



# IMPACT REPORT 2025-26

The professional body for the  
FE and skills workforce

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# INTRODUCTION

## ETF's impact on the further education and skills system

2025–26 has been a year of continued investment in professionalism, workforce capability and sector improvement across further education (FE) and skills. Through our role as the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, the Education Training Foundation (ETF) has supported thousands of practitioners and organisations to enhance teaching and learning, strengthen leadership, advance inclusion and contribute to sector-wide improvement.

Our impact extends beyond participation in programmes. Through professional recognition, workforce development, research, leadership and partnership, ETF helps create the conditions for a highly skilled, evidence-informed and professionally confident workforce capable of meeting the challenges and opportunities facing the sector.

Central to this work is our commitment to co-design and co-production. ETF does not work in isolation; we work with the sector, not simply for the sector. Our programmes, professional standards, research, qualifications and policy positions are developed collaboratively with teachers, trainers, leaders, employers, sector representative bodies, awarding organisations, universities and national partners. By bringing together diverse expertise and lived experience, we ensure that our work reflects the realities of professional practice and responds to the changing needs of learners, providers and employers.

This collaborative approach also enables ETF to act as a trusted convenor across the FE and skills system. Working in partnership with organisations including the Department for Education (DfE), sector membership bodies, awarding organisations, higher education institutions, employer representatives and research partners, we help connect policy, practice and evidence to strengthen professionalism across the sector. By creating spaces for collaboration, challenge and shared learning, we support collective improvement that extends well beyond individual programmes.

Alongside our professional development and workforce programmes, ETF has continued to champion the wider public value of FE and skills. Through our work on social value, public affairs and evidence-informed advocacy, we have brought together the collective voice of the sector to influence national conversations about workforce development and professional learning. This included developing key workforce policy asks for the major political party conferences, contributing to the growing recognition of FE workforce development within national policy debates. We have also continued to engage constructively with the Education Select Committee, Parliament and policymakers, ensuring that the expertise and experience of practitioners remain central to discussions about the future of education and skills. Our parliamentary reception further demonstrated the essential contribution of teachers, trainers and leaders, positioning practitioner professionalism at the heart of national debate.

As this report demonstrates, ETF's impact is cumulative rather than transactional. It is built through sustained relationships, shared endeavour and a collective commitment to strengthening professionalism across FE and skills. We remain grateful to the thousands of practitioners, leaders, providers and partners who continue to shape this work with us. Together, we are building a stronger, more connected and more confident profession for the future.



*Katerina Kolyva*

Dr Katerina Kolyva  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Education Training Foundation

# IMPACT AT A GLANCE: STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONALISM, PRACTICE AND SECTOR IMPROVEMENT

## DRIVING PROFESSIONALISM



**22,311 ETF MEMBERS**

**59 ETF PARTNERS**



**18**

professionals achieved Advanced Teacher Status (ATS), demonstrating excellence in pedagogy and being conferred Chartered Teacher Status, via the Chartered College of Teaching.

**100%**

of professionals who achieved ATS said it had a positive impact on their practice.

**100%**

of professionals who achieved ATS reported having an increased confidence in delivering high-quality teaching and learning.



**646**

**QTLS**

FE and skills practitioners were awarded Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status, a badge of professionalism and recognition in the FE and skills sector.

**92%**

of practitioners who achieved QTLS said it had a positive impact on their practice.



**53**

professionals have been awarded the Specialist Status in Education for Sustainable Development, establishing sustainable educational practices at organisational level.

We had over

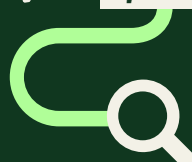
**20,000 SUBSCRIBERS**

to inTuition, our quarterly members' magazine.



**4,917**

FE and skills practitioners and leaders used our ETF standards tool to identify areas for improvement and help to focus their professional development journey.



## IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING



Our T Level Professional Development (TLPD) programme saw

**12,039 ENGAGEMENTS**

from 5,904 individual professionals from across the sector.

**93%**

of participants said that engagement with the programme has improved their knowledge of T Levels.

**93%**

of participants agreed that the TLPD would have a positive impact on their practice, with an overall satisfaction rating of 94%.

**177 PROFESSIONALS**

took part in our English, maths and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) professional development offer.



**97%**

of participants agreed that the programme had a positive impact on their knowledge, skills and professional practice.

7 Technical Teaching Fellowships were awarded, bringing together industry and education in the pursuit of exceptional practice.

## CHAMPIONING INCLUSION

**39**

practitioners registered for the Specialist Status in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, as part of its pilot year.



Through our Centres for Excellence in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) programme, SEND practitioners and leaders registered

**3,938 ENGAGEMENTS**

on our online professional development courses and 31 settings were supported by peer reviews carried out by our flagship centres.



**99%**

said that taking part would have a positive impact on their practice.

## ENABLING SECTOR CHANGE



**100%**

delegates on the CEO programme and the Preparing for CEO programme said that the programme would have a positive impact on their practice.



Nearly

**3,000 SECTOR LEADERS**

leaders, aspiring leaders and governors engaged with our Leadership and Governance development programmes, supporting sector leaders to drive organisational change.



Our governor development workshops had a satisfaction rating of **98%**



The Research Further programme supported

**10 PRACTITIONERS**

to plan, carry out and disseminate research findings.

Our Apprenticeship Workforce Development programme's small to medium enterprise programme saw 171 enrolments from 121 individuals from 100 organisations.



**100%**

enjoyed the interactivity of the course design and 100% were satisfied with their experience.

Through our Practitioner Research programme, we helped 10 practitioners to progress onto Year 2 of their MPhil programme and 10 more practitioners to enrol on MPhil Year 1 to develop practice through research.

## CHAPTER 1

# DRIVE PROFESSIONALISM

## 1.1 ACHIEVING PROFESSIONAL STATUS IN FE AND SKILLS

FIND OUT MORE



We are the professional body for the FE and skills workforce and the only organisation that awards Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status and Advanced Teacher Status (ATS). These prestigious statuses demonstrate a commitment to professional development, promote excellence in teaching and learning, and epitomise ETF's commitment to driving professionalism across the sector.

Throughout the 2025–26 academic year, ETF continued to facilitate and support practitioners from across the sector in achieving our flagship professional statuses of **QTLS** and **ATS**. These professional development programmes represent the gold standard for commitment to excellence in teaching and learning and enhancement of pedagogical practice across the sector. Furthermore, these statuses empower practitioners to embrace their professional curiosity and pursue ambitious quality improvement projects within a supportive structure, facilitated by experts.

In 2025–26, **646** practitioners successfully achieved QTLS. This is an increase from the 615 who achieved QTLS in 2024–25. QTLS participants highlighted an increase in their confidence to deliver excellence in teaching and learning and a recognition of professionalism within the sector as two of the key benefits of achieving this status. Furthermore,



**86%** agreed that the QTLS programme has better equipped them to support their learners to progress, **85%** stated that undertaking QTLS has improved their knowledge around high-quality teaching, while **92%** agreed that it will have a positive impact on their professional practice. All practitioners who achieved QTLS are now listed on the DfE's central record of qualified teachers, managed by the Teacher Regulation Agency. The statistics for this year mean that now, more than **26,000** practitioners hold QTLS status. The continued growth of QTLS demonstrates the increasing importance of professional recognition within FE and skills. As the sector responds to workforce challenges, curriculum reform and increasing expectations around quality, QTLS provides a nationally recognised benchmark of professional excellence and commitment to continuous improvement.

In 2025–26, **18** FE and skills practitioners and leaders achieved ATS. This represents another increase of two ATS awards, compared with 2024–25. The achievement of ATS is more than a recognition of advanced practice; it represents an awareness of curriculum design, organisational priorities, nuanced learner needs and the ability to complete an in-depth practitioner research project, bespoke to each individual's practice and context. ATS is a symbol of excellence and demonstrates a passionate commitment to enhancing pedagogical practices.

As such, practitioners who acquired this prestigious status were also conferred Chartered Teacher Status via the Chartered College of Teaching. **All** ATS participants agreed that the experience will have a positive impact on their professional practice, **100%** reported having an increased confidence in delivering high-quality teaching and learning, and **100%** of participants felt better equipped to meet the responsibilities of their role.

Participant feedback shows that through the application of processes learned on the ATS programme, practitioners have witnessed greater learner participation and motivation, and practitioners have achieved a more supportive learning environment. Other feedback highlights a broader understanding of educational leadership, which has opened new avenues of progression.



The impact of ATS extends beyond individual professional development. Through quality improvement projects undertaken as part of the programme, participants frequently influence organisational culture, curriculum design, mentoring practice and approaches to teaching and learning, creating benefits for colleagues and learners alike. These examples of participant feedback are a testament to the integrity of the programme and highlight the ongoing impact on practice that ATS participants carry with them once they achieve the status, across the sector.

Continued cross-team collaboration and direct alignment with sector needs and trends is essential work for ETF to secure the continued growth of these professional status programmes.

## 1.2 DRIVE PROFESSIONALISM CASE STUDY 1:

### — ATS GRADUATE DR PETRA MELVILLE

**Dr Petra Melville, Curriculum Manager for Haringey Council, achieved ATS in 2025–26 and found it to be key in unlocking opportunities to work with colleagues on an organisational level to drive excellence in teaching and learning through structured coaching and mentoring.**

Petra enrolled on the ATS programme as a step towards enhancing her professional profile and opening avenues for career progression:

'I felt like it was a very important step in my career progression and also a way to demonstrate my expertise.

'I always wanted to do it. For validation, I guess. I was an Advanced Practitioner at the time as well, and it just felt like it would be something to set me apart, give me a bit of legitimacy. To kind of say, "Well, this is why I'm an Advanced Practitioner, because I take my professional development very seriously." And I knew I would get a lot from it through the process, and I would learn a lot.'

For Petra, engagement with the ATS programme was instrumental in unlocking the door to work on an organisational, cross-departmental level through her quality improvement project. Petra undertook an organisation-wide research initiative in which she provided coaching and supervision to colleagues carrying out action research projects as a method of professional development. Petra shared:

'What I enjoyed the most was the collaboration with others through my quality improvement project. I really enjoyed that cross-departmental, cross-institutional collaboration and impact as well. Breaking down silos and making those new connections with staff from other departments that I would not necessarily talk to otherwise.

'For the project itself, we restructured the professional development provision under post-Ofsted pressure, mostly in response to staff feedback. We redesigned the whole professional development provision from a top-down approach into more of an outcome-based framework where we gave staff autonomy to investigate their own educational puzzles.

'We had huge success within just one delivery cycle. We had over 90% completion, over 100 research

projects, all individualised, small-scale action research projects. We worked collaboratively with the Research College Group as external stakeholders and 10 practitioners actually presented their research findings at an Association for Research in Post-Compulsory Education conference at the very prestigious Oxford University.

'But beyond that, we managed to create a culture of excellence, where quality improvement was just embedded. It wasn't an add-on; it was just part of the culture. And it really did create this buzz across the college. Again, it all goes back to that idea of collaboration and breaking down silos and communication across departments.'

When discussing the programme facilitation, Petra reflected:



**Everything was clearly laid out, so I was able to kind of just see the whole programme at a glance, so you always know what's expected of you. I did feel very supported on the programme.**

'For anyone thinking of applying, don't worry, you will be supported every step of the way. If you have any queries or difficulties, just contact the ETF and they will work with you to support you. And just enjoy it!'

Since achieving ATS, Petra's skill as an Advanced Practitioner and a mentor have further developed, and this has led to a new role within the sector as Curriculum Manager.

The legacy of Petra's quality improvement project lives on, with some participants growing their action research projects through the University of Sunderland's Practitioner Research programme (PRP), carrying out practitioner research studies aimed at enhancing practice in the sector.



## 1.3 DRIVING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS AND LEADERS

FIND OUT MORE



**ETF's Professional Standards represent a framework of educational criteria that are recognised nationally across the FE and skills sector as excellence in practice. Teachers, leaders and aspiring leaders self-assess against these standards to reflect on their pedagogical practice and to define their professional developmental priorities. ETF's Professional Standards are more than a set of criteria; they are examples of excellence in practice and represent the high bar that ETF drives to achieve, working alongside the FE and skills workforce.**

ETF's Professional Standards continued to define sector expectations, driving excellence in pedagogy through the Professional Standards self-assessment tool. This tool provides an intuitive and bespoke method for practitioners to reflect critically on their practice, to highlight their strengths and to locate areas for continuing professional development (CPD).

A total of **4,917** self-assessments were carried out in 2025–26, indicating the continued relevance of our Professional Standards in supporting teachers and trainers to take ownership of their professional development and focus their developmental activities in bespoke and personal ways. The Professional Standards continue to act as a shared language for professional excellence across FE and skills. Their use by individual practitioners, workforce development teams and organisations helps create greater consistency in expectations,

supports reflective practice and informs targeted professional development activity. This figure also represents sustained engagement with the tool when considering data from previous years, where between 2021 and 2023, more than **3,500** practitioners self-assessed their practice through our Professional Standards framework. Of the self-assessments completed in 2025–26, **135** self-assessments were carried out by participants on the ATS programme and **1,679** were carried out by practitioners working towards QTLS.

The results from self-assessments provide valuable insights into working trends within the sector. These trends suggest that teachers embrace a strong ethos of diversity, equity of opportunity and inclusion in their practice. Also, a confidence in promoting positive learner behaviours and inspiring learners to foster a passion for learning are distinct strengths.



The self-assessment tool highlighted areas of sector-wide confidence, along with developmental needs. The top perceived strengths are:

- 1** Promote and support positive learner behaviour, attitudes and wellbeing.
- 2** Value and champion equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging.
- 3** Inspire, motivate and raise aspirations of learners by communicating high expectations and a passion for learning.

The same self-assessments also indicate that teachers recognise a need to work more closely with employers and community groups to enhance the experience of education for their learners. A need to explore new ways to promote education for sustainable development (ESD) was also highlighted. Interestingly, a third development area frequently selected shows that teachers want more opportunities to carry out research and apply research findings in their practice. This is an area of specific focus for ETF in the 2026–27 academic year as we look to enhance research opportunities and disseminate findings across the sector.

The top three perceived areas for development are:

- 1** Develop enrichment and progression opportunities for learners through collaboration with employers, higher education and/or community groups.
- 2** Promote and embed ESD across learning and working practices.
- 3** Critically review and apply knowledge of educational research, pedagogy and assessment to develop evidence-informed practice.

All data collected through Professional Standards self-assessments is used to inform targeted strategies designed to continue to enhance teaching, learning and assessment, and drive professionalism across the sector. ETF's focus on embedding research opportunities and creating research communities of practice is just one example of our commitment to foster a confident, skilled and future-focused education workforce through an evidence-led approach.



## 1.4 DRIVE PROFESSIONALISM CASE STUDY 2: — CREATING AN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE OF DEVELOPMENT THAT STARTS WITH ETF'S PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

**David Brook, Head of Operational Training at Carlisle Support Services, an ETF Partner, has an incredible story of personal and organisational development that starts with the use of ETF's Professional Standards:**

'Every day, our people show up to make public spaces safer, cleaner and more welcoming. They are experts in their fields – security, stewarding, cleaning, facilities management and beyond – but they are also educators. And that's where the power of dual professionalism truly lies. Like so many across the FE and skills sector, we're being asked to do more with less. But we believe that the answer isn't to do less learning; it's to invest more deeply in it. Because when our trainers develop both their occupational expertise and their teaching craft, everyone benefits: learners, employers and the communities we serve.'

ETF's Professional Standards form the foundation of David's organisational development plan:

'At Carlisle Support Services, we have built a team driven by one shared mission: to deliver best-in-class training that changes lives. Our approach integrates technical mastery with the art of education, ensuring every trainer is not only a subject specialist but also a confident, reflective practitioner who models lifelong learning.'

'Our relationship with ETF through ETF Partnership underpins this commitment. Every member of our training team holds individual professional membership and works actively with the 20 Professional Standards as their compass for continuous improvement. These standards provide the rigour and reflection that drive innovation, quality and consistency across all our programmes.'

Beyond the Professional Standards, David reflected on a more personal experience of professional development through ETF programmes:

**Personally, my own journey with ETF has been transformative. From the Senior Leader Programme at King's College, to achieving QTLS, ATS and the Specialist Status in Education for Sustainable Development, each experience has deepened my leadership and sharpened our organisation's strategic thinking around pedagogy and workforce development.'**

'As a result, all our training team members now either hold or are working towards higher-level teaching qualifications, complemented by sector-specific expertise across security, stewarding, cleaning and facilities management. Together, we bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring every learning experience is grounded, relevant and of the highest standard.'

'The results speak for themselves. Learners report greater confidence, stronger practical skills and clearer career pathways. Our training consistently achieves outstanding satisfaction ratings, and we see first-hand how professional growth drives organisational performance and culture.'

**My own 25-year journey in professional development has been marked by milestones, but none more defining than achieving ATS, supported by my mentor, Dr Jane Kay, who once told me: "ATS doesn't just open a door – it opens a corridor of open doors."**

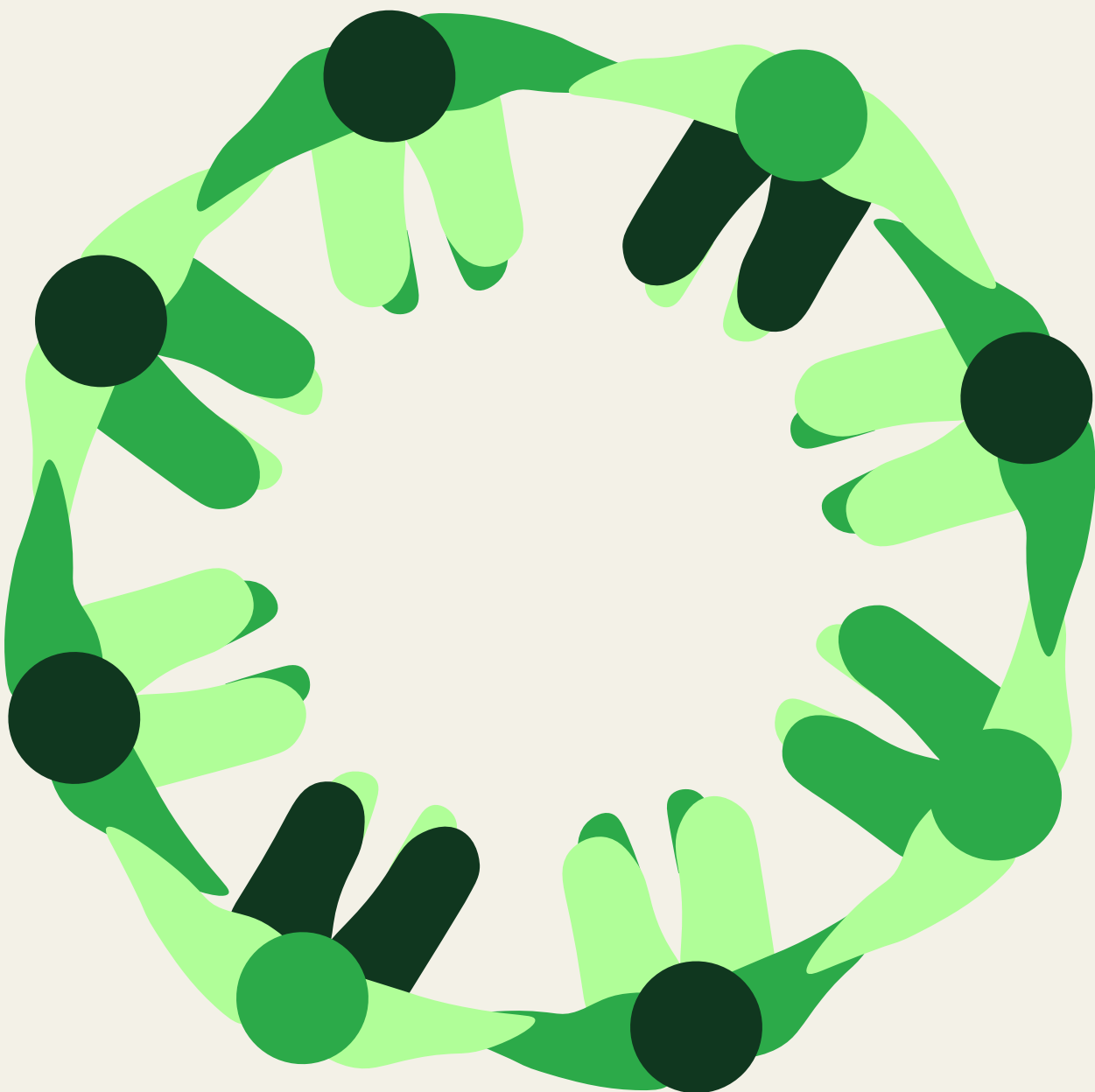
'That corridor has led to senior appointments, an MA in Education and Extremism, and an Advanced Diploma in Counter Terrorism Risk Management.'

It's also inspired my current Doctorate in Education at the University of Huddersfield, exploring how new legislation (the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025) will reshape security training and public safety.'

David's remarkable professional development journey, on an individual level but also as an organisation, through ETF Partnership, has presented other opportunities to work with ETF and impact the sector:

'Today, as a member of ETF's Education, Quality and Standards Committee, I'm proud to represent the voice of employer providers and advocate for the value of dual professionalism across the sector. Our message is simple: we don't just train to meet standards; we lead to redefine them.'

**By working with ETF, we're helping to build a future where every professional in our sector is equipped, recognised and empowered to thrive.'**





## 1.5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SUSTAINABILITY

FIND OUT MORE



**As a response to the highlighted need for teachers to embed education practices that promote sustainable development, ETF launched the Specialist Status in Education for Sustainable Development (SSESD) as a pilot initiative in 2024–25, which expanded in scope to a wider cohort in 2025–26.**

This specialist status was developed in collaboration with the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges. Through expert support and guidance, the programme enables practitioners and leaders to embed sustainable practices in the sector and make a real, tangible difference to their organisation's ways of working. ETF mentors support projects designed by, and bespoke to, each participant, developing knowledge and creating sustainability leaders in the sector.

The 2024–25 pilot saw 21 registrations, with 17 being successfully awarded the status following moderation. The initial success of this programme enabled ETF to grow the offer for 2025–26, including **103** new registrations across three new cohorts. Of these new registrations, **53** have already submitted portfolios that have passed through moderation, successfully leading to the status being awarded. The remaining **50** across the other two cohorts are working towards the submission of their portfolios in the summer of 2026. The SSESD case study in section 1.6 of this report

provides a more nuanced and individual account of how this specialist status programme empowers and enables practitioners to embed change and foster a forward-thinking approach to sustainable educational practices.

The progression from pilot to commercial delivery is a testament to the programme's success. Areas for development of the SSESD include driving greater recruitment of participants and continuing to enhance participant retention. Nevertheless, the SSESD plays a key role in developing sustainability leadership across the sector. The growth of SSESD demonstrates increasing recognition across the sector that sustainability is not solely an environmental issue but also a workforce and curriculum challenge (Smith, 2025). By developing sustainability leaders and embedding sustainable practices within organisations, the programme contributes to wider sector ambitions around environmental responsibility, green skills and organisational resilience.

## 1.6 DRIVE PROFESSIONALISM CASE STUDY 3:

### — SSESD GRADUATE JENNY WILLIS

**Jenny Willis, Advanced Quality Practitioner at Heart of Worcestershire College, graduated from ETF's first full cohort on the SSESD programme, after the initial pilot year.**

Jenny is also an ATS graduate, and it was that positive prior experience of achieving a professional status that led to engagement and enrolment on the SSESD. Jenny told us:

'I had previously done my Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) with ETF, so I felt like I had a good idea of how ETF would run an accreditation like this. So, although it was relatively new, it wasn't as intimidating as something completely unknown, having done ATS before.'

'Sustainability is something that I've been passionate about for a long time and in my current role as an Advanced Practitioner, part of that includes helping other people to look at sustainability and how they include and embed that Professional Standard, and how we do that as a college.'

Reflecting on the course structure, Jenny shared:



**We had to self-assess against a set of criteria and then build a portfolio that shows how we're working to address the spiky profile that the self-assessment posed. Also, we had to complete a project. You could make the project something entirely new or something you've been working on for a while. I chose to focus on something that I had been doing for a while, but what it did for me was really make me look at that afresh, with a critical analytical mindset rather than just carrying on doing things the way we've always done them because that's the way we've always done them. It gave me that impetus to really dig into what is working and what could be better.'**

Jenny's project focused on the creation of new roles within the organisation, Education for

Sustainable Development (ESD) Champions:

'What I was aiming to do was to recruit a Champion from each vocational or academic department within the college and create a sense of community where we could share ideas, resources and good practice. Then the Champions could go back to their teams in their vocational or academic areas and disseminate that practice.'

'I then did some work putting together a survey, which I then shared with the existing members of the ESD Champions team, really digging into what they wanted from that group and how they would like it to work. How can we make this feel like more of a community? Based on the feedback from that survey, we managed to dig out a slot on a professional development day where we could get the group together to share ideas and challenges. And we also opened that up to people who were interested in joining the Champions team, and we had a couple of new people join from departments where we didn't have a Champion. So that was really beneficial and it really refreshed that ESD Champions team and gave us more of a sense of purpose and more of a sense of community.'

'In terms of my practice, one of the criteria that I'd self-assessed not quite as strong as some of the others on was about drawing on feedback. That prompted me to conduct this survey to really think about the responses and then change what I was doing with the Champions.'

Moving forward, I will repeat that survey process again, periodically. There's no point keeping going with something if people aren't getting what they need from it. That's changed my practice: rather than just doing what I think is right, I'm listening to people to find out what they need to move forward.'

Discussing what comes next for Jenny, plans to embed sustainable practices across the organisation continue:

'The ESD Champions will definitely carry on. We've got more freedom to think now and, as a college, we always talk to our learners about the five Cs that employers want: communication, creativity,

critical thinking, and so on. For me there's something to do with the messaging of these skills which I would like to frame differently as these are also green skills. So, I'm thinking about how our communication, our creativity, our critical thinking, are all green skills which can support a more sustainable world.'



## 1.7 INTUITION

**InTuition**, ETF's exclusive quarterly magazine, is a publication that brings together members, partners and the latest developments in the sector. Including insights from sector research, thought pieces, thought-provoking opinions and information on professional development, InTuition is the sector's leading quarterly publication written directly for teachers, trainers and leaders.

ETF's InTuition magazine has also evolved over the last year, strengthening its role as a platform for sharing insight, practice and the sector's voice. With a recent change in editorial leadership, the publication has adopted a more engaging and interactive format, enhancing both accessibility and impact. This refreshed approach has supported increased engagement from across the FE and skills community, creating a stronger sense of connection

and shared dialogue between practitioners, leaders and partners. The magazine continues to showcase thought leadership, innovation and practitioner expertise, while fostering a more dynamic and inclusive community of contributors and readers. Through this evolution, InTuition is helping to ensure that sector knowledge is not only disseminated effectively, but also actively discussed, challenged and built upon.

## CHAPTER 2

# IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

## 2.1 T LEVEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (TLPD)

Since the introduction of T Levels, ETF has worked with practitioners, managers and providers to support with planning, delivery and assessment practices synonymous to the T Level programme. T Levels changed the landscape of post-16 education, creating new opportunities for learners and providing new challenges for educators. ETF's TLPD programme has been a consistent foundation of knowledge, expertise and guidance in the sector and has worked with providers and employers to deliver high-quality professional development, encompassing all aspects of T Levels.

2025–26 ushers in the final year of the T Level Professional Development (TLPD) programme, which has proven to be a mainstay of support, guidance and information for T Level practitioners and organisations since its launch. In 2025–26, the programme has seen **12,039** engagements from **5,904** individuals, with further professional development and T Levels conferences still planned to take place. This shows a strong and sustained engagement from the sector and exhibits the demand for high-quality professional development for leaders, teachers, trainers and support staff delivering T Levels. Furthermore, the TLPD has evolved with the changing needs of providers delivering T Levels. 'Part 2' of the TLPD, launched

in 2024–25, continued throughout 2025–26 and delivered tailored training for subject-specific T Level programmes, alongside wider teaching and learning themes, such as assessment and pedagogy. These developments support more experienced T Level providers to enhance pedagogical practices and promote deeper engagement with T Level delivery.

Since its inception, TLPD has played a significant role in supporting the successful implementation of T Levels across England. The programme has enabled providers to build confidence in curriculum design, assessment and industry placement delivery, supporting consistency and quality during a period of substantial qualification reform. Impact data

from this year shows that **93%** of TLPD participants reported that engagement with the programme has improved their knowledge of T Levels, up 1% on last year. Also, **93%** of participants agreed that the TLPD would have a positive impact on their practice. This year, the TLPD carries a satisfaction rate for the overall learning experience of **94%**. This data

– collected for internal quality assurance purposes – also reflects the wider sector outcomes, as the most recent publication on T Level outcomes nationally shows that **98%** of learners successfully completed an industry placement, with **93%** of T Level learners achieving a pass or above on their study programme (DfE, 2025).





FIND OUT MORE



## 2.2 IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICE

**ETF promotes good practice and excellence in teaching and learning through our membership offer. Members benefit from the full range of our professional development offer, teaching and learning conferences, and up-to-date knowledge of research carried out across the sector. Another unique advantage of ETF membership is the opportunities provided to network and share ideas and practice with FE and skills professionals, keeping members at the forefront of ways of working and sector insights.**

In 2025–26, our ETF membership community continued to be a thriving hub for professionals and organisations across the FE and skills sector. With **22,311** active members across England, Wales, Scotland and the Channel Islands, our membership numbers have remained strong. As the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, ETF's membership community provides an important mechanism for connecting practitioners, sharing effective practice and ensuring that workforce development activity remains grounded in the needs and experiences of the sector. This helps reinforce ETF's professional body role.

In 2025–26, we have also worked with **59** ETF Partners, which is an increase of nine compared with 2024–25. There are significant benefits to being an ETF Partner and different provider types across the sector are represented in this community. ETF Partnership offers providers from across the sector expert support in building a strategic workforce plan, with ETF as their professional career partner. The experiences of an independent training provider ETF Partner are documented in the case study on page 20. Of our current membership community, recent research shows that **81%** feel that ETF sets and upholds professional standards for teaching, learning and leadership in the sector, well or very well. Furthermore, **76%** of members agree that ETF's skills, development, training and professional development offers are of high quality.

Aside from the vast range of professional development, professional networking opportunities and education conferences that are available to ETF members, membership also offers a myriad of ways to explore pedagogy, establish new connections in the sector and break down barriers to form communities of practice across the sector.

One example of this is our **Practitioner Advisory Group (PAG)**. The PAG is made up of more than 100 ETF members, and the group plays a pivotal role in ensuring that ETF continues to refine and shape its strategic goals to best serve the FE and skills sector. The PAG meets three times per year to discuss the current and future membership offer while also exploring key issues in the sector and analysing how best their ETF membership can support them. It is through key working groups such as this that we ensure ETF's strategic focus is always evolving in line with sector priorities.

There are other benefits of being a PAG member. The FE and skills practitioners who make up this group meet regularly to share practice, discuss sector research and share examples of excellence in pedagogy. Moving forward, input from the PAG will be paramount in the formation and operation of ETF's research community of practice. The case study below provides a personal account of experience from a PAG member who defines their college expectations through the consistent use of ETF's Professional Standards.

## 2.3 IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING CASE STUDY 1:

### — ENHANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH CONSISTENCY IN EXPECTATIONS

**Sarah Cattell, Workforce Development and Innovation Manager at Walsall College, is a PAG member and a keen advocate for developing teaching and learning at Walsall College by embedding ETF's Professional Standards across all quality and developmental initiatives. Sarah discussed how they have used the Professional Standards to drive improvement in teaching and learning:**

'We started to utilise the Professional Standards back in 2022 when they were re-energised. We launched the Professional Standards with all of our teaching staff and talked about the importance of reflective practice.'

'What I have done year on year since that point is encourage staff to self-assess on an annual basis, and what we have started to do a lot more now is closely align all of our professional development to the Professional Standards. Our in-house professional development is aligned to the Professional Standards and, working with the quality team, we are creating three different training packages, one for each of the values. We're looking at where the gaps are, and then we're going to create more content aligned to the Professional Standards targeted at the emerging gaps. We're going to get our staff to self-assess in October because what I really want to have in place is that external benchmarking, which ETF can give me. It gives me those top three strengths and areas to develop. Then internally, we can align the Professional Standards to our schemes work, to our observation process, to the walkthroughs that our managers do. So, we've got our internal data and external benchmarking from ETF. I'm not where I want to be yet, but the standards sit within everything that we do in the college.'

Sarah is building a workforce of expert teachers, not only through the embedding of ETF's Professional Standards, but also by supporting staff to pursue professional statuses:

'We've really invested in ATS within the college. The majority of my team have got their ATS but all have QTLS. And we have wider staff across the

college that have also been able to achieve ATS because we fund it through workforce development. But what that gives me is like a mini army of people that totally get what the standards are and how it aligns to work we're doing.'

'We're making progress. By re-energising and refocusing staff, we're going to have more impact. I'm not going to stop until it's completely embedded and everybody's talking about it.'

Discussing working with PAG, Sarah reflected:



**I am really happy to be a part of the PAG. I am looking forward to working with everybody more closely and I just think networking is really important. If you ask anyone in this college, I'm like a super networker because I like to go out and make friends with people. We're a big sector, but we're all working in a similar way, we've all got similar challenges. It doesn't matter where we are in the country. When you talk to each other, it's just nice to have that space to share. I'm very much about sharing.'**

'What I would like to do is host a PAG meeting at the college. We have a really lovely space, and I think it'd be perfect for a PAG meeting. I'm also very happy to share some of the work that we do at the college with the wider PAG group. There are some existing members of PAG who have been a part of our unseen observation pilot. That's something that I'd like to bring to PAG. I haven't had an opportunity yet, but I have plans for the future.'

## 2.4 IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING CASE STUDY 2: BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND CONSISTENCY THROUGH ETF PARTNERSHIP

FIND OUT MORE



**Richard Cooper, Director of Education at Skills for Security, manages a fast-growing training provider in the specialist and safety-critical sector. Skills for Security faced a significant challenge: supporting experienced industry professionals to become effective educators.**

Through its partnership with ETF, the organisation has embedded a structured, sustainable approach to development, helping to build confidence, consistency and a shared culture of professionalism.

‘Many of our coaches were brilliant on the tools but had never received any development in teaching. They didn’t always understand inclusive practice, how to motivate learners or why safeguarding was so central.’

ETF Partnership provided a framework to address this, introducing staff to the Professional Standards and self-assessment tools from the outset. These are now used consistently across the organisation to support reflection and development:

‘The Professional Standards are the platform to develop CPD plans for individuals and to ensure we don’t take a one-size-fits-all approach. What we’ve built is something that allows us to track distance travelled and really understand where people are improving. Staff would dip in, find what they needed, and use it straight away. That’s when we knew the culture had shifted. People were learning because they wanted to, not because they had to.’

A key benefit of the partnership has been its longevity and flexibility, allowing the organisation to move beyond one-off training towards sustained cultural change, as Richard shared: ‘The difference with the ETF Partnership is that it lasts. It’s not a course you finish; it’s a culture you build.’

Alongside formal development, ETF has connected Skills for Security with a wider network of practitioners across the FE and skills sector. This has created opportunities for sharing knowledge,

gaining new perspectives, and adopting innovative approaches.

‘Those interactions really matter. We’ve picked up ideas from across the sector and brought them into our own practice, even down to decisions like investing in new safeguarding systems. That came directly from those conversations.’



**We had people saying they’d never had this kind of development elsewhere, and that made them want to stay. With ETF, we’re not just buying CPD. We’re investing in a relationship that supports our team, our learners and our future. It’s not enough to be good on the tools; we needed a way to grow as educators too. Without that, we’d lose people, performance and trust.’**

The impact of the partnership can be seen in increased confidence across the team and improvements in the consistency and quality of delivery: ‘What works with one group might not work with another, but our coaches and tutors now feel better equipped to deal with this.’

Through its partnership with ETF, Skills for Security is continuing to build a culture of continuous improvement, aligned to its ambition to deliver consistently high-quality provision, as Richard reflects: ‘A strong Ofsted judgement is about more than ticking a box; it’s about being consistently reflective, consistently high quality and always improving. ETF helps us do that because the partnership means we’re not just dipping into CPD; we’re building something over time.’



## 2.5 TEACHING AND LEARNING CONFERENCES 2026

**The 2026 Teaching and Learning Conferences covered current key themes, directly addressing and exploring the changing landscape of education in the post-16 sector. This conference brings together the FE and skills workforce and thought leaders to share forward-thinking approaches to pedagogy and processes and to inspire change.**

ETF's 2026 Teaching and Learning Conferences were held in London and Leeds, bringing together 250 educators, leaders and policymakers from across the sector. Key themes covered by presenters at these events included sustainable pedagogical practices, trauma-informed practice, teaching learners with SEND (special educational needs and/or disabilities) and artificial intelligence (AI) assessment practices, addressing topical issues at a crucial time of policy reform and emphasising the need for consistency as we learn how best to harness the power of AI for educational good.

Highlights included a presentation on inclusive practice – designed to work in every classroom and/or learning environment – a critical journey mapping the various points between wellbeing and AI-enhanced assessment, and an in-depth exploration of designing authentic assessments in the age of AI. The event also showcased the impact

of ETF's QTLS and ATS programmes, exploring the benefits to individuals and organisations of these professional statuses.

Feedback captured from the Teaching and Learning Conferences attendees highlights that **86%** felt that they learned new things that they could take back and implement in their practice, and **92%** agreed that the conference content was relevant to their role. In addition to this, **66%** left feeling more motivated to perform their role. Overall satisfaction with the conference's quality stands at **88%**, with participants commenting that the presentations delivered were engaging and professional, with valuable insights and well-considered points to further develop thinking on both pedagogical and systems levels.

To ensure continuous development of the Teaching and Learning Conferences series, next year ETF

will embed more opportunities for participant interaction and contribution, and will adapt event timings to allow for a greater depth of discussion during evaluation and reflection activities.

The conferences also serve an important convening function for the sector, bringing together practitioners, leaders, policymakers and researchers to explore emerging issues and to share solutions to common challenges. This exchange of knowledge and experience contributes to wider sector improvement beyond the event itself.

The Teaching and Learning Conferences stand as one example of where ETF's continued drive to improve teaching and learning in the sector is exhibited through action, showing how we work directly with practitioners from across the sector to enhance pedagogy, perceptions and education processes.

However, there are further examples of ETF's work in the conference space. Alongside the Teaching and Learning Conferences, ETF convened

the Green Mindset Collective, bringing together leaders, educators, employers and policymakers to develop a shared, sector-wide approach to sustainability. Moving beyond traditional 'green skills' discussions, the collective focused on embedding people, place and planet thinking across teaching, leadership and organisational practice. Central to this work was the development and dissemination of a practical playbook and provocations pack, created in partnership with the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges and FE News, designed to support providers in translating ambition into coordinated, system-wide action. Feedback and discussions highlighted both the strength of commitment across the sector and the need for clearer alignment to overcome fragmented approaches. The collective reinforced the critical role of the FE and skills sector in supporting a green transition and demonstrated how collective action can enable more confident, coherent progress towards sustainability goals.





## 2.6 IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ENGLISH, MATHS AND ESOL

ETF recognises the sector's need for ongoing and in-depth professional development focused directly on the teaching of English, maths and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses in post-16 education. Our range of professional development provisions in these areas are designed to drive excellence in practice, exploring key pedagogical themes and approaches to practice, all of which are delivered by our English, maths and ESOL specialists.

Our English, maths and ESOL professional development provision continued throughout 2025–26 and included a range of online sessions designed to support practitioners to consistently deliver high-quality teaching and learning across these subjects. In 2025–26 alone, the programme engaged **177** participants. The overall satisfaction rating stands at **97%**. Ninety-seven per cent also agreed that the programme had a positive impact on their knowledge, skills and/or professional practice.

Recognising the need to support the sector further in this area, ETF designed training to assist practitioners delivering the English GCSE resit programme. A total of **188** practitioners completed the live online offer, and **94%** stated they were satisfied with their overall learning experience. **Ninety-eight per cent** were satisfied with the knowledge and skills of the facilitators, and **90%** were satisfied with the relevance and appropriateness of the learning content. Exhibiting how the training directly informs teaching and learning, **93%** agreed that the sessions would have a positive impact on their practice. With regard to the eLearning offer within this programme, **238** participants engaged and **83%** agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the overall learning experience, while **89%** agreed that the course was easy to navigate.

Participants reported that the subject-specificity was a particular strength of the programme and that they felt more confidence in trying new techniques in their practice upon completion. Qualitative datasets collected from participants indicate that the course will have a direct impact on pedagogy; one participant stated: 'All the parts have been extremely valuable and well delivered. It provided clear, practical strategies for improving students' responses, particularly around modelling, planning, and making thinking visible for learners.' This dataset also includes more specific references to practice development; another participant noted: 'There were many incredibly useful ideas and resources for fiction and non-fiction writing that I will be using with my students.'

These professional development programmes and resources are carefully designed to improve post-16 maths and English attainment, enhancing learner outcomes and supporting teachers and trainers to develop subject-specific skills designed to extend pedagogical expertise. With the proposed launch of the new level 1 qualification in English and maths designed to support learners who achieved a grade 2 or below at GCSEs currently in DfE consultation (DfE, 2026a), these professional development routes are crucial in ensuring that the workforce remains equipped to respond to the changing landscape of English and maths study in the FE and skills sector.

## 2.7 TECHNICAL TEACHING FELLOWSHIPS

The **Technical Teaching Fellowship (TTF) programme** represents investigation and professional curiosity in the exploration of outstanding approaches to technical teaching. TTF participants follow research-informed approaches to practice in order to push the boundaries of technical pedagogies, moving teaching and learning forward through innovation, collaboration and community.

In 2025–26, **seven** Technical Teaching Fellowships were awarded across **nine** participants (two projects had two Fellows working together). This is an increase on the four awarded last year, which speaks to the sustainable but specialist nature of the programme.

The TTF programme is a jointly funded endeavour by ETF and the Royal Commission for the Exhibition 1851, which aims to develop and disseminate examples of excellence in pedagogical practices, with a specific focus on technical teaching. Bringing together industry and education in the pursuit of exceptional practice, examples of the projects undertaken by Fellows in 2025–26 include: a study that explores the gaps that exist between technical, skills-based learning and more human, employability skills; the creation of an AI teacher

sidekick that is designed to promote the positive use of AI in learning rather than bypassing it; and a project that pressure-tests vocational curricula to raise learner outcomes and more closely align with industry needs.

Fellows share their projects and research findings nationally through conferences and research journals, reshaping and rethinking approaches to technical education practices and pedagogies. Examples of this include Claire Wood, who shared her TTF research with Helen Hayes MP and Anne, The Princess Royal, leading to new and exciting opportunities (explored in more detail in the case study below).

## 2.8 IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING CASE STUDY 3: CREATING A T LEVELS PLAYBOOK

**Claire Wood, Head of Teaching and Learning Development at Chelmsford College, enrolled on ETF's Technical Teaching Fellowship (TTF) programme to enhance how T Levels prepare learners for employment, by carrying out research on how to develop a wider range of skills learners will need to be able to successfully transition into industry-based work experience and full-time work. When discussing what prompted Claire to apply for the TTF, she shared:**

'For me, it was a personal thing. I've been at my college for 16 years and I've done lots of different roles, but I had this idea and I thought, actually, I do want to find out the answers to this research problem, and I do want to do this. So, it started as a personal growth thing and now it's snowballed

into a cross-college initiative, which can only be a positive.'

Claire's research addresses a sector-wide issue relating to the T Level study programme:

'I wanted to find out the work-readiness gaps that

exist in T Level learners, specifically. So, when we send them out on work placements, where are the gaps in our teaching? Because employers were telling us, "You're not teaching them this and this," and the learners were saying, "I don't feel I can do this and this." And the awarding bodies are telling us to teach different things, and I was thinking, but none of it marries up. So, I've basically spent the past 18 months going to the employers and the learners and asking, "How do we get you all work ready?" I have a list of answers now. I have finished my research. As a teacher, I thought it was technical skills, but the employers said it's human skills that are lacking. So, I have written a playbook to be released to the FE sector. It's free. It's a 40-page teaching strategy book on how you can teach human skills in the classroom.'

Claire has wasted no time in sharing research findings with colleagues across the organisation and beyond:

'I have been practising the strategies in class with my learners; they've been giving me feedback on what to keep and what to get rid of. Then I've written the book, based on that feedback. For my next step, I've designed a conference for our college. It's called FE Futures. The whole day looks at policy and culture, and I will be sharing the book at the conference with staff and just saying, have a read, see if you can take anything from it. Then, for the wider sector, I'm presenting at the ETF T Level conference. Again, I'll collect feedback as well as sharing the book. Even though the Fellowship finishes this November, I will still refine what's in that book, to make it better for learners. So, I hope other teachers see it that way too. It's a bit of a shame I've called it the T Level playbook because I think it could fit with any study programme, any curriculum area can pick it up.'

Continuing to discuss plans for sharing the T Level playbook with the wider sector, Claire commented:

'I'm going to the Association for Research in Post-Compulsory Education (ARPC) conference. We're doing a panel presentation, four of us together, and then hopefully we can share the playbook further there. But also, the new Fellows who have started this year, I went to their awards lunch back in March and now I'm sharing what I'm doing with their colleges. So, it's not only sharing within my own

Fellowship, it's also the Fellowship that has come after me.



**Through the TTF, ETF has given me so many opportunities to go to some really high-profile events. I went to the House of Commons to meet with Helen Hayes MP. Then I met Princess Anne at St James's Palace, and these events are so important in meeting the people who make decisions. For example, it was there I met a headteacher of a school in London, and I'm now going over to deliver professional development training to their staff, but in return, they're going to come here and deliver professional development for us. Without those events, this wouldn't have happened.'**

Finally, we discussed how well Claire felt supported while working towards Fellowship status:

'I struggled with a bit of imposter syndrome. I didn't think I could do it. I was comfortable in what I was doing and there was no need to go outside my comfort zone. I had a meeting with my mentor, and they kept asking me what else I was going to do. Finally, I thought, okay, I can do this and then I realised that I was the barrier. We are sometimes the barriers to our own success. We're too caught up in what we're doing. Now, in eight months I've had two promotions. I was a Business Lecturer and then I became a Teaching and Learning Skills Coach and now I'm Head of Teaching, Learning and Development.

'I truly was the barrier and what I needed was someone else to say that I believe in you. All the way through I have had a mentor who has guided me, putting together an action plan, discussing what sorts of things I should be thinking about, and it has been the best support ever. I truly wouldn't be where I am today without that support. I really do mean that. Then I met with the other Fellows on the programme, and through that networking, we're all now doing things together. It's built a solid working relationship with everyone. The Fellows that I work with are from Wales, Guernsey, Sheffield, and we all now meet up regularly, and we share research, which is just amazing.'

## CHAPTER 3

# CHAMPION INCLUSION

## 3.1 INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP ACROSS THE FE AND SKILLS SECTOR

FIND OUT MORE



**ETF remains committed to promoting inclusive leadership and positive change across the FE and skills sector. Our inclusive leadership professional development provision gives leaders and aspiring leaders the tools and processes they need to create real, impactful change within their organisations, always focusing on advocating for equity, wellbeing and inclusivity.**

At a time when the sector faces increasing expectations around equity, wellbeing and organisational culture, inclusive leadership capability is becoming an essential component of effective educational leadership. ETF's programme supports leaders to translate inclusive values into practical organisational action.

ETF's Inclusive Leadership programme continued to support the sector in 2025–26. This course runs in partnership with the University of Portsmouth and is designed to support leaders in embedding inclusivity in real educational contexts. The programme engaged **30** leaders from across the sector in 2025–26, and for the second consecutive year, survey responses from participants show that **100%** were satisfied with their experiences and **100%** agreed that the content will have a positive impact on their role. Furthermore, the mental health and wellbeing webinars, which ran alongside

this programme, received a satisfaction rate of **100%**, up two percentage points from 2024–25.

Feedback from leaders shows that the strength of this programme lies in its thought-provoking, informative and insightful content, which is delivered by approachable and inclusive professionals. Furthermore, participants appreciated the chance to contribute to the learning process in the live sessions, discuss ideas and receive immediate feedback. Leaders reported feeling better equipped to action change in their organisation upon completion of the course. This qualitative data works to show how the Inclusive Leadership programme continues to support sector leaders to foster inclusive environments and support staff wellbeing. This is more fully explored through the experiences of Kim Blanchard, a recent Inclusive Leadership participant, in the next case study.

## 3.2 CHAMPIONING INCLUSION CASE STUDY 1:

### — EMBEDDING INCLUSIVITY AT THE HEART OF LEADERSHIP

**Kim Blanchard, Interim Group Director for Digital Education and AI at Activate Learning, participated in ETF's Inclusive Leadership programme in 2025–26 to connect with colleagues across the sector and explore different approaches to leadership:**

'We all approach leadership in very different ways. I had done some internal courses but, from an inclusive point of view, I really wanted to connect with colleagues across the sector who are in leadership roles and sort of use that as a sounding board to learn what I don't know, because you don't know what you don't know, until you know it.'

Kim particularly valued the programme's flexible structure and emphasis on collaboration:

'The course offered an opportunity to explore the different modules and then you could pick the one that most resonated with you. And I liked that, I liked that style of learning, the collaborative nature where we're all capable of giving our own voice and sharing our expertise and learning from one another.'

Kim chose the digital module, which aligned closely with her leadership remit and the realities of leading in technology-enabled environments:

'I selected the digital module because that resonated with me. Leadership in a digital world is forever changing. The tools that we use, the way that we engage with people through different methodologies is interesting and that resonated with me because it's very difficult to get a sense of the person when you're on a screen with one another, because different tools that are used can also become a barrier to engaging with the person on the other side of the screen. It was very interesting to be able to explore different methodologies that were discussed throughout the course.'

Reflecting on how the learning has influenced her leadership practice at Activate Learning, Kim highlighted openness, adaptability and the importance of seeking support:



**The main takeaway was to be open. There is not a definitive approach. Leadership is not discrete in the sense that it's not one particular thing. There are different approaches to engaging with different people in different ways and applying these different approaches, engaging with your emotional intelligence, touching base with people at different levels, being able to communicate meaningfully through different mechanisms, is really important.'**

'But if you're not good at it, there's no shame in saying, actually, I need to work on this a little bit more and find the best way, using community to help you in the problems that you face. What the course offered was the opportunity to talk with honesty with one another. It felt like a very comfortable space to work within. I enjoyed it. I took a lot away from it.'

For Kim, inclusive leadership is not only about personal practice, but about embedding inclusive thinking into operational decisions – particularly when developing and deploying digital and AI-enabled services:

'The course is not just centred on you as an inclusive leader. It's the inclusive approach that you can apply within the operational side of your activities. There's always something that you can take away that you can apply into your approach so that you guarantee that equitable access to the AI tools is a consideration. Have we achieved that? Is there anything more that we can do? These are the questions that are prompted by our AI tools. Are they hitting at the right note for our most vulnerable learners? Let's think about how we should approach that in a more meaningful way.'

'The course helps you to layer these things into your day-to-day activities. It makes you think in a different way because everybody's a leader in one way, shape or form with the work that they are doing. That's how I approached ensuring that through the activities that we do across the team, there's always that inclusive engagement with the people we deal with. I work with a broad demographic of staff, they all come with their own complexities, and we deliver a service through them, and it's important that across the service we have a very inclusive, accessible, equitable approach. Then, that cascades down to our students as well, both through our direct service, but also through the staff that we serve.'



**I would highly recommend this course because somebody always brings something new to the table to make you think. That light-bulb moment you get from bouncing ideas around with peers is so valuable. And we don't get enough of that, really.'**

Through an inclusive approach to leadership, and the considered deployment of innovative and forward-thinking uses of technology to enhance the learner experience, Kim and Activate Learning were awarded the Learning Institute Award for best use of AI in education in February 2025, and in March 2026 won the JISC-sponsored Beacon Award for best use of digital technology in FE.





### 3.3 ADVOCATING FOR ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE AND LEADERSHIP

ETF remains committed to collaborating with a working group focused on improving the representation and progression of Black leaders, and with wider sector partners to advance inclusive leadership, belonging and equity across the FE and skills sector. Engagement with this working group through an annual conference provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on how these principles are experienced in practice, and on the structural conditions that either enable or constrain meaningful change.

ETF works in close partnership with groups that are focused on improving the representation and progression of Black leaders and have previously worked on a range of topics through these channels, including how to enhance representation and outcomes for learners, staff, leadership and governance, and how to embed workforce succession planning and the talent pipeline for Black staff in the FE and skills sector.

The discussions and insights generated through this work contribute to ETF's wider commitment to creating a sector in which leadership pathways are accessible, representative and inclusive. This aligns closely with ETF's strategic ambition to champion inclusion and support equitable outcomes for both staff and learners.

This year's conference theme was **affirming humanity, decency and belonging during polarised times**. The conference highlighted both innovative responses to student belonging and emerging technologies, and persistent challenges linked to power, representation and decision making within the sector. Kirklees College, Hull

College and the University of Exeter were among the FE and skills providers that shared case studies from their organisations, exploring how they strive to promote student belonging during times of social polarisation; they also shared inquiry work they have undertaken, focusing on the space that sits between inclusion and participation. Topics also covered the silent voices and vivid stories of working with learners from a wide range of demographics in the sector.

Another theme for exploration this year was centred around power, and what power means for those who are historically marginalised. Questions around how AI development groups can present as elitist, especially with regard to the exclusion of Black women, were examined and scrutinised. These insights reinforce the importance of addressing inclusion not only at the level of teaching and leadership practice, but within governance, systems and institutional structures. For ETF, these reflections inform ongoing work to support a sector that is equipped to move from commitment to sustained, systemic impact.

## 3.4 DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL STATUS IN SEND PEDAGOGY

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

**As a response to demand and the current SEND reforms impacting the sector, ETF launched a pilot for a new status in 2025–26, the Specialist Status in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SSSEND). This programme is designed to explore, celebrate and share excellence in SEND pedagogy and innovative ways of working, exhibiting ETF’s commitment to connecting professionals, creating communities across the sector and recognising outstanding practice.**

To further enhance how ETF supports SEND provision in the sector and to expand upon the successful introduction of the Specialist Status in Education for Sustainable Development (SSESD) in 2024–25, this year saw the launch of a new Specialist Status in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SSSEND). This pilot year included **39** registrations from SEND practitioners and leaders who are working towards the submission of their portfolios for peer review.

This specialist status is designed to validate expertise in supporting learners with a diverse range of needs and sets a benchmark for excellence in practice. Not only does this programme build on current knowledge and pedagogies in SEND education, but it formally recognises practitioners and leaders who are contributing to the development of SEND practice within their organisations and communities.

The SSEND represents ETF’s commitment to supporting SEND practice and a response to the need to reflect, review and rethink current practices and processes in line with sector-wide SEND reform.

The development of SSEND reflects ETF’s commitment to recognising specialist expertise and responding proactively to sector priorities. As SEND reforms continue to evolve (DfE, 2026b), the programme will support the development of a stronger community of specialist practitioners capable of influencing practice beyond their own organisations by working with policy change to create smoother transitions for learners into the FE and skills sector (Patel, 2026) and enhanced SEND pedagogy and processes.





## 3.5 CENTRES FOR EXCELLENCE IN SEND

ETF remains committed to exploring a range of ways to support providers with delivering high-quality educational programmes for learners with SEND. Our SEND Centres for Excellence programme is designed to improve the experience of education for learners with SEND and to embed inclusion at the heart of FE and skills development by providing support and resources for leaders and practitioners in creating and maintaining inclusive learning environments. Working in collaboration with our funding partner, the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen), this programme moves beyond professional development to offer expert advice on working with learners with complex needs and to provide networking and collaboration opportunities for centres, delivered by sector professionals.

2025–26 saw ETF continue to explore meaningful collaborations through our [Centres for Excellence in SEND](#) programme to provide expert support for leaders, managers and practitioners in continuing to enhance knowledge and pedagogy and to better support learners with SEND. This programme was designed and delivered in partnership with our funding partner, nasen, and provides peer reviews, support and guidance. The programme was also a collaboration with our 2025–26 flagship centres: National Association of Specialist Colleges (Natspec), City College Norwich, City of Sunderland and Luminate Education Group. With the numbers of learners with SEND in the FE and skills sector more than tripling from 2017 to 2025, and funding decreasing during the same period (Natspec, 2025), this programme is a collective that delivers expert guidance and support for SEND delivery teams, nationwide.

In 2025–26, there were **3,938** engagements across live online professional development events and community of practice sessions, an increase of over 1,000 in comparison with 2024–25. This was

bolstered by 31 centre peer reviews. This reflects an increase of four compared with 2024–25. What these figures show is that this programme has continued to build inclusion capability with providers at a system level rather than implementing isolated intervention.

Data collected from participants who engaged with the Centres for Excellence in SEND programme shows that **99%** thought that the content delivered was relevant and appropriate for their role. Also, **98%** highlighted that engagement with this professional development has improved their understanding on how to better prepare their learners for employment and realise their ambitions, and **99%** agreed that the learning experience has increased their confidence in identifying and meeting learner needs. Overall, **99%** stated that they were satisfied with the learning experience and **99%** said that the experience would have a positive impact on their practice.

Qualitative data gathered through participant feedback highlighted that trainers demonstrated a strong subject expertise and are confident

at addressing misconceptions. Participants also appreciated the opportunities to interact throughout the sessions and the real-life examples and lived experiences shared through case studies. Other feedback highlighted that participants would like to see a more diverse representation of learners in different FE and skills settings, including adult learners with SEND. This valuable feedback will be used in the building of future SEND training provisions.

Peer reviews carried out through the Centres for Excellence in SEND programme are supportive and developmental by design. Throughout 2025–26, they worked to provide settings with confidence in their SEND delivery as well as offer a range of strategies to improve employer engagement. The

learner sits at the heart of these peer reviews, with the focus returning to how providers can best support and improve the learner experience. The programme also highlights the importance of relationship-building between learners, parents, educational departments and employers in seeking to achieve a rounded and holistic approach to SEND education and pathways for progression. This collaborative approach to the development of SEND practices speaks directly to the sector's need for cohesion as we anticipate the impact of SEND reform in post-16 education (FE News, 2026).

A more in-depth and personalised account of the impact of engaging with the Centres for Excellence in SEND programme is explored in the case study below.

## 3.6 CHAMPIONING INCLUSION CASE STUDY 2: — ENHANCING SEND CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGIES

**Lee Lister, Group Executive Principal for Education Partnership Northeast, has enhanced organisational SEND practices from both sides of the Centres for Excellence programme. Lee's engagement with this programme has been transformational for reforming internal SEND practices, but also for other FE and skills providers. Lee's connection with this programme started with a request for peer review:**

'Two years ago, we applied to ETF for a peer review. Western College was one of the Centres for Excellence, so they came up to us, followed by a reciprocal visit to them. It was an incredibly useful experience; whilst we knew we had a good SEND provision, it highlighted lots of additional practice that we could have been doing and should consider, including our relationship and leverage with the local authority as well as the stakeholders that we needed to engage with differently.'

'We absorbed this guidance and information, and at the time, we were a "Good" Ofsted High Needs provider. However, due to the support and work that we did with Western College, at our last inspection in 2024, we received "Outstanding" across all judgement areas, including for our High Needs provision. I attribute that not only to the

excellent staff we have within the college, but also the knowledge base that we gained from ETF's Centres for Excellence peer review with Western College. I do firmly believe that positioned us in a very different way.'

Lee's positive experience of receiving a peer review led to further exploration of how to engage with the programme:

'Our ELT [executive leadership team] are ambitious and to further develop our 10-year vision for exceptional SEND practice, we decided that we wanted to become a Centre for Excellence. We applied to ETF and were successful. The 2025–26 academic year was the first year that we operated as a Centre for Excellence. Our college group is the North East Construction CTEC hub, but we also wanted to be recognised as one of the best

providers in the country for SEND. That's why we applied to be a Centre for Excellence in SEND with ETF. We were delighted when we were successful.'

Discussing how being a part of this programme has impacted SEND practice, Lee shared:

'One of the biggest things we worked really hard on was developing our specialist SEND curriculum. We worked very hard to develop a really robust curriculum, which was skills-led. When Western College visited us, they identified some further improvements we could explore in terms of experiential learning, getting the students out of the classroom more. So, we then returned and refined our curriculum. Importantly, we have shared this curriculum and learning with every one of the five colleges we've undertaken a peer review with. Embedding an understanding of how to link the curriculum back to the preparation for adulthood framework, ensuring they understand the need for a scaffolded, skills-led curriculum and avoiding the common trap of offering only a nurturing curriculum in SEND, has been beneficial for both these colleges and their students with SEND.'

'In the new contract year, we have peer reviews to undertake with colleges, we will be helping their staff teams to understand their SEND curriculum better, because I firmly believe you can't get outstanding outcomes for students if your curriculum is not structured correctly. One other key aspect we received great support from Western College on was how to leverage funding to better provide support and outcomes for students. How we engage with the local authorities and how we agreed our commission places for High Needs was key information we took away and we implemented a different approach. As a result of this, we nearly tripled our number of High Needs funding places at the college, all because of that work. Every time we go into colleges, we help review their funding model. Due to our Centre for Excellence theme being people, we ascertain who is sitting around the table having the conversations with the local authority about funding. And if they're not at the right level or they've not got the right knowledge base, then college should consider a revised approach, as we did.'

Beyond curricula, pedagogical and funding enhancements, engagement with the Centres for

Excellence in SEND programme comes with other benefits:



**We've connected with so many people through ETF. We've made better connections with nasen and with Natspec. We've made lots of different connections at ETF. It's been a really pivotal year for our college and our journey to exceptional. We were very local to the northeast. Now, we undertake SEND work nationally, including facilitation at national conferences. We're involved in the development of the new preparation for adulthood framework. I was also part of the working group that developed the competencies for ETF's new Specialist Status in SEND [SSSEND], and we're now delivering national training for some private sector organisations and ITPs [independent training providers]. I believe it's enhanced our reputation, and every single person that we supported with a peer review, we are still in contact with.'**

Looking back on Education Partnership Northeast's involvement with the Centres for Excellence in SEND initiative, Lee reflected:

'I think what I'm most proud of is everything that we've done over the last 10 years at our college for young people and adults with SEND, we've then supported other colleges and helped them to get on that journey. That to me is really important. We decided to further support colleges this year with additional training days, which weren't part of the contract, but we volunteered to do it as we felt it was important to continue the support after the peer review. Now that has been featured as part of the project for next year. Having a fresh pair of eyes on something can often result in improvements to something that is already powerful. I believe the addition of the training days will be highly impactful.'

'The project has slightly shifted for next year, but with the underpinning principles remaining the same. ETF has been brilliant and listened and reflected on how the project can continue to grow and develop.'

## CHAPTER 4

# ENABLE SECTOR CHANGE

## 4.1 DEVELOPING AN APPRENTICESHIP WORKFORCE

Apprenticeship delivery sits at the heart of the FE and skills sector and is an educational pathway built on pedagogies and processes that are unique to the provider, environment and industry in which the apprenticeship is taking place. As such, ETF recognises the need to provide expert support and guidance for apprenticeship providers across the sector. The **Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) programme** is an initiative designed to develop the quality of apprenticeship delivery, enhancing the employer's understanding of key processes and improving the learner experience.

ETF's AWD continued to work closely with partners to deliver a range of professional development for providers, delivering targeted, tailored support. A successful year for the programme saw engagement in our online courses and tailored, in-house professional development programmes continue to grow in 2025–26, confirming the positive impact of the programme.

AWD's live online professional development offer had **2,465** attendances from **1,367** participants across **607** organisations. Forty-four per cent of attendees returned to complete another course, highlighting the value of the in-built course progression opportunities available to participants. Across all online delivery courses, **96%** of participants were satisfied with the quality

of the programme, demonstrating the sustained value of the training. The asynchronous online professional development offer reached **2,038** enrolments from more than **1,300** participants based in **714** separate organisations. This programme has seen **751** completions from approximately **500** participants in more than **250** organisations.

The tailored in-house offer supported apprenticeship teams in delivering a high-quality end-to-end experience, improving the quality of apprenticeships and supporting practitioner development via bespoke professional development aimed directly at the participating organisation's needs. **Seven** providers received tailored support in 2025–26, covering topics

such as onboarding, employer engagement, and leadership and management. Survey responses show that **92%** of attendees were satisfied with the quality of the course.

In addition, in 2025–26, the AWD included a programme of on-demand professional development courses aimed specifically at

assisting small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in delivering high-quality apprenticeships. The programme saw **171** enrolments from **121** individuals from **100** organisations, with **53** completing one or more courses. Participant survey results show a **100%** satisfaction rating, and **100%** assessed the learning experience to be accessible and inclusive.



## 4.2 LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT

The leadership and governance initiative is a series of programmes aimed at developing leadership capabilities for FE and skills professionals. Courses include online content, delivered sessions and in-person residentials, where ETF experts, leaders, aspiring leaders and governors from across the sector can share their skills and experience. The programme develops participants' confidence in becoming authoritative voices in the sector, driving long-term and sustained impact.

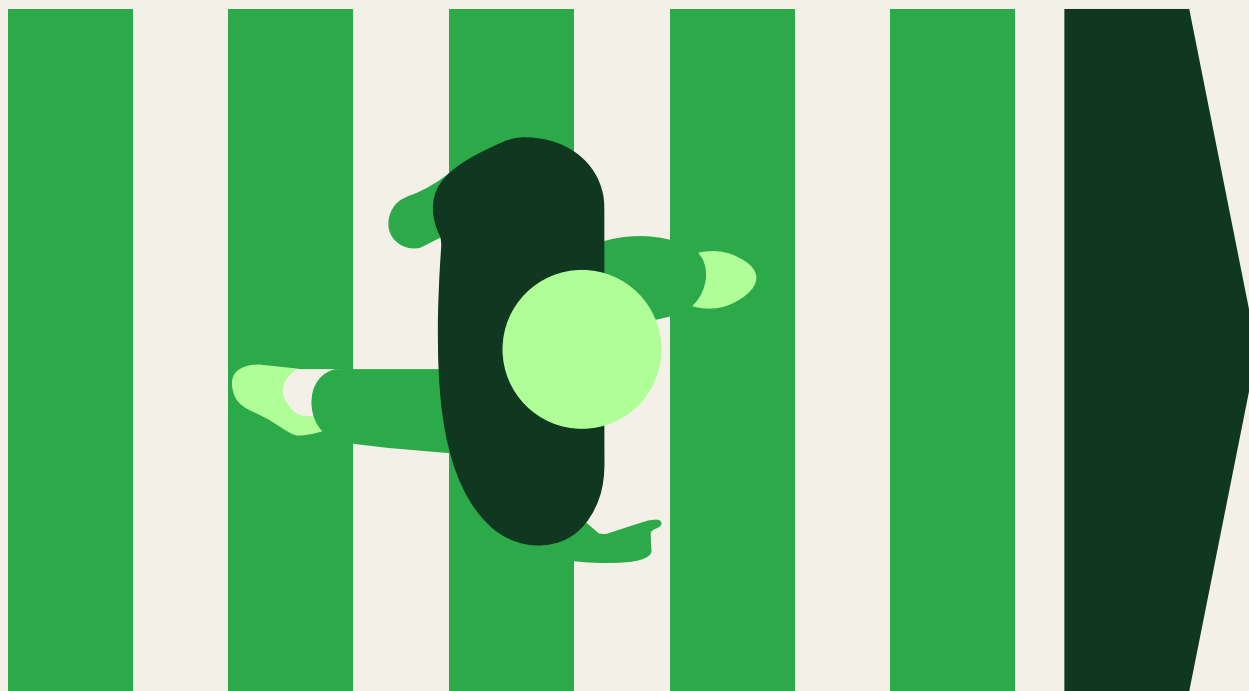
In 2025–26, ETF engaged **2,836** sector leaders and aspiring leaders through a range of **leadership and governance** courses. Strong leadership remains one of the most important factors in organisational effectiveness and learner success. ETF's leadership and governance programmes support both current and future leaders to navigate increasing complexity, lead organisational change, and contribute positively to the wider FE and skills system. Furthermore, recent reports indicate that one in eight 16- to 24-year-olds are not in education, employment or training (DWP, 2026). As such, the importance of effective leadership in the FE and skills sector in securing positive outcomes for young people cannot be underestimated. ETF's leadership and governance programmes included live online sessions, modular courses and thematic webinars and were designed to support leaders in building strategic capability and confidence in shaping the future of the FE and skills sector. These courses continued to perform well in 2025–26, with nine separate initiatives receiving a satisfaction rating of **100%** from participants.

Our **CEO programme and Preparing for CEO programme** are a collaboration between ETF, Saïd Business School and King's College. Feedback from these programmes shows the distinctly positive impact on participants. Across all **33** delegates, **100%** were satisfied with their experiences on the programme and **100%** agreed that the programme would have a positive impact on their practice. Qualitative datasets collected suggest that participants felt more knowledgeable about how to enable effective leadership strategy after taking part in the course and they reported an increased confidence in driving up standards

and improving learner outcomes. Candidates appreciated the opportunity to step back from day-to-day operational pressures and think at a systemic and strategic level. The same data also indicates that the programme is seen as instrumental in developing principals/CEOs within the sector. A personal and nuanced account of leadership development through our CEO programme is explored in the next case study.

The professional development that focused on developing governance in the sector shows equally robust outcomes. The **Governance Development programme and governor development workshops** received satisfaction ratings of **96%** and **98%**, respectively. Participants strongly appreciated the presenters' depth of experience, clarity of explanation, sector insight, and ability to simplify complex topics such as Ofsted, funding, governance roles, and curriculum quality on these programmes.

To continue delivering high-level, impactful professional development programmes, the **Governance Development programme** will be reviewed ahead of the next academic year to ensure that information is current and reflective of the latest sectoral developments.



## 4.3 ENABLE SECTOR CHANGE CASE STUDY 1: LEADING WITH PURPOSE, HUMILITY AND AMBITION

**Oliver Traylor, CEO of Runway Training, enrolled on the CEO programme to step away from the pace of organisational leadership – not for a pause, but as a strategic decision:**

'I enrolled on ETF's CEO programme at Saïd Business School because I wanted space away from the day-to-day demands of leading an organisation to think more deeply about my role as a CEO. In the education and skills sector, leadership rarely stands still. We are constantly responding to policy change, funding pressures, learner needs, employer expectations, quality requirements and the wider economic context. It is a sector that demands resilience, clarity and adaptability.'

'The programme came at the right time. Runway Training had continued to grow and evolve, and I wanted to ensure my leadership was developing at the same pace. I was keen to challenge my thinking, learn from leaders beyond my immediate environment, and return with practical insight that could strengthen my practice and how we lead Runway into its next stage.'

'The programme blended academic insight,

practical application, peer learning and reflective practice. It explored authentic leadership, organisational culture, systems thinking, strategic decision making and leading through change. What made the learning powerful was that it was never theoretical in isolation; we were constantly encouraged to connect ideas to the realities of leadership: difficult decisions, competing priorities, people dynamics and the need to keep moving forward when the answers are not obvious.'

When reflecting on the impact of the programme, Oliver shared:

'One concept that has had the greatest impact on me is the distinction between technical and adaptive leadership. It helped me recognise that while some organisational challenges can be solved through expertise, process or established systems, many issues in education and skills are more complex. They require leaders to influence

behaviour, build trust, bring people with them, and create the conditions for others to think, contribute and adapt. That has changed my approach. I am now more conscious of when to provide direction and when to step back, ask better questions, and enable others to shape the solution.

'The part I enjoyed most was, without question, the community that developed through the programme. Executive leadership can sometimes be isolating. You are often expected to be clear, confident and decisive, even when the situation is complex or uncertain. Being in a room with other CEOs and senior leaders who understood that reality was incredibly valuable.'

As with all ETF programmes, the sense of community-building shaped the learning experience:

'The peer learning was one of the strongest aspects of the experience. The group brought together leaders from different organisations and backgrounds, each with their own perspective. That diversity challenged my assumptions and broadened my thinking. The conversations were open, honest and practical. We tested ideas, talked through leadership dilemmas, and learned from each other's successes and setbacks. It created a level of trust that made the learning feel real and relevant.

'Importantly, that network has continued beyond the formal programme. The relationships built through the CEO programme remain an important source of support, challenge and encouragement. We continue to share thinking, discuss common pressures and provide each other with perspective. For me, that ongoing CEO network is one of the programme's greatest legacies, a community of practice that extends beyond the classroom and continues to add value to my leadership.

'The biggest challenge was making the time to engage fully while continuing to lead a busy organisation. Like many CEOs, my instinct is to prioritise immediate operational demands. However, the programme reminded me that investing in my own learning is not separate from my responsibilities; it is part of them. Creating protected time to reflect, challenge my thinking and focus on strategic leadership has become one of the most important disciplines I've taken from the experience.

'I felt extremely well supported throughout. The faculty combined world class academic thinking with practical leadership insight. The coaching, discussion and facilitation created the right balance of support and challenge. Just as importantly, the peer group became a significant source of support. There was generosity in how people shared their experiences, including the things that had not gone to plan. That honesty made the programme more meaningful and gave me confidence to reflect openly on my own leadership.

'My biggest achievement has been a shift in how I see my role. It has strengthened my confidence to lead authentically, make values based decisions and embrace complexity rather than simplifying too quickly. I have become more intentional about creating space for others to lead, encouraging wider ownership and building leadership capacity across the organisation.

'The programme also reinforced the importance of inclusive leadership and evidence informed decision making. At Runway, we work with learners, employers, partners and communities facing a wide range of challenges. The programme helped me reflect on how leadership can create the culture, systems and trust needed for people to do their best work. It has influenced how I support colleagues, approach change and think about long term organisational resilience.'

Since the programme, Oliver has a renewed focus for leading the organisation:



**Perhaps the greatest impact of the CEO programme is that it reshaped not only what I do as a leader, but how I think about leadership. It reinforced that leadership isn't about having all the answers; it's about asking better questions, creating clarity, staying curious, building trust, and enabling people and organisations to adapt.'**

'The programme strengthened my confidence, broadened my perspective and connected me with a trusted network of CEOs and senior leaders whose insight continues to shape my development. It has helped me lead with greater purpose, humility and ambition, and deepened my commitment to contributing not only to Runway Training, but to the wider education and skills sector.'



## 4.4 ENABLING PROFESSIONALISM THROUGH RESEARCH

ETF is one of the few professional bodies to provide a complete research pipeline from practitioner enquiry through to doctoral study and publication. The Research Further programme is an initiative that provides support and guidance for colleagues carrying out research to drive professionalism and enhance pedagogy across the FE and skills sector. This programme is a collaborative initiative between the Association of Colleges, NCFE, Edge Foundation and ETF.

The **Research Further programme** continues to form a key part of driving professionalism and moving practice forward in the sector. Research projects undertaken address current and pertinent issues faced by practitioners in the FE and skills workforce. The Research Further team helps these practitioners to find workable solutions that are both context- and environment-specific, as they work towards contributing to the ever-growing bank of knowledge production through research in the sector. Topics covered this year range from enquiry into the financial health of the sector, to professional development and subject-specific pedagogy. Research plays a unique role in supporting practitioner-led knowledge-creation within FE and skills. By enabling practitioners to investigate challenges directly relevant to their contexts, the programme helps build a stronger evidence base for the sector

while simultaneously developing research capability within the workforce.

In 2025–26, **10** sector practitioners were supported through funding to carry out their bespoke research projects. Four webinars have taken place throughout 2025–26 to disseminate research findings and insights, each with a specific focus, including: emerging insights from FE practitioner research; women, leadership and research; and writing for diverse audiences. These research projects are also disseminated through the publication of findings in think pieces, reports, articles and blogs.

Research Day 2025 took place on 28 May and was attended by 12 scholars and alumni. The event included research presentations, a blog-writing workshop and structured networking activities.

## 4.5 THE PRACTITIONER RESEARCH PROGRAMME: CHANGING THE SECTOR THROUGH RESEARCH

The Practitioner Research programme (PRP) is a collaboration between ETF and the University of Sunderland. This transformative research programme, which develops research in the FE and skills sector directly through the sector's workforce, builds leadership and research capabilities of participants through intensive residentials and expert supervision, provided by the University of Sunderland's Excellence in Teacher Training team. The programme offers participants routes to carry out academic research, working towards an MPhil postgraduate research degree and further support with transitioning from MPhil to PhD. The research studies are bespoke to each individual participant, but all have a focus on professionalism, teaching and learning, equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging, sector leadership and sector development.

The **Practitioner Research programme** enhances professional development in the sector through research. It remains one of the most distinctive professional development opportunities available within FE and skills. Few sectors are able to offer practitioners a structured pathway from classroom enquiry through to doctoral study, publication and sector influence. Through the PRP, ETF is helping to build a research-informed profession and strengthening the sector's capacity to generate and apply evidence. Since the programme's inception in 2009, the PRP has enrolled **471** practitioners and leaders from across the FE and skills sector. The programme supports participants in honing a research idea, carrying out a robust literature review, exploring methodological concepts, collecting and analysing data, and capturing findings that can be shared with the sector, informing and enhancing practice. Through intensive research residentials, the programme is structured to develop enquiry skills in candidates and provides expert support and guidance through MPhil to progression to PhD.

Currently, there are **20** participants enrolled on the PRP. Ten of these are studying on the MPhil

Year 1, and the other 10 are on Year 2 of the programme and are approaching PhD transfer. Since the programme's launch, the PRP has seen **37** postgraduate research degrees awarded. In 2025–26 alone, **12** participants are expected to graduate with a PhD, a record amount for the programme in a single period.

Furthermore, the programme is prolific in presenting participants with opportunities to share their research and communicate findings to inform practice in the sector. The PRP has supported more than **30** publications in research journals and books and has published **26** PhD theses. In 2025–26, the PRP supported a further **10** participants and alumni in contributing to a special edition of Education Sciences, which focused on the role of aesthetic experience in education. PRP candidates are also provided with a range of opportunities to present their research at sector-wide conferences, through collaboration with the Association for Research in Post-Compulsory Education, and other key sector research communities.

Throughout the summer of 2026, ETF is carrying out an in-depth analysis on the impact of the PRP. Findings will be disseminated in due course.



## 4.6 ENABLE SECTOR CHANGE CASE STUDY 2:

### DEVELOPING ACADEMIC RESEARCH SKILLS THROUGH THE PRP

**Sarabjit Borrill, iPGCE Lecturer at the University of Derby, is a PRP participant who has recently submitted her PhD thesis. When discussing Sarabjit's research and how she came to apply for the PRP, she shared:**

'By 2018, I'd already completed two small-scale research projects in adult further education, both looking at how teachers use video for reflection. I'd run these in my own workplace and found the results really interesting. When I went on to complete my Advanced Teacher Status, part of that involved a quality improvement project (QIP), so I decided to build on those two studies and focused my QIP on the same topic: video reflection for teachers in FE.'

'When the opportunity came up to engage with the PRP, I knew I wanted to take what I'd already started and develop it further. I wanted to make my work more rigorous and more critical. I wanted to be challenged, deepen my understanding, and to have the support of an academic team to help me develop my skills.'

'The course gave me a grounding in educational philosophy, introducing me to key thinkers like Aristotle, Dunne, Carr and Biesta, and opening up questions about what education is and what practice actually means. The programme also connected me with like-minded enquiring FE teachers doing research in their own organisations, which I found valuable.'

'What I appreciated was the design of the programme, structured and step by step, so you were guided through building your research. There was genuine room to ask questions, share ideas, and think more deeply about topics, and it taught me a great deal about practitioner research.'

Continuing with the theme of how supportive the programme was, Sarabjit reflected:



**The people delivering the programme were knowledgeable, experienced academics in practitioner research, and what really came through was their genuine passion for developing research skills in FE practitioners. Their enthusiasm and drive were palpable from the start. Meeting other practitioners from the same sector was important. Being around like-minded FE teachers created a trustworthy environment where we could genuinely be challenged, share ideas and support each other: there was a real camaraderie among the participants.'**

'Then there were the residentials, which were a privilege to be by the seaside, completely focused on learning alongside enquiring teachers, without the usual pressures of work and everyday life. A beautiful location, well organised.'

Reflecting on the more conceptually stretching aspects of the programme, Sarabjit noted:

'We explored what practice is and the philosophy of education, and some of the conceptual frameworks, like Aristotle's forms of knowledge, which are important to really grapple with, because they underpin how we think about and engage with research. It's not something we work through once and move on; it's an ongoing process of deepening understanding.'

'But we weren't left to navigate that alone. Maggie and Gary's support and the reading they provided gave us a strong foundation. Having ongoing supervision throughout the PRP was invaluable for thinking about those foundational concepts, and the peer network added another layer of collegiate support alongside that.'

'My PRP experience highlights the importance of understanding the conditions that can support teachers' own enquiring dispositions, to enhance their practice, as well as the barriers that might dampen curiosity and inhibit learning.'

'What I found most compelling was the qualitative side, the real-life stories, the narratives of the teachers who took part in my study. Their words made for a rich and fascinating picture. I feel I've produced something genuinely authentic, something that gives voice to experienced FE teachers, and I think that perspective is currently missing from the literature.'



**My research and writing skills have both grown, and that feeds directly into the conversations I have with my trainee teachers. I'm now challenging their thinking around ontology, epistemology and methodology with a greater depth and confidence. And beyond that, the PRP has opened doors to collaboration with others across the sector.'**



## 4.7 ENABLE SECTOR CHANGE CASE STUDY 3:

### THE PRP: A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

**Jen Deakin, Lecturer in Digital Transformative Education at Leeds Beckett University, applied to take part in the PRP after developing a passion for research on the TTF. Jen reflected:**

'I found a love for research and that initially attracted me to the TTF programme. Through attending the action plan workshops with Maggie and Gary, I was kind of in awe of how much knowledge they had, how inspirational they were in terms of what they knew about education and that sparked my interest in taking my studies further, to PhD level. I did an MA in design education not so long ago, so my interest in taking it further had already been there, but actually speaking with people on the TTF programme had given me hunger to do more. So, I put an application in for the PRP.'

'The first residential that we had was all about how to formulate your research questions and so on. And then the second one focused on your literature review. I feel that the teaching on the programme really gives you the knowledge and the skills you need to be able to do that independent study, because a lot of the programme does involve you working independently and being quite strict with your time. But how the residentials are spaced, it allows you to keep up, keep pace with where you're meant to be, and give you what you need to actually be able to do it.'

As the discussion progressed, Jen shared the part of the programme she has enjoyed most so far:

'I would say 100% the residentials. The highlight for me is the community side. The teaching is amazing and what you learn is amazing, but one of the best things about the programme is getting away to Sunderland three times a year, being around people that have similar interests to you, who are really interested in research and pedagogy, and just being in that environment. There's something really unique about it that I don't think you can experience elsewhere. It's really hard to put into words, what you get from being in that environment. It's not just the

lectures; it's having those continued conversations with the group about what they're doing and that social part of it as well. For me, that has been the highlight and I'm just so glad and I feel so lucky to be part of that programme.'

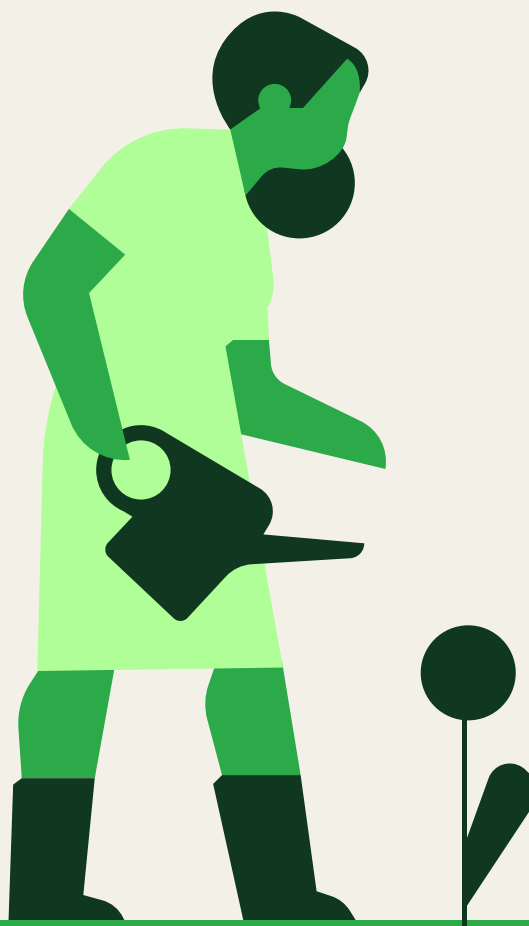
'I had this passion for research, and I realised that in my career, I want to do more of that research within my working week. Because I had the knowledge from doing the TTF and the PRP, I could then help other teachers with their projects. So, my career shifted slightly from full-time teaching in the classroom to supporting other teachers to get into the sector and do research in the sector. I feel like I'm in the right place, so the PRP has had an impact on my career in that sense, but also in terms of networks. Since the PRP, I've become more involved with ETF and I'm now Deputy Chair of the Practitioner Advisory Group (PAG), and I just love talking to other people nationally working in FE and skills about research and what's going on in the sector and sharing practice. So, it has opened doors there. And the people I've met since joining the programme and kept in touch with have just been incredible. I've never really experienced something in such a short timeframe that has been so life-changing.'

Jen is now approaching the end of the second year on the PRP. While discussing the biggest benefits of the programme so far, Jen shared:

'The biggest achievement from a personal perspective would be in my confidence. I've always struggled a bit with confidence with presenting, and through participating in both the TTF and PRP, it's allowed me to speak more confidently. Since starting the PRP, I've presented at the Festival of Education twice. I'm speaking there for a third time this year, and I've attended other conferences, like the ARPCE. I think it's given me the confidence in myself knowing that the research is valuable for the sector, knowing

that what I'm doing is on the right track. It's great to see that people are interested. When people come over after I've done a presentation, I really feel a nice buzz knowing that people are interested in what I'm doing and that my work is really valued or helpful to others. So, for me, my best achievement, I would say would be my improved confidence.

**I've just learned so much and I can't speak highly enough of the programme. I really can't. For anyone thinking about applying for the PRP, I would say definitely go for it. You won't look back. It's just a life-changing experience and I'm really grateful to be a part of it.'**



## 4.8 **ENABLE SECTOR CHANGE CASE STUDY 4:** **THE ONGOING IMPACT OF ETF'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFER**

**Jan Hanson, Neurodivergent Researcher, Trainer and Coach, has a remarkable career journey in education, marked by a keen focus on professional development and a determination to improve the experience of education for learners across the sector. Jan was among the very first cohort to achieve the professional status of QTLS.**

'I became a member of the Institute for Learning (IFL) in 2008; I was a Health and Social Care Tutor at the time and the first programme I ever signed up for was QTLS. I was in the first cohort. I was in the first 111 practitioners to be awarded QTLS. As a celebration, we had a presentation at Westminster to show that we'd got through it and that this programme was specifically for people who were

working in further education. So, that's where it all started. But the impact of me doing the QTLS is that I joined the IFL Advisory Committee, and then we campaigned to get parity between QTLS and QTS [qualified teacher status]. That's one of my bigger achievements; I was on the committee that helped to achieve that parity in recognition.

'Then my job role changed and I moved across to training. I was working with NVQs [National Vocational Qualifications] because I was a trained assessor and internal verifier. I then led a team in health and social care, but also in business studies. We were providing coaching and mentoring, but also, I was looking at skills for life and that's where things started to change a bit more because that's where my focus has stayed.

'I was looking at my professional foundation and ETF's Professional Standards and then I started doing more teacher training and observations. But obviously, it was always focused around training and workplace learning. And I then moved into offender learning (OL) and became the OL representative on the IFL Advisory Council.'

Jan's remarkable career progression after achieving QTLS brought with it a wealth of experience and knowledge. These valuable learning experiences led Jan to pursue further professional development and a new professional status:

**Then in 2019, I thought it's probably about time I looked at doing my ATS. I enjoyed ATS because it gave me the chance to start doing different things. Doing the ATS research has really helped, and also doing the viva and doing the research poster and everything, that really helped me. Because I'd done professional qualifications, but getting that sort of information and putting it all together, that was really good and it was helpful to do it. Also, it was nice going to the Chartered Teacher presentation. Our posters were up on the wall; I didn't know that mine was actually up there and I was really shocked to see it.'**

'Actually, while I was doing my ATS, I got workplace support through Access to Work. It was the first time I'd actually had any support at all. And the lady that supported me, she was phenomenal. It was during the pandemic, so it was all online, she was absolutely phenomenal.'

Jan's ATS research started a line of enquiry that would grow over the following years and eventually became a doctoral study:

'My research was about Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) systems for neurodivergent students, and it was the basis of what I took forward into my doctorate. DSA systems are difficult for students, because the issue is, they change when you apply for different courses. But nobody tells you that. So, I thought, why can they not make them better?

'When I started my doctorate, I said it was about systems for neurodivergent students and how difficult things are for them. And my thesis is about final-year neurodivergent students transitioning into the workplace. It captures the lived experiences of neurodivergent students. That's exactly what I said I wanted to do, right from the word go, right from when I started my doctorate. During my doctorate, I was diagnosed with autism and ADHD. But I passed my viva in March. Now that I'm Dr Hanson, the work continues. My thesis recommendations are being implemented at a Russell Group university, which means my research is already shaping how that institution communicates with and supports its neurodivergent students. Through my own practice as a coach, tutor and assistive technology trainer, I work directly with neurodivergent learners and the practitioners who walk alongside them, and I'll be sharing my research at academic and professional conferences over the coming months. It's good stuff for a girl who failed all her O Levels!'



## CHAPTER 5

# ETF'S SYSTEM IMPACT

## 5.1 CONVENING THE SECTOR AND INFLUENCING POLICY

Throughout 2025–26, ETF has continued to fulfil its role as the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, supporting workforce professionalism, improving teaching and learning, championing inclusion and enabling sector-wide change. The impact presented throughout this report demonstrates the breadth of ETF's contribution across the FE and skills system. While individual programmes deliver distinct outcomes, their collective effect is the development of a more professional, research-informed, inclusive and future-focused workforce.

ETF's contribution extends beyond workforce development. As the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, it brings together practitioners, providers, representative organisations, employers, researchers and policymakers to shape the environment in which professionalism can flourish. Through convening, co-design, co-production and evidence-informed advocacy, ETF helps ensure that the voice of the profession informs national policy, workforce priorities and public understanding of the value of FE and skills. Collaboration sits at the heart of ETF's approach. Rather than developing policy, professional standards and workforce initiatives in isolation, ETF works alongside the sector to co-design solutions that reflect the realities of professional practice. By working in partnership with providers, sector representative organisations,



awarding organisations, higher education institutions, employers, research organisations and government, ETF helps align policy, practice and evidence to strengthen the FE and skills system as a whole.

During 2025–26, ETF continued to strengthen the collective voice of the profession through an expanded programme of public affairs and stakeholder engagement. A significant milestone was ETF's parliamentary reception, which brought together parliamentarians, sector leaders, practitioners and partners to celebrate the professionalism and impact of the FE and skills workforce. The event provided an important opportunity to showcase the expertise of teachers, trainers and leaders, positioning practitioner voice at the centre of national conversations about economic growth, productivity, opportunity and lifelong learning. ETF also strengthened its engagement with Parliament through constructive dialogue with the Education Select Committee, ensuring that the perspectives of practitioners, leaders and sector experts informed discussions about workforce capability, professional standards and the future of post-16 education. Alongside this, ETF worked collaboratively with sector partners to develop a shared set of workforce priorities for the major political party conferences, advocating for sustained investment in professional development, workforce capability, professional recognition and the long-term resilience of the FE and skills workforce.



This collective advocacy helped raise the profile of workforce development within national policy discussions. The growing recognition of continuing professional development as a strategic enabler of workforce reform, including the inclusion of FE continuing professional development within the Prime Minister's conference speech in September 2025, reflected the increasing prominence of priorities that ETF and its partners have consistently championed. While policy development is shaped by many organisations and influences, ETF has played an important convening role in building consensus, bringing together evidence and creating opportunities for the sector to speak with a stronger, more coherent voice.

ETF also continued to articulate the wider social value of investing in the FE and skills workforce. Through research, public affairs and stakeholder engagement, the organisation has demonstrated that professionalism delivers benefits far beyond individual practitioners and providers. A highly skilled, confident and professionally supported workforce contributes to improved learner outcomes, increased productivity, stronger local economies, greater social mobility and more resilient communities. Positioning workforce development within this broader public value narrative has helped strengthen understanding of the essential contribution that FE and skills makes to national prosperity. These activities demonstrate that ETF's impact is not confined to the programmes it delivers. By convening partners, amplifying practitioner voice, shaping national conversations and influencing policy, ETF helps build the professional infrastructure within which teachers, trainers and leaders can thrive. This systems-level contribution complements ETF's work in professional standards, leadership, research and professional recognition, reinforcing its role as both a trusted partner and the professional body for the FE and skills workforce.



## 5.2 STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONALISM ACROSS THE SECTOR

**Professionalism remains central to the quality and reputation of the FE and skills workforce. Through the continued growth of QTLS, ATS and specialist professional statuses, ETF provides nationally recognised pathways that support practitioners and leaders to demonstrate excellence, engage in sustained professional development and contribute to organisational improvement.**

Professional Standards continue to provide a common framework for excellence across the sector, supporting individual reflection, organisational workforce development and the identification of future professional learning needs. Together, these initiatives help establish a shared understanding of professional practice and create a

culture in which continuous improvement is valued and recognised.

More than 26,000 practitioners now hold QTLS, demonstrating the growing importance of professional recognition within FE and skills and reinforcing ETF's unique role as the professional body for the FE and skills workforce.



## 5.3 BUILDING WORKFORCE CAPABILITY

**ETF's programmes support workforce capability at every stage of professional development, from new and aspiring practitioners through to experienced leaders, governors and chief executives.**

During 2025–26, thousands of professionals engaged with programmes focused on teaching and learning, leadership, governance, SEND, sustainability, apprenticeships and technical education. These programmes support practitioners to develop specialist expertise, enhance learner experiences and respond effectively to changing policy and workforce priorities.

The evidence throughout this report demonstrates that the impact extends beyond individual participants. Quality improvement projects, curriculum innovations, leadership initiatives and organisational development activities undertaken through ETF programmes continue to influence colleagues, departments and institutions across the sector.

## 5.4 ADVANCING INCLUSION AND EQUITY

**Creating an inclusive FE and skills sector remains fundamental to ETF's mission. Through SEND programmes, inclusive leadership development, anti-racist practice initiatives and the introduction of the Specialist Status in SEND, ETF has continued to support providers in creating environments where learners and staff can thrive.**

This work contributes to a more equitable sector by supporting leaders and practitioners to develop inclusive cultures, improve outcomes for learners with additional needs and create stronger pathways into leadership for underrepresented groups.

As national reforms continue to reshape the educational landscape, ETF's role in supporting inclusion and belonging remains increasingly important.

## 5.5 DEVELOPING A RESEARCH-INFORMED PROFESSION

**Research and evidence-informed practice represent one of ETF's most distinctive contributions to the sector.**

Through initiatives such as the Practitioner Research programme and the Technical Teaching Fellowship programme, ETF supports practitioners to generate, apply and disseminate knowledge that directly informs educational practice.

Few professional sectors provide practitioners with structured pathways that begin with practitioner enquiry and extend through postgraduate research,

publication and doctoral study. By supporting these opportunities, ETF is helping to build research capacity within FE and skills while strengthening the evidence base that informs professional practice, leadership and policy development. This investment in practitioner-led research contributes to a culture of curiosity, critical reflection and innovation across the sector.

## 5.6 SUPPORTING SECTOR CHANGE

**The FE and skills sector continues to operate within a rapidly evolving environment shaped by technological advancement, changing workforce demands, sustainability priorities, devolution, inclusion agendas and curriculum reform.**

ETF's programmes, partnerships and communities of practice help providers navigate this complexity by creating opportunities for collaboration, professional dialogue and shared learning. Through leadership development, professional recognition, research and workforce development, ETF supports the sector not only to respond to change but also to shape it.

The examples throughout this report demonstrate how practitioners, leaders and organisations are using ETF support to implement new approaches, strengthen provision and improve outcomes for learners and communities.

## 5.7 LOOKING FORWARD

**The collective impact of ETF's work extends beyond programme participation. It can be seen in stronger professional identities, enhanced teaching and learning, more inclusive organisations, greater research engagement and increased leadership capacity across the FE and skills sector.**

As the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, ETF will continue to work alongside practitioners, leaders, providers, employers and partners to support a highly skilled, professionally confident and evidence-informed workforce capable of transforming lives through education and training. The impact presented throughout this report demonstrates not only what has been achieved

during 2025–26, but also the foundations being laid for the future development of the FE and skills workforce. As the FE and skills sector continues to respond to economic, technological and societal change, ETF remains committed to supporting a highly skilled, professionally confident and evidence-informed workforce capable of transforming lives through education and training.

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**As the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, ETF sets standards, provides continuing development opportunities, and fosters an inclusive community of educators, leaders and support teams.**

**We do this by:**

**elevating individuals on their professional growth journey, improving their skills and impact**

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**empowering organisations to build cultures where teams are developed, valued and able to thrive**

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**enabling system leadership and sector-wide self-improvement, so the FE and skills community grows its collective impact and value.**

As the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, ETF sets standards, provides continuing development opportunities, and fosters an inclusive community of educators, leaders and support teams.

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