

# NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS: **PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK**

2024-2025

Accredited NPQ provider



Department  
for Education



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# Introduction to the programme

School leadership is important. The quality of the teaching that our pupils receive is probably the biggest lever we have for improving their outcomes and future life chances (Slater et al., 2012). School leaders play a similarly significant role – their impact is second only to classroom teaching in generating school improvement (Bush & Glover, 2014). This is because school leaders influence the quality of teaching by creating the conditions where teachers keep getting better.

However, school leadership is complex. There is lots to know and to be able to do well. The National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) are designed to support teachers at every level of leadership to build their expertise and confidence, to enable them to have an even bigger impact on the children they serve.

## About Ambition Institute

As one of the Department for Education's lead NPQ providers, we are delighted to support you on your development journey.

At Ambition Institute, our mission is to support schools tackling educational disadvantage to keep getting better and help their teachers and leaders to become more expert over time.

This is how we build an education system where every child can thrive, no matter what their background. To achieve this, we design and deliver professional development that draws on the latest evidence, the insights of expert educators across the country, and our experience of what works.





# Programme overview

Our NPQ programmes draw on the best available evidence, alongside the NPQ frameworks, to help craft a set of experiences that will help leaders keep getting better during critical periods and transitions in their careers. Our design principles below provide the foundations of our programme design. They ensure our NPQs are based on and deliver full coverage of the frameworks, whilst also creating the best possible conditions for learning to take place.

- > **Evidence-informed:** both our content and programme design are grounded in the best available evidence from multiple fields.
- > **Granular, frequent and sustained:** our programme is broken down into bite sized chunks, covered in familiar ways across the programme to help build effective habits.
- > **Supportively challenging:** we create experiences that help teachers to get better, but do so in ways that can become part of typical school routines.
- > **Actionable:** our content is organised around the key challenges that participants face in their role, and includes rich examples of what evidence looks like in practice.
- > **Socially helpful:** we use structured opportunities for collaboration to create enhanced understanding and practice.
- > **Flexible:** programmes are designed to fit with the busy lives of teachers, and school terms and timetables.

To make the most of your NPQ, we recommend you:

1. **Carve out some time on a weekly basis:** rather than big chunks of content, our NPQ programmes all take a 'little and often' approach and are designed for you to undertake a 50 minute input each week.
2. **Tailor it to your needs:** we have designed a comprehensive programme but also one that should be able to flex quite a lot and still deliver (Cordingley et al., 2015). If you consistently study powerful ideas, improvement will follow. When and how you apply your knowledge matters less.
3. **Go with it:** it may not always be clear why a certain topic is in a certain place on the programme. However, we have thought carefully about the sequencing to ensure you come across the right ideas at the best times and revisit them lots to ensure they take hold (Dunlosky et al., 2013).
4. **Have an open mind:** the reformed NPQs are very different from previous ones. The new frameworks seek to map out what best practice means for school leadership, in a move that takes these NPQs towards a domain specific approach to leadership. Be open minded to this new approach – and try and drop any expectations you might have from previous leadership development programmes you have been a part of. We think it will pay off.

# An introduction to each NPQ programme

## Leadership NPQs

**NPQ for Executive Leadership (EL)** is an 18-month long programme designed to develop the expertise needed to become an outstanding executive leader, leading change and improvement across a group of schools or multi-academy trust. This programme puts key themes such as culture, teacher education and implementation at the heart of executive leaders' work.

**NPQ for Headship (H)** is a programme for headteachers or aspiring heads which combines insight and practice to drive change. Within 18 months, participants on this programme will develop the knowledge that underpins expert school leadership and apply it to become an outstanding headteacher.

**The Early Headship Coaching Offer (EHCO)** is a programme exclusively available to participants who are within the first five years of their first headship post. It can be completed alongside the NPQH, or following the completion of the NPQH. During this 12-month support offer, new headteachers are supported to diagnose and practice a 'context specific problem on a termly basis'.

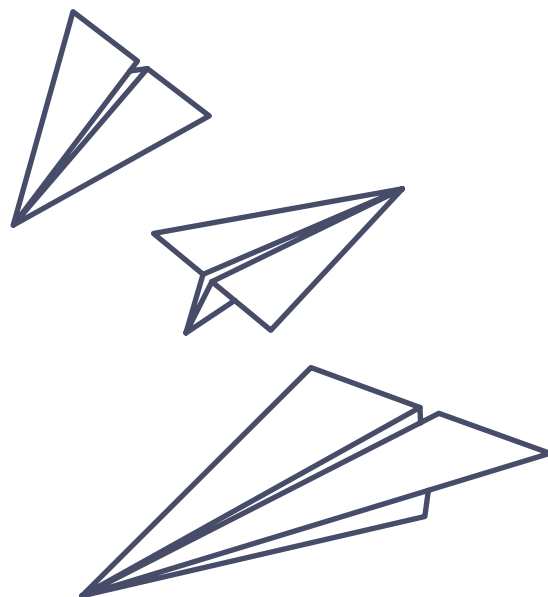
On the EHCO, new headteachers are supported via 3 x 1-hour coaching sessions from experienced headteachers. Alongside coaching, the EHCO offer includes:

- > Pre and post coaching activities
- > Carefully matched shadowing opportunities
- > Access to peer communities of practice from similar contexts

**NPQ for Senior Leadership (SL)** is an 18-month training programme designed for senior leaders and aspiring senior leaders. It is designed to help develop senior leadership knowledge and expertise to improve outcomes for teachers and pupils.

**NPQ for Early Years Leadership (EYL)** is the first NPQ specifically designed for leaders or aspiring leaders of early years settings. In this 18-month programme, participants are supported to develop expertise in early years leadership, helping to give all children up to the age of five the best possible start in life.

**NPQ for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs)** is an 18-month mandatory qualification for SENCOs, replacing the NASENCO qualification. The programme will support SENCOs to become experts in leading special educational needs and disabilities provision in their school.



## Specialist NPQs

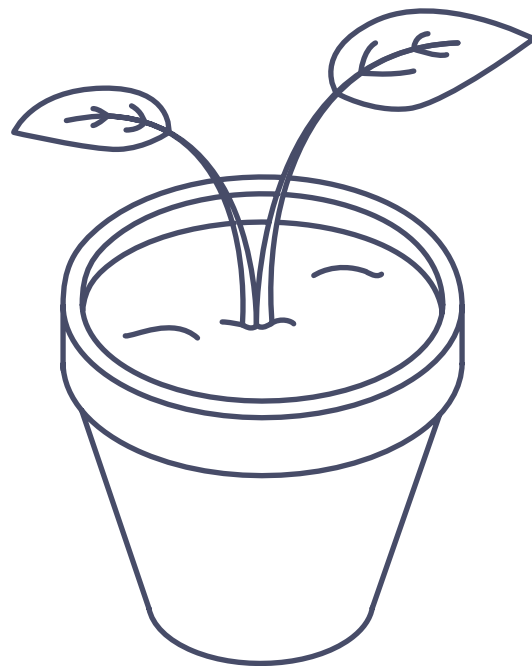
**NPQ for Leading Behaviour and Culture (LBC)** is a 12-month long programme where participants gain expertise in behaviour management and discover how to create a culture where staff and pupils can thrive. This programme is for teachers who have, or are aspiring to have, responsibilities for leading behaviour and/or supporting pupil wellbeing.

**NPQ for Leading Teaching (LT)** is for teachers who have, or are aspiring to have, responsibilities for leading teaching in a subject, year group, key stage or phase. In this 12-month programme, teachers will discover what outstanding teaching looks like and use this knowledge to become an excellent leader.

**NPQ for Leading Teacher Development (LTD)** is a 12-month programme for teachers who have, or who are aspiring to have, responsibility for leading other educators to develop. This may involve supporting all teachers within the school, trainees or newly qualified teachers.

**NPQ for Leading Literacy (LL)** focuses on improving pupils' literacy skills. This 12-month programme is designed to help teachers become an expert in literacy and leadership to enable young people to benefit from the curriculum and improve their chances of success.

**NPQ for Leading Primary Maths (LPM)** supports teachers to develop their understanding of excellent mathematics teaching for mastery and the knowledge and concepts that support successful leadership of mathematics. This 12-month programme is for teachers who have, or are aspiring to have, responsibility for leading maths teaching in the primary phase. The programme helps to develop informed and intentional approaches to instruction, curriculum, assessment, adaptive teaching, professional development and implementation for the teachers they lead.



**Follow the link to Ambition Institute's website to learn more about any of our programmes.**

# Key people and responsibilities

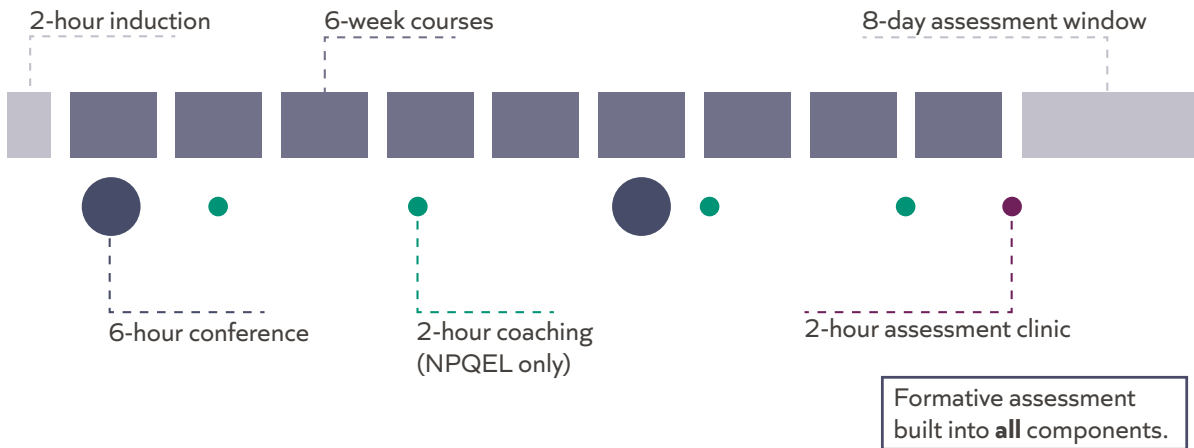
	You	Your buddy	Your facilitator
Role	You will be in a role aligned to your specific NPQ.	You will work with a buddy throughout the programme.	Conferences and clinics will be led by expert facilitators.
Responsibilities on the programme	Learning and applying aspects of the framework throughout the programme.	Providing you with actionable feedback to keep getting better, supporting you to make sense of, and to apply, knowledge and holding you to account.	Ensuring that participants are able to engage with programme content and supporting participants with their learning.

You will also be part of a **clinic group** and a **community** to support you to collaborate with peers and build your professional network.

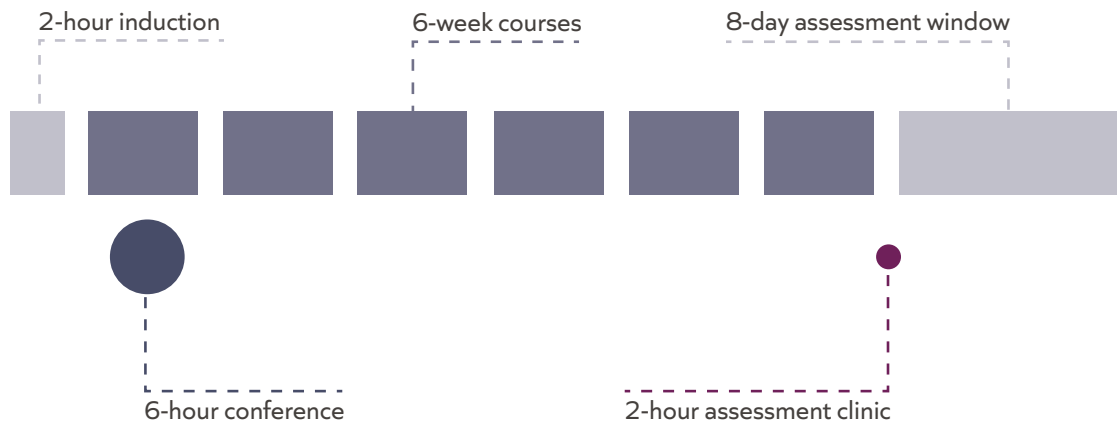


# Programme journey

## NPQSL / NPQH / NPQEL / NPQEYL / NPQSENCO



## NPQLBC / NPQLT / NPQLTD / NPQLL / NPQLPM

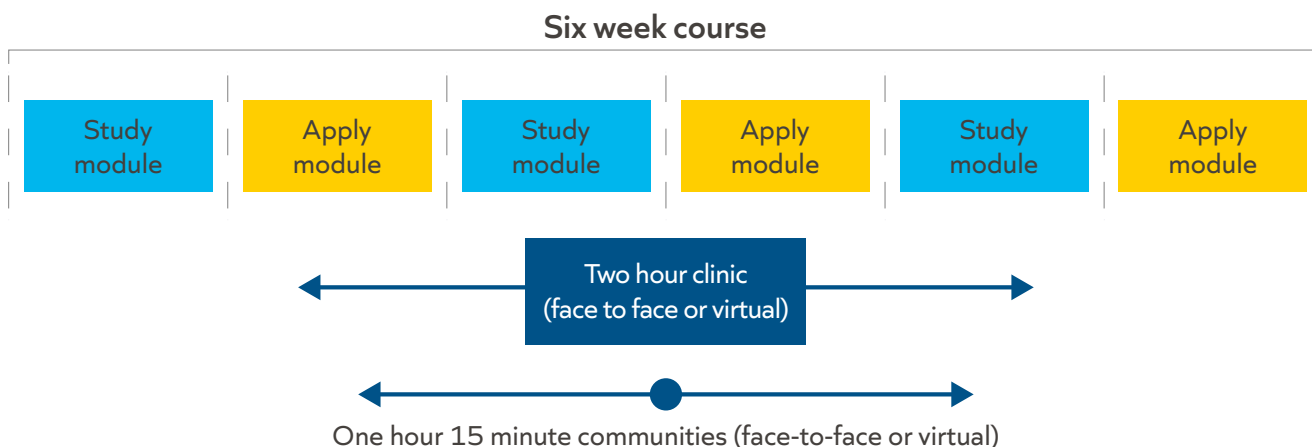




# Core input and timings

Our programmes are designed for participants to engage in both synchronous (live, facilitated sessions) and asynchronous (modules that you can complete at any time) learning opportunities, to embed the necessary learning and application for school leaders. The programme journey varies between qualifications.

Our NPQ programmes are designed from the same set of components:



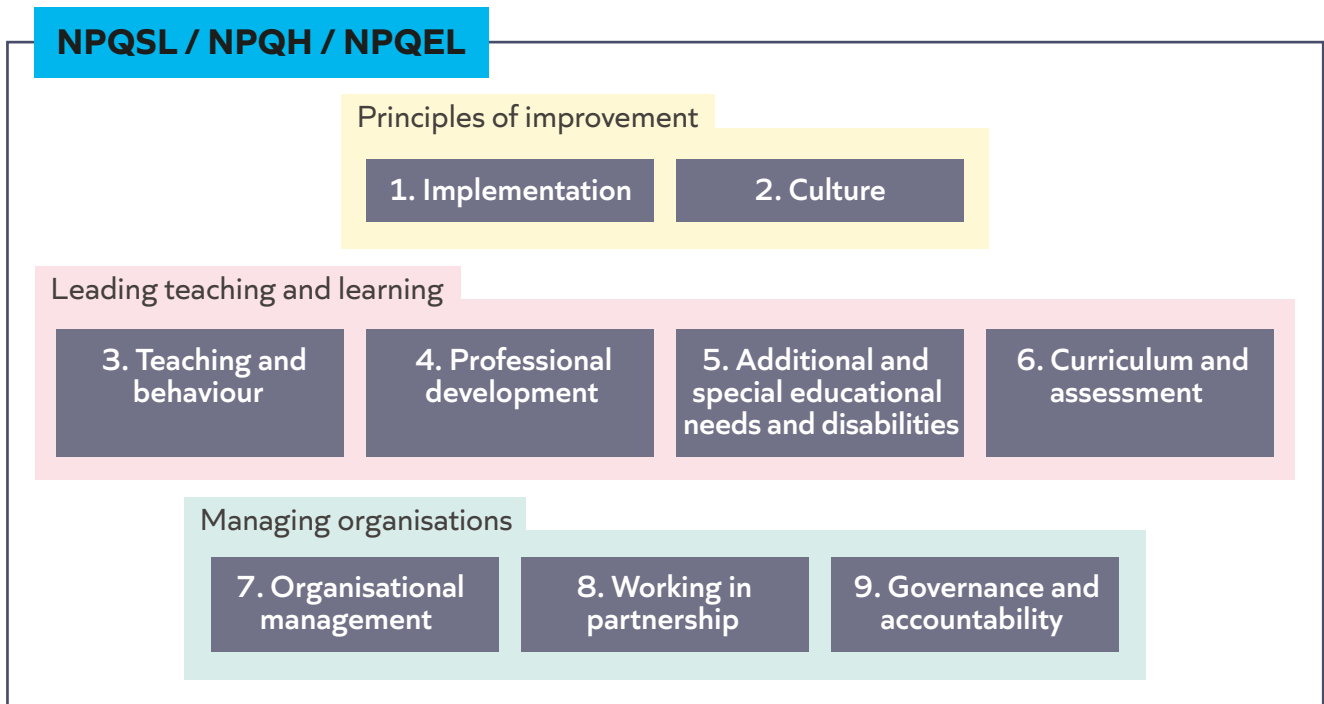
Component	Description
<b>Induction</b>	All programmes begin with a 2-hour, online induction or 'orientation' on Steplab. Steplab is the online learning platform through which you will complete all asynchronous programme content. You will receive instructions for accessing Steplab when you are formally inducted to the programme.
<b>Conference</b>	A 6-hour face to face event.  Specialist NPQs have one conference.  Leadership NPQs have two conferences.
<b>Course</b>	Induction is followed by half-termly courses.  Specialist NPQs are made up of 6 courses (because they are 12 months long and therefore have 6 half terms).  Leadership NPQs are made up of 9 courses (because they are 18 months long and therefore have 9 half terms).

Component	Description
<b>Module</b>	<p>During each week of a course, you will complete either an Study module or an Apply module. Study modules include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An evidence summary which introduces the module and the underpinning evidence.</li> <li>• Clear exemplification of the concept in question, for example through a video or a paper-based document.</li> <li>• An opportunity to consolidate what has been learnt through quiz questions or reflective prompts.</li> </ul> <p>Apply modules provide the opportunity to apply what has been learnt during the Study module. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diagnosis: where you will review previous actions you have set for yourself and what the focus of your application should be (you will have different activities to choose from).</li> <li>• Model: where you return to the models you looked at to continue to analyse their features.</li> <li>• Application: where you have a go at doing the thing you have seen modelled with a buddy (a peer on the programme) and receive feedback and practice again.</li> <li>• Actions: where you agree what you will take forwards into your practice and how you will hold yourself and your buddy to account.</li> </ul>
<b>Clinic</b>	<p>Clinics are 2 hours long. They vary in number depending on the qualification. They are facilitated and are an important opportunity for formative assessment of participants.</p> <p>They start with an introduction, by facilitators, to set expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insight: the facilitator introduces ideas, checks participant understanding and supports participants as they make sense of ideas presented in the session.</li> <li>• Case study: participants have time to read a case study independently. They answer prompt questions and prepare for a group analysis of the information. They have the opportunity to consider a specific element of the case study and how this relates to their own context.</li> <li>• Analysis: the facilitator leads a discussion providing formative feedback to participants to support and challenge their understanding. This is also supportive of preparation for the formative assessment.</li> <li>• To close, the facilitator summarises the discussion, provides any relevant feedback to the group and shares next steps for learning.</li> </ul>

Component	Description
<b>Community</b>	Communities are 1-hour 15 minute sessions where participants consolidate and contextualise their learning from the programme by working together to solve problems related to a previous course. They vary in number depending on the qualification. Participants are organised into groups to network and build supportive relationships.
<b>Coaching</b> (NPQEL and the Early Headship Coaching Offer only)	For participants on the NPQEL or the Early Headship Coaching Offer, coaching is 1:1 and supported by a protocol designed by Ambition.
<b>School visit</b> (NPQH only)	You will have the opportunity to attend a school visit as part of the NPQH programme. The visit will be constructed around a particular topic area, for you to explore further in a school setting.
<b>Assessment webinar</b>	Each programme includes 2 asynchronous webinars, up to 30 minutes in length, designed to support the summative assessment.
<b>Assessment clinic</b>	Each programme ends with a facilitated clinic focused on the summative assessment.
<b>Assessment</b>	All participants will complete the summative assessment within an 8-day window. This will be scheduled to take place following your 12 or 18 months on the programme and we will communicate the dates at the beginning of your programme. The assessment will be based around a case-study which will be released on the first day of the 8-day assessment window and you will submit a 1500-word response. The assessment is open book, meaning you will have access to all of the programme content and any other materials or research to support you in completing your assessment. The case study will assess various aspects of the programme and so it is important that all sessions, face to face, virtual and digital are completed.
<b>Programme buddy</b>	<p>You will be introduced to one or two colleagues who will be your programme buddy or buddies for the duration of the programme.</p> <p>The Apply modules on Steplab have been designed to be completed in pairs or threes so that you can share and discuss your ideas.</p> <p>If you are unable to collaborate with your buddy or buddies on one or more Apply modules, there is also the option to complete modules individually. You will not be disadvantaged if you do this.</p>

# The sequence

The programme is composed of courses. A course contains carefully sequenced content that a school leader will work through over the period of roughly a half term, aligned to the qualification they are undertaking. Each course has a core focus but includes relevant content from across the framework. Each course is composed of six or nine modules. These are designed to be worked through on a weekly rhythm, alternating between independent study in Study modules and paired practice in Apply modules. Learning from this independent and paired study is then consolidated during clinics. Please see below the course titles for each qualification:



## NPQEYL

### Principles of improvement

1. Implementation

2. Culture

### Leading teaching and learning

3. Child development

4. Professional development

5. Effective early education

6. Curriculum and assessment

7. Additional and special educational needs and disabilities

### Managing organisations

8. Organisational management

9. Working in partnership

## NPQSENCO

### Core knowledge

1. Culture

2. Teaching

3. Behaviour

### Specialist knowledge

4. Identification & Assessment

5. Provision & Intervention

### Application

6. Professional development

7. Working in Partnership

8. Implementation 1: Explore

9. Implementation 2: Prepare; Deliver; Sustain

### **NPQLBC**

1. Teaching and learning
2. Enabling conditions
3. Culture
4. Supporting all pupils
5. Professional development
6. Implementation

### **NPQLT**

1. Culture and learning
2. Assessment
3. Instruction
4. Subject and curriculum
5. Professional development
6. Implementation

### **NPQLTD**

1. Teaching
2. Teacher learning
3. The what
4. The how
5. Enabling conditions
6. Implementation

### **NPQLL**

1. Effective teaching and learning
2. Developing language
3. Developing reading
4. Developing writing
5. Implementation
6. Professional development

### **NPQLPM**

1. Culture and learning
2. Assessment
3. Instruction
4. Curriculum
5. Professional development
6. Implementation



# Expectations

## Engagement

To complete your NPQ, you are expected to complete 100% of the content and must complete a minimum of 90% to be entered for your assessment.

Ambition Institute will monitor participant engagement with the programme. If you do not engage with the programme over a sustained period, this may result in withdrawal from the programme. Where you are at risk of withdrawal, Ambition Institute will communicate this clearly to you and support you to re-engage with the programme.

Delivery Partner lead their own engagement strategies; however, our delivery partner leads offer support, including sharing our key milestone dates and expected engagement at these points. Final sign off on withdrawing a participant from a delivery partner programme sits with the partner.

You can view our withdrawal policy on our [website](#).

## Assessment

You must complete 90% of your NPQ content by the deadline. If you're not sure when your deadline is, contact Ambition Institute or your delivery partner.

If you do not complete 90% of your programme by the deadline, and do not contact your provider to request a deferral prior to the deadline, then you will lose one opportunity to complete the assessment (you have 2).

If you don't think you can achieve 90% completion by your deadline, contact Ambition Institute or your delivery partner to discuss a deferral prior to your assessment. If deferral is arranged prior to your 90% completion deadline, you will not lose a submission attempt.

If you achieve 90% completion and are entered into the assessment but do not submit, you will lose a submission attempt (unless extenuating circumstances apply). If you think you're entitled to an exemption, due to extenuating circumstances, contact Ambition Institute or your delivery partner to discuss.

For further details, please refer to our assessment handbook.

# Support

Thank you in advance for your hard work to make our NPQ programmes a success in your school or trust. We look forward to working with you. For further support and guidance, please refer to your on-boarding materials for contact details specific to your programme.

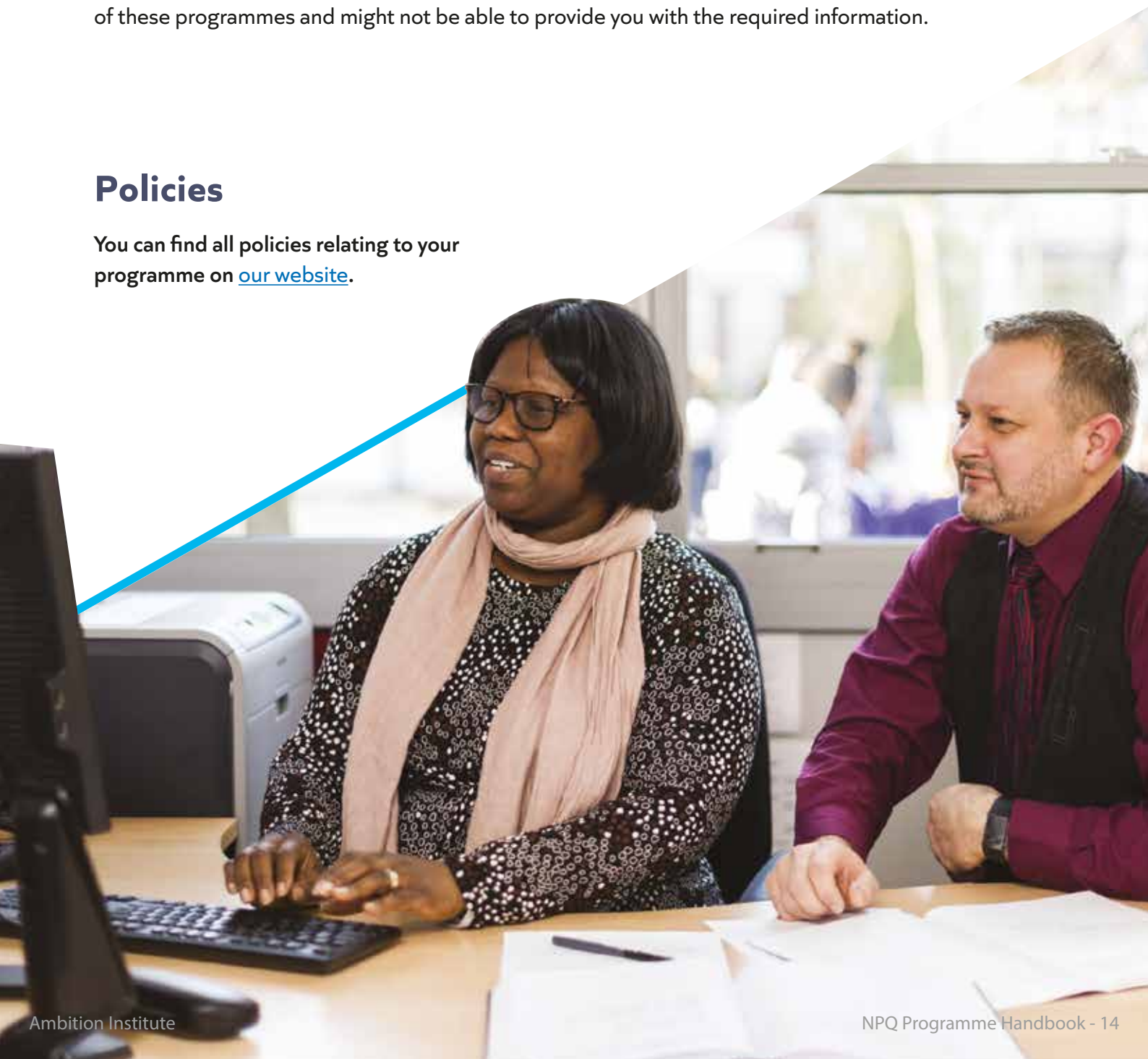
Flexibility is a key underpinning design principle of our programmes. If you require any support whilst on your programme, please contact your programme team as soon as possible. We understand there may be circumstances where you require additional support or to request to pause your programme and defer your place.

Providing future cohorts are available, it is possible to arrange a deferral. Your options would be discussed with you on a case-by-case basis.

If you are completing your NPQ programme through one of our delivery partners, please contact your NPQ lead for any queries. The national programmes team are not responsible for delivery of these programmes and might not be able to provide you with the required information.

## Policies

You can find all policies relating to your programme on [our website](#).





## Could your colleagues benefit from an NPQ?

**Help us get the word out. We're looking for more teachers and leaders like you to join our upcoming NPQ cohorts. With ten NPQs now available, including five specialist programmes, your colleagues can start their NPQ and take advantage evidence-informed CPD.**

Plus, there's scholarship funding available. For the majority of NPQs, funding eligibility is linked to the number of pupils on pupil premium in your school.

You can register your school's details below or pass the link on to your colleagues:  
[www.ambition.org.uk/npqs-national-professional-qualifications](http://www.ambition.org.uk/npqs-national-professional-qualifications)



**KEEP  
GETTING  
BETTER**