

Request for proposals

16-19 technical and vocational teaching – a practice review

Background

The EEF exists to break the link between family income and educational attainment. Our focus is on 2-to-19 year-olds. The socio-economic attainment gap widens as learners progress through the education system. By the end of secondary school, disadvantaged pupils are, on average, 19 months behind their peers. For those enrolled in 16-19 education, the gap has remained fairly stable since 2017 at between 3.3 to 3.5 grades¹. The 16-19 stage of education is a vital stage of education to try to minimise the attainment gap before most young people leave the education system.

The salience of technical and vocational education has grown in recent months, as a key policy focus for the new Prime Minister. At the core of this agenda sits a proposal to expand the technical education offer in schools from age 14, with the aim of leading more students towards sustained technical and vocational pathways at post-16 education. Prior to that, several key sector changes were outlined in the Education and Skills Whitepaper and the Curriculum and Assessment Review. This included the introduction of A level sized Vocational levels (V levels) to sit alongside T levels, a new occupational level 2 pathway at 16-19, and rollout of the Technical Excellence College (TEC) model to a wider set of priority sectors.

At present there is limited literature around what vocational and technical teaching looks like at a national level, as well as what constitutes effective teaching and learning in these subject areas with 16-19 learners.

Aims of the project

The aim of this piece of research is to understand current teaching practice in technical and vocational classrooms and workshops. This will inform future commissioning within wider EEF research rounds relating to vocational and technical education, as well as supporting with future guidance for the sector. The findings will also be of relevance to policy makers considering the transferability of practices within the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career

¹ Annual Report 2026 - Education Policy Institute <https://epi.org.uk/annual-report-2026/>

Framework (ITTECF²) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) to technical and vocational professionals.

Research questions

Main research question

- Do vocational and technical teachers use the teaching practices identified from the schools ITTECF in their day-to-day teaching?

This element of the research will involve identifying which of the practices from the ITTECF are observable in vocational and technical classrooms and workshops. In order for this to be achievable during observations, a shortlist of approximately 20 practices will be produced. This list will be produced by the EEF and will be shared and finalised with the research team at the start of the project. The list will include practices that are strongly evidenced in the ITTECF, able to be observed within classroom as well as workshop teaching and those that are adaptable for technical and vocational teaching. A few examples from the ITTECF that could be adapted for the observation proforma include:

- *2k) Increase likelihood of material being retained, by increasing challenge with practice and retrieval as knowledge becomes more secure (e.g. by removing scaffolding, lengthening spacing or introducing interacting elements)*
- *4i) Model effectively, by narrating thought processes when modelling to make explicit how experts think (e.g. asking questions aloud that pupils should consider when working independently and drawing pupils' attention to links with prior knowledge)*
- *6j) Provide high-quality feedback, by focusing on specific actions for pupils and providing time for pupils to respond to feedback*

To maintain a tight focus for this project, we have identified three Sector Subject Areas (SSAs) for research teams to focus on:

Sector Subject Area (SSA)
Health, Public Services and Care
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment

² Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661d24ac08c3be25cfbd3e61/Initial_Teacher_Training_and_Early_Career_Framework.pdf

A long list was created based on DfE data on number of learners taking part in a subject, based on 2025 data³, and filtered for subjects that include practical teaching. This list was then refined based on knowledge of sector and policy priorities, to cover a range of technical and vocational qualification. Each of the three SSAs listed contain a broad range of subjects and qualification types. To ensure the review is manageable, the successful team will need to select a smaller sub-sample of subjects to focus on, ensuring a representative balance is achieved across a range of technical and vocational qualifications.

Secondary research questions

- Are any of the teaching practices more prevalent than others, and if so why?
- Are other teaching practices observed that are not included on the list from the ITTECF?
- Do colleges who do particularly well for learners in the identified SSAs use different combinations, or amounts, of the identified teaching practices in the first research question?

As part of the sampling for this project, applicants should consider a sample pool that includes ‘positive deviant’ colleges that have exemplary results in the three SSAs outlined, when controlling for prior attainment. This will allow for a comparison of teaching practice in these colleges and others, enabling a link between the practices observed and strong outcomes for learners. Interviews will be used to explore why some practices are more, or less, prevalent than others would.

For all identified research questions, research teams should consider any differences in areas of high disadvantage.

Methodological considerations

This project will consist of primary research, to give a snapshot of current teaching practice in technical and vocational teaching in 16-19 education. We are open to proposals that answer the primary and secondary research questions using a variety of methods and are open to innovative approaches. We will expect college visits, lesson observations and interviews to be a key focus of the research plan.

We expect proposals to include a short feasibility phase in a small number of colleges, to test the three SSAs identified and the list of classroom practices.

³ ‘Student counts - vocational qualifications by subject and student characteristics (end of 16-18 study)’ from ‘A level and other 16 to 18 results’, Permanent data table - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK

Please describe any ethical clearance that you will need to obtain if conducting primary research that collects data from participants. Please also clearly specify your legal basis for processing personal data, as well as your legal basis for processing any special category data, according to the GDPR [Art. 6](#) and [Art. 9](#), respectively.

Who should apply?

Research teams with experience of conducting qualitative research in education, a strong understanding of the 16-19 sector and pedagogy in England.

We are interested in proposals from single research teams or from consortia with complementary expertise and where the consortium can demonstrate that they will work well together to ensure the quality and efficiency of the project. This call for proposals is open; researchers do not need to be part of EEF's panel of evaluators to apply.

We accept applications from legally constituted organisations and not from individuals. The organisation does not have to be based in England. If you are based outside of England, you will need to demonstrate how you will ensure that research outputs are relevant to the English education system and that your proposal represents value for money.

What does a successful proposal look like?

Teams should submit a proposal, which will:

- Indicate how the research questions are being answered by the design.
- Involve a **strong team** with prior experience of similar research, including research expertise related to the approaches and education phase being investigated. Please include CVs of proposed team members, highlighting relevant expertise. Please describe the role each team member will play in the study, and the amount of time that they will give to the study.
- Provide a **detailed description** of the research project. This should include:
 - A detailed description of the practice review methodology.
 - Any available background scoping work that supports your assessment of the identified strategy.
- Provide a clear project management plan for completing the research in achievable timelines, including:
 - An assessment of risks to the completion of the research and how these will be mitigated.

- Confirmation that members of the proposed team have the capacity and availability to complete the research.
- A timeline which includes key touchpoints at which the team will brief EEF on emerging themes/findings, as well as a presentation of findings before a final written output.
- Represent **good value for money**. All applications must attach a **budget** with reasonable disaggregation across cost categories such as staff costs for each evaluation team member; other staff costs (e.g., research support); administrative costs; data collection costs; and any other costs (with details). We expect the project to fall outside the scope of VAT. Similar projects that we have commissioned recently have fallen within the range of £70,000 and £120,000, depending on the design.
- Be approximately **2,500 ~ 3,000 words long**, excluding CVs, budget and references.

What does a successful proposal look like?

The research proposals will be scored under the following criteria each with their respective weighting and using the scoring scale indicated below.

- I. Capability and relevant experience of core project team (35%)
 - a. The proposed team demonstrates experience conducting research in education, including in the methods proposed for this practice review.
 - b. The proposed team demonstrates understanding of the evidence/existing research, context and expertise that are relevant for the areas for the practice review.
- II. Methodology and approach (50%)
 - a. The proposed practice review methodology is well defined.
 - b. The proposed research design will provide high quality evidence to answer the identified research questions.
 - c. Key risks to project delivery are identified and appropriate strategies to mitigate these risks are proposed.
 - d. The proposal describes the research team's approach to research ethics and data protection, including but not limited to GDPR compliance and specifying legal bases for processing personal and special category data.
- III. Value for money (15%)
 - a. The proposal is clearly costed and demonstrates value for money.

Scoring Criteria	
0	Totally fails to meet the requirement - information not available
1	Meets some of the requirements with limited supporting information

2	Meets some of the requirements with reasonable explanation
3	Fully meets the requirements with detailed explanation and evidence
4	Exceeds the requirements with extensive explanation and evidence

How to apply

Full research proposals, and any questions relating to the tender, should be sent to Becca Phillips (post-16@eefoundation.org.uk). Interested applicants should submit their research proposals by **5pm on Friday 16 October 2026**.

Timeline

Task	Date
Deadline for proposals	16 October 2026 at 5pm
Selected applicants notified	23 October 2026
Set up meeting / Work commences	Tuesday 27/Wednesday 28 October <i>(Exact date/time to be agreed with successful team. Please ensure you have some availability on these days).</i>
Full approval by grants committee	18 November 2026
Bi-weekly/ weekly check-ins	November - June
Preliminary presentation to EEF team	April 2027 (date TBD)
Final report	June 2027 (TBD)