

16-19 performance measures

Education Endowment Foundation Response, July 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. **Performance measures shape provider behaviour, and how providers approach progress in 16-19 matters directly to the EEF's mission to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners.** These learners are disproportionately represented in both the resit cohort and among students taking technical and vocational qualifications. The way the accountability system recognises their progress is not only crucial to evaluating the effectiveness of 16-19 provision, but to ensuring these students receive the necessary support and opportunities to succeed. It is for this reason that we respond to this consultation, drawing on relevant evidence, including from EEF's own research in 16-19.

EEF's evidence on 16-19 performance

1. **Evidence suggests substantial improvements to resit outcomes are extremely challenging to achieve under the current framework.** The EEF has funded several resit-focused evaluations; none has produced evidence that the intervention substantially improved attainment outcomes for resit learners. Our response to the recent consultation on 16-19 level 1 English and maths qualifications (EEF, 2026a) sets out these trials, and the limits of what they have been able to conclude, in more detail.
2. **GCSE grades (as opposed to raw marks) do not always capture the progress made by learners with the lowest prior attainment.** Our 'Lessons Learnt from EEF Post-16 Evaluations' paper (EEF, 2024) documents the insensitivity of GCSE grades as an outcome measure in this sector. For learners entering 16-19 study well below a grade 4, a year of teaching may produce genuine gains in underlying attainment (visible in raw marks) without yet crossing a grade boundary, which makes the effect of interventions on their progress hard to isolate. This is not an argument against expecting grade improvement however; for the majority of resit learners, particularly those entering with a grade 3, performance measures should reflect the expectation that these learners can improve their grade within a year of teaching.
3. **Disadvantaged learners are disproportionately represented in the resit cohort.** They are also more concentrated in FE colleges compared to the wider sector, and are more likely to enter technical or

vocational qualifications than their non-disadvantaged peers (EEF, 2024). Decisions about which qualifications and which learners count in performance measures are therefore, in large part, decisions about the visibility of disadvantaged learners' outcomes.

4. **Effective resit practice is integrated and takes time.** The Post-16 GCSE Resit Practice Review (CfEY, 2023) found that the most effective resit approaches involve practices including mastery and formative assessment. These can be difficult to embed in teaching within the short timescales currently incentivised for colleges entering learners for resits.

What this implies for the consultation

5. **We support the proposals to broaden and improve the transparency of performance measures.** Broadening performance measures to a wider set of qualifications, making measures more consistent and comparable, and publishing breakdowns of progress by prior attainment can all support the sector's understanding of the progress and performance of disadvantaged learners across the range of available study pathways.
6. **Removing penalties for later resit entries may allow settings to take a longer-term view.** A longer view of how best to prepare and enter students would be consistent with the evidence that effective resit practice needs time to embed. This should not, however, come at the cost of students undertaking additional years of study, or delaying their progression: the aim should be entry at the point of readiness, not later entry as a matter of course. The EEF has recently completed a scoping project (EEF, 2026b) to identify the different approaches settings take to resit timing and to assess the feasibility of an evaluation of exam entry approaches. We will share these findings with the Department as they become available.
7. **Stronger caps on learners that do not improve are likely to fall hardest on providers serving more disadvantaged learners.** Because disadvantaged learners are over-represented in the resit cohort and concentrated in FE colleges, a steeper penalty for grades below prior attainment may incentivise providers away from enrolling more disadvantaged learners. We think it is crucial that any changes to the accountability system incentivise colleges to both enrol disadvantaged learners and support these learners to achieve. Equally, we recognise the importance of a strong accountability system that drives high standards and positive outcomes for all students, so would encourage the Department to closely monitor the effects of changes to measure caps on enrolment patterns.
8. **Performance measures should recognise progress for learners with the lowest prior attainment, including within grade boundaries.** For learners entering 16-19 study with the lowest prior attainment, meaningful progress may be real but incremental, and improvements in exam marks that fall short of a full grade increase currently go unrecognised. The proposed 16-19 level 1 stepping stone qualification can provide such an indicator, and there is an opportunity to ensure the accountability system recognises success in this qualification consistently. We would not extend this argument to learners closer to a grade 4, where grade-boundary measures remain the right incentive and where a year of study should be expected to deliver a grade improvement. For the lowest prior attainers specifically, the Department should consider weighting progress within the measures, alongside the proposed prior-attainment breakdowns.

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/>

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