for gaining a more nuanced understanding of how education researchers spend their time, how workload is distributed and experienced, the activities that are formally/informally accounted for, and the impact of workload on academics' roles and lives generally (rather than focusing on research and scholarship as we have done here).
- 5. International comparative work:** It would be interesting and valuable to extend the current SOTD work beyond the UK, and to examine how education researchers' roles, experiences, research foci and contexts compare across the globe. Such work is likely to be helpful for situating our knowledge of the education discipline internationally, while also informing and facilitating useful connections and networks to stimulate further high-quality research.
- 6. Longitudinal work on the SOTD and the roles of education researchers:** Repeating the current survey exercise at regular intervals (for example every five or ten years) would allow us to track and explore

changes and developments in the discipline over time. It would also be valuable to develop a 'cohort study' element whereby a group of education researchers could be followed over time, as a way of better understanding the academic 'pipeline' and the trajectories and progression of respondents at different stages of their careers.

- 7. Developing coherence and unity across the research discipline:** The current study has briefly touched upon issues relating to motivation for conducting research and respondents' views on the purpose and value of the work they do. While the discipline appears to have many common aims and interests, there is arguably value in developing a bigger, more inclusive discussion or series of debates about the role, purpose and quality of education research for achieving those aims. BERA could potentially take a leading role in this kind of activity. Research into successful models and the challenges of *intradisciplinary* work would be valuable. Also, a focus on how educational research aims and approaches can be advanced and foregrounded in an *interdisciplinary* space would be an important complement to policy and practical action.

5.2.2 Recommended areas for policy and practice focus

Finally, we consider areas of policy and practice that our results suggest require particular attention, and offer directions for future development. This study has focused on the SOTD and has not examined the available policy and practice options at length. The results do, however, imply many priority areas for development. Therefore, we recommend areas for policy and practice in the form of questions which we believe need to be considered and addressed.

The nature and quality of education research

1. What practical, methodological, philosophical and sociocultural aspects of education research distinguish it as a discipline? How does education research compare and contrast with research from related disciplines and fields?
 - a. What does an education-specific set of research methods look like?
 - b. What are the implications of education as a distinct discipline for furthering collaborative interdisciplinary work and funding opportunities with other areas?
 - c. How can education-related values, theory, methods and outcomes be advanced in an interdisciplinary space?

- d. How do the level and nature of policy/practice impact and engagement in education research compare to other subjects and disciplines?
2. In what areas is it possible to improve the quality of education research across the discipline? How might improvement in priority areas be achieved?
3. How will the nature of education research develop over the coming years, especially in relation to wider technological, cultural and sectoral change?

Research funding and accountability

1. What can be done to improve the fairness and transparency of external funding and peer-review processes, and the sector's perceptions of these?
2. How does the discipline secure more external research funding to support high-quality education research?
3. What are the reasons for and implications of the low proportion of education researchers entered in the REF? Does this reflect inequalities of access and status of education research? How could we enable more education researchers to be entered?
4. To what extent is the nature of educational research purpose and practice reflected in the REF criteria and process? Do perceptions of what makes high-quality education research in the discipline align with conceptions encapsulated by the REF?

Career development and training

1. How can education researchers engage with and receive effective professional development at every stage of their career? What are the 'cold spots' and barriers? How does the diversity in education researchers' subjects, careers and personal backgrounds influence training and professional development needs?
2. What steps need to be taken to ensure fair access to and progression in HE research roles, particularly for ECRs and those from under-represented groups?
3. How can educational researchers be supported to achieve complementarity, and reduce tensions between teaching and research/scholarship aspects of their roles?

Working conditions and experiences

1. How can issues related to precarity and insecure contracts be addressed? What are the main issues, barriers and models of best practice?
2. How can inequalities and negative experiences for individuals and groups be addressed? What are the main issues, barriers and models of best practice?

3. How can the sector take steps to effectively manage education researchers' workload to a) support the wellbeing and flourishing of staff, and b) to ensure that workload is not a barrier to the production of high-quality research?
4. At what levels (sectoral, disciplinary, institutional, departmental) is action on these issues most effective?

Professional bodies

1. What role is there for BERA, and other professional bodies, to develop and support policies that directly impact the working lives of education researchers? At what level and in what ways can professional bodies most effectively act?
2. What role do professional bodies hold in relation to education research – its focus, quality and impact? How can they support, develop and build capacity for high-quality education research?
3. In what ways and for what purposes could BERA further collaborate with other professional bodies, inside and outside education, to co-ordinate responses to some of these issues?

Collaboration and co-working to tackle big issues

1. How can BERA facilitate shared research-based practice and collaboration about key themes that impact the discipline – for example sharing research findings related to curriculum decolonisation?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between education research in HE and education research undertaken in policy, practice or third sector spaces? How do these forms of education research differ and what opportunity is there for tension, complementarity and collaboration?
3. How can we acknowledge and value the diversity of education research, recognising different purposes, approaches and traditions, and ensuring resources are fairly targeted to meet education research aims and to advance the discipline?

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Appendix 1

BERA 'State of the Discipline' survey: Concept and content map

Topic	Themes	Sub-themes	Informal values	Formal structures
Identity and values	Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnicity • Gender • Sexual orientation • Disability • Social class • Age • Qualifications • Carer (not just parent) • Estranged from family • Religion • Salary/band • Pension scheme/s & no. years' membership • Commuting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social networks • Behaviours and attitudes • Social justice/equality • Racial barriers • Intersectional barriers • Intersectionality • Harassment/support • Social capital • Cultural capital • Economic capital • Symbolic capital • Imagined social capital (Jocey Quinn) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social networks • Recruitment • Formal networks • Specialised provision • Flexible working • Social justice/equality • Maternity/paternity arrangements • Unpaid leave • Pastoral loads • Representation • Deficit model of representation • Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policy • EDI training (unconscious bias, widening participation) • Contextual differences in Northern Ireland/Wales/Scotland/England
	Researcher identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paradigm • Ontological perspectives • Methodologies • Self-reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and purpose of education research • Beliefs • Assumptions • Ethical values • Lived experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title • Interaction between title and role/responsibilities • Differences in titles for identical roles • Sabbaticals/study leave
	Career stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early career researchers (ECRs) • Mid-career researchers (MCRs) • Second-career researchers • Retirement-age researchers/late career researchers (LCRs) • Postgraduate researchers (PGRs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career opportunities • Rate of promotion achieved • Development opportunities • Precarity of work • Instability • Future work opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Career pathways • Career opportunities • Skills development • Line management • Contract types • Progress reviews • Applying for promotion

Topic	Themes	Sub-themes	Informal values	Formal structures
Identity and values	Education & background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior education and training • Any close family members working/ worked as academics/ researchers in HE (highest qualifications in family) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional values • Ethical values • Personal traits • Perceptions of different institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career history • Education history • First in family to go to HE
	Non-typical researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working class academics • BAME academics • Female professors • Part-time academics • Disabled academics (including invisible disabilities like autism and ADHD) • Non-guild route academics • Researchers without doctorates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-identity at work/ home • Fluid identities • ‘Imposter’ syndrome • Role models and precedence • Cultural differences and potential tensions • Ability to ‘bring whole selves’ to work (concealment/identity creation) • Management of work-life roles • Relationships with family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficit model of representation • Recruitment and progression • Contextualised recruitment • Formal structures and governance • Flexible working policies • Formal policies (inclusion) • Formal development programmes • Accessibility – physical (steps, parking, lifts and so on); technology (screens, keyboards and so on); adaptations (chairs, desks, facilities)
Community and environment	Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviours and attitudes • Norms and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affective issues • Psychological safety and failure • Job satisfaction • Criticism • Competition • Community • Overwork (evenings/ weekends) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance structure (departmental/wider) • Leadership • Grievance procedures • Cultures of performativity and accountability • Flexible working • League tables
	Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical environment of teaching/research space on campus or at home • The effect of space on working relationships • The effect of space on collaboration • Relationship between space and feelings of safety/comfort/wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections and conversations • Networking • Interpretation of space • Safety and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office space • Space allocation • Design of space • Technology and technology support • Remote working • Teaching spaces • Risk management • Hybrid working • Travel
	Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-departmental interactions • Conferences/external interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional services/ academic relationships • Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional services/ academic networks • Committees • Governance in departments • Governance in divisions

Topic	Themes	Sub-themes	Informal values	Formal structures
Experience and perspectives	Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for teaching • Time allocation for teaching/tutorials • Teaching development • Students • Level of teaching for example undergraduate or postgraduate • Changes during Covid-19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic pressures • Work-life balance • Workloads • Student support (informal) • Informal teaching development • Online tutorials and lectures (additional time/infringing on research?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing professional development/ accreditation • Institutional expectations • Student supervision • Student support (formal) • Technology support • Graduate Teaching Assistant roles • Line management • Progress goals reviews
	Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics/foci/areas • Methods • Interdisciplinarity • Effect of administrative processes on applications and research processes • Relationships between professional services and academic staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic pressures • Work-life balance • Workloads • Administrative workloads and pressures • Quality of research • Methods used/hierarchy of methods • Publication quality • Research time • Quantitative/qualitative tension around impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/ departmental support • Grant applications and research funding • Institutional expectations • Administrative responsibilities • Network of administrative approvals processes • Complicated administrative processes • Career mentoring received • Career mentoring given to others • Line management • Progress goals/reviews • Review process
	Practice-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second-career researchers • Bringing experience from outside academia into education research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes and behaviours • Affective issues • Informal development opportunities • Contextual knowledge in 'real life' scenarios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPD/accreditation/formal training • Institutional support/ development • Dedicated time for development • Observation

Topic	Themes	Sub-themes	Informal values	Formal structures
Systems & contexts	What works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of the agenda on types of research • Prioritisation of quantitative research? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and purpose of research • Relationship between research and dissemination (policy, media, general interest) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based practice • Systematic reviews • Experimental approaches (including randomised control trials)
	REF/RAE/TEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact agendas • Impact on policy • Definition of impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stratification of REF/RAE results • ‘Game-playing’ • Elitism • Internal rankings • Academic behaviour • Tensions around methodologies • Tensions around what ‘impact’ means • Value of research • Perceptions of different types of research • Researcher identities based on this type of valuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultures of performativity and accountability • Type of research used • Impact case studies • Evidence-based practice • Policy impact • REF process (administrative) • Administrative support available • Management of repositories • Use of repositories • Environment statements
	Funding allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What research gets funded? • What research is prioritised? • Who gets funding? • What are the processes for funding? How are they different across the four nations? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devolved funding allocation in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales • Research agenda • Funding agendas • Funding strategies
	Professional bodies/memberships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership and perspectives on professional bodies, such as BERA, SRHE, ITE and practitioner networks (e.g., CCT), BELMAS, BESA, IPDA, UCET • International bodies • Unions • Journals boards/networks • SIGs within organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal networks of support • Interest groups • Blogs • Communities and networks • Polarisation and collaboration of bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalised support for members • Guidance • Best practice • Legal support • Conferences • Publications • Resources/journals • Campaigns • Activist networks • Industrial action
	Policy & governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions between policies • Absent policies • Policies in place on certain issues • EDI policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily issues with policy/governance structures • Formation of policy for research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University structures and governance hierarchies • Formal university processes • Formation of policy for research

Appendix 2

The survey questionnaire

The survey questionnaire has been reproduced in full and is available to download as a separate document at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/education-the-state-of-the-discipline-survey-of-education-researchers>

Appendix 3

Education research blogs

Blogs in the *Education Research* blog series:

- How can educational researchers help achieve a democratic ideas-informed society? – Chris Brown
- Supporting doctoral students and early career researchers in journal peer review in educational research: Issues and suggestions – Sin Wang Chong
 - Part 1
 - Part 2
- Up the creek without a paddle? Perhaps a subject association can help – Caroline Lewis
- Researching the future university – Adam Matthews
- Connecting education research and practice: What works? – Lee Elliot Major and Steve Higgins
- What is the status of comparative international education (CIE) in UG education programmes? – Leanne Cameron, Rafael Mitchell, Martin Preston and Gurbinder Singh Lalli
- What role is there for university-based teacher educators in an increasingly school-based teacher education system? – Polly Glegg
- Creating a platform for all voices in education research – Jess Brown
- Not learning from experience: The decline of a masterly-led teaching profession – Deborah Outhwaite
- Pre-application doctoral communications and gatekeeping in the academic profession – Sophia Kier-Byfield

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Thomas Perry's research and teaching focus on research- and evidence-informed education policy and practice. He has specialist methodological expertise relating to systematic review and evidence synthesis; quantitative methods and secondary data analysis; evaluation, improvement and enquiry; social scientific methodology; and knowledge mobilisation, exchange and use. Substantive topics of particular interest featuring in his research include applied cognitive science, structural reform, inequalities, accountability, school improvement and professional development. Thomas leads the University of Warwick's education doctorate (EdD) programme, leads the research methods course for postgraduate taught students in education studies, co-leads a module on equity and effectiveness in education, and teaches on the advanced research methods course for doctoral students.

Emma Smith is a professor of education at the University of Warwick. Her research interests are in the field of sociology of education, specifically exploring issues of social justice, inequality and policy as they apply to access and engagement in education at all levels. She is interested in all aspects of research methods but particularly in the use of large-scale secondary datasets to explore issues of education and inequality. She has published widely in this area and is the author of the textbook *Key issues in social justice in education*, now in its third edition, and co-editor of two SAGE handbooks: *The BERA handbook of education research* and *The handbook of comparative studies in education*.

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