

16-19 Level 1 English and Maths Qualifications

Education Endowment Foundation Response, June 2026

About the Education Endowment Foundation

1. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. Our mission is to support the education sector to transform outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people from age 2 to 19. We do so by enabling early years settings, schools, and colleges to focus on delivering high-quality education, based on evidence and what works best in practice.
2. We hold a unique position in the English education system, with three key roles:
 - **We summarise evidence.** We synthesise the global evidence base to find out what is already known about improving teaching and learning.
 - **We build evidence.** We develop, evaluate, and scale up programmes and approaches that aim to boost outcomes for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - **We put evidence to use.** We help policy makers, leaders and educators to use evidence to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. **Supporting improved English and maths outcomes for disadvantaged learners in 16-19 is key to the EEF's mission.** Young people who leave compulsory schooling without a level 2 pass in these subjects face well-documented disadvantages in further study, training and employment. At the same time, the disadvantage gap in 16-19 progression to level 2 has widened in recent years. Disadvantaged learners are over-represented in the resit cohort, and around a third less likely to pass than resit learners on average, resulting in a disproportionate number of disadvantaged learners entering multiple resits. (EPI, 2024). Only around one fifth of students who had not achieved a level 2 in English or maths at 16 go on to achieve both by 19 (DfE, 2026). It is for this reason that, since the EEF's remit extended to post-16, we have invested in this area through funding evaluations of programmes intended to improve resit outcomes, and commissioning a major review to explore current practice in relation to post-16 GCSE resit teaching.

EEF's evidence on 16-19 English and maths resits

4. **Evidence suggests substantial improvements to resit outcomes are extremely challenging to achieve under the current framework.** The EEF has funded several evaluations which explored current practice in relation to post-16 GCSE resit teaching, including:
 - a) A targeted text-message intervention (Texting Students and Study Supporters / Project Success) exploring whether text messages prompting resit learners to attend and engage with their classes could improve the outcomes of GCSE resit exams.
 - b) A pilot investigating the use of contextual learning (i.e., the use of 'real life' and vocational examples in teaching) to emphasise the relevance of studies to the future careers of resit learners.
 - c) A formative-assessment pilot (Assess for Success) that provided diagnostic assessment, monitoring resources, and tracking tools alongside a practitioner CPD programme to support teachers and learners in English resits.

None of these evaluations have produced evidence that the intervention substantially improved attainment outcomes for resit learners.

5. **Structural factors have limited EEF's ability to generate robust evidence on effective approaches to improve outcomes for resit learners.** Some of our post-16 evaluations were disrupted by the pandemic; some have been delayed by data access challenges; others were pilots and were not designed to generate conclusive impact evidence. Our *Lessons learnt from EEF post-16 evaluations* paper (EEF, 2024) sets out in detail the methodological challenges of generating rigorous evidence in this sector, including challenges around data collection, the sensitivity of GCSE grades as an outcome measure, the difficulty of recruiting and retaining settings in trials, and the variability of "business as usual" in 16-19 settings.
6. **We strongly support the principle that learners who have not achieved a grade 4 should be enabled to keep working towards level 2 in these subjects,** given the importance of literacy and numeracy to later-life outcomes. However, the present design of the post-16 offer has not delivered the outcomes the policy was intended to achieve, and the interventions we have funded within that design (including professional development programmes to improve teaching and engagement and motivation programmes) have not proved sufficient. There is therefore scope to consider a changed policy approach to 16-19 English and maths which seeks to better support all learners to receive good outcomes.
7. **Our most directly relevant published synthesis is the *Post-16 GCSE Resit practice review*** commissioned from the Centre for Education and Youth and the University of Warwick (CfEY, 2023) aimed at building a more robust and objective picture of what current practice looks like within the post-16 space. The review is a mixed-methods, practice- and policy-focused study, combining a desk-based review, practitioner interviews, focus groups, evidence analysis and synthesis. The central findings of this review inform our response:
 - a) Effective resit practice requires the integration of academic and socio-emotional approaches to a greater degree than at key stage 4, and;
 - b) The most successful approaches draw on evidence-informed principles related to formative assessment, cognitive science (e.g. spaced learning) and mastery.

What this implies for the consultation

8. **A key opportunity is to embed evidence-informed pedagogy within any new qualification framework.** The CfEY review found that the most successful resit approaches combine targeted (gap-focused) and core (full curriculum) teaching, and draw on evidence-informed principles related to formative assessment, cognitive science (e.g. spaced learning) and mastery (CfEY, 2023). There are opportunities to consider how these principles are embedded nationally, both through the content assessed within any new qualification and in any training and guidance that is provided to teachers delivering these qualifications.
9. **The new qualification is also an opportunity to consider learner motivation through course design.** The CfEY review identified low motivation and the continuation of negative pre-16 experiences as defining features of the resit cohort (CfEY, 2023). The current pattern of learners repeating curriculum content in shorter timeframes with low likelihood of success risks reinforcing disengagement and low motivation. A course structure that recognises improvement and allows learners to consolidate knowledge may help support low attaining students to make further progress towards achieving a grade 4 or above.

10. **The new qualification's success will depend as much on structural factors as its design.** The CfEY review identified the post-16 English and maths teaching workforce as highly heterogeneous in subject specialism and access to effective CPD (CfEY, 2023), and our trials have repeatedly encountered the practical realities of variable attendance, late enrolment, and limited time for teacher development that this workforce contends with (EEF, 2024a). Sustained, evidence-informed professional development aligned to the qualification's design will be critical. The EEF has published guidance for effective professional development in 16-19 settings (EEF, 2025) that we would encourage the DfE to draw upon when considering how to support implementation of the new qualification.
11. **When developing an approach to the cohort, structure, content, grading, and equalities impact, we would encourage the DfE to draw on the qualitative findings on of the CfEY practice review,** and on the published evidence base for the wider resit cohort (e.g. EPI, 2024; EPI, 2025) in addressing those questions.
12. **We would encourage the DfE to pilot the new qualification ahead of wider roll-out, with evaluation designed around its stated objective of supporting learners to achieve a GCSE grade 4 or above in their first year of 16-19 study.** The EEF's implementation guidance (EEF, 2024b) underlines the value of structured implementation even for well-evidenced approaches, and the same logic applies at policy scale. At the same time, there is a clear urgency to support, in particular, low-attaining students at grade 2 or below - the vast majority of whom do not leave education with a level 2 qualification. Piloting would allow the design to be tested and refined while recognising that, for a cohort currently so poorly served, the priority must be to move at pace toward a better offer.

References

CfEY (2023). Post-16 GCSE Resit Practice Review. Education Endowment Foundation, in partnership with the University of Warwick. URL: <https://cfey.org/reports/2023/07/post-16-gcse-resit-practice-review/>

DfE (2026). Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25: April 2026. URL: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2024-25>

EEF (2024). Lessons Learnt from EEF Post-16 Evaluations: Recommendations for Evaluators. Education Endowment Foundation: September 2024. URL: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/evaluation/eef-evaluation-reports-and-research-papers/syntheses-of-eef-evaluations/lessons-learnt-from-eef-post-16-evaluations>

EEF (2024). A School's Guide to Implementation: April 2024. URL: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/implementation>

EEF (2025). Effective Professional Development in 16-19 settings: September 2025. URL: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/16-19/continuing-professional-development>

EPI (2024). Blog: Time for a resit reset? Education Policy Institute: January 2024. URL: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/blog-time-for-a-resit-reset/>

EPI (2025). English and Maths Resits: Drivers of Success. Education Policy Institute / UCL CEPEO: July 2025. URL: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/english-and-maths-resits-drivers-of-success/>

Individual EEF-funded post-16 evaluations referenced in the body:

Texting Students and Study Supporters / Project Success (efficacy trial): <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/texting-students-and-study-supporters>

Embedding Contextualisation in English and Mathematics GCSE Teaching (pilot): <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/embedding-contextualisation-in-english-and-mathematics-gcse-teaching>

Assess for Success (pilot): <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/assess-for-success>