



Centre for Teaching Excellence
Ionad Sàr-mhathais ann an Teagasg

Centre for Teaching Excellence: Technical Report on Initial Engagement Phase

Irene Bell, Stuart Hall, Aileen Kennedy, Kevin
Lowden, Kevin Proudfoot

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Executive Summary¹

The Centre for Teaching Excellence (CfTE) was established to support research-informed professional learning across Scotland's education system. This report presents the findings from its initial engagement phase, designed to identify priority areas for research and development, and to shape the Centre's structure and operations in collaboration with teachers and wider stakeholders.

Purpose and Approach

The engagement phase addressed Objective 1 of the CfTE brief: 'Working in collaboration with teachers and other stakeholders to identify priority areas for research in learning, teaching, and assessment'. A two-tier methodology was adopted, comprising:

- Focus Groups: 19 online sessions with 106 participants (teachers and other stakeholders), conducted in English and Gaelic.
- National Teacher Survey (in English and Gaelic): 1,934 responses gathered in June 2025.

This mixed-methods approach ensured both depth and breadth, capturing diverse perspectives while foregrounding the voices of teachers.

Key Findings

Stakeholder Priorities

Across teachers, parents/carers, young people, and system-level stakeholders, several converging themes emerged:

- Curriculum & Pedagogy: Demand for inclusive, creative, and flexible curricula, especially in Gaelic and ASN contexts.
- Equity & Inclusion: Emphasis on trauma-informed practice, social justice, and culturally relevant education.
- Professional Learning: Preference for practitioner enquiry, modular CPD, peer mentoring, and critical engagement with AI.
- Research Access: Need for co-produced, accessible research that bridges theory and practice.
- Barriers: Time constraints, workload, rural isolation, and fragmented PL systems.

Teacher Survey Insights

Teachers ranked ASN, literacy, pupil engagement, and classroom pedagogy as top professional learning priorities. Open responses highlighted additional needs in numeracy, behaviour management, wellbeing, and leadership development.

¹ This Executive Summary has been adapted from a version created using Co-Pilot Generative AI

Teachers reported that their professional learning was primarily self-directed or aligned with school priorities. The most frequently accessed support for professional learning included online searches, CLPL events, and teacher networks. Academic research was valued but often inaccessible due to paywalls and time constraints.

Significant numbers of teachers engaged in practitioner enquiry and communities of practice, which they reported as enhancing confidence, reducing isolation, and improving learner outcomes. Key skill gaps included literature searching, methodology selection, and qualitative analysis.

Teachers envision CfTE as a platform for:

- Relevant, needs-led professional learning
- Collaboration and networking
- Curated resources and research access
- Career development and recognition
- Equity of access across contexts
- System-level alignment and change

Strategic Implications

The findings underscore the need for CfTE to:

- Anchor professional learning in practice through modular, inquiry-based formats
- Embed equity for ASN, Gaelic, and rural communities
- Amplify practitioner voice and expertise
- Translate research into accessible, actionable outputs
- Foster multi-agency collaboration
- Support teacher wellbeing through reflective, workload-sensitive professional learning
- Ensure strategic coherence while protecting local autonomy

Next Steps

The CfTE Research and Evaluation Team is conducting deeper analysis of subgroup data and will publish the survey data via the University of Glasgow's Enlighten platform to enable others to access the data and conduct focused analyses. The insights from this initial engagement phase will inform the focus of CfTE's Thematic Hubs and the Centre's ways of working.

Core Message

CfTE should be a catalyst for systemic change—bridging research and practice, empowering teachers, and embedding equity and wellbeing at the heart of Scottish education.

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List of abbreviations

Additional Support Needs	ASN
Association of Directors of Education	ADES
Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland	AHDS
Career Long Professional Learning	CLPL
Centre for Teaching Excellence	CfTE
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities	COSLA
Educational Institute of Scotland	EIS
Education Scotland	ES
General Teaching Council for Scotland	GTCS
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education	HMiE
Local Authorities	LAs
National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers	NASUWT
Professional Learning	PL
School Leaders Scotland	SLS
Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators	SAMEE
Scottish Catholic Education Service	SCES
Scottish Council of Independent Schools	SCIS
Scottish Secondary Teachers Association	SSTA

1. Background

As part of the very early development of the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CfTE), the CfTE Research and Evaluation team had responsibility for leading an initial engagement phase with teachers and wider stakeholders in order to help set the direction and structure of the Centre as it moves forward. Specifically, it sought to address Objective 1 of the CfTE brief, namely:

Working in collaboration with teachers and other stakeholders to identify areas of priority for research on learning, teaching and assessment in Scotland's education system.

The 'areas of priority' would inform the focus of Thematic Hubs, to be established following the existing Core Hub model.

The research design for this initial engagement phase took into account both the need for rigorous evidence upon which to build the Centre and the need to engage in this piece of work at pace. Another key priority for the team was to ensure that from the very start, the Centre was accessible to teachers in both English and Gaelic. Taking each of these imperatives into account, the broad design for the initial engagement phase adopted a two-tier approach, consisting of:

1. Focus group interviews (online, in English and Gaelic)
2. National teacher survey (in English and Gaelic)

The rationale for this two-tier approach was that a round of targeted focus group interviews with key stakeholders would mean that the subsequent national survey would be informed by a range of stakeholder perspectives meaning that it could be more targeted than just a survey alone.

While CfTE is focused on 'teachers first and foremost, it is recognised that wider stakeholders, who bring with them a range of different perspectives, also hold vital knowledge about system needs in terms of research-focused teacher professional learning. This two-tier approach allowed for wider stakeholder views to be included, whilst still ensuring that the National Teacher Survey could shed light on the priorities of teachers across Scotland; the people who will engage directly with the Centre's activities and opportunities. Therefore, eight focus groups were targeted at teachers and eight at stakeholders as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Focus group target groups

Teacher focus groups (8 groups in total)	Stakeholder focus groups (8 groups in total)
1 x Gaelic Early Years/Primary 1 x Gaelic secondary 2 x Early Years/Primary 2 x Secondary 2 x Additional Support Needs (ASN)	1 x Gaelic stakeholders 1 x Professional Associations 1 x SCIS/SCES/SAMEE 1 x Parents/carers 1 x Young People 2 x System-level organisations (ADES, COSLA, ES, GTCS, HMiE) 1 x Academia

This report outlines the methodology and reports on findings which were then presented to the Advisory Board ² for their consideration in coming to agreement about the suggested priorities for the CfTE Thematic Hubs.

² The CfTE Advisory Board is Chaired by Margery McMahon (Director, CfTE) and Victoria Kelly (Scottish Government). Membership includes Centre partners and key stakeholders. As part of the Centre's governance framework, the Board provides advice, guidance and feedback on the Centre's services and provision for teachers.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The engagement phase of the CfTE drew on three distinct approaches to understand and secure the views of the teaching profession on their professional learning priorities and their suggestions for developing in the Centre to best address these. These approaches were:

- Discussions with key stakeholders.
- Focus groups with teachers and other stakeholders.
- National survey of teachers.

2.2 Discussions with key stakeholders

This ongoing engagement involved both formal and informal discussions amongst members of the team and colleagues across HEIs, Local Authorities and schools. These discussions sought to identify the current professional learning needs of teachers and identify a range of question prompts for the focus group programme and ultimately survey components for the national survey. At a formal level the CfTE Advisory Board were key in helping to set the context for the work and reporting their understanding of the profession and its current challenges and needs. Members of the Board included representatives of Scottish Government, Education Scotland, the GTCS, Trade Unions and Professional Associations. These colleagues also provided much support and feedback on the developing research instruments for the focus groups and survey as well as also providing additional routes of contact and publicity especially in relation to the national survey.

2.3 Focus Groups with teachers and other stakeholders

The second strand of the engagement phase involved conducting focus groups with teachers and other relevant stakeholders. Focus group discussions centred on exploring participants' views on what support teachers require to support them to engage with, use and generate teaching-focused research. Specifically, the discussions sought to identify the challenges in schools which could be supported through additional focused support and gather views on the best ways to facilitate teachers' professional learning to meet these challenges. Ultimately the findings from the discussions were used to inform the creation of a list of key professional learning priorities which teachers were asked to rank and add to in the subsequent national survey - See following section. Given the centrality of Gaelic Education and rural educational provision to CfTE, focus groups were convened specifically to gather the views of Gaelic and rural teachers.

Conducting the focus groups

Focus groups were conducted online, facilitators kept notes on the discussion and responses. In addition, and as a backup, sessions were recorded using the recording facility on Teams. These recordings were primarily used as memory prompts and to supplement the facilitators' notes, although Gaelic focus groups were transcribed and translated into English. It was decided early in the planning for the focus groups that the primary source of analysis would be the facilitators' notes in order to analyse findings expeditiously. However, it is expected that the Teams recording will be revisited by the research team when time is available for more detailed analysis. On average focus groups lasted between 45 minutes and one hour.

Scale of the exercise

Nineteen focus groups took place between 28 April and 8 May 2025. In total there were 106 participants, 57 of whom were teachers: 12 Additional Special Needs (ASN) teachers; 19 Early Years & Primary (EY & P) teachers and 26 Secondary teachers. The latter two categories include Gaelic teachers and teachers from Dumfries and Galloway (D & G). Given the short timescale available for conducting the focus groups we consider the resultant number of groups to be particularly noteworthy and a sound basis for subsequent analysis.

Table 2 shows the number of attendees by stakeholder group and Table 3 shows teacher participant numbers by sector.

Table 2 - Focus Group Participants by group and numbers

Stakeholder Group	Number Participating
Academic	7
ADES/ES/GTCS/LA	6
ASN Teachers	12
Children and Young People*	5
EY & Primary Teachers	19
Gaelic Stakeholders	6
Parents/Carers	11
Professional Associations	8
SCIS/SCES/SAMEE	6
Secondary Teachers	26
Total	106

*Collaboration with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) allowed the Evaluation team to consult members of their pupil voice group.

Table 3 - Focus Group Teacher Participants by Sector

Teacher Stakeholders	Number Participating
ASN Teachers	12
EY and Primary Teachers	8
EY and Primary Teachers: D & G	4
EY and Primary Teachers: Gaelic	7
Secondary Teachers	17
Secondary Teachers: Gaelic	9
Total	57

Analysis of focus group material

Analysis of the focus group material was conducted in two ways. The first method involved members of the research team conducting a manual thematic analysis of facilitators' notes using the discussion topics as a template for analysis. The second method involved conducting a further thematic analysis of the material through the use of AI. This allowed the research team to compare the results from both methods ensuring a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the material had taken place.

2.4 National survey of teachers

The final stage of data gathering during the engagement phase involved the use of a national survey to consult the teaching profession on a range of relevant issues but with a primary focus on the identification of professional learning priorities and the role that the CfTE could play in supporting teachers.

Survey content

The survey was built around a number of relevant areas, responses to which were regarded as key in the development of a relevant, effective and impactful CfTE. Respondents were asked about:

- Ranking and identifying Professional Learning priorities.
- Identifying drivers of Professional Learning.
- Use of existing sources of support for research-informed Professional Learning.
- Experience of research activities over the previous year.
- Engaging with Communities of Practice.
- Teaching-focused research skills.
- How the CfTE can best support teachers.

Gaelic and English versions

Given the centrality of GME to the CfTE the Glasgow evaluation team worked closely with colleagues in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to create a Gaelic version of the questionnaire which was launched at the same time as the English version.

Piloting

A draft of the survey was piloted through in-depth discussion with six teachers. Helpful feedback was garnered on content, terminology and user experience which fed into a final draft. This final draft was then reviewed by members of the wider CfTE team and Scottish Government colleagues, leading to the final version (Appendix 1).

Publicising and launching the survey

It was recognised that publicity for the survey was key to securing responses and a number of overlapping publicity routes were adopted. Invitations to teachers to complete the survey were sent using the Scottish Government school database. In addition, information and invitations were sent out to every Local Authority, professional associations, key stakeholder groups, trade unions and teacher interest groups. When the CfTE webpages and social media accounts went live, these were also used to promote the survey. The survey was launched online using the Qualtrics platform on the 2nd of June 2025 and was available until the end of school term (30th June) when it was closed.

Responses

In total 1,934 responses to the survey were received. One thousand nine hundred and twenty teachers responded to the English version of the survey and 14 to the Gaelic version (and some Gaelic teachers responded to the English version). Despite the support of the Advisory Board, teacher professional associations, and other educational colleagues and authorities who reminded teachers of the survey and encouraged them to complete it, response rates remained low. However, it was clear from discussions with educational colleagues that the low response rate was not unexpected given the current challenges faced by the profession and the timing of the survey – during the later stages of the final term of the school year. The timing of the survey had been dictated by the other stages of the CfTE set-up. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the views of just under 2,000 teachers does represent a substantial body of evidence.

Who responded?

Briefly, the majority (71.9%) of respondents worked in local authority non-denominational schools, with a slightly over-representative sample (53.3%) working in the secondary sector, but with all sectors represented. The majority of responding teachers (56.2%) were

main grade teachers with 13.7% being Headteachers or Depute Headteachers. In terms of experience, just under six out of ten respondents (59.2%) had 16 years or more service in teaching, while only 1.1% were probationer teachers. Thirty one of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland were represented.

The survey findings section of the report and Appendix 2 provide a fuller description of respondents.

Analysis and findings

The Qualtrics survey platform provides a limited range of analysis options but, in the first instance, was sufficient to generate immediate reports for Scottish Government and the Advisory Board in relation to teacher ranking of professional learning priorities. Subsequently, the complete database was downloaded onto the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS allows for sophisticated and comprehensive analysis of numerical data. Quantitative findings in this report are presented in terms of frequencies, representing the aggregated voice of teachers who responded to the survey.

Where possible survey findings were also subject to additional statistical analysis to determine if there were significant and consequential differences in the responses of participant groups, for example, between less and more experienced teachers, or between primary and secondary teachers. However, the scope of this exercise is restricted by the relatively low response rates and the low numbers of participants in many categories. Ultimately, results are only reported where significant and meaningful differences have been established.

In addition, a number of questions allowed open text responses. These open contributions have been analysed thematically using AI with the aim of identifying key topics and ideas emerging from teacher responses. For several questions substantial numbers of teachers provided typed responses and the analysis of this material proved particularly insightful and will likely make a major contribution to CfTE hub developments and its subsequent activities.

3. Analysis of Focus Groups

The foregoing sections outline the aims and objectives of the CfTE initial engagement phase, and the methodology used to achieve them, including data collection through a series of focus groups. These focus groups explored the views of teachers and other key stakeholders on areas of priority for research on learning, teaching and assessment in Scotland's education system.

This section presents an analysis of the findings in relation to the four key stakeholder groups – Teachers, Parents/Carers, Young People, and System Stakeholders – exploring each group's priorities, and their views on effective support and enablers/inhibitors to accessing professional learning and teaching-focused research. It then provides a synthesis across the four stakeholder groups, highlighting cross-cutting themes, points of alignment, focus and contrasts and implications for the design of CfTE.

3.1 Teachers (Primary, Secondary, Gaelic Medium Education, ASN)

Key priorities for professional learning and research

- **Primary:** Primary teachers emphasise maintaining practitioner enquiry and peer learning to share expertise. They value collaboration across sectors, particularly to overcome isolation in rural contexts. Creative curriculum design, including play pedagogy, is seen as essential for engaging learners. Upskilling in digital pedagogy remains an urgent priority to align with learners' needs and technological change.
- **Secondary:** Priorities include more classroom-applicable pedagogy (e.g., active questioning, interactive strategies), stronger integration of ASN learners, and developing interdisciplinary learning approaches. Secondary teachers also identify the need for structured peer mentoring systems and for critical engagement with AI as a pedagogical tool.
- **Gaelic Education:** Gaelic teachers stress the need for immersion pedagogy informed by research on bilingualism and Gaelic acquisition. They highlight shortages of Gaelic-speaking staff, lack of immersion-appropriate resources, and the importance of building a strong Gaelic ethos in schools.
- **Additional Support Needs (ASN):** ASN teachers seek clearer, accredited training pathways into ASN specialisms, more targeted research into non-linear learning progress, and hands-on professional learning. They also identify workload reduction and specialist retention as priorities.

Effective support for professional learning and research

- Teachers value professional learning that is practice-based, collaborative, and tailored to sector needs. They highlight peer observation, cross-sector partnerships, and professional autonomy as effective support.

- Secondary teachers note the importance of structured peer mentoring; ASN teachers call for conferences and practice demonstrations; and Gaelic teachers emphasise Gaelic-specific hubs and networks.
- Teachers across sectors stress the importance of access to summarised, digestible research, as well as exposure to expert speakers and applied inquiry models such as lesson study.

Access: enablers and inhibitors

- **Enablers:** Opportunities for peer observation, leadership that supports protected time, flexible CPD formats (short recordings, bite-sized learning), and professional networks.
- **Inhibitors:** Time and workload pressures, rural isolation and professional loneliness, shortages of Gaelic and ASN resources, initiative overload, and lack of intermediary roles to translate research into practice.

Summary (teachers)

Teachers prioritise contextual, practice-grounded professional learning that values autonomy, peer collaboration, and sector-specific pedagogy. While leadership, networks, and flexible formats support access, systemic inhibitors such as workload, rural inequities, and resource scarcity persist.

3.2 Parents/carers and young people

Key priorities for professional learning and research

Parents/carers emphasise the need for earlier and more consistent identification of additional needs. They highlight persistent gaps in trauma-informed practice and express concern that teachers lack expertise in neurodiversity, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and sensory processing differences. They also call for more inclusive and strengths-based assessment models that recognise learner diversity.

Young people emphasise the importance of empathy and recognition of their individual needs. They highlight inconsistencies in curriculum and assessment guidance, particularly in secondary education. They also call for better transition support between primary and secondary school, and for teachers to be confident in using digital tools.

Effective support for professional learning and research

Parents/carers recommend the introduction of designated in-school specialists for ASN to provide immediate support. They suggest modular and flexible CPD to make training accessible, and improved collaboration between teachers and allied professionals (speech therapists, psychologists) to ensure consistent approaches.

Young people value teachers who are digitally skilled, empathetic, and able to deliver clear, consistent guidance on assignments. They see structured mentorship for teachers, technology-focused training, and in-person professional learning as ways to strengthen pedagogy.

Access: enablers and inhibitors

- **Enablers (Parents/carers):** Collaborative networks that include parents, co-produced research valuing lived experience and accessible summaries of research findings.
- **Enablers (Young people):** Peer learning and mentorship opportunities for teachers, structured training sessions, school-based networks.
- **Inhibitors (Parents/carers):** Teacher workload and lack of release time for CPD, fragmented system priorities, and underfunded services that prevent early intervention from being sustained.
- **Inhibitors (Young people):** Resistance to change among some teachers, uneven access to technology training, and lack of opportunities for student perspectives to be integrated into professional learning design.

Summary (parents/carers)

Parents/carers prioritise early identification, inclusive assessment, and trauma-informed practice. They support models where in-school expertise and modular CPD are combined with multi-agency collaboration. However, systemic workload and funding issues undermine implementation.

Young people prioritise empathy, consistency, strong digital pedagogy, and smooth transitions. They support mentorship and practical training for teachers but see resistance to change and uneven technology use as persistent barriers.

3.3 System-level stakeholders

Key priorities for professional learning and research

- **Academics:** Prioritise practitioner enquiry, inclusive pedagogy, creativity in teaching, and empowering teachers as curriculum-makers.
- **System Leaders:** Focus on ASN, literacy, attendance, AI, equity, workload, and alignment with national policy priorities.
- **Gaelic Stakeholders:** Highlight Gaelic immersion pedagogy, language-specific literacy, transition pathways, identity, culture, and teacher supply challenges.

- **Professional Associations:** Call for alignment of professional learning with professional standards, inclusion and ASN support, clearer professional learning landscapes, and workload consideration.
- **Education Organisations:** Focus on curriculum design, learner engagement, behaviour post-COVID, digital pedagogy, and advancing social justice.

Effective support for professional learning and research

- Stakeholders endorse longer-term approaches such as lesson study, practitioner enquiry, and leadership development programmes (e.g., Into Headship).
- Collaborative learning communities and context-sensitive approaches are strongly preferred. Risks are identified in superficial one-off courses and duplication of provision.

Access: enablers and inhibitors

- **Enablers:** Incentivisation (release time, recognition), mentoring, grassroots leadership, digital platforms, and international/cultural exchange networks.
- **Inhibitors:** Lack of time and funding, inaccessible academic language, equity challenges (ASN, Gaelic, rural), overloaded professional learning landscape, and lack of clarity of purpose.

Summary (system-level stakeholders)

Stakeholders emphasise sustained, collaborative, and context-sensitive professional learning that promotes inclusion and equity. Access depends on structural support, mentoring, and research translation. Barriers include inequities, duplication, funding/time shortages, and lack of clarity.

3.4 Synthesis across stakeholders

Narrative synthesis

Across groups, several converging priorities emerge: - **Curriculum and Pedagogy:** All groups call for more inclusive, creative, and flexible curricula, with Gaelic and ASN contexts requiring targeted support. - **Equity and Inclusion:** Parents, young people, and system stakeholders all stress social justice, ASN inclusion, and culturally relevant education. - **Professional Learning:** Shared preference for practitioner enquiry, collaborative models, flexible modular CPD tailored to context, structured peer mentoring systems and critical engagement with AI as a pedagogical tool. - **Research Access:** Demand for accessible, translated, and co-produced research bridging theory and

practice. - **Barriers:** Structural inhibitors such as workload, time, inequitable access (ASN, Gaelic, rural), and fragmentation across the professional learning system.

Summary synthesis, (extended focus group synthesis in Appendix 3)

- **Teachers:**
 - Priorities: Context-specific pedagogy;
 - Supports: Peer networks, autonomy;
 - Barriers: workload, rural gaps.
- **Parents/Carers:**
 - Priorities: Early identification, trauma-informed;
 - Supports: ASN specialists, modular CPD;
 - Barriers: workload, fragmented services.
- **Young People:**
 - Priorities: Empathy, consistency, digital competence;
 - Supports: Mentorship, tech training;
 - Barriers: resistance to change, uneven digital use.
- **System Stakeholders:**
 - Priorities: Equity, coherence, Gaelic/ASN;
 - Supports: Long-term inquiry, leadership;
 - Barriers: time/funding, inaccessible research.
- **Combined Insights:** Shared demand for inclusive, collaborative, inquiry-based professional learning, anchored in practice and research translation.

3.5 Key themes (cross-cutting)

- **Equity and Inclusion:** Central to all groups, including ASN, Gaelic, trauma-informed practice, and broader social justice aims.
- **Curriculum Reform:** Relevance, creativity, and cultural identity embedded in learning.
- **Practitioner Empowerment:** Teachers valued as professional experts and inquiry leaders.
- **Sustained Collaborative Professional Learning:** Inquiry, networks, and mentoring identified as effective across stakeholders.
- **Research Translation:** A pressing need for accessible, co-produced, practice-grounded evidence.
- **Structural Barriers:** Time, workload, resource scarcity, duplication, inequities, and fragmented provision.

3.6 Points of convergence and divergence between stakeholder groups

- **Alignment:** All groups emphasise equity, practitioner-led inquiry, accessible research, and systemic support.
- **Focus:** Parents prioritise trauma-informed practice and early intervention; young people focus on empathy, transitions, and digital readiness; teachers stress sector-specific pedagogy; system stakeholders emphasise policy coherence and strategic clarity.
- **Contrasts:** Variation exists between local autonomy (teacher and school-based enquiry) and system-level coherence. Equity challenges specific to Gaelic and ASN sit uneasily within broader universal provision models.

3.7 Focus group analysis conclusions

The evidence demonstrates a strong consensus on the urgency of reforming professional learning and research access in Scotland. Stakeholders converge on the need for inclusive, research-informed, practice-grounded professional learning embedded in collaborative networks. However, systemic inhibitors – time, workload, inequities, and resource shortages – threaten sustainability. Addressing these requires structural investment, coherent policy alignment, and recognition of practitioner expertise.

In particular, the findings highlight the importance of striking a balance between local autonomy and national coherence, while ensuring that specific contexts such as Gaelic Medium Education and ASN provision receive targeted investment. Parents and young people underscore the need for relational, empathetic, and trauma-informed approaches, which must be integrated into teacher development at scale. For system stakeholders, the challenge is to streamline provision and ensure equitable access without sacrificing contextual sensitivity.

Key insights for CfTE development

- **Anchor Professional Learning in Practice:** Develop modular, enquiry-based professional learning opportunities tailored to specific contexts, prioritising practical, classroom-applicable strategies.
- **Embed Equity:** Ensure provision for ASN, Gaelic, and rural communities, and embed trauma-informed practice as a universal standard.
- **Value Practitioner Expertise:** Position teachers as co-researchers and curriculum-makers, amplifying practitioner voice in shaping system priorities.
- **Translate Research:** Establish research-to-practice provision that produces accessible, co-produced, and action-oriented outputs.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Promote multi-agency and cross-sector partnerships, creating consistent approaches across education, health, and social care.

- **Support Wellbeing:** Build reflective practice structures and workload-sensitive professional learning, embedding teacher wellbeing as a foundation for quality.
- **Ensure Coherence:** Provide strategic clarity at the national level while protecting practitioner autonomy and innovation.

Core message from focus groups

The new Centre should act as a catalyst for systemic change – bridging research and practice by drawing on and enhancing the range of research and enquiry expertise in (and beyond) Scotland, empowering teachers, and embedding equity and wellbeing into the heart of Scottish education.

4. Summary Findings from the National Teacher Survey

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report summarises findings from the national teacher survey which, among other things, sought to identify key priorities for the CfTE from the teaching profession. The survey was launched online using Qualtrics on the 2nd of June 2025 and closed on the 30th of June by which time it had received 1,934 responses. One thousand nine hundred and twenty teachers responded to the English version of the survey and 14 to the Gaelic version. This section aggregates findings from both surveys.

A note on analysis and reporting

The majority of findings in this section are presented in terms of frequencies, representing the aggregated voice of teachers who responded to the survey. Where possible survey findings were also subject to additional statistical analysis to determine if there were significant and consequential differences in the responses of participant groups, for example, between less and more experienced teachers, or between primary and secondary teachers. However, the scope of this exercise is restricted by the overall response rate and the low numbers in many categories. Ultimately, results are only reported where significant and meaningful differences have been established.

In addition, a number of questions allowed open text responses. These open contributions have been analysed thematically with the aim of identifying key topics and emerging ideas.

4.2 Who responded to the national teacher survey?

This section provides a summary of the teachers who responded to the survey. A detailed overview of respondent demographics is provided in Appendix 2.

The survey obtained responses from teachers across Scotland, representing 31 of 32 local authorities. Most respondents (71.9%) were employed in local authority non-denominational schools, with a further 12.9% in denominational schools. Permanent contracts were the norm (90.9%), with nearly four in five (79.7%) working full time. Over half (53.3%) taught in the secondary sector, around a third (32.2%) in primary, and smaller proportions worked across stages, in special units/schools, or early years.

The most common roles represented were main grade teachers (56.2%), followed by principal teachers (13.5%), headteachers (7.6%), and deputy headteachers (6.1%). Teaching experience skewed towards the more experienced end: 59.2% had 16 or more years of service, while only 1.1% were probationers. Among secondary respondents, the largest curricular groups were English (14.6%), Mathematics (11.3%), and Learning Support/guidance (8.0%).

Geographically, 47.2% worked in urban settings, 32.2% in small towns, 17.2% in rural areas, and 3.4% in island communities. While the largest raw numbers of respondents came from Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Argyll and Bute, the latter contributed a disproportionately high share relative to its teaching workforce.

Educationally, 65.6% held a Bachelor's or Master's degree, with 70.1% entering teaching through a postgraduate route (PGDE or PGCE). Other routes included undergraduate education degrees, further education teaching qualifications, and overseas pathways.

The workforce profile was predominantly female (73%), with 23.1% male, 0.4% non-binary, and 3.4% preferring not to say. The overwhelming majority (87.7%) identified as white, with small proportions from other ethnic backgrounds, including Asian, Black, mixed, and other white ethnicities.

4.3 Teachers' priorities

The survey asked teachers to rank a series of priorities which had previously been identified in focus group discussions with teachers and other relevant stakeholders (see previous section).

Table 4 presents the outcome of this exercise based on the average rank score of each of the priorities. Table 5 presents the priorities in relation to their most commonly identified rank (the mode).

Table 4 – Teacher ranking of priorities by average rank score (N³=1259)

Priority	Rank	Average score
Additional Support Needs	1	3.63
Literacy	2	3.77
Pupil Engagement and Attendance	3	4.05
General pedagogical practices in the classroom	4	4.06
Curriculum-making and teachers as curriculum designers	5	4.88
Subject Knowledge	6	5.37
Social Justice	7	5.41
Engaging with Parents, Carers and the Wider Community	8	6.83
Artificial Intelligence and Technology	9	7.00

³ N= total number of responses to the question

Table 5– Teacher ranking of priorities by most frequent rating (N=1259)

Priority	Modal value
Additional Support Needs	1
Literacy	1
Pupil Engagement and Attendance	2
General pedagogical practices in the classroom	3
Curriculum-making and teachers as curriculum designers	5
Subject Knowledge	8
Social Justice	8
Artificial Intelligence and Technology	9
Engaging with Parents, Carers and the Wider Community	9

Tables 4 and 5 show a marked degree of correspondence in relation to the rank position of priorities. *Additional Support Needs*, *Literacy*, *Pupil Engagement and Attendance* and *General pedagogical practices in the classroom*, were more likely to be identified as priorities by respondents. On the other hand, *Social Justice*, *Artificial Intelligence and Technology* and *Engaging with Parents, Carers and the Wider Community* and were ranked less highly.

Five hundred and thirty-one (44.4%) of 1195 responding teachers also indicated having other priorities for their own professional learning, not included in the list for ranking. Their textual responses were subjected to an inductive qualitative analysis process to generate the major themes in their comments.

Numeracy/Maths (187) was the clear top priority with **Behaviour management** (152), **Health and Wellbeing of staff and pupils** (127), **ASN** (116), and **Leadership development/career progression** (104) also being very prominent in their comments. **Teacher Professional Learning & Conditions** (88) was a distinct theme from leadership development.

Mental Health (43) was a frequent subtheme of HWB but strong enough to be coded separately. **Digital Technology/ICT use** (41), **Outdoor Learning and Play Pedagogy** (36), **Coaching/Mentoring/Instructional Leadership** (34) and **Global Citizenship/Sustainability** (29) were mentioned as independent repeated priorities as was **Early Years/Child Development** (21).

The analysis also indicated associations between teacher reference to Behaviour Management and Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice. Leadership and Career Development often mentioned Coaching/Mentoring/Instructional Leadership explicitly. Teacher Professional Learning & Conditions references were often associated with workload, contracts and conditions.

4.4 Drivers of professional learning

Teachers' professional learning was driven by a range of factors. The overwhelming majority of teachers indicated that their professional learning was, to some or to a large extent, driven by; their *own professional learning needs/desires* (88.8%) or by *school/faculty priorities* (91.5%). Although *local authority priorities* and *national initiatives/policies* were less likely to be identified as major drivers of individual professional learning, they clearly still played significant roles, see Table 6 for detail.

Table 6 - To what extent are teacher priorities for professional learning driven by the following? (N=1121)

Drivers of professional learning	Percentage			
	Major extent	Some extent	Minor extent	Not at all
Your own personal professional learning needs/desires	53.3	35.5	7.9	3.4
Your school/faculty priorities	47.3	44.2	5.8	2.7
Your local authority priorities	20.7	46.7	23.1	9.5
National initiatives/policies	17.8	47.6	26.0	8.7
Other driver – please specify	13.7	4.4	2.9	79.0

4.5 Sources of support for professional learning

From a list of potential sources of professional learning support, teachers indicated the extent to which they accessed each of them over the past year. Results from this exercise are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 - How often have teachers accessed the following sources of support for research activity in the past year? (N=1050)

Sources of support	Percentage		
	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
A Googling/ web searches	85.6	13.2	1.1
B Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) courses and events run by national, local authority or independent providers	41.5	49.7	8.8
C Accessing academic literature e.g. journal articles and books	33.5	53.0	13.4
D Accessing online resources, e.g., Education Scotland webpages, government statistical reports, websites such as Education Endowment Foundation	42.5	45.2	12.3
E Reading professional periodicals/newsletters e.g. TES, University newsletters	24.8	53.4	21.8
F Analysing data available within your local authority or school e.g. attainment data	43.6	41.8	14.6
G Engaging with local authority officers and resources	17.3	46.9	35.8
H Accessing teacher groups such as subject associations or Facebook teacher groups	46.1	32.3	21.6
I Accessing academic articles via the EBSCO catalogue on MyGTCS	3.8	28.2	68.0
J Live/recorded research presentations/podcasts online (e.g. YouTube)	23.7	52.4	23.9
K Accessing education groups and educationalists on Social media (e.g. X, Bluesky or Tik Tok)	23.1	34.4	42.5
L Working with colleagues in further and higher education	16.1	31.9	52.0

By far the most frequently accessed source of support was **Googling/web searches** with over 86% of respondents *regularly* using it. **Accessing teacher groups, Analysing data available within the local authority or school, Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) courses and Accessing online resources** were *regularly* accessed by between 41% and 46% of teachers. At the other end of the scale, **Accessing academic articles via the EBSCO catalogue on MyGTCS** was *regularly* used by only 3.8% of respondents. Indeed 68% of teachers indicated that they had never accessed this catalogue.

Having identified which support teachers regularly accessed we also asked them to identify the source that they saw as most helpful. Table 8 summarises the findings. The Table count allowed multiple responses per entry where applicable (e.g., “A, C, D” was counted as 1 for each letter). It comes as no surprise that the two sources identified as most helpful, *Googling/ web searches* and *Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) courses and events run by national, local authority or independent providers*, were also the two most frequently accessed sources. Interestingly, *Accessing teacher groups such as subject associations or Facebook teacher groups* was not among the most frequently identified sources of support but was clearly seen as a helpful source by those who were involved. *Engaging with local authority officers and resources* was selected by only a few teachers as their most helpful source of support.

Table 8 - What do teachers consider the most helpful source for research support?

Sources of Support	Count
A Googling/ web searches	216
B Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) courses and events run by national, local authority or independent providers	195
H Accessing teacher groups such as subject associations or Facebook teacher groups	116
D Accessing online resources, e.g., Education Scotland webpages, government statistical reports, websites such as Education Endowment Foundation	99
C Accessing academic literature e.g. journal articles and books	97
J Live/recorded research presentations/podcasts online (e.g. YouTube)	47
F Analysing data available within your local authority or school e.g. attainment data	44
L Working with colleagues in further and higher education	42
K Accessing education groups and educationalists on Social media (e.g. X, Bluesky or Tik Tok)	38
E Reading professional periodicals/newsletters e.g. TES, University newsletters	18
I Accessing academic articles via the EBSCO catalogue on MyGTCS	16
G Engaging with local authority officers and resources	6
M Other research (please specify)	21

In addition to the information presented in Table 8 there were 216 additional textual responses to the question. Many of these typed the response rather than the associated letter e.g. *Googling/ web searches* rather than writing the letter *A* and a number also detailed their ‘other research’ responses. Table 9 groups the textual responses thematically with an estimation of their frequency. Findings are broadly in line with the information in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 9 - Thematic Areas in textual responses to most helpful support

Theme	Estimate of frequency
Online search and web browsing	Very common
Collegiate/peer collaboration	Very common
CLPL / CPD / courses	Frequent
Education Scotland / national resources	Frequent
Academic literature and reading	Moderate
Social media & digital communities	Frequent
Data/evidence use	Moderate
Critical/negative views	Notable minority

4.6 Characteristics of the most helpful sources of professional learning support

Teachers were also asked to indicate why they believed their most helpful source was just that. These open responses were subject to thematic analysis and are detailed below. From this analysis we can identify a number of ‘key characteristics’ of the most helpful sources of support. Such information will be of significance to the design and operation of CfTE.

Ease of access and convenience

Teachers overwhelmingly value sources that are quick, easy to access, and available on demand. Many cited the importance of being able to access resources at any time or from anywhere (e.g., during commutes or in evenings). Time constraints and workload make accessibility a top priority.

Practicality and relevance to daily practice

Sources are appreciated when they offer directly applicable strategies, advice, and resources. Teachers want ideas they can implement immediately in the classroom, especially if developed by current practitioners. Many valued resources that are ‘by teachers, for teachers.’

Tailored, specific, and contextual content

Respondents preferred sources aligned to their subject area or stage (e.g., ASN, secondary, STEM) and/or their local context or current school priorities. Sources that allowed teachers to tailor learning to their personal or departmental needs were viewed favourably.

Trustworthiness and quality

Teachers valued sources they viewed as credible, well-researched, and reliable. Academic research, when accessible, was respected for its rigour, though many found it hard to access or too time-consuming. Concerns were raised about outdated or generic materials provided by official bodies.

Collegiality and professional dialogue

Peer-to-peer exchange - whether through formal networks, CPD, or informal social media - was frequently cited as highly beneficial. Teachers trusted advice from

colleagues more than from removed ‘experts.’ Many described the value of shared lived experience and being able to ask questions in real time.

Autonomy and flexibility

Teachers liked being able to choose what, when, and how they learn, rather than being tied to fixed-format CPD. Self-directed learning is seen as more efficient and empowering than top-down, one-size-fits-all models.

Alignment with professional priorities

Many sources were chosen because they aligned with; School/authority improvement plans, Personal development goals, Current issues or needs (e.g., curriculum design, ASN, leadership).

Breadth and variety of perspectives

Teachers appreciated sources that offered a wide range of viewpoints or examples from across Scotland and internationally. Exposure to different educational contexts was seen as broadening and enriching.

Engagement format

Teachers favoured sources that were engaging and digestible. Podcasts, short videos, and practical webinars were often preferred over dense texts. Jargon-free, down-to-earth communication styles were welcomed.

Finally, there were a few comments highlighting cost and barriers to access.

Cost and barriers to access

Some teachers expressed frustration at paywalls or the cost of accessing academic literature or association memberships. Several also highlighted that useful research is often locked behind university access and not available to working teachers.

4.7 Engaging in research activities over the previous year

To get a systematic indication of the nature and extent of teachers’ engagement with research they were asked to indicate which activities they had been involved with over the previous year. Results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10 - Teacher engagement in research activities in the past year? (N=996)

Research activities	Percentage	
	Yes	No
Involved in individual practitioner enquiry within my own establishment	44.9	55.1
Involved in collaborative practitioner enquiry within my own establishment	39.4	60.6
Taken part in CLPL with a research component	28.6	71.4
Involved in collaborative practitioner enquiry with colleagues in other establishments	25.6	74.4
Involved in a professional reading group	23.8	76.2
Taken part in peer review of other colleagues’ research work	16.4	83.6
Undertaking postgraduate qualification involving research activity	15.2	84.8

It is clear from Table 10 that substantial numbers of teachers had been engaged in research activities. Most commonly this comprised; individual practitioner enquiry (44.9%) or collaborative practitioner enquiry (39.4%) within their own establishment. Less common among respondents were, taking part in peer review of other colleagues' research work (16.4%), or undertaking a postgraduate qualification involving research activity (15.2%).

These findings are broadly in line with previous research on practitioner research initiatives in Scotland which have been conducted by members of the Research and Evaluation team over recent years.

What teachers did and what difference it made to them and their practice

Teachers were also asked to give a 'flavour' of the research activities they had engaged in and the difference it had made to them. These open responses were subject to thematic analysis and are discussed below.

Analysis of responses indicates that recent professional learning activities undertaken by teachers cluster into six broad areas: curriculum and pedagogy; ASN and inclusion; digital skills; leadership; collaboration; and self-directed learning. Across these categories, the perceived value of professional learning was consistently linked to direct applicability in the classroom, improved learner outcomes, and enhanced teacher confidence.

Professional learning focused on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment was valued for its alignment with current educational standards and its role in improving teaching precision and engagement. ASN-related professional learning addressed the growing complexity of learner needs, equipping teachers with targeted strategies for inclusion and wellbeing. Digital skills development enabled more efficient and engaging delivery, particularly in blended contexts. Leadership-oriented professional learning fostered strategic thinking and supported career progression, while collaborative opportunities built networks that strengthened practice and reduced isolation. Self-directed professional learning offered flexibility and personal relevance, increasing immediate impact.

Overall, the findings suggest that respondents believe effective professional learning is characterised by relevance to current teaching contexts, opportunities for practical application, and the potential to strengthen both classroom practice and professional capacity at individual and organisational levels. Again, these insights will be important in the development of the CfTE and its constituent hubs.

4.8 Communities of practice

Over a third of the survey respondents (36.2%) were involved in a community of practice or teacher learning community. These respondents were asked to provide a brief description of the activity and comment on how they benefitted (or otherwise) from the experience. Again, these open comments were subject to thematic analysis and are discussed below.

The analysis of teachers' descriptions of their professional learning experiences highlights the central role of collaborative networks, both formal and informal, in supporting professional growth. School-based teacher learning communities, cross-school collaborations, and subject-specific networks were reported as particularly beneficial for fostering professional dialogue, enabling peer observation, and facilitating the sharing of effective teaching strategies. Digital platforms and social media extended these networks beyond geographical boundaries, offering flexible and immediate avenues for resource exchange and problem-solving.

Subject-specific groups, often operating at regional or national levels, provided targeted opportunities for curriculum development, assessment moderation, and engagement with current pedagogical research. Formal leadership programmes and specialist qualifications were valued for their structured development pathways, while practitioner enquiry projects - particularly those undertaken collaboratively - supported reflective practice and evidence-informed decision-making. Inclusion- and equity-focused networks also emerged as significant for enhancing knowledge and practice related to ASN, diversity, and social justice in education.

Teachers consistently reported that these experiences enhanced their professional confidence, reduced feelings of isolation, and contributed to improved classroom practice and learner outcomes. Access to shared resources and professional dialogue was seen as key to reducing workload and improving curriculum coherence. However, challenges were also evident, including time constraints, variable commitment from colleagues, and the lack of formal recognition for contributions to subject leadership or collaborative initiatives. Overall, the findings underscore the value of sustained, well-facilitated professional learning communities in fostering both individual teacher development and collective improvement across the education system.

Helpful professional learning experiences

- **Collaborative Networks** – School-based learning communities, cross-school clusters, and online networks enabled sharing of pedagogy, peer observation, and joint problem-solving.
- **Subject-Specific Groups** – Regional and national groups provided targeted curriculum support, resource sharing, and assessment moderation aligned to subject needs.
- **Formal Programmes** – Structured courses and leadership qualifications (e.g., Into Headship, practitioner enquiry) built skills, confidence, and strategic capacity.
- **Inclusion and Equity Focus** – ASN, diversity, and equity networks improved teachers' knowledge, strategies, and inclusive practice.
- **Informal & Self-Directed Learning** – Conferences, webinars, personal networks, and independent research offered flexible, responsive learning opportunities.
- **Benefits to Teachers** – Increased confidence, reduced isolation, access to high-quality resources, enhanced leadership capacity, and stronger curriculum coherence.

- **Benefits to Learners** – Improved engagement, better support for diverse needs, and enhanced learning outcomes.
- **Challenges Noted** – Time constraints, inconsistent colleague engagement, and limited recognition for leadership and collaborative contributions

4.9 Teaching-focused research skills

Teachers provided information about the skills that they felt they required more support with in order to more fully engage with teaching focused research. Table 11 summarises the findings. Most commonly, respondents highlighted a need for Identifying key literature (48.9%), Identifying appropriate methodologies (45%) and Qualitative analysis (39.6%). Again, such information is helpful in the development of the CfTE hubs and its subsequent programmes and approach to professional learning.

Table 11 - Skills required to engage more fully with teaching-focused research? (N=937)

Research skills	Percentage		
	Yes	No	Maybe
Identifying key literature	48.9	24.1	27.0
Report writing	21.0	54.9	24.1
Critically evaluating research findings	36.8	35.8	27.4
Developing research questions	30.2	42.2	27.6
Identifying appropriate methodologies	45.1	28.1	26.8
Qualitative analysis	39.6	35.1	25.3
Research design	30.9	38.1	30.9
Statistical analysis	39.2	32.7	28.2

4.10 How can CfTE best support teachers?

Teachers were invited to comment on how CfTE could best support them in accessing, using, and generating teaching-focused research. Again, these insights will be important in informing the development in the Centre. Open responses were subject to thematic analysis and are discussed below.

Teachers' responses indicate that the Centre's most valued role in promoting professional learning lies in providing relevant, accessible, and research-informed opportunities that directly address practitioners' identified priorities. Teachers emphasised the importance of professional learning that is both grounded in evidence and practical in application, with flexible delivery formats catering to varied contexts, including rural and remote settings.

A strong theme was the desire for the Centre to act as a hub for collaboration and networking, enabling professional dialogue and the sharing of practice across schools, authorities, and subject areas. Access to curated resource libraries, succinct research summaries, and illustrative case studies was seen as critical to supporting both individual practice and school-level improvement.

Teachers also sought pathways for professional recognition and career progression, including support for GTCS accreditation and leadership development, alongside mentoring and coaching opportunities. Equity of access emerged as a key concern, with calls for geographically and financially accessible provision, flexible scheduling, and sector-wide inclusion. Finally, respondents noted the potential for the Centre to contribute to system-level change by aligning activities with local and national priorities, supporting leadership, and fostering school cultures that value and prioritise professional learning.

Key ideas about how CfTE can support professional learning

- **Relevant, needs-led professional learning** – Research-informed, practical learning focused on priorities such as ASN, wellbeing, literacy, and inclusion.
- **Collaboration and networking** – Facilitate cross-school, cross-authority connections, subject networks, and professional dialogue.
- **Resources and research access** – Curated resource libraries, accessible research digests, and inspiring case studies.
- **Career development** – Support GTCS recognition, leadership qualifications, and mentoring/coaching pathways.
- **Equity of access** – Ensure provision reaches all contexts, with flexible timing, formats, and affordability.
- **Support for system change** – Align with national/local priorities and foster school cultures that prioritise professional learning.

4.11 Summary of main findings from the national teacher survey

The national teacher survey, completed by 1,934 respondents, identified *Additional Support Needs, literacy, pupil engagement, and classroom pedagogy* as top-ranked professional learning priorities, with additional emphasis on *numeracy, behaviour management, health and wellbeing, and leadership* in the free-text comments.

Teachers report that their professional learning is primarily self-directed or aligned with school priorities, with local and national agendas also influencing engagement. The most valued professional learning sources are accessible, practical, context-specific, credible, and foster collegial exchange. Commonly used supports include online searches, CLPL events, teacher networks, and in-school data analysis, though cost and restricted access to academic literature remain barriers.

Significant numbers of teachers participate in practitioner enquiry and communities of practice, which enhance confidence, reduce isolation, and improve learner outcomes. However, time constraints and limited recognition of contributions persist. Key skill development needs include literature searching, methodological selection, and qualitative analysis.

Teachers see CfTE as a vehicle for delivering relevant, flexible, research-informed professional learning; facilitating collaboration; curating accessible resources; supporting career progression; ensuring equitable access across contexts; and aligning

with system priorities. Overall, the findings point to the importance of professional learning that is timely, practical, and collaborative, strengthening both individual practice and the wider education system.

5. Using the Findings from the Initial Engagement Phase

Summary overview of findings

The initial CfTE engagement phase consisted of a series of focus groups with teachers and other stakeholders, followed by a national teacher survey. Analysis of each stage is outlined above in sections 3 and 4 respectively. Here, we offer a high-level synthesis of overall findings from these two elements together, before finishing with discussion of the ways in which the data from this study can be used to the benefit of the wider education system.

Key messages from the initial engagement phase

a. **Professional learning must be practical, contextual, and collaborative**

Across focus groups and survey responses, teachers emphasised that professional learning should be rooted in classroom practice and tailored to local needs. Enquiry-based and modular approaches were highlighted, alongside opportunities for collegial exchange through practitioner enquiry, communities of practice, and cross-sector partnerships.

b. **Equity and inclusion as core principles**

Equity was identified as a non-negotiable priority. Teachers highlighted the need for professional learning that better supports Additional Support Needs, literacy, and pupil engagement (top-ranked survey priorities), while focus groups surfaced the need to ensure provision for Gaelic, rural, and ASN contexts, and embedding trauma-informed approaches as standard practice.

c. **Teachers as experts, co-creators, and leaders**

There was clear appetite for professional learning that positions teachers as more than simply recipients of knowledge, but rather as co-researchers, curriculum-makers, and leaders of innovation. Both focus group participants and survey respondents valued practitioner enquiry for its impact on confidence, agency, and learner outcomes, while also calling for greater recognition and support for these contributions.

d. **Bridging research and practice**

Teachers want access to credible, research-informed learning that is applicable to their practice. However, barriers such as cost and restricted access to academic literature persist. Focus groups highlighted the need for effective research/practice knowledge exchange, producing co-created and action-oriented outputs, while survey respondents identified a range of skill development needs in research methods and data analysis.

e. **Teacher and learner wellbeing as foundations for improvement**

Wellbeing was consistently identified as integral to positive learning experiences. Teachers called for workload-sensitive learning structures and reflective practices that recognise the pressures they face. The link between teacher wellbeing and quality learning experiences for pupils was emphasised across both datasets.

f. **System coherence with space for autonomy**

Participants called for greater clarity and coherence at national level, aligning

professional learning with system priorities (literacy, ASN, pupil engagement, wellbeing, leadership) while protecting space for practitioner-led innovation. Aspirations were expressed that CfTE act as a catalyst for systemic change, curating resources, facilitating collaboration, and aligning efforts across the system.

Core Message: This initial CfTE engagement phase highlights a strong demand for a model of professional learning that is teaching-focused, collaborative, and equity-driven. Teachers want professional learning that not only improves classroom practice but also empowers them as professionals, bridges research and practice, addresses systemic inequities, and supports wellbeing. The ultimate aspiration expressed by both focus group and survey respondents is that CfTE should not simply become another provider of training, but should grow into a strategic, transformative hub that strengthens both individual teacher development and the wider education system.

Using the data

This initial engagement phase was primarily directed at identifying priority thematic areas for CfTE to focus on in the first instance. The engagement activity also took the opportunity to find out more about teachers' current professional learning, their ways of engaging with teaching-focused research and their aspirations for CfTE. This information will not only help with identifying what CfTE should focus on, but also how it will operate.

As the approach to the initial engagement phase was being designed, and as key findings began to emerge, the Research and Evaluation Team engaged with Scottish Government colleagues and with key stakeholders via the CfTE Advisory Board. Not only is this useful in sense-checking the approach and emerging findings, but these opportunities to share the work also enable it to be fed back into the system.

In addition to the key findings outlined in this report, the Research and Evaluation Team is in the process of carrying out some 'deep dives' into the data to explore the extent to which sub-groups of respondents demonstrate particular patterns of responses. Findings from these more in-depth and focused explorations of the data will be shared in due course. The survey data set will also be available open access through the University of Glasgow's Enlighten platform, enabling other stakeholders and researchers to interrogate the data further.

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

Final Official Teacher Survey (English)

SECTION 1: PRIORITY AREAS FOR THE CENTRE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Q1. The following priorities were identified by teachers and other stakeholders through a series of recent focus group discussions. Please rank them in terms of priority for you, by clicking and dragging so that your top priority is as the top of the list and so on. (The next question will allow you to add other priorities of your own.)

- Literacy
- Social Justice
- General pedagogical practices in the classroom
- Artificial Intelligence and Technology
- Curriculum-making and teachers as curriculum designers
- Additional Support Needs
- Pupil Engagement and Attendance
- Subject Knowledge
- Engaging with Parents, Carers and the Wider Community

Q1b. Do you have other areas of priority for your own professional learning? (select one option)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If Yes, please indicate your other priorities -

Q2. To what extent are your current priorities for professional learning driven by the following?
(select one option on each line)

	Major extent	Some extent	Minor extent	Not at all
Your own personal professional learning needs/desires	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your school/faculty priorities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your local authority priorities	☐	☐	☐	☐
National initiatives/policies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other driver – please specify (if no other drivers then please select ‘Not at all’)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q3. How often have you accessed each of the following sources of support for research activity in the past year?

	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
A. Googling/ web searches	☐	☐	☐
B. Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) courses and events run by national, local authority or independent providers	☐	☐	☐
C. Accessing academic literature e.g. journal articles and books	☐	☐	☐
D. Accessing online resources, e.g., Education Scotland webpages, government statistical reports, websites such as Education Endowment Foundation	☐	☐	☐
E. Reading professional periodicals/newsletters e.g. TES, University newsletters	☐	☐	☐
F. Analysing data available within your local authority or school e.g. attainment data	☐	☐	☐
G. Engaging with local authority officers and resources	☐	☐	☐
H. Accessing teacher groups such as subject associations or Facebook teacher groups	☐	☐	☐
I. Accessing academic articles via the EBSCO catalogue on MyGTCS	☐	☐	☐
J. Live/recorded research presentations/podcasts online (e.g. YouTube)	☐	☐	☐
K. Accessing education groups and educationalists on Social media (e.g. X, Bluesky or Tik Tok)	☐	☐	☐

L. Working with colleagues in further and higher education

☐
☐
☐

M. Other research please specify_____

Q3b. From the list in Q3, what do you consider as your most helpful source for research support?
(use the letter associated with your chosen source, i.e., A, B, C etc., please select one source only)

My most helpful source for research support: _____

Q3c. Do you have anything particular to tell us about why you consider this to be your most helpful source? (optional)

Q4. Have you engaged in any of the following research activities in the past year? (select one option on each line)

	Yes	No
Involved in individual practitioner enquiry within my own establishment	☐	☐
Involved in collaborative practitioner enquiry within my own establishment	☐	☐
Involved in collaborative practitioner enquiry with colleagues in other establishments	☐	☐
Involved in a professional reading group	☐	☐
Undertaking postgraduate qualification involving research activity	☐	☐
Taken part in peer review of other colleagues' research work	☐	☐
Taken part in CLPL with a research component	☐	☐

Q4b. If you have taken part in any of the above activities over the last year, please give a brief description of what you did, why, and what difference it made. *(optional)*

Q5. Do you currently belong to what might be called a community of practice or teacher learning community? *(select one option)*

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q5b. If yes, please give a brief description and comment on how you benefit (or otherwise) from the experience? *(optional)*

Q6. Which of the following skills would you like support with in order to engage more fully with teaching-focused research? *(select one option on each line)*

	Yes	No	Maybe
Identifying key literature	☐	☐	☐
Report writing	☐	☐	☐
Critically evaluating research findings	☐	☐	☐
Developing research questions	☐	☐	☐
Identifying appropriate methodologies	☐	☐	☐
Qualitative analysis	☐	☐	☐
Research design	☐	☐	☐
Statistical analysis	☐	☐	☐

Q7. Please use this space to tell us how the new Centre for Teaching Excellence (CfTE) might best support you to access, use and generate teaching-focused research? *(optional)*

Q8. What type of establishment do you work in? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Local authority non-denominational school
- ☐ Local authority denominational school
- ☐ Independent school
- ☐ Gaelic Education/Gaelic Medium Education
- ☐ Special school/unit
- ☐ Other (please state in box below)

Q9. How many years of service do you have as a teacher? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Probationer
- ☐ 2-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21-25 years
- ☐ 26-30 years
- ☐ 31+ years

Q10. What is your current role? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Main grade teacher
- ☐ Chartered teacher
- ☐ Lead teacher
- ☐ Faculty head
- ☐ Principal teacher
- ☐ Supply teacher
- ☐ DHT
- ☐ HT
- ☐ Other (please state in box below)

Q11. Which of the following best describes the stage in which you work? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Early years
- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Work across stages
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Special unit/school

Q11b. Please select your main curriculum area (Secondary only). *(Tick all those that apply. Choose N/A if not Secondary.)*

- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Art and Design
- ☐ Biology with Science
- ☐ Business Education
- ☐ Chemistry with Science
- ☐ Computing Science
- ☐ Dance
- ☐ Drama
- ☐ English
- ☐ Gaelic
- ☐ Geography
- ☐ History
- ☐ Home Economics
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Modern Languages
- ☐ Modern Studies
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Physical Education
- ☐ Physics with Science
- ☐ Psychology
- ☐ Religious Education
- ☐ Technological Education

- ☐ Learning Support/Guidance
- ☐ Other (please state in box below)

Q12. Which of the following best describes the location of your establishment? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Small town
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Island community

Q13. Which council area do you work in? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ [All 32 listed in turn]

Q14. How would you best describe your current contract? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Permanent
- ☐ Temporary
- ☐ Short term supply

Q15. Are you *(Select one option)?*

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time

Q16. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Bachelors degree or equivalent
- ☐ Some Masters credits
- ☐ Full Masters degree or equivalent
- ☐ Doctoral degree or equivalent
- ☐ Other (please specify in box below)

Q17. Which of the following routes into teaching did you take? *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Undergraduate degree or integrated Masters with teaching qualification
- ☐ Postgraduate/Professional certificate or diploma in education (PGCE or PGDE)
- ☐ Other route (please specify in box below)

Q19. Please indicate your gender identity. *(Select one option)*

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q20. Can you...? *(Select one option on each line)*

	Yes	No
Speak proficient Gaelic	☐	☐
Write proficient Gaelic	☐	☐
Teach in Gaelic	☐	☐

Q21. Please indicate your ethnicity (categories taken from the Scottish Census 2022) *(select one choice)*

- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Any other Asian background
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ African
- ☐ Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background
- ☐ White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ White and Black African
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background
- ☐ English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ Roma
- ☐ Any other white background
- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Any other ethnic group
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Appendix 2: Survey respondents

School Just under three quarters of respondents (71.9%) were employed in a Local Authority Local authority non-denominational school. A further 12.9% worked in a Local authority denominational school. See Table 1 for detail.

Table 1 - Type of establishment employed in? (N=917)

Establishment	Percentage
Local authority non-denominational school	71.9
Local authority denominational school	12.9
Independent school	1.4
Gaelic Education/Gaelic Medium Education	3.2
Special school/unit	4.7
Other (please state in box below)	6.0

Contract Ninety-point nine percent (90.9%) of respondents described their current contract as *permanent*, 6.1% *temporary* and 3.1% *short term supply*. Almost four out of five (79.7%) worked *full time* and 20.3% indicated being *part time*.

Sector A majority of respondents (53.3%) were employed in the secondary sector and just under a third (32.2%) were employed as primary teachers. Table 2 summarises respondents teaching stage.

Table 2 – Educational sector (N=908)

Stage	Percentage
Secondary	53.3
Primary	32.2
Work across stages	7.3
Special unit/school	5.6
Early years	1.7

Role The majority of responding teachers (56.2%) were main grade teachers with 13.7% being HTs or DHTs. Table 3 details respondents' current roles.

Table 3 - Current role of respondents (N=917)

Role	Percentage	Role	Percentage
Main grade teacher	56.2	Supply teacher	3.2
Chartered teacher	1.6	DHT	6.1
Lead teacher	0.8	HT	7.6
Faculty head	4.8	Other	6.2
Principal teacher	13.5		

Service Just under six out of ten respondents (59.2%) had 16 years or more service in teaching. See Table 4 for detail.

Table 4 - Years of service as a teacher? (N=917)

Duration	Percentage	Duration	Percentage
Probationer	1.1	16-20 years	20.7
2-5 years	12.1	21-25 years	15.5
6-10 years	14.3	26-30 years	11.1
11-15 years	13.3	31+ years	11.9

Secondary curricular areas Among secondary teachers, responses were most frequently received from; English, Mathematics and Learning support/guidance teachers. To some extent this probably reflects the numbers employed in these curricular areas. See Table 5 for detail.

Table 5 - Secondary teachers, main curriculum area - (N=548)

Curriculum area	Percentage	Curriculum area	Percentage
Art and Design	3.1	Mathematics	11.3
Biology with Science	4.6	Modern Languages	4.7
Business Education	1.8	Modern Studies	3.3
Chemistry with Science	6.0	Music	3.1
Computing Science	2.0	Physical Education	3.3
Dance	-	Physics with Science	3.8
Drama	0.7	Psychology	0.4
English	14.6	Religious Education	2.7
Gaelic	1.6	Technological Education	4.9
Geography	2.9	Learning Support/Guidance	8.0
History	2.9	Other	10.9
Home Economics	3.1		

Among those who indicated *Other*, responses are outlined below.

Frequently Mentioned

- **Additional Support Needs / Learning Support / Inclusion** – including nurture groups, pupil support, wellbeing, and mental health.
- **Science Disciplines** – Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Science, often taught together or up to specific year levels.
- **Humanities** – Geography, History, Modern Studies, RMPS/Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies, Politics, Philosophy.
- **Languages** – ESOL, Gaelic, English (with Media), Modern Languages.
- **Arts** – Music, Drama, Media, Music Technology.
- **Business and Computing** – Business Management, Business Education, Computing Science.

Other Notable Areas

- Primary-level teaching (some secondary staff covering primary work).
- Outdoor Education / Outdoor Learning / Wider Achievement programmes.
- Global Citizenship.
- Developmental Milestones (specialist early years/development focus).
- Projects-based learning (IPQ, HPQ).

- Health & Wellbeing.
- Raising Attainment / Targeted Intervention.

Unusual or Unexpected Combinations

- **Highly Cross-Disciplinary Roles** – e.g., teaching Maths, Science, and Geography-related courses equally; or History, Geography, Modern Studies, and RMPS concurrently.
- **Senior Leadership Overlap** – e.g., Biology teacher with DHT role overseeing multiple unrelated departments (Maths, Performing Arts, Modern Languages).
- **Specialist-Therapeutic Areas** – wellbeing and mental health explicitly cited as teaching areas.
- **Primary Teaching within Secondary Roles** – rare crossover noted by a small number of respondents.
- **Frustration with Survey Restrictions** – multiple comments about the inability to select more than one subject in the survey interface, which limited accurate reporting.

School location Just under half of the respondents (47.2%) identified their school's location as urban, 32.2% small town, 17.2% rural and 3.4% Island community.

Responses by Local Authority Thirty one out of 32 local authorities were represented among respondents, only Shetland Islands returned no surveys. The greatest numbers were returned by respondents from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Argyll and Bute. Given that Glasgow and Edinburgh are the largest cities in Scotland with the highest number of schools you would expect the greatest number of returns. This is not the case with Argyll and Bute which has a considerably smaller estate. Table 6 details responses by Local Authority.

Table 6 – Responses by Local Authority (N=908)

Local Authority	Responses	%	Local Authority	Responses	%
Glasgow	99	10.9	East Dunbartonshire	17	1.9
Edinburgh	87	9.6	Dundee	16	1.8
Argyll and Bute	72	7.9	West Lothian	16	1.8
Perth and Kinross	54	5.9	West Dunbartonshire	15	1.7
South Lanarkshire	50	5.5	East Ayrshire	13	1.4
Aberdeenshire	48	5.3	Inverclyde	11	1.2
Highland	45	5	Midlothian	11	1.2
Dumfries and Galloway	42	4.6	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	10	1.1
East Renfrewshire	41	4.5	Falkirk	10	1.1
Stirling	39	4.3	Scottish Borders	10	1.1
Fife	38	4.2	East Lothian	6	0.7
North Lanarkshire	38	4.2	Clackmannanshire	5	0.6
Angus	28	3.1	South Ayrshire	5	0.6
Moray	27	3.0	North Ayrshire	4	0.4
Aberdeen City	26	2.9	Orkney Islands	4	0.4
Renfrewshire	21	2.3	Shetland Islands	-	-

Looking at responses as a proportion of the teaching population in each of the authorities (see Table 7) it is clear that Argyll and Bute returned proportionately many more questionnaires than other Local Authorities. Most local authorities returned only a small fraction of their potential.

Table 7 – Responses by teaching population in Local Authorities (N=908)

Local authority	Responses as % of teachers in LA*	Local authority	Responses as % of teachers in LA
Argyll and Bute	8.8	Aberdeen City	1.4
Stirling	4.1	East Dunbartonshire	1.3
Perth and Kinross	4.0	Renfrewshire	1.2
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	3.2	Dundee	1.2
Dumfries and Galloway	3.1	East Ayrshire	1.1
East Renfrewshire	3.0	Fife	1.1
Moray	2.9	North Lanarkshire	1.0
Angus	2.5	Midlothian	1.0
Edinburgh	2.4	Scottish Borders	0.9
Highland	2.0	Clackmannanshire	0.9
Aberdeenshire	1.8	West Lothian	0.8
Glasgow	1.8	Falkirk	0.6
West Dunbartonshire	1.7	East Lothian	0.6
Orkney Islands	1.6	South Ayrshire	0.4
Inverclyde	1.5	North Ayrshire	0.3
South Lanarkshire	1.5	Shetland Islands	-

* 2024 SG figures

Educational qualifications Just under two thirds of respondents (65.6%) had completed a *Bachelor's degree, Master's degree or their equivalents*. See Table 8.

Table 8 - Highest level of formal education completed? (N=893)

Education	Percentage
Bachelors degree or equivalent	37.3
Full Masters degree or equivalent	28.3
Some Masters credits	27.1
Doctoral degree or equivalent	3.9
Other	3.4

Among the Other responses the following were common:

- **Bachelor's Degree plus Postgraduate Teaching Qualification** – Often a Bachelor's degree followed by PGDE, PGCE, or similar.
- **Postgraduate Diplomas** – Including Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Technical Translation, Early Education, and generic postgraduate diplomas.
- **Postgraduate Certificates** – In education and related fields, sometimes combined with diplomas.
- **Diplomas in Education/Child Education** – Pre-PGDE qualifications or sector-specific diplomas.

Other Notable Entries included

- **MA (Hons) with PGDE** – Specific honours-level undergraduate degree followed by teaching qualification.
- **Masters Credits Pending** – Respondents currently working toward a master’s qualification.
- **Specialised Postgraduate Fields** – Technical Translation, Early Years Education (Strathclyde), Early Education.
- **Unspecified “Post Graduate”** – Multiple entries gave the label without a specific award or field.

Less common responses

- **Technical Translation Postgraduate Diploma** – Non-education field feeding into teaching qualifications.
- **Early Years Module without full award** – Single module from university cited as highest level.
- **Incomplete Masters** – Masters-level study in progress listed as current highest qualification.

Routes into Teaching Most commonly and in the majority of cases (70.1%), teachers completed a postgraduate qualification after a first degree as their route into teaching. (see Table 9).

Table 9 - Routes into teaching (N=893)

Route into teaching	Percentage
Postgraduate/Professional certificate or diploma in education (PGCE or PGDE)	70.1
Undergraduate degree or integrated Masters with teaching qualification	26.5
Other routes	3.4

Common Other routes into teaching included

- **Undergraduate Education Degrees** – BEd (Primary, Technological Education, Education with IT), often followed by further postgraduate study (e.g., MEd).
- **Graduate Teacher Programme (England)** – Several respondents entered via this in-service training route to achieve Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).
- **Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE)** – Some with extensive FE lecturing experience transitioned to school teaching via this pathway.
- **Diploma in Education/Teaching** – Pre-PGDE era qualifications, often cited by those with long-standing careers.

Subject- or Profession-Specific Pathways

- Degrees in specialist subjects (e.g., Maths, Chemistry, Classical Music, Social and Criminal Justice) followed by teacher training qualifications.

- Professional or vocational backgrounds leading into teaching (e.g., music therapy, dance movement therapy).

International Routes

- Overseas teacher education and qualifications (e.g., Switzerland, India, USA), later recognised or supplemented in Scotland/UK.

Postgraduate and Further Study

- Multiple respondents undertook Master's or doctoral-level study, sometimes long after initial qualification (e.g., MEd, MSc in Transformative Learning, PhD).
- Chartered Teacher programme mentioned as a career milestone, particularly near retirement.

Less common responses included

- **Non-Scotland Context** – One respondent lives in the USA and expressed frustration about receiving the survey, noting “assumptions are bad.”
- **Highly Academic Pathways** – A few with exceptionally high qualifications (multiple MAs, PhDs) before or after entering teaching.
- **Therapeutic Professions** – Music therapy and dance movement therapy backgrounds feeding into teaching roles.
- **Long-Term FE Sector Experience** – Over 20 years as an FE lecturer before transitioning to school teaching.

Respondents Gender *The majority of respondents (73%) were female. Twenty-three-point one percent (23.1%) were male, 0.4% identified themselves as non-binary and 3.4% preferred not to state a gender.*

Respondents Ethnicity *The overwhelming majority of teachers (87.7%) identified themselves as white. The next largest groupings were other white background (3.9%) and Irish (2.4%). Three-point four percent (3.4%) preferred not to say. Table 10 gives full details of ethnicity.*

Table 10 – Respondents’ ethnicity* (N=893)

Ethnicity	Percentage
Asian or Asian British	
Indian	0.4
Pakistani	0.3
Bangladeshi	-
Chinese	0.1
Any other Asian background	0.1
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	
Caribbean	0.1
African	0.2
Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background	0.1
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	
White and Black Caribbean	0.1
White and Black African	-
White and Asian	0.2
Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background	0.3
White	
English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	87.7
Irish	2.4
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.1
Roma	0.1
Any other white background	3.9
Other Ethnic Group	
Arab	-
Any other ethnic group	0.3
Prefer not to Say	
Prefer not to say	3.4

*Categories taken from the Scottish Census 2022

Appendix 3: Extended focus group synthesis

Stakeholder Group	Key Priorities	Effective Support	Access: Enablers & Inhibitors	Combined Insights
Teachers	Sector-specific pedagogy (digital, ASN, GME); practitioner enquiry; curriculum creativity	Peer observation; autonomy; collaborative networks; summarised research	Enablers: leadership, networks, flexible CPD. Inhibitors: workload, rural gaps, scarce resources	Teachers want context-specific, practical PL with autonomy, but structural barriers persist
Parents/ Carers	Early identification, trauma-informed practice, inclusive assessment	In-school ASN specialists; modular CPD; multi-agency collaboration	Enablers: collaboration, parent involvement. Inhibitors: workload, fragmented priorities	Parents emphasise earlier support, inclusive pedagogy, and trauma-informed approaches
Young People	Consistency, empathy, smooth transitions, digital competence	Mentorship for teachers; technology training; in-person PL	Enablers: mentorship, networks. Inhibitors: resistance to change, uneven digital skills	Young people want empathetic, digitally skilled teachers offering clear guidance
System Stakeholders	Equity, coherence, Gaelic/ASN priorities, curriculum creativity	Long-term inquiry, collaborative models, leadership PL	Enablers: mentoring, incentives, networks. Inhibitors: time/funding limits, inaccessible research, duplication	Stakeholders stress systemic reform, coherence, and sustainable models
Combined	Curriculum reform; equity and inclusion; practitioner voice; research translation	Collaborative, inquiry-driven, context-sensitive PL	Enablers: networks, mentoring, autonomy. Inhibitors: workload, inequity, fragmentation	Shared demand for inclusive, research-informed, collaborative professional learning