Department for Education

NQT and provider-level response rates: exploratory research

Research report

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1. Background and objectives

The annual survey of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) is an important way for the National College of Training and Leadership (NCTL)[1] to monitor NQTs' experiences of training and provides a benchmarking tool for comparisons between different types of teacher training provider. However, the survey response rate has been declining which has meant that provider-level analysis is not possible. This has also undermined stakeholders' faith in the reliability of the data. Given this, a sample survey was conducted in 2016 and will be again in 2017. It is hoped that an increase in responses will mean that the survey can return to a census in the near future and generate robust provider level data.

Exploratory research is needed to provide practical recommendations to NCTL which set out how the NQT Survey could be implemented in the future. Therefore, it should consider why response rates have fallen and how to arrest the declining response.

The specific objectives of the exploratory research are to:

- Investigate trends in response rates across a range of survey populations, to explore whether (and, if so, why) response rates amongst teachers are particularly low.
- Identify specific issues that may affect response rates to the NQT Survey, including:
    - The perceived value of the NQT Survey;
    - How the NQT Survey is used by key stakeholders including providers, NQTs and prospective NQTs; and
    - Overlaps with any other surveys that NQTs are asked to complete.
- Identify how to increase response rates to a survey/census of teachers, including considerations of issues including:
    - Survey mode(s) and method of administration, timing, length, questionnaire design and so on; and
    - Promotional and profile-raising activity, including support from providers.

[1] From 1 April 2018 the National College for Teaching Leadership was re-purposed to form the Teaching Regulation Agency. All NCTL functions except teacher regulation have been moved to the Department for Education.

2. Methodology

In order to answer the research objectives, the following methodology was adopted.

2.1 Desk research and expert consultations

An initial desk research phase was carried out to investigate response patterns in surveys generally as well as among teachers to provide useful context for the NQT Survey. This focused on understanding what has worked in terms of achieving high response rates, or in increasing response rates, in other work, particularly among teachers. This phase explored aspects of surveying approaches that may be helpful (such as the surveying mode) as well as details about how surveys are implemented (such as the way reminders are sent or the way survey sponsors and stakeholders promote surveys). It also explored approaches that are likely to be particularly effective for teachers.

This phase also included carrying out expert consultations with researchers responsible for carrying out studies of relevance to the NQT survey. This includes the National Student Survey (NSS) which achieves a response rate in excess of 70% among higher education students and includes marketing campaigns and provider-level incentives and sanctions. This also includes the Learner Satisfaction Survey and Learner Voice Wales which both use a provider-led approach to survey administration (which may be helpful for the NQT Survey).

2.2 In-depth interviews with NQTs

Fifteen in-depth interviews were carried out with NQTs to understand their awareness of and views of the NQT survey and to explore what would encourage or discourage them to take part in the survey.

Interviews were conducted by phone and lasted around 40 minutes. An incentive of £25 cash was given to each respondent as a thank you for their contribution to the study. A discussion guide was used to moderate the interviews which was developed and agreed with NCTL. Interviews were carried out by members of the Ipsos MORI research team.

Respondents were recruited from a sample drawn by Ipsos MORI from NCTL's database of current NQTs.

Interviews were split to cover an even mix of provider/route types (SCITT school direct, SCITT provider led, HEI school direct, HEI provider led, Teach First) and secondary/primary phase. In addition, seven interviews were conducted with NQTs

who said they would be unlikely to complete the survey, in order to explore the views of 'reluctant' respondents.

2.3 In-depth interviews with providers

Thirteen in-depth interviews were carried out, lasting around 45 minutes, with providers in order to gauge their perceptions of the NQT survey, understand what surveys of NQTs they conduct, and explore their potential role in administering the survey to NQTs and/or persuading reluctant NQTs to participate.

The sample frame of providers, from which the providers were chosen for interview, were supplied by NCTL and survey stakeholders. A spread of types of providers (HEI, SCITT, or Teach First) and size of providers (small, medium, or large[2]) were chosen for interview.

[2] Small = 1-100 trainees; Medium = 101-400; Large = 401 +

3. Research findings

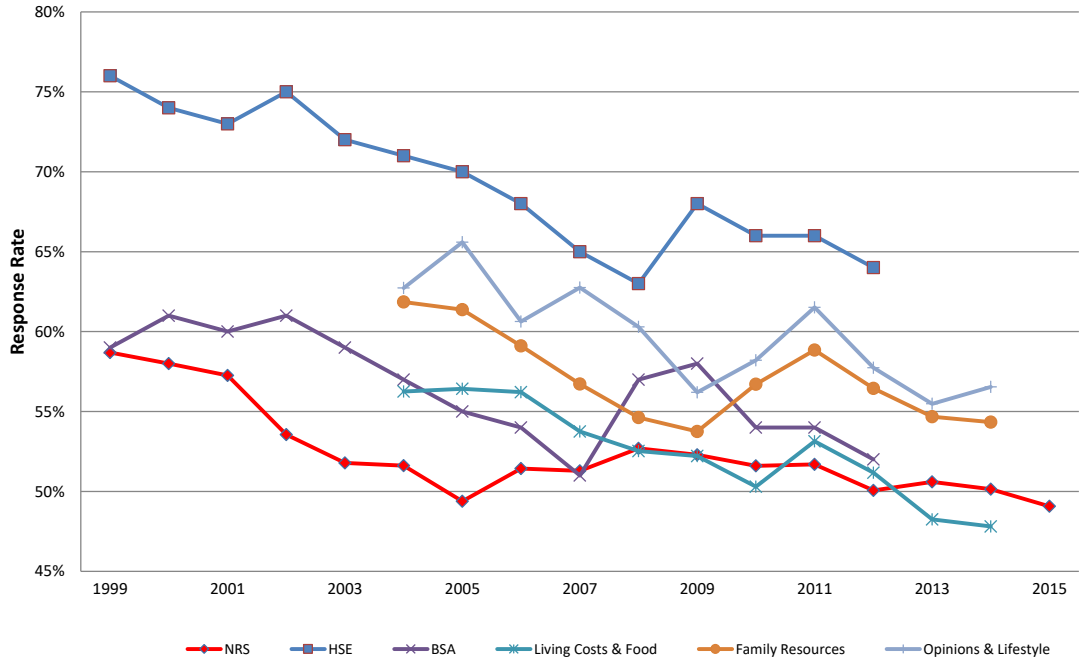
The findings from our research are set out in this section. The first section discusses external factors affecting response rates, i.e. those phenomena that cannot be controlled within the survey design. Aspects of the survey design that could have an impact on response rates are then discussed. Lastly, methods for raising response rates are examined, including a provider supported approach to survey administration.

3.1 External factors affecting NQT response rates

3.1.1 Trends in response rates among the general population in the UK

As important context, it is important to bear in mind that response rates to general population surveys have been in decline over recent decades. Trends in living patterns and attitudes have increased the problems faced by research agencies in obtaining acceptable levels of response in two main ways. It has become more difficult to find people at home; and it has become more difficult to persuade people, once contacted, to take part in surveys. The chart below shows the decline in response rates across a number of large, national studies.

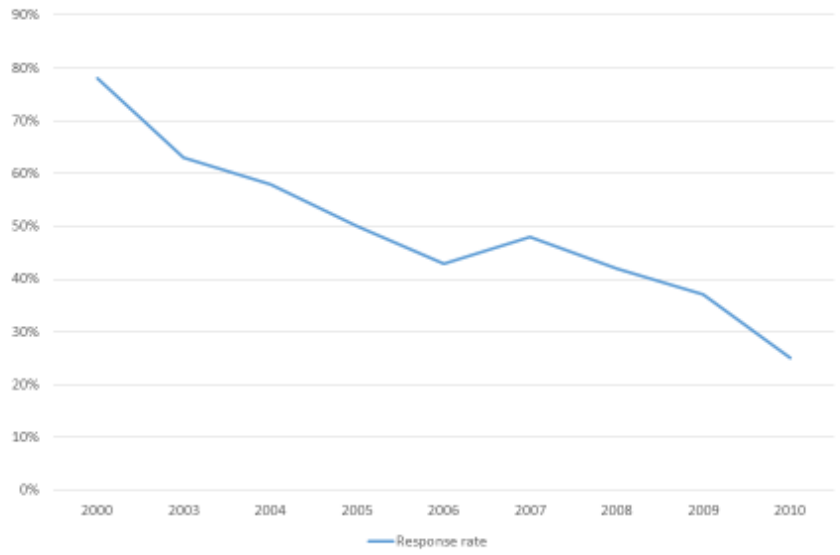
Figure 1: Response rate by year for random probability surveys



3.1.2 Trends in response rates among teachers

Like the general trend, response rates of surveys of education professionals and schools are also in decline. It is considered that this stems in part from the implementation of a number of important changes in the UK compulsory education system. These centre on an increased administrative burden on schools and teaching staff, greater weight afforded to coursework based assessment and external audit through Ofsted. The report produced by the US NISS/ESSI Task Force on Participation Rates in International Assessments concluded that similar forces underlie the increasing reluctance of schools to participate in the PIRLS, PISA and TIMSS surveys in the US (NISS, 2004). By way of illustration, the chart below shows the declining response rate to the Teacher Workload Survey conducted on behalf of the Department for Education.

Figure 2: Response rate by year for Teacher Workload Survey



3.1.3 Survey fatigue

Survey fatigue is the name given in survey literature to the phenomenon of lower response rates due to respondents previously receiving similar surveys[3]. It is useful, then, to look at the environment within which the NQT survey lies, to assess whether survey fatigue could be negatively affecting response to the NQT survey.

From interviews with NQTs and providers, it is apparent that trainee teachers and NQTs receive a range of surveys about their training. First, providers often send numerous surveys to trainees during their ITT year. Some trainees receive a survey at the end of each term, while others are surveyed more frequently at the end of each module. Moreover, some providers also issue surveys during the NQT year, on top of the ones they administer during the ITT year.

As well as the frequency of these training-related surveys, NQTs also highlighted that the questions asked in the NQT survey were similar to those that they had been asked before. This might not be surprising, considering that providers described how their internal surveys are either based on the questions included in the NQT survey, or the topics are broadly similar.

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[3] More specifically, a study found that administering multiple surveys in one academic year can significantly suppress response rates in later surveys. See Stephen R. Porter, Michael E. Whitcomb, William H. Weitzer (2004). 'Multiple Surveys of Students and Survey Fatigue'. Wiley.

"[the NQT survey] hasn't stood out for me as something radically different [to other teacher related surveys]." **NQT, Teach First, primary**

There are also a number of other national surveys which trainees and NQTs may receive including the National Student Survey or surveys from teaching unions.

Therefore, an NQT could potentially receive over 10 surveys about their teacher training and NQT year, before they receive the NQT survey; and research tells us (see footnote 1) that this number of similar surveys is likely to supress response rates. A key challenge for the NQT Survey is how to differentiate itself from other similar surveys and encourage NQTs to complete this survey.

3.2 Survey design factors that may affect NQT response rates

3.2.1 Survey timing

NQTs are busy professionals, spending much of their time in the classroom and working in the evenings. This affects their likelihood of participating in the NQT Survey. Decisions about the optimum time to carry out a survey should therefore take into account when NQTs are most likely to respond to a survey.

NQTs expressed a range of views on when they are most/least likely to respond to a survey. Reponses ranged from those who would complete it during the working week, as they are in the work mind-set, to those who said they would complete it during the holidays or on weekends. A common response however was that NQTs would complete the survey in the evenings. "It's a bit of a cool-down task", as one NQT described.

In summary, there is not an optimum time of year for the survey to run, in terms of increasing responses rates among NQTs.

3.2.2 Communications with NQTs

Mixed modes of contact

Recent research[4] suggests it is possible to increase online survey response rates by using a mixture of contact modes, for example, combining letter, SMS and email contact methods. This was evident in the 2016 NQT Survey. Some respondents were sent a letter in advance of the survey which included an email invitation which contained a direct link to the online questionnaire. They were also sent the online survey via email. Sending an advance letter by post (and then sending the email invitation) was associated with a +5 percentage point increase in the response rate.

There is also evidence that introducing an additional type of contact at the reminder stage can increase response rates. For example, a postcard reminder was used in the GP Patient Survey (a large national postal survey). This, in addition to re-designing the content and look of the invitation letters, resulted in a 7 percentage point increase in the response rate. Importantly, the extra cost of the postcard reminder was offset by (a) a reduction in the issued sample size without sacrificing

[4] Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014). Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys. Wiley.

the total number of completed questionnaires, and (b) a reduction in the total number of reminder letters being sent out with replacement questionnaires.[5]

In addition to email, post, and SMS, it is also worth considering using social media to publicise the survey and emphasise its importance. Some NQTs interviewed said that they use social media channels as an information source, in particular Twitter. Marketing the survey at face-to-face events, e.g. conferences, might also encourage completion of the survey. Indeed, providers interviewed reported that they use face-to-face reminders for their own surveys.

Content of communications

The design of the letters, emails and SMSs are crucial because these are the only means for engaging the NQT and persuading them to take part. For example, rather than focus on re-sending the same body of text, all letters, emails and text messages should be designed as a coherent package of communications which tap into different reasons for taking part in the survey. The 2016 survey took this approach, which likely contributed to the increase in the response rate from the previous year (see figure 3.2).

The use of an official letter, such as one signed by a senior colleague at NCTL, can also be a good tool for persuading people that the survey request is genuine, their participation is important, their information is valuable and useful, and taking part is quick and easy with no risk to them.

Using work email addresses

There were NQTs who mentioned that they were more likely to check their work email than their personal emails. It could, therefore, be beneficial to obtain work email addresses, in addition to personal ones, to maximise the chances of the survey being seen by respondents.

3.2.3 Mode of data collection

Generally, response rates tend to be higher with a paper-only survey compared to web-only and mixed-mode surveys that include web[6], although there is also some

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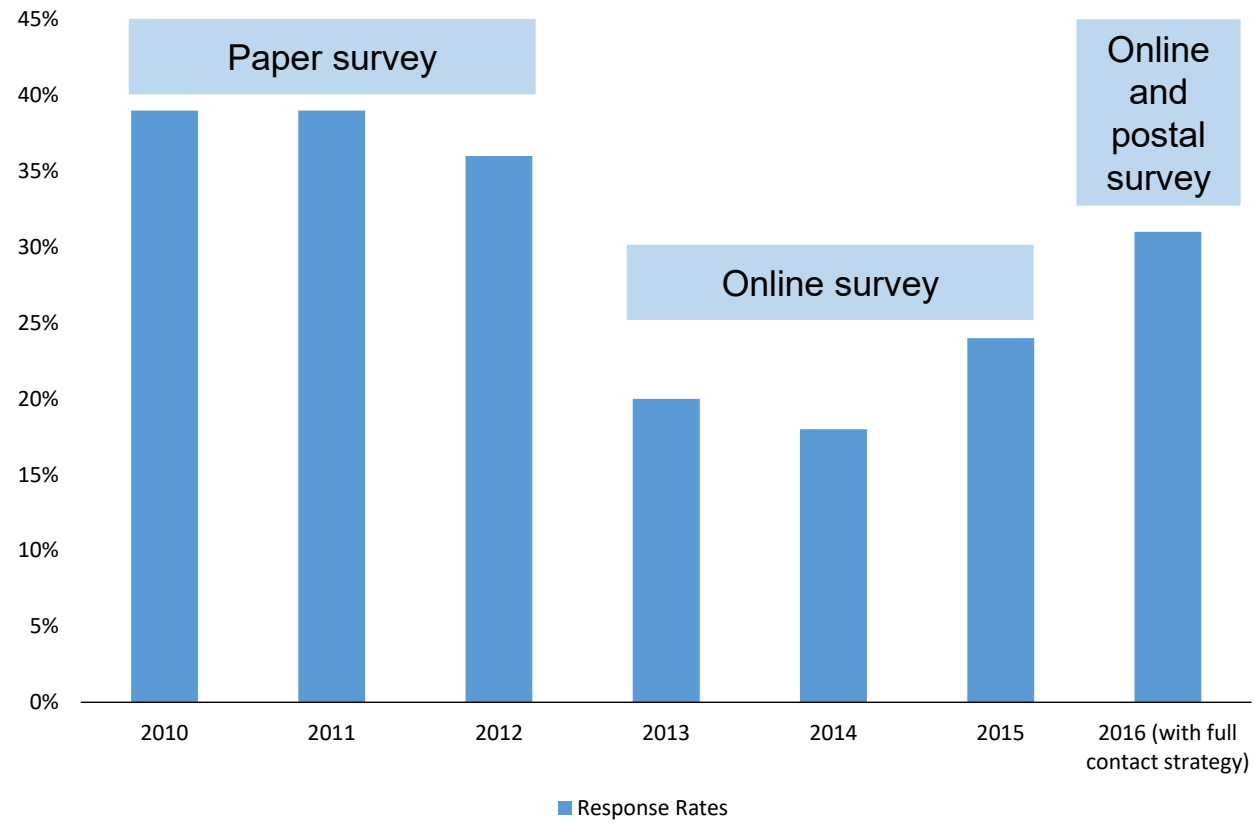
[5] Nicolaas, G., Smith, P., Pickering, K. & Branson, C. (2015). Increasing response rates in postal surveys while controlling costs: an experimental investigation. Social Research Practice, Issue 1 Winter 2015.

[6] It is important to note that mixed mode surveys are only helpful in raising response rates, if delivered sequentially, not in parallel. See Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014). Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys. Wiley.

evidence that web response rates are slightly higher for student surveys[7]. This tallies with patterns of response to the NQT survey. As figure 3.2 shows, response rates decreased by 16 percentage points when the survey moved from a postal to online mode.

Figure 3: Response rate by year for the NQT Survey



Of course, the cost of delivering solely a postal survey is high and conducting an online survey is far cheaper. Therefore, a mixed mode design of online and postal is preferential. In response to this evidence, the NQT survey in 2016 ran as a mixed-mode online and postal survey to test whether the introduction of a postal mode of completion could help to boost the overall response rate. For the main sample in 2016, those who did not respond to the first two email contacts were sent a copy of the questionnaire in the post, with a request to complete either the paper

[7] Manfreda, K.L., Bosnjak, M., Berzelak, J., Haas, I., and Vehovar, V. (2008). Web surveys versus other survey modes: A meta-analysis comparing response rates. International Journal of Market Research, 50:79–104. Shih, TH. & Fan, X. (2008). Comparing Response Rates from Web and Mail Surveys: A Meta-Analysis. Field Methods, 20: 249.

questionnaire or the online survey. Indeed, as shown by figure 3.2, response rates increased from 24% in 2015 to 31% in 2016.

However, it is important to bear in mind that analysis of response to the 2016 survey shows there do not appear to be many systematic differences in the profile of those responding online and by post – in other words, the postal survey does not appear to reduce bias (at least on observable characteristics) in the achieved sample.

3.2.4 Questionnaire design

Survey length

Keeping the survey as short as possible is essential for maximising response.[8] In 2016, the mean completion time was just under nine minutes (excluding those where the survey was open for very long periods and the website 'timed out') and 84% of respondents completed the survey within 5-15 minutes.

For some NQTs interviewed, the length of a survey was the deciding factor in whether they would complete it.

"That's the main thing I think about surveys; how long they take." **NQT, HEI provider led, primary**

Ten minutes was generally seen as a satisfactory length for a survey, although there were NQTs who felt this was still too long.

"Sometimes [the surveys] can be quite long. They take about 10 minutes to fill out." ***NQT, Teach First, primary***

Making the survey device agnostic

It is useful to also consider the design of the online survey in more detail. To minimise costs, it is essential to maximise the online response before moving to (more costly) paper questionnaires. Recent evidence emphasises the importance of designing device agnostic online surveys (i.e. questionnaires that can be completed on a PC, mobile or tablet) for maximising response rates.[9] Respondents want the ability to complete online questionnaires when and how they want.

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[8] Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014). Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys. Wiley.

[9] Forum: What market researchers should know about mobile surveys, International Journal of Market Research, Vol. 57 No. 4, 2015 p.521–532

Furthermore, looking at the 2016 survey, as shown in Table 3.1, over half of respondents completed the questionnaire on mobile devices (55%), with the majority of these completing on smartphones. Table 3.2 provides further detail about the operating systems used, and highlights that any online survey of this population needs to cater for all the major operating systems in order to be accessible and support high response rates. The findings underline the importance of providing an optimal experience for those completing on mobile devices, as any difficulties are likely to lead to break offs.

Table 1: Type of device used to complete online survey

Type of device	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Any mobile device	893	55%
Smartphone	777	48%
Tablet	116	7%
Desktop	683	42%
Unknown	36	2%

Table 2: Operating systems used to complete online survey

Operating system	Number of respondents	% of respondents
iOS/Mac	803	50%
Android	251	16%
Windows	549	34%
Other	9	1%

This is also reflected in feedback from NQTs during the depth interviews who highlighted the importance of being able to complete the survey on a variety of devices. This is particularly important for such a busy, time poor audience.

The questionnaire

Careful consideration needs to be made to the questionnaire, as the length, wording and order of questions, can greatly affect response rates.

The survey in 2016 demonstrated that long questions can cause people to drop out of the survey. As shown in table 3.3 all grid questions (those questions with multiple statements) in the 2016 survey generally had more people abandon at that point than the non-grid questions. Moreover, the longest grid question, with 15 statements, was the question where the highest number of respondents abandoned the survey.

Table 3: Where respondents abandoned the survey

Question number	Number of respondents abandoning survey at this question	Type of question
Q1	31	Scale
Q2a	38	Grid (4 statements)
Q2b	15	Grid (4 statements)
Q3	10	Pre-coded list
Q4	12	Scale
Q5	6	Numerical
Q6	18	Numerical
Q7	5	Grid (2 statements)
Q8	-	Scale
Q9	17	Grid (3 statements)
Q10	41	Grid (15 statements – 3 pages of 5 statements each)
Q11	24	Grid (6 statements)
Q12	7	Scale
Q13	-	Open-ended
Q14	2	Pre-coded list
Q15	8	Pre-coded list
Q16	5	Scale
Q17	2	Grid (4 statements)
Q18	2	Open-ended
Q19	10	Pre-coded list
Q20/21	3	Open-ended/ database

Questions that do not appear relevant to respondents or questions which are a cognitive burden also discourage respondents from completing surveys. This effect can also be seen in the 2016 survey. Question 2a had 38 people dropping out at this point; a relatively high number. This question asked about different NCTL services. For the first three services, between 64-69% of respondents had not heard of the service. This may have led respondents to feel the survey was not relevant to them, accounting for the high number of abandonments.

Question 6 also had a high number of respondents abandoning the survey. This question asked about the number of weeks and days per week that NQTs had worked with pupils during their ITT year. Although the cognitive testing for the 2016 survey showed that respondents could answer this question easily, providers singled this question out as being difficult for NQTs to answer, or that it would not be relevant for NQTs. For example, it was highlighted that generally Teach First pupils are in their schools 5 days a week and therefore there was no need to have this question in the survey.

In conclusion therefore, if tweaks to the 2016 questionnaire were made and if Q2a, 6, 10, and 11 were not in the questionnaire, 177 more respondents may have completed the survey.

3.3 Methods for improving the current NQT response rate

3.3.1 Further improve communications with NQTs

The 2016 survey used all of the communication tactics advised by survey literature, to raise response rates. These including mixed contact modes, the use of a letter signed by NCTL, and different communication content at each reminder (see section 3.2.2 for more detail). As there was an increase of seven percentage points between the 2015 and 2016 surveys[10], it is suggested these are kept in place. However, these strategies could be further tested. For example, different sequences and mixes of contact could be tested according to the contact details available for NQTs. For instance, those with no telephone or email contact details but with a postal address, could be sent a postcard reminder, whereas those with a workable email, would only be sent email reminders.

3.3.2 Provide an incentive

Dillman et al. highlight that a cash incentive sent alongside a survey is one of the most effective ways of improving survey response (unconditional incentives). This is because the respondent feels that it is appropriate to return the monetary gesture by filling out the survey. Incentives can be particularly effective at improving the representativeness of a survey by encouraging those who would not have participated without the incentive to complete the questionnaire. For this group, incentives could play a key role in tipping the balance in favour of participation – something that is usually achieved by well-trained interviewers in telephone and face-to-face surveys. Furthermore, an increase in response can sometimes offset the cost of providing incentives (for example reducing costs of printing and posting a paper questionnaire to non-responders).

As far as we are aware, there is no robust evidence about whether incentives improve response rates among surveys of teachers/NQTs.

[10] To note – this was the difference between the response rates of the 2016 sample where all communication tactics were used. A reserve sample was also included in the 2016 survey. This has not been included.

The findings from the qualitative interviews present a mixed picture as to whether incentives would increase response to the survey. While some NQTs reported that receiving an incentive would motivate them to participate[11], the most commonly expressed view was that they would take part if they thought the survey would be their chance to have their say on training and result in changes for future teacher cohorts.

"it's whether I feel there's value in it, if I've got something to say, if I think it's relevant, if it will be used in a positive way rather than just as a random survey-- it's going to inform decisions. It's nice to see what the survey will lead to. What's the overall aim of it?" ***NQT, HEI provider led, secondary***

Indeed, Dillman et al. also highlight that specifying how survey results will be useful, is a good tool to raise response rates.

Therefore, monetary incentives may increase response rates but this would of course be costly, particularly when the survey returns to a census. However, as the NQT interviews highlight, making clear in respondent communications that the survey would directly improve training for future cohorts of NQTs could be as much of a reason to take part as a monetary incentive.

3.3.3 Improve the questionnaire design

Minimising the negative effects of grid questions

As discussed above, a large number of respondents closed down the survey at the long grid questions. There are however two alternatives to replace the traditional grid which, if used, should be used across all online devices: (1) the progressive grid and (2) the collapsible grid.

The progressive grid

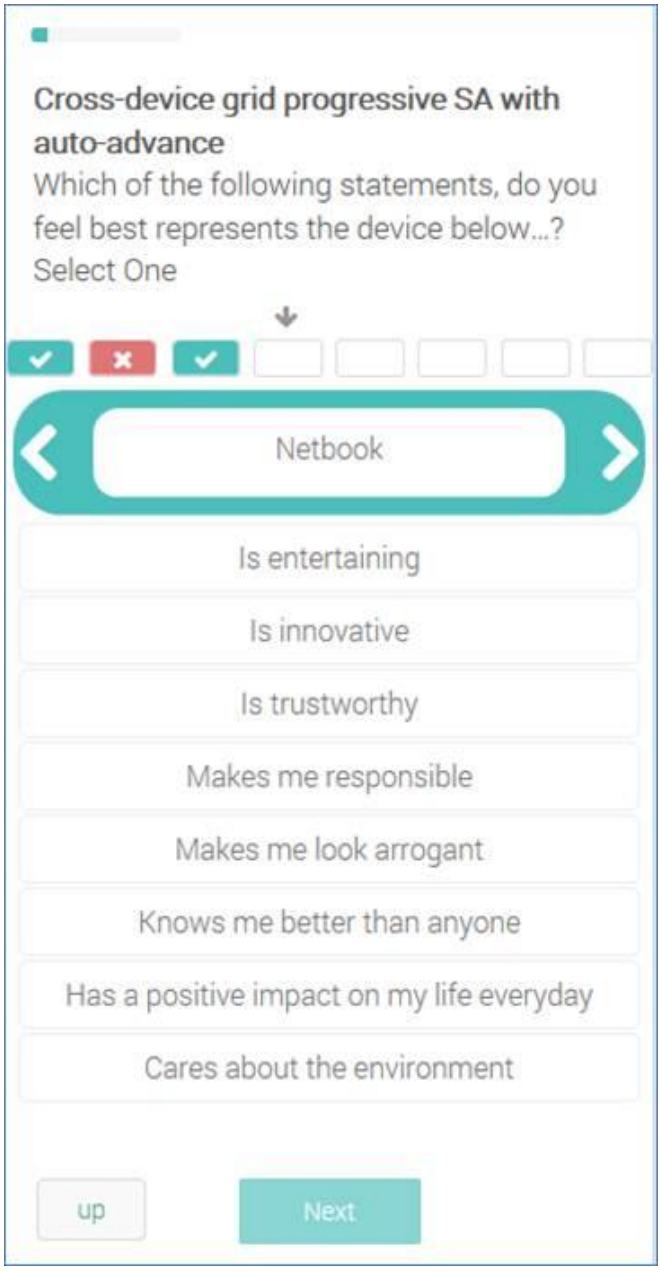
For the progressive grid, the items are presented one at a time in a box at the top of the screen with the response list presented underneath. The response list is static whereas the item in the box changes to the next one when the respondent selects an answer for that particular item (i.e. automatic progression). See Figure 3.4 for an example of this format. Recently at the General Online Research conference in Berlin (16-17 March 2017), this type of grid was compared with a traditional grid,

[11] It should be borne in mind that NQTs received an incentive for participating in the depth interviews which may have affected their response when asked about the role of incentives in motivating them to take part in the NQT survey.

item by item with scrolling, and item by item with a paging design (Hanson, 2017). The experiment found:

1. Similar substantive results and less straight-lining (where respondents choose the same response code for questions) for the progressive grid compared to a traditional grid.
2. The completion times for the progressive grid was less than both “item by item” approaches, but also slightly less than the completion times for a traditional grid.
3. Lower levels of skip attempts for the dynamic grid compared to both “item by item” approaches.

Figure 4: An example of a progressive grid, showing the fourth item out of a total of eight items and a progress indicator for the grid which shows that the second item was skipped



The collapsible/accordion grid

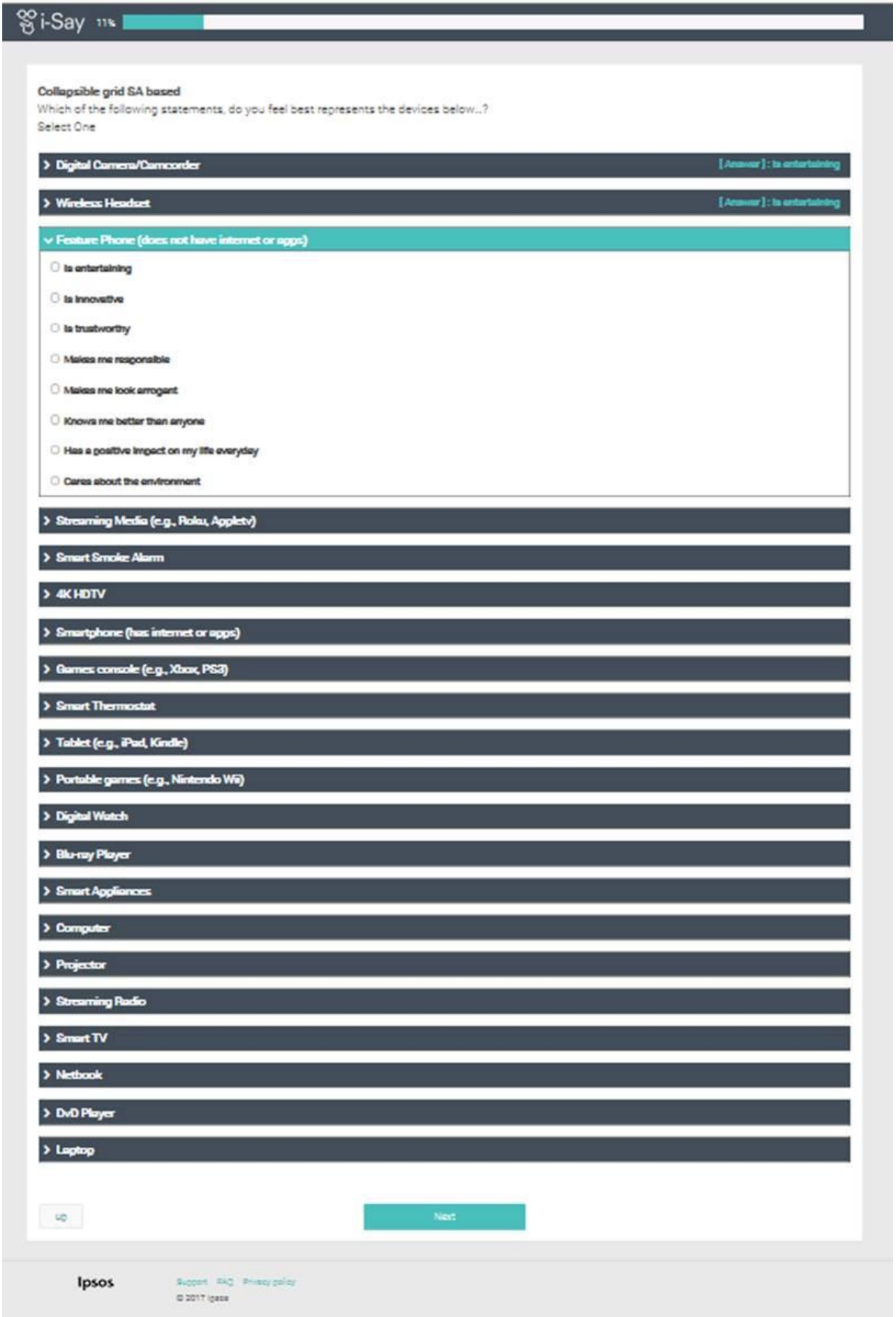
A collapsible/accordion grid is a vertical list of expanding headers for the items. The header opens when clicked to reveal the response list and closes when a selection is made. The selected response option is visible within the header using a different colour/font size. See Figure 3.5 for an example of this format. A collapsible/accordion grid would be a more desirable solution than using item-by-item with paging for the following reasons:

1. The time taken to complete the collapsible grid is similar to a traditional grid, and will therefore be much quicker than an item-by-item approach with paging.
2. Using this approach, respondents can see all items on a single screen, along with the entire response scale for each item, and their selected response per item. This allows them to easily compare and contrast their answers across items, as they would normally be able to do with a traditional grid.
3. The collapsible grid produces comparable data to traditional grids.
4. It is easy to use for respondents.

A recent study[12] found similar results from the two grid formats. Respondents reported that they found the collapsible/accordion grid easy to use and felt they were as accurate as those responding with a traditional grid. The time taken to complete the collapsible/accordion grid was similar to a traditional grid.

[12] Frances M. Barlas, Randall K. Thomas, Nicole Buttermore. (2017). Mobile-Friendly Grid Questions: The Accordion Grid as an Alternative to the Traditional Grid. Presentation at the General Online Research Conference, 16-17 March 2017, Berlin, Germany.

Figure 5: An example of a collapsible/accordion grid



3.3.4 Use support from providers

The merits of provider support

A number of studies run by Ipsos MORI use a provider-administered approach to increase survey response. For example, Learner Voice Wales for the Welsh Government, which surveys post-16 learners, achieved a response rate of between 40% and 48% between 2013 -15. The Learner Satisfaction Survey, on behalf of the Skills Funding Agency, gained 325,467 learners from 757 providers for the 2015/16 survey.[13]

For both surveys, providers sent an email link to an online survey and sent paper questionnaires to non-responders (these questionnaires were either sent to providers from Ipsos MORI, or they were printed and distributed by the provider) [14]. Providers were incentivised with a report containing provider level results to achieve a certain response rate.

Providers also play a large role in the administration of the National Student Survey which, in 2016, achieved a response rate of 72%. This was slightly different to the Learner Voice and Learner Satisfaction surveys, in that Ipsos MORI sent the initial email and postal questionnaires but Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) then encouraged students to take part and sent reminders. Again, institution-level reports were given to those HEIs who achieved a certain response rate.

The provider-led approach works well in these studies because they capitalise on the personal relationship between learners and their provider as a way of encouraging learners to respond to the survey. Additionally, the results feed into the national ranking of providers which motivates institutions to assist with the survey administration.

However, it is important to consider that, although this provider led approach is effective in improving response rates to these studies, it is also costly. The success of this approach relies on extensive day-to-day contact with providers to deal with queries and encourage them to continue to advocate completion of the surveys amongst learners. Additionally, workshops were held as part of the Learner Voice Wales study to further engage providers in the study.

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[13] As the survey was an open link, there was no method of assessing how many survey links had been sent out. Therefore, a response rate cannot be calculated.

[14] In the Learner Satisfaction Survey, there were telephone booster calls by Ipsos MORI, after all other modes of contact had been made.

The involvement of providers in the administration of a survey therefore relies heavily on their buy-in into the study and an effective incentivisation strategy. The viability of this for the NQT Survey is discussed further below.

3.4 Viability of provider support for the NQT survey

This section largely draws on interviews with teacher training providers and outlines the attitudes of providers to the survey as it currently stands and their attitudes to the potential models of support they could give, to assess buy-in.

3.4.1 Providers' views of the current survey

Survey content and aim

Providers were not aware of the purpose of the survey. A few thought it was a quality assurance tool for Ofsted and no one said it was a survey for providers.

"I couldn't tell you what NCTL would say it's for but I would guess it's in terms of tracking and insuring people are in placements and have jobs." **Provider, small HEI**

Overall providers felt that the topics covered in the NQT survey were relevant. Nevertheless, they also felt that the survey content needs to adapt to the changing national context quickly. For example, one provider mentioned that equipping teachers with the tools to teach more able students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds has been high on the agenda this academic year. They would therefore like to see questions about this.

A few providers highlighted a number of questions in the survey as not being relevant or designed in the way they would want. For example, some said they would not distinguish between theory and practice, as is done in the survey.

"Those questions are really difficult to answer. What we do is integrate theory and [the] practical…this is the line that is being played out: theory is what you do in university and practical is what you do in school. This is simply not the case - it's a combination of the two. The division is divisive and I don't think it helps student teachers." **Provider, large HEI.**

The question asking NQTs to state how many placements they had been on during training, was also highlighted. Providers were unsure what the purpose of the question was – querying whether it was to check that trainees had completed the statutory requirement of two days on placement. It was also felt that NQTs would find it difficult to answer the question as some placements can last just one day and therefore they were unsure what would be included or not.

Timing of the survey

Timing affecting data quality

There was widespread concern among providers that responses to questions about the ITT year are affected by the fact that survey respondents are in their NQT year when they complete the survey. They therefore felt that they could be unfairly judged since they have no control over what happens in the NQT year.

“Because the answers are so coloured by the experience of the induction year you haven't really got clean data." **Provider, large SCITT**

"Some of the resistance is: what is the value of the NQT survey? It's something that's been used as a measure against a sector when we've got no control over it.” ***Provider, large HEI***

To remedy this, some providers have administered their own internal surveys. These are often based on questions in the NQT survey.

"When Ofsted come and they look at NQT responses, although they know about the low response rates…a focus of theirs would be the lowest options on the NQT survey. A wise provider would have alternative and more up-to-date data at hand...to show a more accurate picture" **Provider, small SCITT**

That said, most NQTs interviewed for this research (as well as NQTs interviewed as part of the cognitive testing of the 2016 and 2017 NQT Surveys[15]) said they could easily distinguish between the ITT and NQT years and therefore would answer the questions accurately.

"you are required to do a lot of reflection on what you've done throughout different terms…. so it sticks in your mind.” **NQT, school direct, secondary**

Therefore, having the survey at the end of the NQT year may not affect the results to the extent that providers perceive it to. There is also the argument that NQTs would be in a better position to make judgements about their ITT year once they have started teaching. Indeed, one provider suggested that instead of a survey in their NQT year it would be better to have a survey is delivered a couple of years into teachers’ careers.

[15] Cognitive interviews

In conclusion, if a provider-administered approach is taken, this level of distrust in the timing of the survey would need to be addressed in order to achieve sufficient provider buy-in.

When providers receive survey data

Providers also reported that the current timing of the survey means that they receive the data too late to implement changes for the following cohort of trainees, therefore reducing its usefulness.

"You can't use the information to improve next year's programme. An example of this is when we had the NQT survey and results for a programme that no longer existed…our life has moved on, our training has moved on, national initiatives have moved on." **Provider, small SCITT**

Reporting

The reporting of the 2016 NQT survey, was a source of frustration for some providers interviewed. The ranking of routes, whilst giving limited context as to the differences in nature of the routes, was seen to be unfair.

"I had a discussion with the NCTL about the report that was written on the NQT survey which in my view came across as very biased towards school link provision." **Provider, medium HEI**

It was also felt that the ranking of routes was not helpful due to the fact that the satisfaction of training is less to do with the route they're on and more to do with other environmental factors, as is highlighted in report for DfE by Gorard[16].

3.4.2 Providers' views on administering the survey

Types of provider support models

There are three possible ways that providers could assist with the implementation of the NQT Survey.

1. The survey (as set by NCTL) is administered by providers;
2. NCTL adds questions to providers' own surveys
3. NCTL/an agency administers the survey but the providers encourage NQTs to complete the survey.

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[16] 2015, Gorad S, *Newly Qualified Teacher 2015: An investigation of attitudes in terms of route and context.*

These are discussed further below.

A provider administered survey

There were mixed views as to whether providers would be willing and able to administer the survey to NQTs. Smaller providers tended to say they would be able to administer the survey and that it wouldn't be a large administrative burden, whereas larger providers felt it would be very costly to do this.

"Why would we want to carry the cost of administering? I'm not prepared to have my institution hammered for not getting a good response rate for a survey that's not for us, it's for NCTL." **Provider, Large SCITT**

Some providers also questioned how they would receive the data, as well as whether the survey would be conducted at the same time as other surveys they administer, such as the NSS, which would add to the administrative burden.

NCTL includes questions within providers' own surveys

Most providers said that this method would work for them in principle and providers were more likely to be content with this idea than administering the NQT survey themselves.

However, an important consideration for NCTL if this approach is taken is how the surveys are administered by providers and the reliability of the data. Providers reported that they often administer their own surveys in classroom sessions with the class tutor present (who is being asked about in the questionnaire). It is important that the conditions of the survey protect confidentiality and minimise social desirability bias in order for NCTL to be able to use the results reliably. For example, we would recommend that if paper questionnaires are used learners are required to place their completed questionnaire in an envelope to protect privacy. Also, if an online survey is administered it is vital that respondents are able to complete this privately. In order to use data collected in this way, NCTL would need to issue guidelines for providers on how their surveys are administered.

NCTL/an agency administers the survey but the providers encourage NQTs to complete the survey

Some providers reported that they already publicise the NQT Survey to their former learners – for example at meetings held during the NQT year. Some also reported they email their NQTs to remind them to complete the survey. However, given that

NQTs have moved to their NQT year so no longer based at their ITT provider, there is a limit to the extent to which this would be successful in improving response.

3.4.3 Provider incentives

Provider level reports

One way of encouraging providers to support the survey would be to give provider level reports. When asked whether provider level reports would be an incentive to administer the survey, a typical answer was that they already receive this and therefore this would unlikely work as an extra incentive, unless these provider level reports are conditional on particularly high response rates (above the threshold that was set for the previous census surveys). In addition, for the data to be useful for providers, it is likely they would need to be released before the September after the survey and if the survey ran during the ITT year. Please see section 3.4.1 for more on this.

Providers being able to add questions on to the questionnaire

Another method of engaging providers is to have the option for them to add their own questions to the NQT Survey. This option is available in the National Student Survey and would give providers their own data for issues relevant to them. However, given that providers already administer their own surveys, the usefulness of adding questions to the NQT Survey would need to be made clear to them. The issue of timing of the NQT Survey may also be a barrier to the popularity of this option among providers.

4. Recommendations

There are a number of small changes to the survey design and implementation which may improve the NQT Survey response rate by a few percentage points which are summarised below.

- Ensure communications about the survey makes clear that the survey is an important way for NCTL to monitor experiences of ITT and so changes can be made for future cohorts.
    - Acknowledge that they may have received numerous requests to participate in other surveys (including from their provider) but this survey is important because it looks at training from a national perspective.

- Increase publicity of the survey at NQT events and social media around the time that the survey is sent out which will help emphasise its importance.
- Consider introducing a postcard reminder which has proven effective at increasing response to the GP Patients Survey. This could be targeted at those with no mobile or email contact details, but have a postal address. It is important to weigh up the cost of this against the potential improvement in response rates.
- Further improvements to the design of the online survey to minimise break-offs and quality of the data collected – for example using progressive or collapsible/accordion grids instead of traditional grid questions. It is essential that the survey continues to be designed to be 'device agnostic' to facilitate the likely increasing number of NQTs who will complete the survey on a smartphone.
- Ensure question content is reviewed before each survey wave to ensure it is relevant to NQTs and questions are as quick and easy to complete as possible. Consider reducing questionnaire length further if possible; if not ensure the average completion time does not exceed 10 minutes.

However, these small enhancements are unlikely to have a large enough effect on response rates to produce robust provider-level findings as is desired by NCTL. In order for this to happen it is likely that providers will need to be involved in administering the survey (as has been the case in other studies mentioned in this report). However, this would require fundamental changes to the survey. Our recommendations are discussed further below.

- Consider changing the timing of the survey so it takes place at the end of the ITT year (to provide data on NQTs' experiences of their training which would be unaffected by the NQT year) and a further survey at the end of the NQT year (to provide data which helps assess the role of ITT in preparing NQTs for teaching).
    - Surveying trainees during their ITT year would also be beneficial from a sampling perspective as more accurate contact details could be collected.
    - Data would need to be available for providers quickly so the findings could be used to implement changes before the next academic year.
- The most effective way of involving providers in increasing response rates is to include a ranking system or make funding contingent on survey responses. However, this is likely to be very controversial and the reporting of these

comparisons needs to be carefully operationalised. Providers highlighted that they operate in different circumstances and it is important that comparisons handle this sensitively. That said, it may be worth considering whether comparisons within provider type (e.g. SCITT) are more viable. In order for this to be implemented successfully we would strongly recommend further discussions with providers to explore how to alleviate their concerns.

- Providers would need to be 'incentivised' to carry out this additional work. This could be in the form of a report containing provider-level findings which could be automated to reduce costs.
- A provider-led survey would increase the overall cost of the survey. Additional budget would be needed to cover the increase in administrative costs for providers as well as the additional provider engagement work required.

Conclusion

There are a number of enhancements that can be made to the design and implementation of the NQT Survey which may increase the response rate by a few percentage points. However, these measures are unlikely to result in a sufficiently large increase to enable robust comparisons in results between providers. In order to achieve this, provider involvement in the NQT Survey is likely to be needed. However, for this to take place, fundamental changes to the NQT Survey are required. This includes the timing and funding of the survey as well as implementing an incentivisation strategy which motivates providers to help improve response to the survey.

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