

Teachertapp

NPQs: Leadership Pathway or Passing Phase?

By Grainne Hallahan

Learn more at:

 | teachertapp.co.uk

Key findings

NPQs have been enormously popular. Over half of all teachers have completed (or are currently completing) at least one NPQ, as of November 2024.

The perception of NPQs by teachers is mainly positive. The most positive example is that three quarters of those who studied the Headship NPQ reported that it had improved their leadership skills, and 39% said it made them more employable. Just 11% said it didn't help at all.

Although teachers felt their NPQ improved their employability, hiring managers don't always weigh them heavily in decisions. Only 3% of heads and senior leaders felt the NPQ was a significant factor in offering a job, and 27% considered it a small factor. Most school leaders weren't influenced by an NPQ at all.

Commitment to teaching isn't significantly different among those who engaged with NPQs. Teachers were no more likely to say they wanted to stay in teaching until retirement compared to those without. Across all roles, differences were minimal.

NPQs have been popular, but demand may slow now that so many teachers have completed them. Over half of teachers who haven't done an NPQ (51%) say they never want one, and 14% are unsure. That leaves just over a third who are still interested – but most would only do it if their school pays.

What is Teacher Tapp?

Our mobile app, **Teacher Tapp**, surveys over **10,000 teachers** with three multiple choice questions every single day...

(Yes, even Christmas day!)

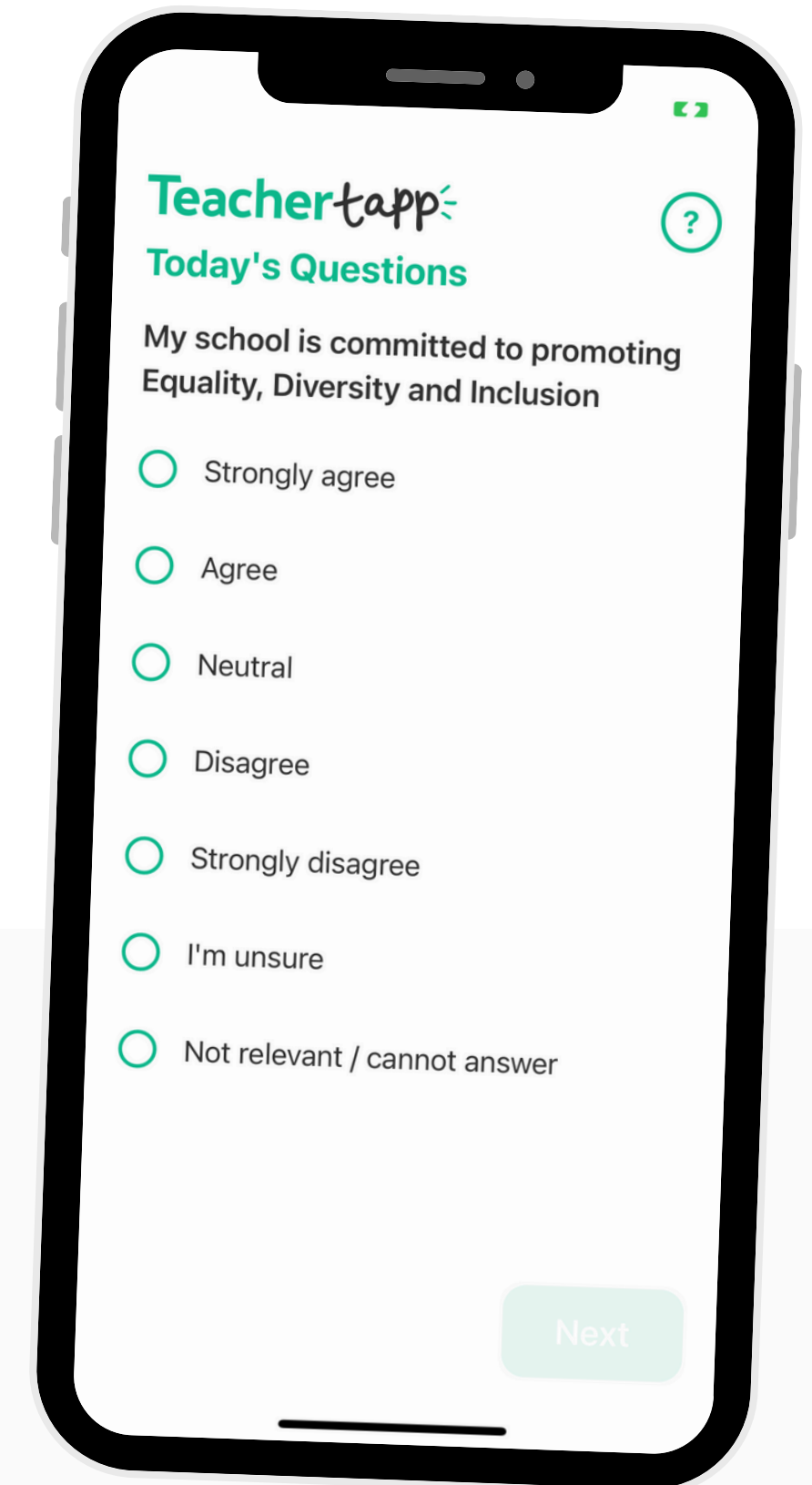
We have every type of teacher on our app, from primary through to every subject at secondary phase, and at every level of seniority too.

We've collected **more than 65 million data points** already so we know our teachers *really* well!

Founded by experts

Professor Becky Allen and **Laura McInerney** set up Teacher Tapp in 2017 as an experiment when Becky was running Education Datalab and Laura was editor of Schools Week.

Teacher Tapp surveys have been featured on the *BBC*, *Sky News*, *Radio 4's More or Less*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *TES* and *Schools Week*.



How we wrote this report

Teacher Tapp surveys thousands of teachers every day, collecting insights on their experiences, views, and professional development. As part of this, we regularly ask about National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), tracking participation, perceptions, and the impact of these qualifications over time.

For this report, we analysed **data from November 2024**, when we surveyed around **5,000 teachers on their experiences with NPQs**.

Our **11** questions covered:

- Whether they have completed or are currently studying an NPQ
- Their views on the impact of NPQs on career progression
- School leaders' attitudes toward funding NPQs in the future

As with all Teacher Tapp data, responses were weighted to reflect the national teacher and school demographics.

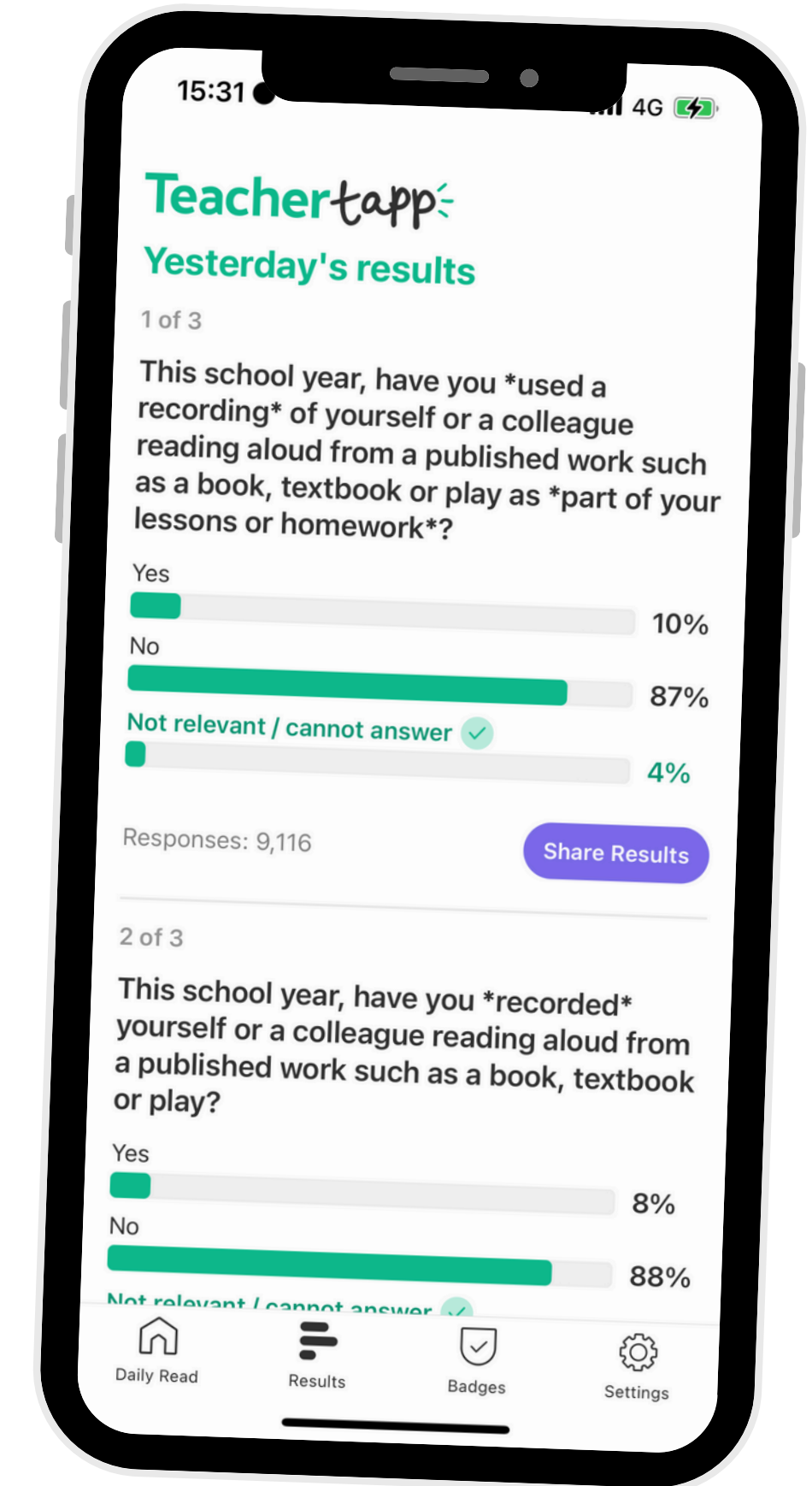
Further analysis is available for purchase, including breakdowns by region and NPQ provider. To learn more, contact hello@teachertapp.com.

How do we know our data is reliable?

Our daily surveys fairly represent the teaching population overall, so you can have confidence in our results.

- 1. We 're-weight' our sample each day.** This means we statistically re-balance the results, using the Workforce Census, to ensure we have the right proportion of teachers by gender, age, phase, job seniority and region.
- 2. We check results from key questions against other national surveys.** We can show that we get very similar results to other 'random sample' surveys.

With over **10,000** daily participants in over **5,000** schools, we have a wider reach than any other regular teacher survey.



What are NPQs?

For most of the late 20th century, once teachers completed their Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and obtained Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), there were no further nationally recognised qualifications specifically designed for classroom practitioners. While Masters and PhDs in education were available, these were more academic in nature and rarely tailored to the practical development of teachers in schools.

Enter the National Professional Qualifications...

In 1997, the first National Professional Qualification was introduced - the National Professional Qualification for headteachers (NPQH). As school leadership evolved, so did the NPQs. In the 2000s, new qualifications were introduced for senior leaders (NPQSL) and middle leaders (NPQML).

All of the NPQs were originally offered by a National College of School Leadership, however, from 2010 onwards, independent providers offered the qualifications and they were overseen by a second iteration of the college.

In 2020, the NPQs were overhauled again, and aligned with recommendations made in the 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy. The suite of NPQs expanded to include more specialist courses, such as 'leading behaviour and culture' (NPQBC) and 'leading teacher development' (NPQLTD).

Between 2020 and 2024, all NPQs were fully funded by the Department for Education as part of efforts to support schools during the Covid recovery period. This made the qualifications much more accessible for a number of years.

However, changes are afoot yet again - and the funding is reducing.

Funding changes...

Since 2024, funding has become more targeted, focusing on schools and educational settings facing the greatest challenges and serving disadvantaged communities.

For the October 2024 cohort, only 10,000 funded places are available. This number includes those that are covered by universal funding that continues for specific NPQs, including the NPQ in Headship, for SENCOs, in Leading Primary Maths, and the Early Headship Coaching Offer. For other NPQs, funding is only targeted at schools with the highest 50% of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, as well as early years and 16 to 19 settings identified as serving disadvantaged communities.

What is next for NPQs?

This report sets out to answer the questions:

- Now the funding has changed, how available are NPQs?
- Given the increase in uptake over recent years, do people still want to do NPQs?, and
- What might the future of NPQs look like in order to keep teachers engaged in professional development?



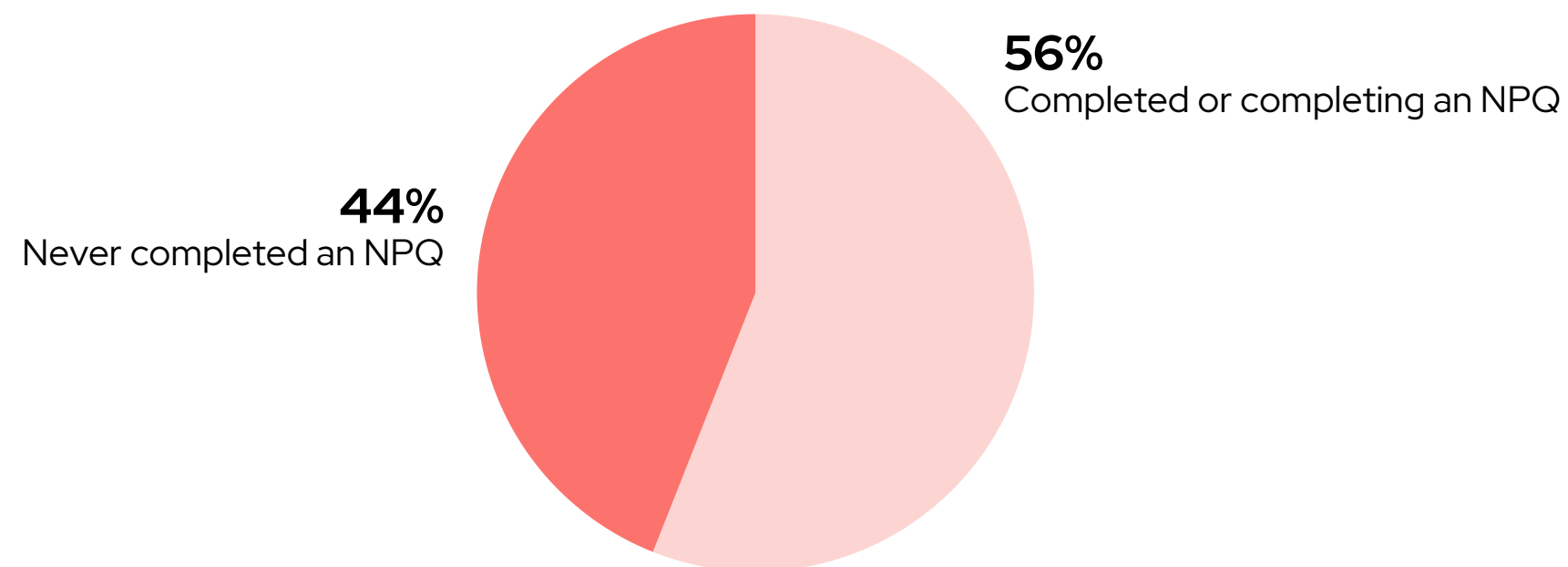
Current Popularity of NPQs

Popularity - Over half of teachers have completed an NPQ

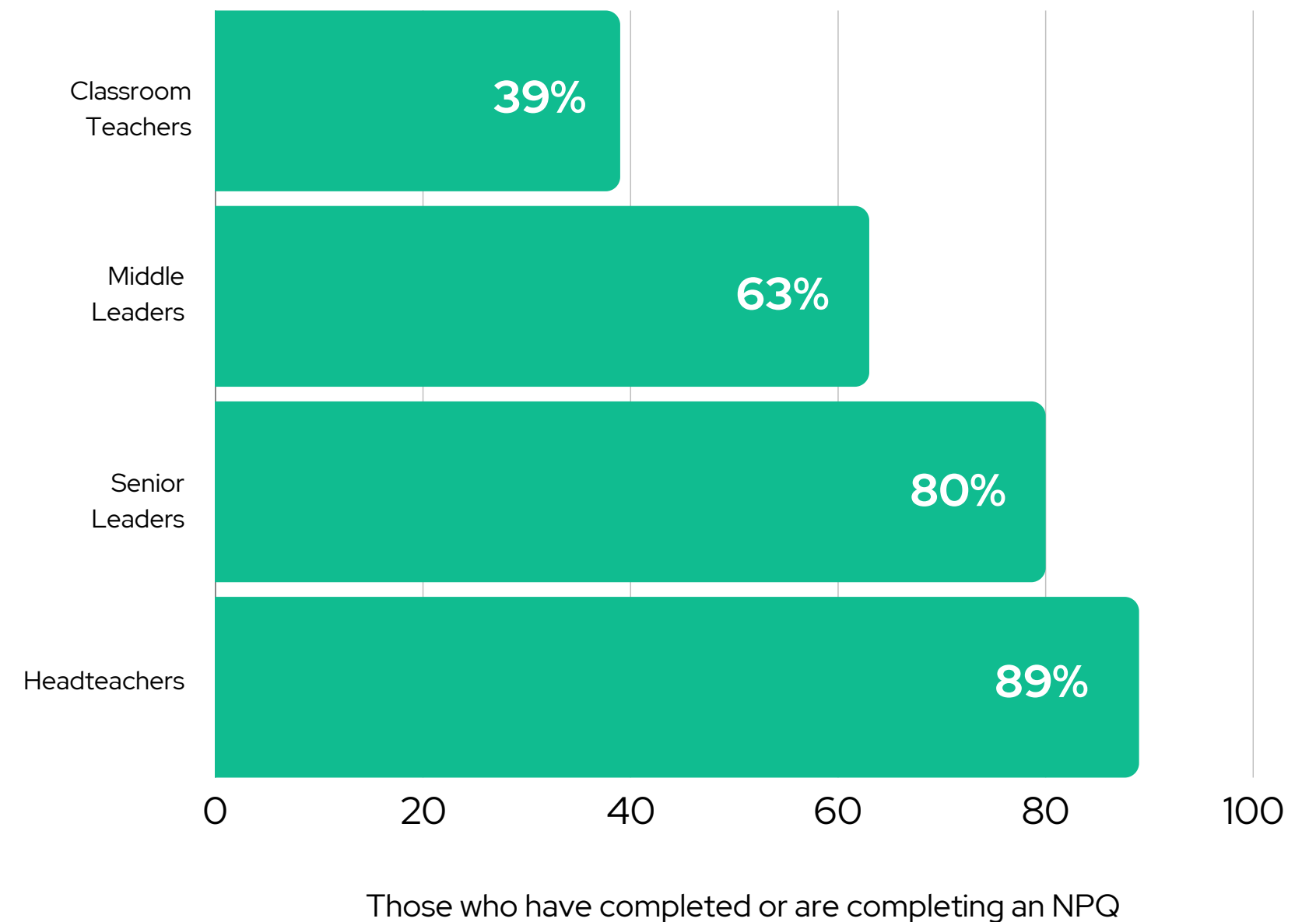
NPQs have been enormously popular. **Over half of all teachers have completed (or are currently completing) at least one NPQ**, as of November 2024.

The most likely teachers to have completed an NPQ are **senior leaders** and **headteachers**.

Only 39% of classroom teachers have completed an NPQ, compared to 63% of middle leaders, 80% senior leaders and 89% of headteachers



Those who **HAVE** completed an NPQ tend to be senior leaders and headteachers.



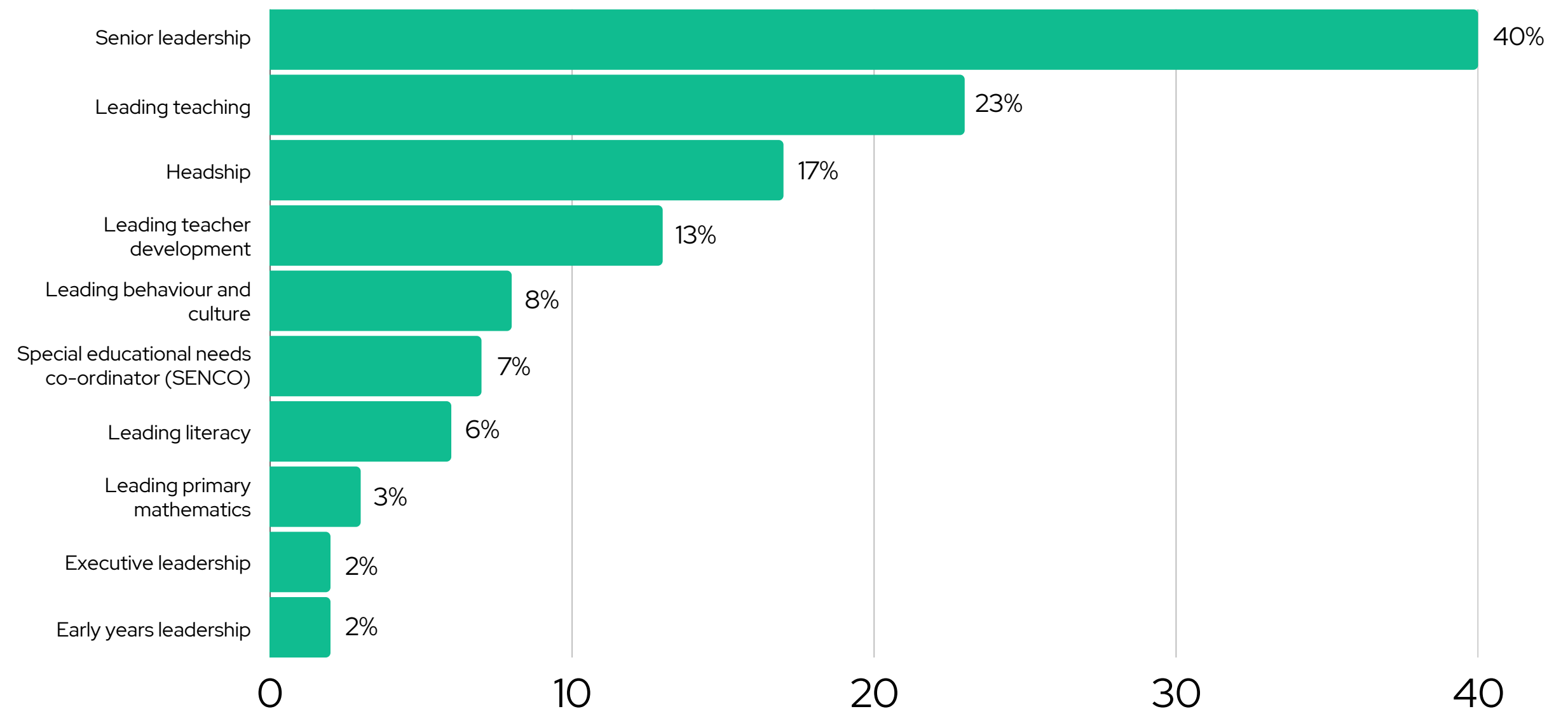
Types of NPQ - Senior leadership is the most common topic

NPQs can be taken in different topics. By far the **most popular is the senior leadership NPQ** (which was one of the earliest to be introduced).

The second most common is Leading Teaching (23%), followed by Headship (17%).

Some of the topics are newer and more in line with government policies than others. For example, the recently introduced SENCO NPQ replaced the NASENCO award as the mandatory qualification for SENCOs in mainstream schools as of September 2024. Currently, 7% of teachers have completed it or are studying for it.

Which of the following NPQs have you completed or are you currently studying?



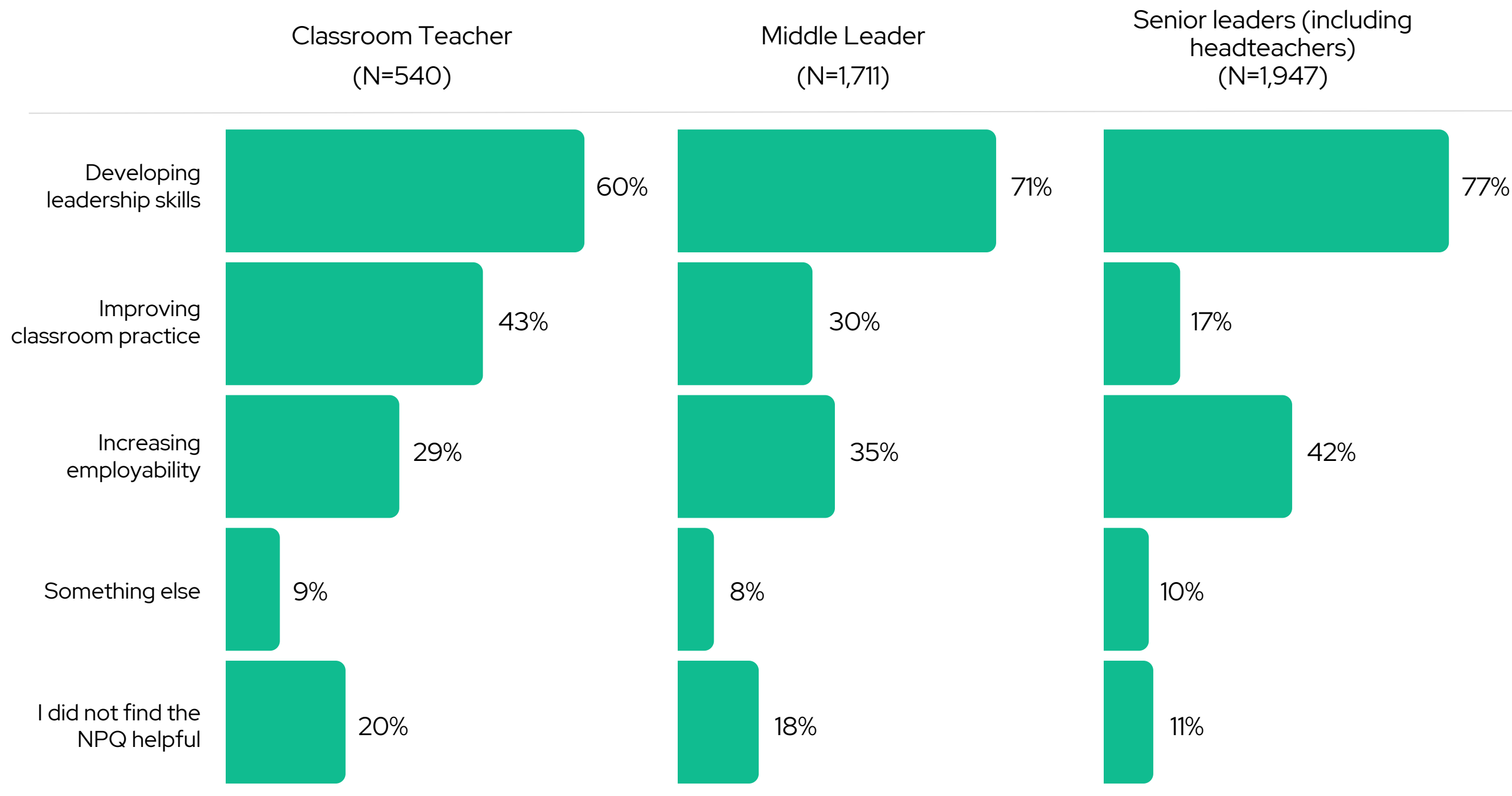
Question answered by 4,495 teachers on 12/11/2024 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)



Why do an NPQ?

What do NPQs help teachers to do better?

Has completing an NPQ helped you with any of the following:



Given the popularity of NPQs so far, do teachers feel it has made a difference to their performance?

77% of senior leaders and headteachers reported better leadership skills, and 42% reported that the NPQ had made them more employable.

Among classroom teachers, 60% felt they had developed their leadership skills and 43% had developed their classroom practice - though it will depend on which NPQ they took and what they hoped to improve.

A higher proportion of teachers than leaders said they did not find it useful (20%).

Question answered by 4,198 teachers on 12/11/2024 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

What do NPQs help teachers to do better?

Headship NPQ

- **75%** of teachers reported that their headship NPQ improved their leadership skills.
- **39%** of teachers felt it made them more employable.
- Just **11%** did NOT find it helpful at all.

Leading Literacy NPQ

- **51%** of teachers reported that their leading literacy NPQ improved their classroom practice, and **69%** felt it improved their leadership skills.
- **28%** of teachers felt it made them more employable.
- Only **13%** did NOT find it helpful at all.

Leading Teaching NPQ

- **65%** of teachers reported that their leading teaching NPQ improved their leadership skills.
- **33%** of teachers felt it made them more employable.
- However, **20%** did NOT find it helpful at all.

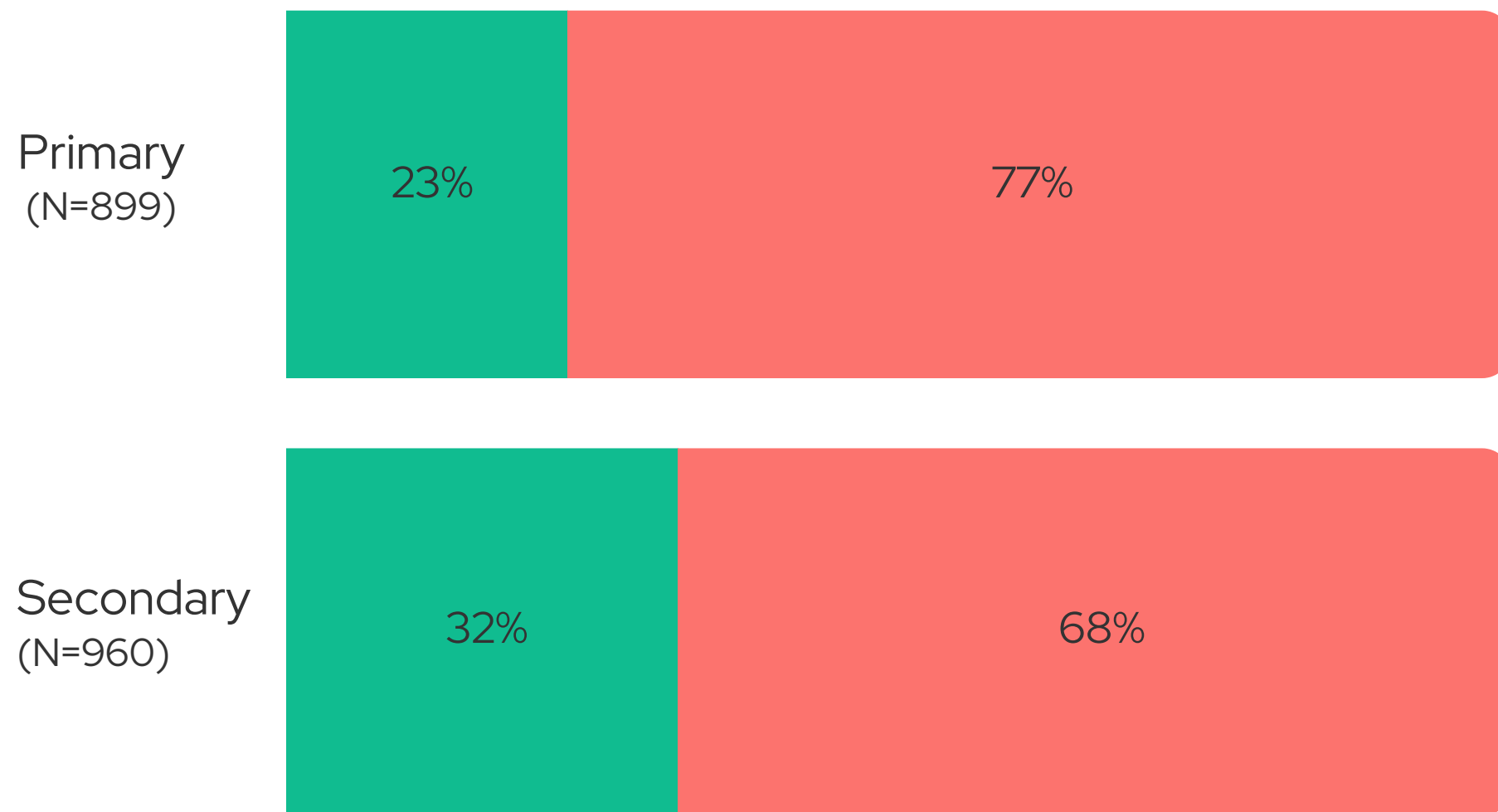
The NPQ programme was designed to develop teachers - **but which NPQs did teachers report had been particularly helpful?**

Promisingly, 3/4 of all teachers who studied the Headship NPQ reported that it had improved their leadership skills, and 39% found it made them more employable. Just 11% said it didn't help at all - this was the lowest number of all the NPQs.

In a similar pattern, Leading Teaching NPQ had the majority reporting that it had improved their leadership skills (65%) and a third said it made them more employable. However, it had one of the highest numbers reporting that it wasn't helpful at all (20%) with only 'Leading Teacher Development NPQ' rating higher at 22%.

A third of secondary leaders have offered NPQs as a retention tool

Have you suggested funding an NPQ to encourage a staff member to stay?



Question answered by 1,859 teachers on 18/11/2024 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Yes No

Losing a good member of staff costs a school more than merely the cost of a job advert: retention is key to building relationships, and holding onto teachers who you have already invested in is of the utmost importance for leaders.

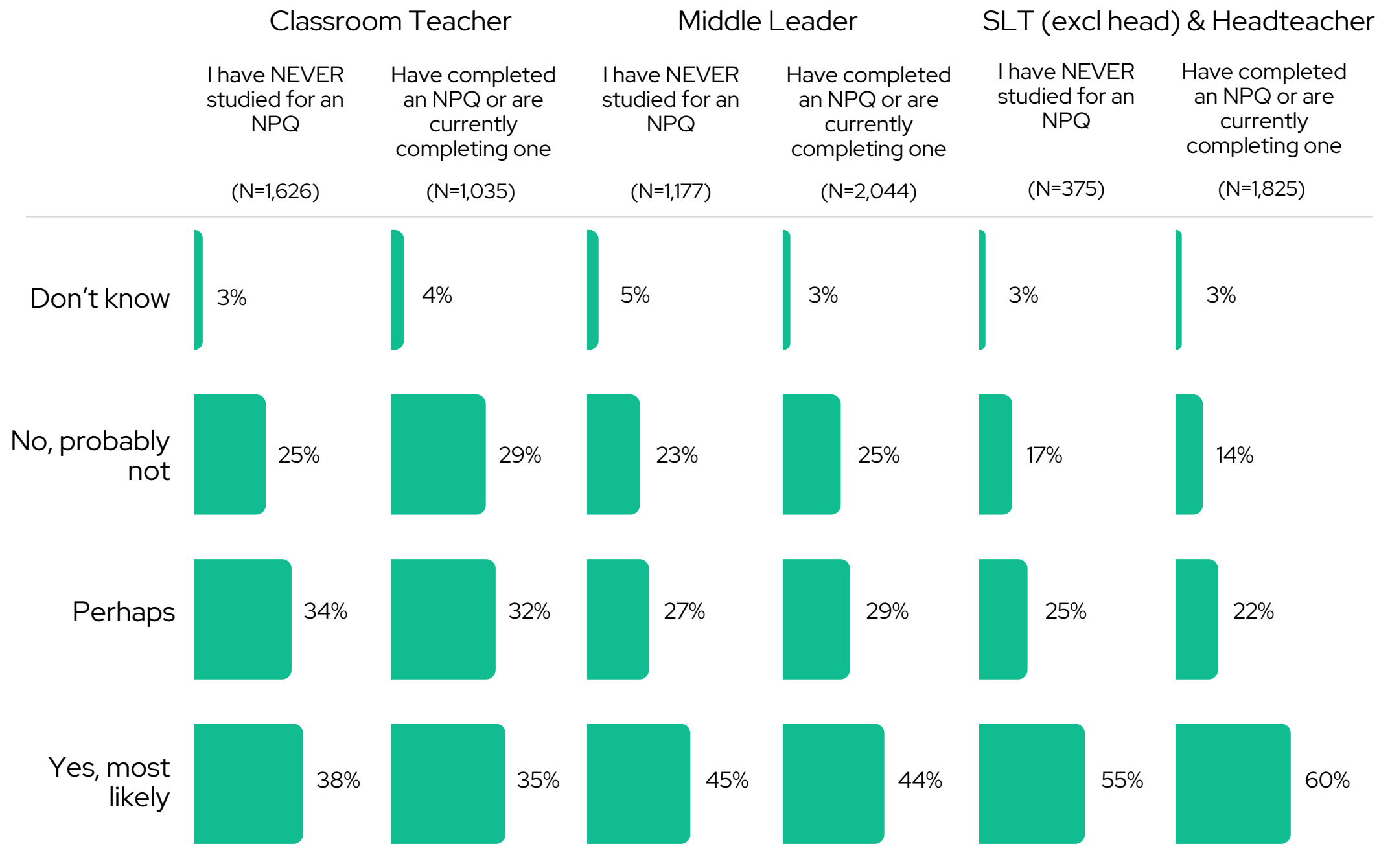
Offering NPQs to teachers as an incentive to stay has been adopted in schools, with 23% of primary senior leaders and 32% of secondary senior leaders employing this tactic in the past.

It's not just the phase that makes a difference here - so does the level of deprivation where the school is located.

Leaders in schools with the highest number of students on Free School Meals (FSM) are more likely to offer NPQs as incentives to staff to encourage them to stay when compared to leaders in schools with the lowest numbers of FSM students (32% vs 24%).

Do NPQs help with teacher retention?

Which of the following NPQs have you completed or are you currently studying? (across) versus Do you expect to be a teacher until retirement (down)



Question answered by teachers on 22/02/2025 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Does an NPQ impact a teacher's desire to stay in teaching?

One aim of the NPQ rollout was to help tackle teacher retention—but does completing an NPQ make teachers more committed to the profession?

Among classroom teachers, 29% of those with an NPQ say they are “probably not” going to stay in teaching until retirement, compared to 25% of those without one. This four-percentage-point difference is minimal, suggesting little impact on long-term commitment either way.

Middle leaders show a similarly small gap—23% of those with an NPQ say they won't stay until retirement, compared to 25% without one.

Senior leaders and headteachers, unsurprisingly, show the strongest commitment, as they are closer to retirement. Among this group, 14% of those with an NPQ say they “probably won't” stay, compared to 17% without one. Again, the difference is small.

Overall, NPQs appear to have little effect on whether teachers believe they will remain in the profession.

Does having an NPQ make it easier to find a job?

Teachers see NPQs as a boost to their career, but school leaders don't always share that view.

While 35% of teachers felt their NPQ improved their employability, hiring managers don't always weigh them heavily in decisions.

Only 3% of heads and senior leaders felt the NPQ was a significant factor in offering a job, and 27% considered it a small factor. In fact, most school leaders weren't influenced by an NPQ at all.

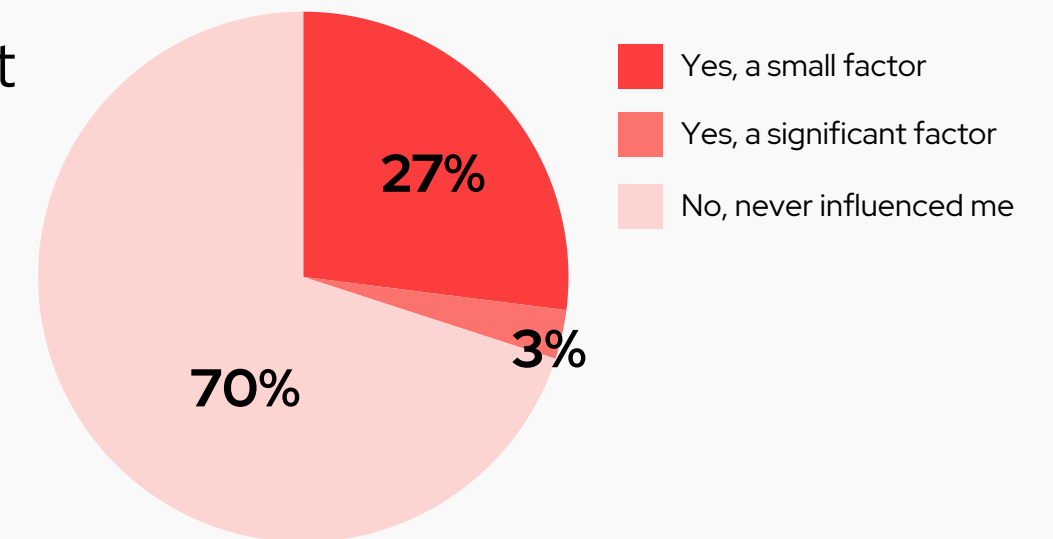
When comparing teachers self perception of yearly improvement, teachers **with** NPQs and those **without** NPQs, report very similar levels of improvement.

51% of senior leaders and headteachers who **have engaged** with NPQs felt they had improved in the last year, compared to **46%** of senior leaders and headteachers who **have NOT engaged** with NPQs.

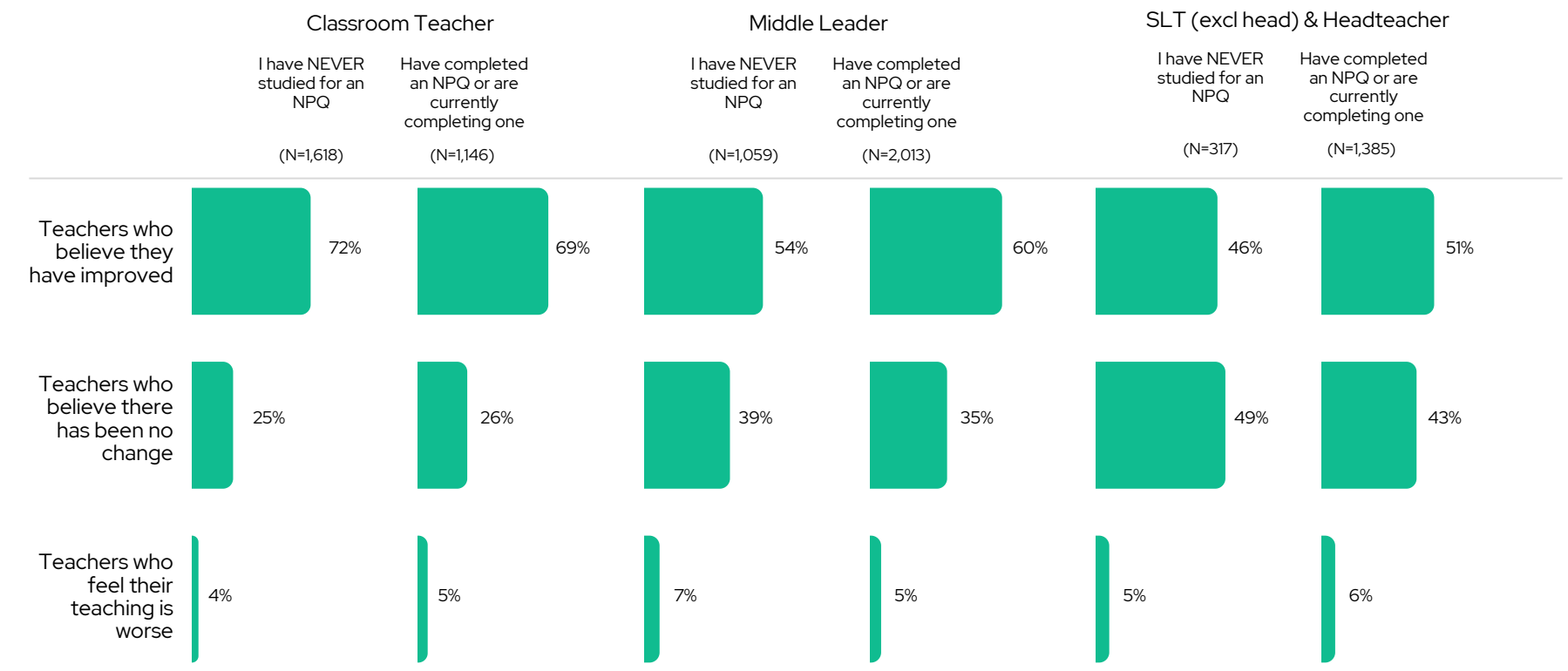
A similar pattern can be found among middle leaders: **60%** who **have engaged** with NPQs felt they had improved, compared to **54%** of those who **have not engaged** with NPQs.

Among classroom teachers, the rates, again, were very similar, with **69%** of those who **have engaged** feeling they had improved, compared to **72%** who **have not engaged**.

Most leaders have not been influenced to hire a teacher because they had an NPQ.



Which of the following NPQs have you completed or are you currently studying? (across) versus Overall, do you feel you are a better teacher right now than you were at this time last year? (down)



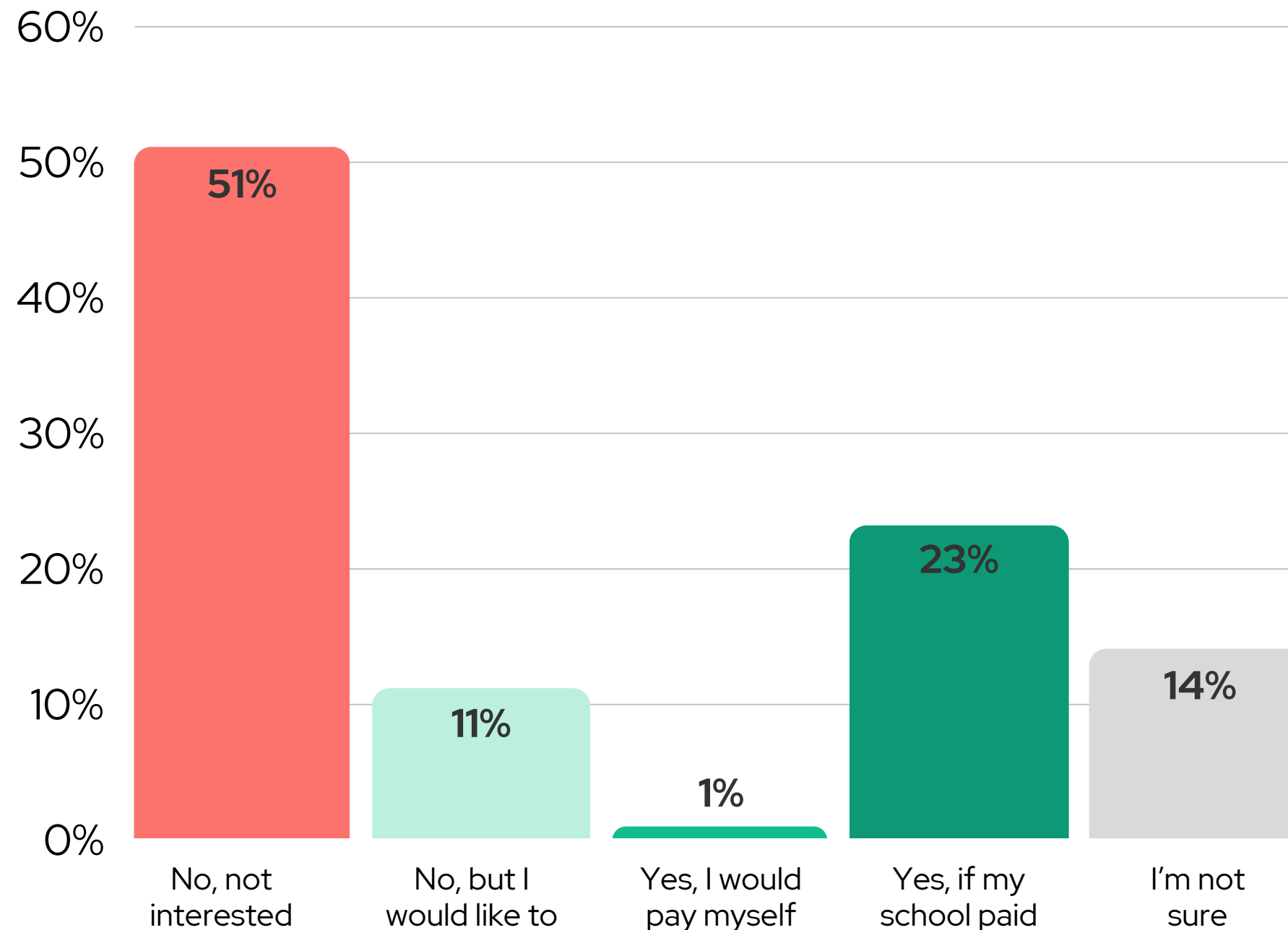
Question answered by teachers on 22/02/2025 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)



Future Demand for NPQs

Half of teachers without NPQs don't want one

Do you plan to do a National Professional Qualification (NPQ) in the next two years?



NPQs have been hugely popular, but demand may slow as many teachers have already completed one.

Right now, over half of teachers who haven't done an NPQ (51%) say they don't plan on doing one in the next two years, and 14% are unsure.

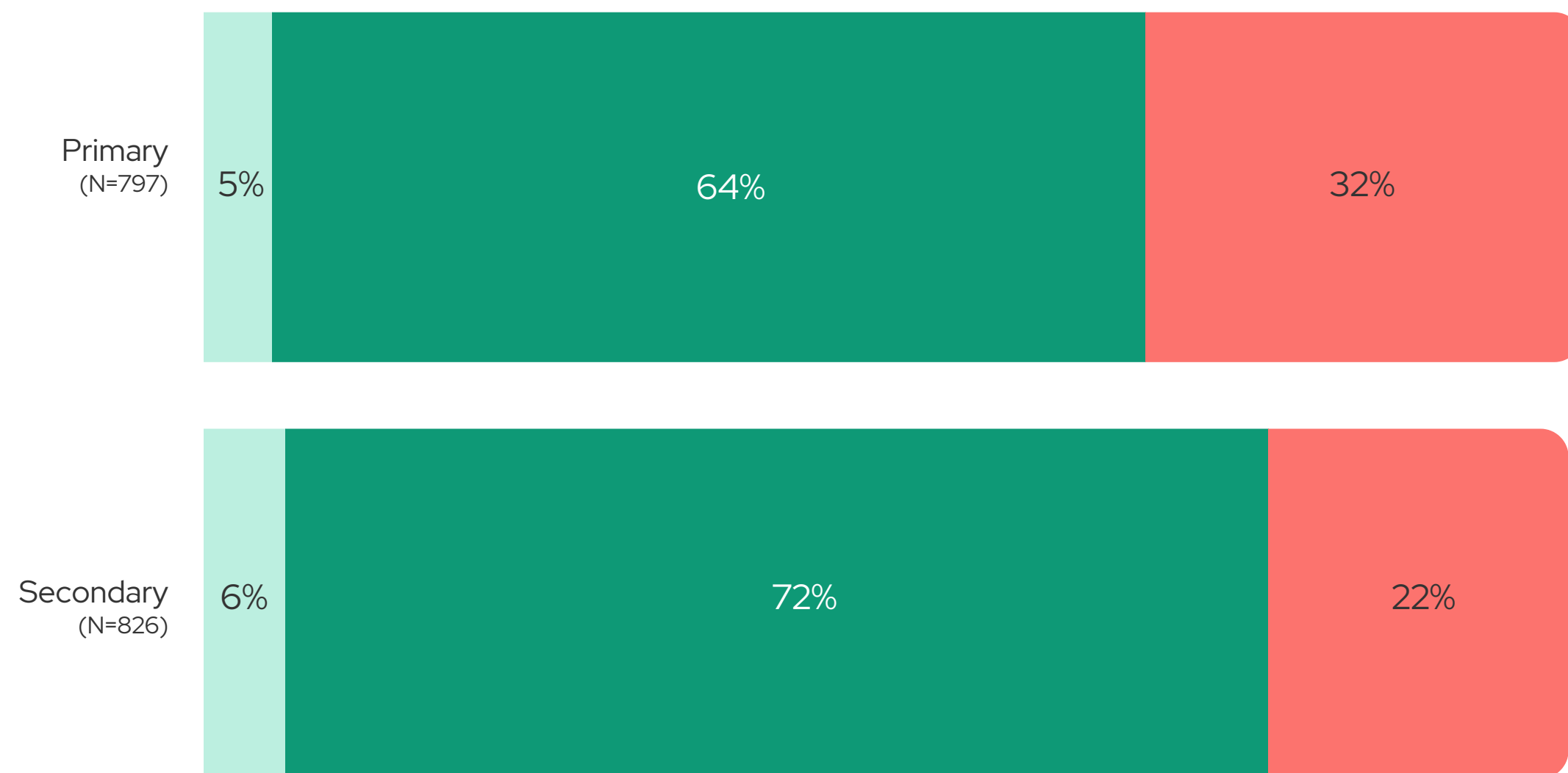
That leaves just over a third who are interested—but most would only do it if their school pays.

23% say they'd sign up if funded, while just 1% would pay out of their own pocket. Another 11% would like to take an NPQ but know they won't be able to.

With funding changes ongoing, the big question is whether schools will keep covering the costs—because very few teachers are willing to pay for NPQs themselves.

Funding NPQs: Future courses won't be for everyone

Do you plan to fund NPQs for your staff in the future?



Question answered by 1,623 teachers on 18/11/2024 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Yes, for ALL staff Yes, on a case-by-case basis No

With full NPQ funding coming to an end, school leaders will be forced to make tough decisions. The good news? Most still plan to invest in NPQs. The catch? Blanket funding for all staff will be rare.

Instead, leaders are shifting to selective support—72% of secondary and 64% of primary leaders say they'll fund NPQs on a case-by-case basis, rather than making NPQs universally available.

Secondary schools, with typically larger budgets and leadership structures, are more likely to keep funding NPQs (78% plan to, compared to 69% in primary).

But nearly a quarter of secondary leaders and a third of primary leaders are saying no to funding them at all. This will mean NPQs become harder to access.

Teachertapp[®]

What next?

Here at Teacher Tapp, we will continue to use Teacher Tapp to monitor the situation.



If you'd like to commission further analysis of this data set, or commission your own Teacher Tapp questions for teachers or leaders please...

-  **Email us at:** hello@teachertapp.co.uk
-  **Visit our website at:** www.teachertapp.com
-  **Follow our LinkedIn page at:** <https://uk.linkedin.com/company/teachertapp>