

People Behind the Mission

Emerging findings on staff engagement in education and youth organisations

The sector's first shared benchmark

Findings from the pilot year, January and June 2026



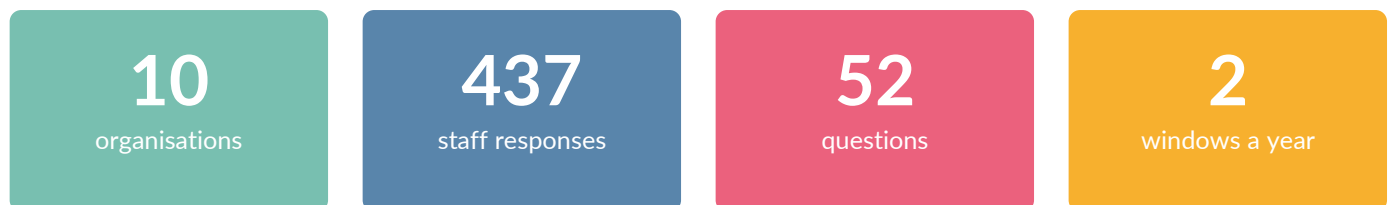
Why we built this

The sector has long borrowed engagement tools from the corporate market. They ask about what matters in a commercial setting and miss much of what shapes working life for those working with children and young people and in the education sector: mission connection, funding insecurity, small teams carrying wide remits, and delivering for beneficiaries on tight budgets.

People Behind the Mission asks about those things directly, and lets organisations see their results against comparable peers rather than a corporate average.

- **Sector-specific questions:** Written for mission-driven education and youth organisations, not adapted from corporate surveys.
- **Peer benchmarks:** Compare against organisations like yours, not a corporate average.
- **An organisational-health lens:** Engagement read alongside perceptions of how effectively the organisation is run.
- **A learning cohort:** Shared insight and practice with other sector leaders.

The pilot at a glance



Emerging findings

Our pilot of ten organisations and 437 responses give a credible first picture and a usable benchmark, not a representative sample of the sector. The benchmark strengthens with every organisation that joins the cohort.

All participating organisations work in education or with children and young people in the United Kingdom. Every score is on a 0 to 10 scale, and higher is better throughout.



What we measure

Fifty-two questions in two halves: how people feel about working here, and how effectively they think the organisation is run. Together they show both the experience of the work and perceptions of the health of the organisation behind it.

Eight drivers of engagement



Mission & purpose



Advocacy & commitment



Team & collaboration



Inclusion & culture



Management & support



Workload & wellbeing



Organisational change



Evidence & impact

Eight dimensions of organisational health

Drawn from ImpactEd Group's Impact and Sustainability Framework, our model of how a purpose-driven organisation is run.

Governance

Strategic direction

Outcomes

Activities

Revenue

Operating model

People

Community

Does the survey hold together?

Yes - across the eight engagement drivers, internal reliability ran from 0.79 to 0.91 in the first window. In plain terms, the questions within each driver behave as though they measure the same underlying thing, which is what a reliable instrument should do.

We will undertake similar testing on the eight organisational health dimensions as more data is collected. We say more about the method, and its limits, on the final page.

What we learnt from the pilot year

Engagement is high, and it rests on mission and relationships.

Across the cohort, overall engagement sat at 8.0 out of 10. The strongest scores are about pride in the organisation, connection to the mission, and trust in the line manager. The pattern held across organisations of different sizes.

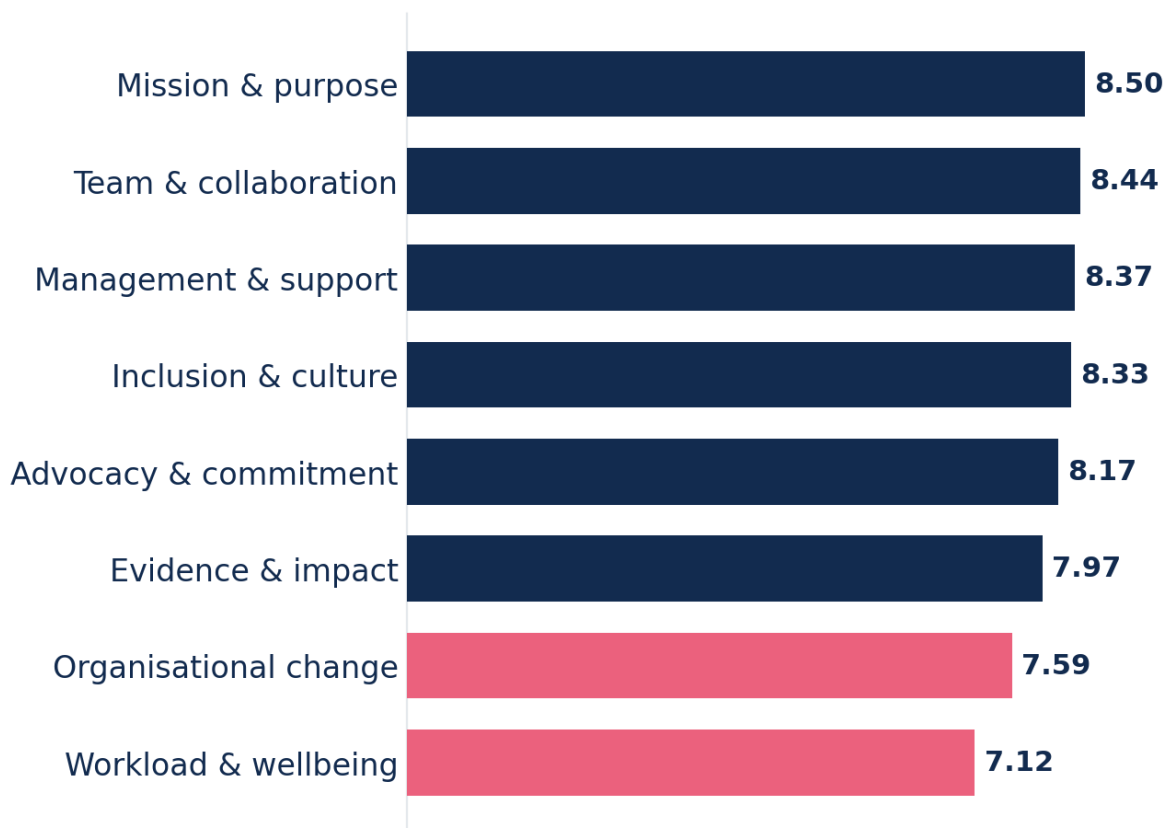
8.0

overall engagement, cohort average across 2 windows,
10 organisations

437

individual staff responses across 2 windows, 10
organisations

Engagement drivers, cohort average across both windows (0 to 10)



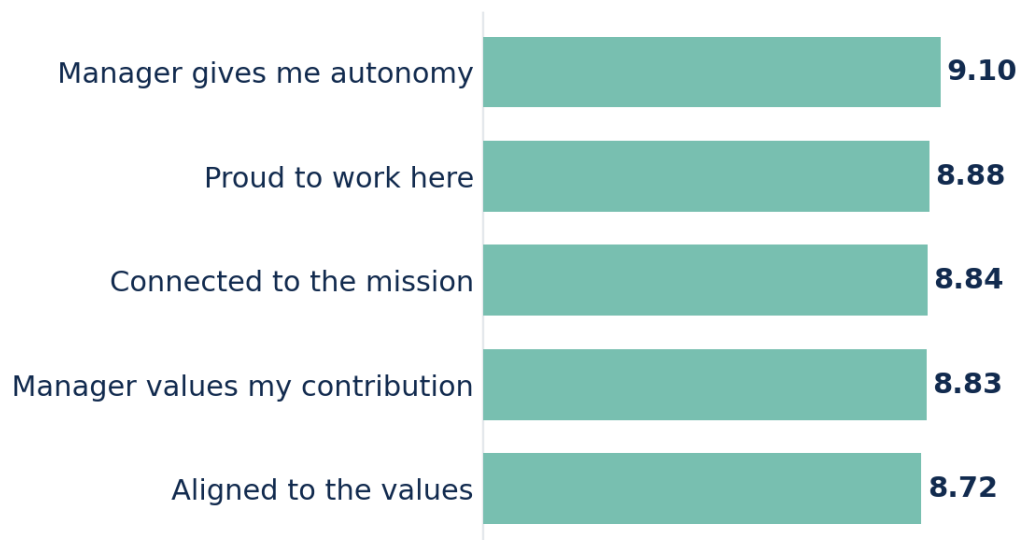
A strong foundation to build on

The high scores on mission, pride and relationships are a genuine asset, and one worth protecting. Examining the drivers also point us to where the greatest opportunities lie: supporting workload and the way change is handled. These are areas within a leadership team's influence, so focused, achievable steps can make a real difference.

Strengths and areas for development

Strengths

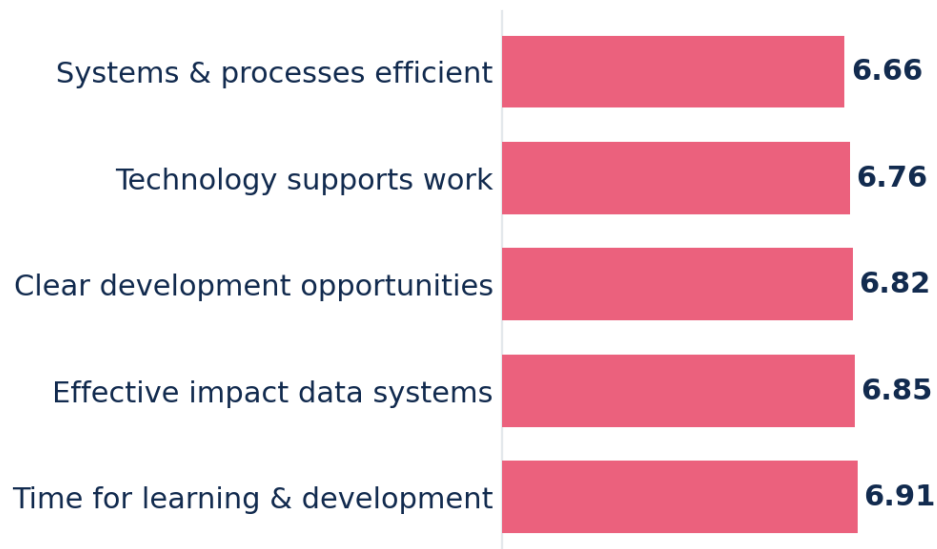
Highest-scoring questions



Autonomy, pride, mission and the line-manager relationship are the strongest areas. Staff know why their work matters and largely trust the person they report to.

Areas for development

Lowest-scoring questions

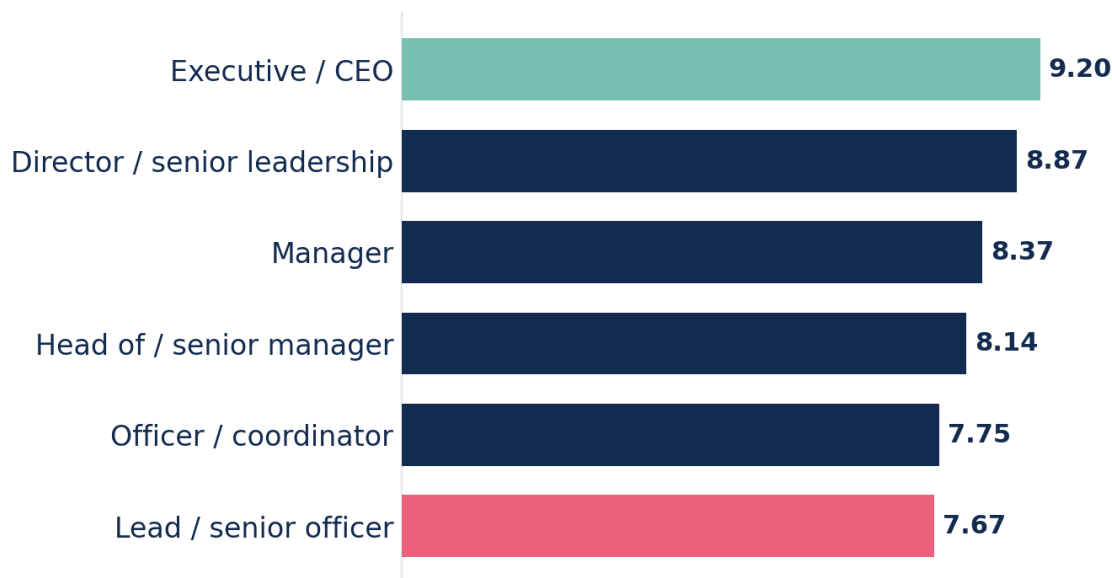


The gaps are not one simple fix. They span back-office systems and technology, the time (not just the budget) for development, workload sustainability, and how change and internal progression are handled.

Beneath the average

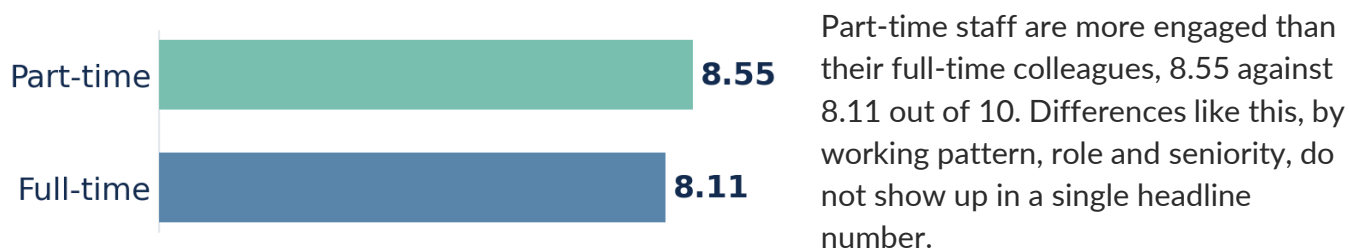
Cohort averages are useful for benchmarking but can be misleading as a description of any single organisation. Two patterns matter more than the headline.

Engagement falls with distance from the leadership team



Executives score highest, while staff closest to delivery score at the lower end. The view from the top acts as a poor guide to how an organisation feels further down.

Engagement also varies by working pattern

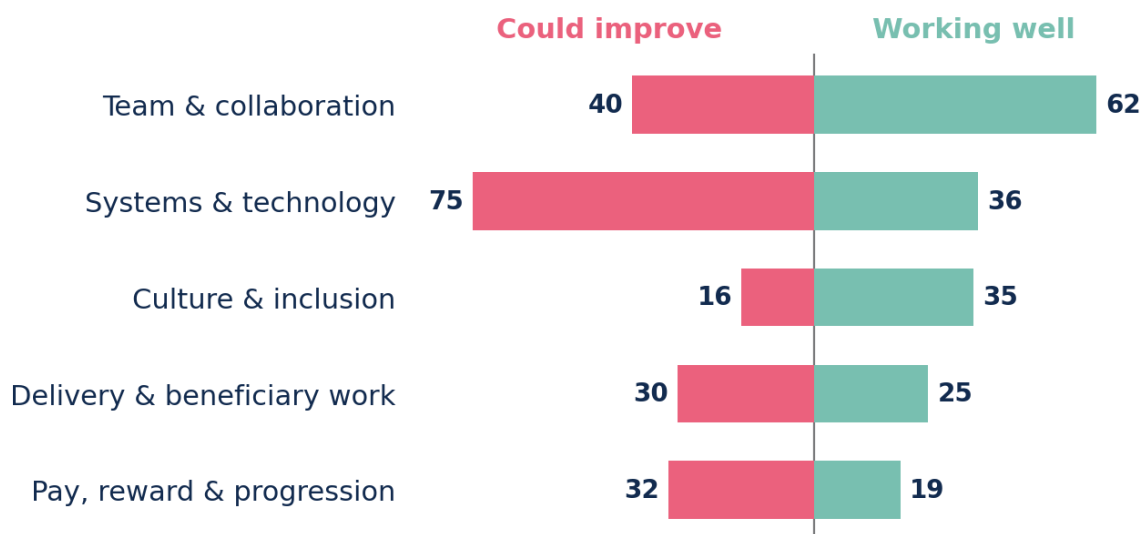


The average is only the starting point

Two organisations can report the same average while different groups within them experience work quite differently. Looking beneath the average, by group and by team, is what turns a score into something a leader can act on.

In their own words

Staff wrote several hundred open comments. Tagged to common themes, they corroborate the scores: team and collaboration draws the most praise, systems and technology are the areas where staff most highlight the need for improvement.



What this means for organisation leaders

- 1 Don't assume the view from the top is the same throughout the organisation:** The seniority gradient is the largest single pattern, but it is invisible in a headline score.
- 2 Treat systems and technology as a people issue:** These areas scored lowest and attracted the most comment, and they sit within a leadership team's control to change.
- 3 Separate development provision from the time to use it:** Staff report the absence of time more strongly than the absence of opportunity.
- 4 Invest in how change is handled, not only the decision:** Voice in change and fair progression score among the lowest questions.
- 5 Look at the distribution, not just the mean:** Two organisations with identical averages can face entirely different problems.
- 6 Meaningful benchmarks and consistency add value:** Cohort leaders told us the value grows over time with a shared benchmark to measure against peers, and the same robust survey repeated, so they can see whether the changes they make are working.

Method and limitations

This is an emerging picture which we share openly alongside appropriate cautions and how we can strengthen the findings for future benefit.

- **A credible first benchmark:** Ten organisations and more than 430 responses give a credible benchmark and meaningful insights about engagement in our sector.
- **The benchmark grows with the cohort:** A larger cohort will make the benchmark more robust, which is why we are now opening participation up more widely. Every organisation that joins will sharpen the benchmark, benefitting all organisations that participate.
- **Association, not causation:** Where two things move together in the findings, that is what we report, as the design cannot show that one causes the other.
- **Confidential throughout:** All figures are cohort level in this report. Within reports produced for organisations to share their own findings, no other organisation is identified, and nothing is reported that could identify an individual (small subgroups are suppressed).
- **Ethical and secure:** Data is collected under a data sharing agreement with each organisation. All staff are told how their data will be used and take part voluntarily, giving their informed consent.

Take part, and help build the benchmark

The next window is November 2026 and we are welcoming new organisations in the sector to take part. To talk through the findings and find out more about the research or participation, contact Holly Waddell.

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