

Applying for EEF funding

Guidance notes to support you in completing the application form for our Spring 2026 funding round

Round open: Tuesday 27th January 2026

Closing date: 11am, Wednesday 11th March 2026

Interventions to support attendance and transition for 16–19 learners on vocational and technical courses – pilot applications

The EEF's grant-funding rounds test the impact of high-potential programmes and approaches aiming to raise the attainment of 2–19-year-olds from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Funding rounds focus on projects within selected themes. This ensures that we are funding projects that can answer the most important questions as suggested by the existing evidence base and college priorities, while also giving precedence to the areas that are likely to be most beneficial for socio-economically disadvantaged young people/learners.

This guidance document is for organisations considering applying in the **16–19 theme** of the EEF's Spring 2026 funding round.

The socio-economic attainment gap widens as learners progress through the education system. By the end of secondary school, disadvantaged learners are, on average, 18.8 months behind their peers. This gap is even wider for persistently disadvantaged learners—defined as those who have been eligible for free school meals for at least 80% of their school time—who are almost two years (22.7 months) behind their peers by the end of secondary school. This stage of education is therefore a 'last chance' to try to minimise the attainment gap before most young people leave the education system.

The objective of this funding round is to support and evaluate programmes that seek to improve **attendance and transition for 16–19 learners on technical and vocational courses**. Programmes can be general or subject specific, across technical and vocational qualifications, with the exception of apprenticeships, which sit outside of the EEF's remit.

16–19 priority areas and sub-themes

For each of the priority areas, we have identified that there is a gap in high-quality programmes to support practice change and learner outcomes already available to settings, but great need from the sector, which is why the EEF is calling for organisations to develop programmes of support in these areas.

Applications may cover multiple priority areas and sub-themes but must address at least one. The sub-themes have been identified in consultation with college leaders and practitioners, as well as key sector bodies. The application form will ask you to indicate which of the priority areas and sub-themes your application is addressing, referring to the number and letter from the table below.

Priority Area One: Attendance for technical and vocational courses

Sub-theme 1a: College-wide programmes that aim to increase learner attendance (both targeted and universal) for technical and vocational courses.

Sub-theme 1b: Programmes that aim to improve attendance on specific courses.

Priority Area Two: Transition for technical and vocational courses

Sub-theme 2a. Programmes that utilise collaborative relationships with feeder schools and/or local authorities to facilitate transition from school to college (in relation to technical or vocational courses).

Sub-theme 2b. Programmes that support learners with the transition from school to college, specifically for technical and vocational courses, with a focus on preventing learners from becoming not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

Which funding stream should I apply for?

This funding round is open to developers of programmes that seek to improve outcomes for 16–19 learners and align with one of our priority areas and sub-themes identified above.

The EEF evaluates programmes in different ways depending on how developed they are, what their prior level of evidence is, and at what scale they are currently being delivered. For this 16–19 funding round, we are open to applications in the **pilot phase** of our evidence pipeline. You should decide whether your programme fits into our pilots funding stream based on how developed your programme is, the existing evidence for the programme, and at what scale the programme is currently being delivered.

Pilots include independent evaluations of programmes that are fully developed and ready to be tested for feasibility in a small number of settings.

The below diagram shows the different project stages we fund, referred to as our [evidence pipeline](#). The types of projects funded in this round are outlined.



Pilot projects

Applications selected for a pilot project will require minimal development work. The programme, or most elements of the programme, will have been delivered in around 11–20 settings, and will have some supporting research data indicating that the programme has promise. This could include findings from qualitative data, such as case studies, or quantitative attainment data, usually without a comparison group. Successful applicants will be paired with an independent evaluator who will design the pilot evaluation. The aim of the pilot evaluation will be to test the programme’s feasibility of implementation, initial evidence of promise, and to consider if the programme is ready to be trialled at efficacy level.

Prior to the evaluator appointment, shortlisted applicants will be asked to attend a developmental theory of change workshop. If the programme looks like a good fit for a pilot evaluation, they will proceed to final sign-off from our Grants Committee. At this stage, successful developers will be expected to refine their budget, working with the EEF to accommodate the needs of the programme evaluation. The EEF funding will typically cover a portion of the costs to deliver the programme to a defined number of settings that are part of the evaluation, and separately, the costs associated with the evaluation of the programme. More information on what costs EEF covers can be found in our [FAQs](#).

In limited circumstances, we may offer some pre-pilot developmental support to programmes that we think show promise in an area of high priority for the EEF but are not quite ready for independent pilot evaluation. Example circumstances include if a programme has been delivered internationally with promise but needs support with translation to the English context before evaluation or is being adapted for a type of setting or age group of learners. In such circumstances we may offer an EEF-supported pre-pilot phase, where we provide you with some guidance on programme design and development, and the opportunity to deliver the programme to a small number of settings and collect feedback, before we commission an independent evaluator. A fixed grant of up to £25,000 would be available to contribute towards the costs of engaging in this development process, delivering the programme to settings, and collecting formative feedback. The expectation would be that a pilot evaluation would directly follow if the programme still showed promise at this stage.

What makes a successful proposal?

Successful proposals will be:

- **Well defined, with a clear explanation of what the programme is and how it will be implemented.**
 - Can you be clear about what will happen at every stage of your programme? Have you thought through what support schools/settings will need to implement it effectively?
 - As the intention is to fund programmes that have an increased impact compared to what schools/settings are already doing, your programme should be a sufficient change from usual practice.
- **Clear with regards to how they will support children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.**
 - The EEF is dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. There should be a clear rationale as to why your programme is likely to particularly benefit young people and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Your project description should clearly outline the programme itself, the research evidence it is rooted in, and how change happens through your programme to ultimately have an impact on these learners' attendance, the transition from school to college or attainment outcomes (this is referred to below as your theory of change).
 - If the proposal is successful, we will expect grantees to prioritise recruitment of schools/settings with high levels of socio-economically disadvantaged young people and learners to the trial (this may be less important if your programme is targeted and targets these learners specifically). Applicants need to consider and justify how their programme will be implemented and delivered with this in mind.
 - **Please note:**
 - applicants do **not** need to have identified specific settings or areas to work in - this would be agreed in discussion with the EEF and an independent evaluator if your application is successful.
 - applicants do **not** need to work exclusively with young people and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds - but there should be a clear rationale for how the programme will support the EEF's mission to close the attainment gap.
- **Informed and supported by evidence of impact on learning outcomes.**
 - We are primarily interested in programmes that show positive impact on learners' attendance, the transition from school to college, and attainment outcomes.
 - We are seeking programmes with a clear description of the mechanisms that lead from the proposed activities to the positive impact on young people and learners' outcomes. This is commonly referred to as a theory of change. This should be supported by evidence from rigorous research from wider literature, and/or previous evaluation of the specific approach. In addition, we expect applicants to build on previous literature reviews and any evaluations

of similar interventions to describe how their programmes will mitigate any delivery barriers previously identified.

- We strongly encourage applicants to consult reviews of the wider evidence base in preparing their applications and reference the wider evidence in the application with clear links back to their programme.
- **Practical, cost-effective, and scalable.**
 - Our aim is to identify programmes that, if shown to be successful, could be taken on by educational settings across England. Therefore, we are only interested in developing and testing initiatives that are practical and cost-effective to deliver.
 - A programme that relies on the ability of one particular trainer or developer is not scalable. Scalable programmes can be delivered by other teachers and other organisations. We will assess your programme's scalability as part of your application, with higher expectations for scalability for programmes at more advanced stages of the [evidence pipeline](#).
- **Willing and able to be independently evaluated.**
 - We expect you to be willing to work with an independent evaluator, who will design and conduct the evaluation of your programme. This includes a willingness to adapt your delivery plan and budget to accommodate the evaluation. For example, this could include recruiting a larger number of schools/settings or delaying the implementation of the programme until baseline assessments are collected.
 - **Please note:**
 - Applicants do **not** need to include an evaluation design in the programme plan or budget.
 - Applicants do **not** need to contact evaluation teams independently. The EEF will appoint an independent evaluator from our panel of evaluators, and work with successful applicants to design an appropriate evaluation plan.

How to apply

- To submit an application, please complete the online [Pilot Application Form](#).
- Guidance on each of the questions can be found below.
- You might also find it useful to have a look at our [Funding FAQs](#). Moreover, for examples of the types of programmes we fund, please check the [projects](#) we have funded in the past. We aim to fund a mix of different types of programmes, so if your idea is very similar to something we have already supported, do contact us before applying, and/or ensure you address this clearly in your application.
- Please consider attending the 16–19 applicant webinar we are hosting on **Thursday 12th February 15:00–16:00** to support prospective teams in applying for funding. You can sign up [here](#).
- **The deadline for applications is Wednesday 11th March 2026 at 11:00am.**
- Shortlisted programmes will be supported to submit their proposal to the EEF Grants Committee in **July 2026**.

- After an independent evaluation team is appointed, applicants will work with the EEF and the evaluation team to design the accompanying evaluation and finalise the programme plan.
- The updated proposal and budget will be presented to the Grants Committee in **January 2027**.

Timeline for pilots

Activity	Date
Funding round opens	27 th January 2026
16–19 applicant webinar	Thursday 12 th February 15:00–16:00
Deadline for applications	Wednesday 11 th March 2026 at 11:00am
Interview and budget, theory of change workshop, finalise programme, design evaluation (<i>working with the EEF and independent evaluator</i>)	April 2026–December 2026
Final EEF Grants Committee decision	January 2027
Estimated time for recruitment of schools/settings to take part in the programme – project dependent (this is usually the grantees' responsibility)	February–July 2027
Programme starts in schools/settings – project dependent	September 2027

Pilot application form guidance notes

To submit an application, please complete the [online Pilot Application Form](#).

Wherever the guidance refers to ‘schools/settings’, this can be read as referring to a range of settings, including FE colleges, sixth form colleges, school-based sixth forms and other 16–19 providers. Where the guidance refers to ‘teachers’, this can be read as referring to a range of practitioners, such as teachers, early years educators, and teaching assistants. Where the guidance refers to ‘parents’, this can be read as including other carers. Where the guidance refers to pupils, this can be read as including young children, pupils, and young adults engaged in 16–19 education.

Applications can be saved on the system while drafting. You may find it easier to draft first in another program, like Microsoft Word, paying attention to the word count for each question. If copying into the form, please format using the form’s tools.

Please note that confirmation that your application form has been submitted, and the outcome of your application, will be sent to the ‘applicant contact email’ address given in the application form below.

The following notes explain each question from the application form. Each section relates to a section on the form. If you have any questions, please contact the EEF at applications@eefoundation.org.uk.

Eligibility screening

1.1 Where will your proposed programme take place?

Please note that the EEF can only fund programmes that will work for the benefit of learners and settings in England.

1.2 Is your application from a legally constituted organisation?

We accept applications from legally constituted organisations, and not from individuals. The organisation does not have to be based in England, although if you are not based in England, we would expect you to demonstrate reasonable partnerships and knowledge to support you to work with English schools/settings.

1.3 Would this grant be used to pay for any costs already incurred?

Our grant funding is restricted to cover activities supporting your proposed programme and cannot be used to cover costs that have already been incurred. For pilot projects, the grant typically starts after the programme has been given final approval by the EEF Grants Committee (any travel expenses incurred before this can be expensed).

1.4 What types of costs or activities would the grant be used for?

We are not a source of funding for ongoing delivery of existing commitments. If successful, you will be required to work with new settings that you have not previously worked with. For pilot projects, if successful, you would collaborate with an independent evaluation team who will work with you to design a robust evaluation of your programme, and funding would support the direct costs of delivering the programme for the evaluation. Funding is not available to cover: property or capital items; learner fees, scholarships or bursaries; loan or debt repayment. We do not fund university overheads as these can be reclaimed. Website development and seminar attendance are also out of scope, except for where they are part of a wider proposal with the broad aim stated above.

1.5 To which of the following research agenda themes does your application relate?

Please select from:

1. Attendance for technical and vocational courses
2. Transition for technical and vocational courses
3. None of the above

About your organisation

2.1 Organisation name

2.2 Organisation type

Please select from:

- Early Years setting
- Primary school
- Secondary school

- Special school
- Further education college
- Sixth form college
- Sixth form attached to a school
- Independent training provider
- University
- Local education authority
- Charity
- For-profit company
- Multi-academy trust / Teaching School Alliance
- Community Enterprise Company / Social Enterprise
- Other (please state)

2.3 Number of employees

2.4 Please describe the experience and expertise of the proposed team, highlighting key members that will be involved in the delivery of the programme (max. 200 words)

2.5 Briefly outline your experience of working with learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (max. 150 words)

Please include here an indication of the demographic of learners your organisation works with. This would include, for example, indicating the percentage of learners who are eligible for free school/college meals.

2.6 Applicant title

2.7 Applicant first name

2.8 Applicant last name

2.9 Applicant contact email

2.10 Applicant contact phone

2.11 Applicant job title

2.12 Please give the name and a brief description of any partner organisations that will contribute to this programme (max. 100 words)

Please indicate what role the partner organisation(s) will play in the proposed programme.

Programme priorities

3.1 Please select the main priority area the proposed programme is related to:

Please select from:

1. Attendance for technical and vocational courses
2. Transition for technical and vocational courses

3.2 Which sub-theme(s) does your programme fit within (see application guidance)?

Please select from:

Sub-theme 1a: College-wide programmes that aim to increase learner attendance (both targeted and universal) for technical and vocational courses.

Sub-theme 1b: Programmes that aim to improve attendance on specific courses.

Sub-theme 2a. Programmes that utilise collaborative relationships with feeder schools and/or local authorities to facilitate transition from school to college (in relation to technical or vocational courses).

Sub-theme 2b. Programmes that support learners with the transition from school to college, specifically for technical and vocational courses, with a focus on preventing learners from becoming not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

3.3 How does your programme link to the priority area and sub-theme(s)? (max. 150 words)

If it links to any further priority areas and sub-themes, please mention it here.

Programme questions: overview

3.4 Name of the programme (max. 15 words)

Please give your programme a title. Simple, descriptive titles (e.g. “Peer-tutoring in the North-East” or “Mentoring programme for Year 11s”) are welcome. If you are applying with a named programme, please include the name in the title.

3.5 Please provide a brief, two sentence summary of your programme (max. 50 words)

In your summary, aim to concisely capture the most important activities in your programme, highlighting its purpose, target audience, and the key outcome it seeks to affect. Focus on what makes your programme unique or impactful. Ensure that the sentences are clear and easy to understand by someone unfamiliar with your work.

3.6 Aims and objectives of the programme (max. 400 words)

Please describe (i) the aims and objectives of your programme, and (ii) its ‘core components’ i.e. the essential elements required for the programme/intervention to achieve its intended outcomes. Please include the specific activities that settings, teachers, and learners will be expected to do.

3.7 Please describe how your programme is beneficial to socio-economically disadvantaged learners (max. 200 words)

The EEF is dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. When assessing how your application fits the EEF’s portfolio, a key consideration will be alignment with our mission.

You can assume that we have some understanding of the broad issues facing socio-economically disadvantaged learners. Here, we are interested in how your specific programme aligns with EEF's mission. Details specific to your programme – e.g. specific language deficits or gender sub-groups – should be briefly explained.

In particular, please outline why the programme is expected to have a greater impact on the learning outcomes of disadvantaged learners. Please indicate what evidence supports your claims.

3.8 Please describe how your proposed programme is likely to be different from usual practice in settings (max. 200 words)

Please detail here precisely how the approach differs from typical practice, and how you know.

3.9 Please describe how an evaluation of your proposed programme contributes to the evidence base, and/or will address sector interests (max. 200 words)

Please describe how your proposed programme could contribute to the existing evidence base, as well as how the programme addresses sector interests such as those of schools/settings or policy-makers. If the proposal is similar to anything that the EEF has funded in the past, please highlight this and expand on what this research will add to the evidence base.

3.10 Please provide an explanation of the research evidence that supports the theory that your programme will work. You may provide references. Please also include information from any previous evaluations (max. 200 words)

In this question, we are looking to understand the academic literature your programme is rooted in, and evidence from similar programmes that indicates your programme is likely to work. If you have a formal impact evaluation of your programme already, include that result here too. In **Q3.18** we ask about feedback you have collected from your programme, which is where you can provide any formal and informal qualitative and quantitative findings from monitoring your programme delivery.

You may describe here evidence from evaluations of very similar approaches. This evidence could be drawn from international studies. If quoting wider literature, please make clear reference to the characteristics your programme shares with the programmes referenced. More information about what the EEF considers to be good evidence can be found on the evaluation section of our website.

Good applications will reference high-quality evidence. This might include systematic reviews and meta-analyses that collate multiple previously published research studies. Applications might also refer to experiments (e.g. randomised controlled trials) that compare the impact of one teaching approach or programme with one approach, or no intervention at all.

Good applications will reference reliable studies. Indicators of reliability in a study include independence (the researcher is unbiased) and a large enough sample size to generalise its conclusions to the wider population.

EEF's resource, [Using research evidence](#), gives an overview of different types of education evidence, what they can be used for, and what their limitations might be.

Settings/learners

3.11 Which Key Stage/s are you targeting?

Please select the main Key Stage focus of your programme:

- KS4
- KS5 (16-19)

3.12 Please indicate the type of setting that the programme will be delivered in.

Please select from:

- Maintained secondary schools
- 16–19 settings and/or colleges

If the programme/ intervention predominantly takes place in the home learning environment, indicate which type of setting(s) you intend to recruit learners/families through.

3.13 Is your programme targeting: whole setting/whole class/targeted group of learners?

Please give an indication of whether the programme is aimed at **whole setting change** (e.g. training all educators in a setting); **whole class** (e.g. training practitioners to improve their classroom practice); **large part of a setting** (e.g. targeting a specific subject department or Key Stage); or a **targeted group of learners** (e.g. additional small group support for struggling learners).

3.14 Please outline how many settings the programme has been delivered in, to date, and how many of those were in England (max. 200 words)

We are interested in how developed the programme is and what its reach has been prior to EEF involvement.

How many English settings have participated so far? If your programme has been delivered in schools/settings outside of England, please specify to how many, and in which countries.

Did previous settings deliver the same version that is now being proposed? How many settings have received the version of the programme that is being submitted as part of this application for funding?

For how long has the programme been available to schools/settings? How has the number of settings receiving the programme changed over time?

What is the profile of schools/settings that have taken part so far? We are particularly interested in programmes that have already been running in schools/settings serving higher-than-average proportions of socio-economically disadvantaged learners.

3.15 How many settings has the programme been delivered to in the last year?

Delivery/implementation

3.16 Please outline any training or professional development commitments for teachers and/or settings taking part in your programme (max. 200 words)

You should consider both the initial and ongoing training commitments, and also any ongoing additional work the programme adds to teacher or wider school/setting commitments, for example, additional administrative tasks that may be caused by taking part in this programme. This may be an estimated or proposed outline, and could include, for example, the number of hours participants are expected to self-study, or between-training activities undertaken by participants to fulfil programme demands.

3.17 Please outline how you think the implementation of your programme leads to behaviour change in staff/settings/parents/learners as appropriate. If you have a theory of change or logic model, please feel free to upload it, but we don't expect you to write one for the application (max. 300 words)

Here we want to understand *how* and *why* the programme works to raise the attainment and skills of learners. What is the theory that links the programmes' activities and its intended outcomes? What are the key mechanisms that trigger the desired change? (For example, a mentoring programme that aims to increase the attainment of learners could do so by increasing learners' attendance). What changes are you expecting to see in the short term and how are these likely to influence behaviour change in the long term?

When answering this question make sure you think about and clearly outline:

- What are the key activities of your programme?
- How are the different activities intended to change the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours of either learners or practitioners in the short or medium term?
- How are these changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or behaviours expected to affect the final desired outcomes, including attainment for learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds? As an example: if your programme involves training practitioners in an approach, how do you expect the activities you do with practitioners to translate to a change in practitioner behaviour? And how will a change in practitioner behaviour translate to a change in learners' outcomes?

3.18 Please describe any feedback you've collected from settings and teachers that have participated in the programme (max. 200 words)

Briefly describe the methods you used to gather feedback, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, or informal discussions. You might refer to quantitative data (e.g. survey results) or qualitative insights (e.g. comments from interviews) that you collected. Good responses to this question will summarise broad trends and insights, rather than relying on individual quotations.

Highlight any specific comments about the ease or challenges of implementing the programme. This could include feedback on how achievable the implementation was in terms of time, resources, and integration with existing school/setting practices.

3.19 Do you need to make any further adaptions to your programme before it is evaluated? (max. 150 words)

Generally, at Pilot stage we would expect minimal adaptions to the programme to be required (applicants should be applying with fully developed programmes). In limited circumstances, we may offer some pre-pilot developmental support to programmes, see the guidance notes for examples for where this might apply. Please describe here if any adaptations need to be made to your programme/ intervention delivery before an evaluation and if you would like to be considered for pre-pilot development support from the EEF to make these adaptations to your programme.

Scaling

3.20 If the proposed programme were to be funded by the EEF, and positive results were found, would your organisation be able to deliver the programme for an EEF-funded impact evaluation, likely in around 50 settings? This would likely be a randomised controlled trial (max. 100 words)

We are interested in how your programme might be scaled up so that it could be delivered in large numbers of schools/settings in England. For example, does the lead organisation have the capacity and skills to grow the model? Or would it need to partner with a larger organisation/network?

We suggest reviewing the EEF's [Scaling Framework](#) to see the indicators of good scalability at all stages of our evidence generation pipeline and to support thinking about the areas that you may need to consider as an organisation.

3.21 If the answer to the question above is no, would you be willing to work with EEF to develop routes to scale? E.g. through finding a partner organisation to support delivery at scale (max. 50 words)

Finance

4.1 Please include an indicative budget for a pilot with 20 settings, broken down into the direct cost per setting and central costs for managing the project (max. 200 words)

All applicants will be required to submit an indicative budget for a pilot of 20 settings. Once the scoring process has been completed, projects selected for the pilot route will hone their budget with the EEF team.

4.2 In each setting, how many learners benefit from the programme in a single academic year? (max. 50 words)

4.3 How much does it cost you to deliver your programme to one setting for one academic year? What is included in this cost? Consider your staff costs, administrative costs and non-staff costs. (max. 100 words)

4.4 Your budget is for 20 settings. Please outline any cost savings you would envisage if scaling the programme to more settings in the future. These can be indicative. (max. 100 words)

5.0 Additional documentation upload (optional)

If you already have a theory of change for your programme, please do include this as an additional document.