

Life After
School

 **Impetus**
Private Equity Foundation

Life after school: Confronting the crisis

March 2017

Impetus – The Private Equity Foundation (Impetus-PEF) transforms the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in the UK by ensuring they get the support they need to succeed in education, in work, in life. We find, invest in and build the best charities in the country working with these young people, helping them to have a bigger impact and on more young lives.

We do this by providing them with a unique package of funding, management and pro bono support. This, and our work to influence the policy and resource decisions that impact young people's lives, enables us to make a real contribution to closing the education and employment gaps between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.

Contents

01	Acknowledgments
02	Executive summary
06	Introduction
12	Our findings
24	Our recommendations
29	Appendix

Acknowledgements

This report is the second in Impetus-PEF's Life After School campaign. Our sincere thanks go to Rebecca Allen and Dave Thomson from Education Datalab, who extracted and analysed data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individualised Learner Record (ILR). A debt of gratitude is also due to all of our interviewees, with special mention to our charity partners and their learners, who contributed so willingly towards forming our qualitative findings. Thanks also to our team at Impetus-PEF, who provided both insight and editorial contribution to this report. A final thank you must go to our supporters, R.R. Donnelley for kindly printing this report.

Executive summary

Overview

Every young person should be supported to achieve good levels of competency in English and maths at school. Our best schools succeed in supporting pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve good GCSEs in these subjects. However, too many are still not attaining these crucial qualifications at 16 and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are faring worse. The introduction of a new 1-9 grading system this summer will only add to this challenge.

Without good English and maths qualifications, life after school is much tougher, with fewer options and less access to jobs and higher education. So those who don't get the grades at 16 need a second chance to catch up by 19. In March 2016, Impetus-PEF published its report *The road most travelled? The 16-19 journey through education and training* which revealed that over a third of our young people are still leaving education at 19 without attaining A*-C GCSEs or equivalents in English and maths, and for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, this figure stands at over half. These are not educational outcomes that we can be proud of.

So what happens to those young people who fail to achieve an A*-C in their English and maths GCSEs at 16? Where do they go next and what do they study? What are their chances of success? The next stage in our research sought to answer these questions to understand how we can improve their outcomes.

We commissioned Education Datalab to analyse data available through the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individual Learner Records (ILR) and we conducted field research, speaking to providers, learners and decision makers in the 16-19 education sector. This report presents our findings, which paint a picture of a crisis within the sector and our recommendations for confronting this.

Our findings

GCSE catch-up provision is not working. Most students who do not attain English and maths at 16 do not catch up by 19:

A Irrespective of background

- Nearly double (61%) the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds fail to attain an A*-C in their English and maths GCSEs at 16 compared to their peers (34%)
- But regardless of background, too few students catch up by 19:

Percentage of students who do not achieve an A*-C in GCSE English and maths at 16 but who do catch up by 19, by disadvantage

	English	Maths
Students on free school meals	17%	8%
Students not on free school meals	25%	13%

B Irrespective of provider

- Schools and sixth form colleges are more likely to enrol students who require catch-up provision in only one subject, or who attained D-grades so are, in theory, not far off from passing.
- Further Education (FE) colleges enrol bigger numbers, have lower attaining students and face significant structural challenges.
- Catch-up success rates do vary for different types of institution but even in standalone sixth form colleges (which do best), less than a third of students overall successfully catch up:

Percentage of students not achieving an A*-C in GCSE English and maths at 16 who catch up by 19, by provider.

	School	Sixth form college	FE college
English	26%	32%	13%
Maths	11%	18%	5%

C The majority of students who catch up by the end of year 13, do so through Functional Skills

- Many FE students are taking other Level 2 English and maths catch-up courses, commonly Functional Skills, rather than GCSEs. These qualifications, while increasing in recognition, are still relatively unheard of with little data available measuring their progression potential and lack the currency amongst employers that GCSEs hold.

For low-attaining students, their routes to progression are unclear and lacking quality

- The majority of students who need to catch up in English and maths at 16 are either taking below Level 2 courses, are not enrolled in catch-up provision or are not recorded in education at all.
- Nearly a fifth (17%) of both FSM and non-FSM students needing to catch up in both subjects, drop out at the end of year 12.
- Very few catch-up students progress to Level 3 pathways in year 13. Only 4% of catch-up students start A-Levels and 28% in either vocational or mixed (combination of vocational and academic) Level 3 courses.

FE colleges face significant challenges which inhibit their ability to drive progression

- FE colleges serve three times more catch-up students (124,982) than schools (38,657) and ten times more students than sixth form colleges (12,924).
- The vast increase in numbers of students entering FE colleges requiring catch-up provision has put pressure on timetabling, facilities, recruitment and teaching.
- Many of these students lack confidence, are disengaged and will drop out of mainstream education and enrol with independent learning providers, like our charity partners.

Our recommendations

1

That the government retain its ambition for everyone to attain a Level 2 (GCSE or equivalent) in English and maths by 19.

- Students closest to achieving the equivalent of a 'C' under the new 1-9 grade scale at 16 should continue working towards this level through GCSEs. All other lower-attaining students should have the option of working towards a good GCSE or high-quality and well-recognised equivalent.

2

That the government create an 'Excellence in English and maths fund' committing an extra £935 per pupil retaking English and maths, with half of the payment awarded to providers up front and the other half conditional on attainment, to drive innovation.

- The 'Excellence in English and maths fund' would be a funding incentive that provides colleges additional money based on the amount provided to secondary schools through the pupil premium.
- Full funding should be made available to students who need to catch up in both subjects and half of this amount for students who need to catch up in one. Half of the funding would be made available on enrolment and the other half on successful completion of a GCSE or equivalent English and/or maths course.

3

That the government and all relevant stakeholders commit to developing Functional Skills into a high quality and valued qualification, measured on progression rates and employment outcomes.

- Attainment rates of students achieving Level 2 English and maths, specifically through Functional Skills, should be better publicised and progression rates to Level 3 study programmes or into work should be published to assess and demonstrate their value.
 - This commitment should be fronted by a campaign to increase awareness and value for the qualifications so that businesses, parents and students are informed of their potential.
-

4

That the government test ways to increase the supply of qualified English and maths teachers in the FE sector.

- Successful programmes like Teach First are well supported by government. The Education and Training Foundation have completed a 'positive' Premium Graduate scheme to attract new teachers to the FE sector. To prove impact, an expanded trial should be supported.
-

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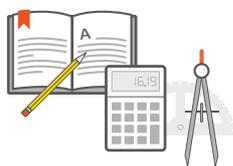
That the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education monitors and reports on key 'social mobility indicators' such as the gap in access, completion and progression between disadvantaged young people and their peers entering technical routes and apprenticeships.

- We recommend that government designs a high-quality transition year, as cited in the *Post-16 Skills Plan*, to facilitate access for all students without GCSE English and maths to high-quality catch-up provision and careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG).
- The Institute should be required to measure the gap between disadvantaged students and their better off peers entering for Level 3 technical education and apprenticeships and publish findings and mitigation plans on an annual basis.

Introduction: The post-16 English and maths landscape

“Good English and maths grades are fundamental to young people’s employment and education prospects. Individuals with very low literacy and numeracy are severely disadvantaged in the labour market. Every other country in the developed world concentrates on improving the language and maths skills of its post-16 students and so should England. Recognising the central place of English and maths skills in society is long overdue.”¹

- Baroness Wolf of Dulwich CBE



English and maths matter...

In the UK, GCSEs in English and maths are considered the benchmark which all young people should attain. They are the gateway to A-Levels and university, apprenticeships and employment. Without them, young people’s choices and prospects are limited.

Failing to meet this benchmark is problematic; it impacts on young people’s lives, on our national productivity and on our global standing in today’s world.

According to a 2014 Department for Education report:

‘Those in the labour market with full Level 2 GCSEs (including English and maths) earn on average £283,000 (men) and £232,000 (women) more during their lifetime, compared to those without qualifications.’²

The Education and Training Foundation has found ‘widespread agreement about the critical importance of maths and English skills to employers and their desire to see standards improved.’³

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) reported that ‘raising GCSE attainment is crucial to get more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into university.’⁴ The CBI, in a 2012 report, went further, stating:

‘Every young person must master a range of core subjects to an adequate level – including critically maths, English and the sciences.... These are core because only when young people have reached a sufficient standard in them can they make substantive progress in their studies and wider life. They furnish the essential scaffolding for gaining other knowledge and skills, whether in the classroom or a workplace.’⁵



... but our young people are not getting the qualifications they need

Despite a raft of changes over the last 50 years aimed at improving the level of basic skills, the problem of low literacy and numeracy has remained persistent. A recent government review of the impact of poor English and maths skills on employers stated:

'As technology and globalisation have continued to bring about major changes in the workplace, so too have poor skills levels become an issue for governments aiming to increase the UK's productivity and build sustainable growth.'⁶

The 2015 PISA rankings published in 2016 reinforced their standard finding: that there has been little change in the level of literacy and numeracy of 15 year olds in the UK in the last three years.

Since 2012, the UK fell one place in maths, to 27th, and climbed one place in English, to 22nd out of 72 countries. This is despite the UK still significantly outspending other countries on education, 'paying \$114,900 per student from the age of six to 15, compared with the \$90,300 OECD average.'⁷

As a country, we have a structural problem ensuring all young people develop basic English and maths skills.



There is political will to reform the system...

Since 2010, the government has embarked on an overhaul of English and maths provision designed to improve the quality of GCSEs and to renew focus on ensuring that all young people gain these qualifications by the age of 19.

Michael Gove introduced reforms to GCSEs in 2013 by stating:

'I have prioritised English and mathematics because they are both fundamental to facilitating learning in other subjects, and yet PISA evidence demonstrates that 15-year-olds in nine other countries are, on average, at least half a year ahead of students in England in both reading and mathematics. Reform of these key subjects is, therefore, a matter of pressing urgency.'⁸

GCSE reforms entail the introduction of more rigorous curricula and a change in the grading system (from A*-F to 1-9). These combined changes will raise the threshold for a GCSE pass from summer 2017.

Post-16 education has also been subject to a number of reforms. These include:

- The introduction of the raised participation age (RPA), which requires all young people to remain in some form of education or training until at least the age of 18.
- The introduction of study programmes (as recommended in the 2011 *Wolf Review of Vocational Education*).
- The requirement to continue studying English and maths until age 18 for learners without pass grades in these subjects at 16.
- Compulsory GCSE resits for pupils gaining a grade D at 16. Those gaining lower than a grade D can start by taking an equivalent qualification, such as Functional Skills.



... but resources have not followed

As a consequence, the 16-19 education sector has been placed under considerable strain. By 2015, there had been a 156% increase in the number of students retaking English and a 58% increase in those retaking maths at age 17, compared to before the reforms were introduced.⁹

The effects of more rigorous GCSE curricula and grade changes will be seen from summer 2017 and are predicted to result in a further dip in pass rates (at least at first). One assumption suggests that around 35% of pupils would have achieved a grade 5 (the presumptive long-term 'C' equivalent) or above in both English and maths in 2015 had GCSEs been graded on the 1-9 scale.¹⁰ If this scenario comes to fruition, it will lead to a further swelling of the numbers of students requiring catch-up provision post-16.

The expectation that FE colleges pick up low-attaining students, deliver new and more challenging curricula, and implement changes outlined in the Post-16 Skills Plan against the backdrop of area-based reviews and stagnant funding, is a huge risk.

This is the crisis facing 16-19 education and urgent action is needed to address it.



Our research methodology

To better understand the journey taken by students who need to catch up in English and maths post-16, we commissioned Education Datalab to link data available through the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individual Learner Records (ILR) of post-16 education.

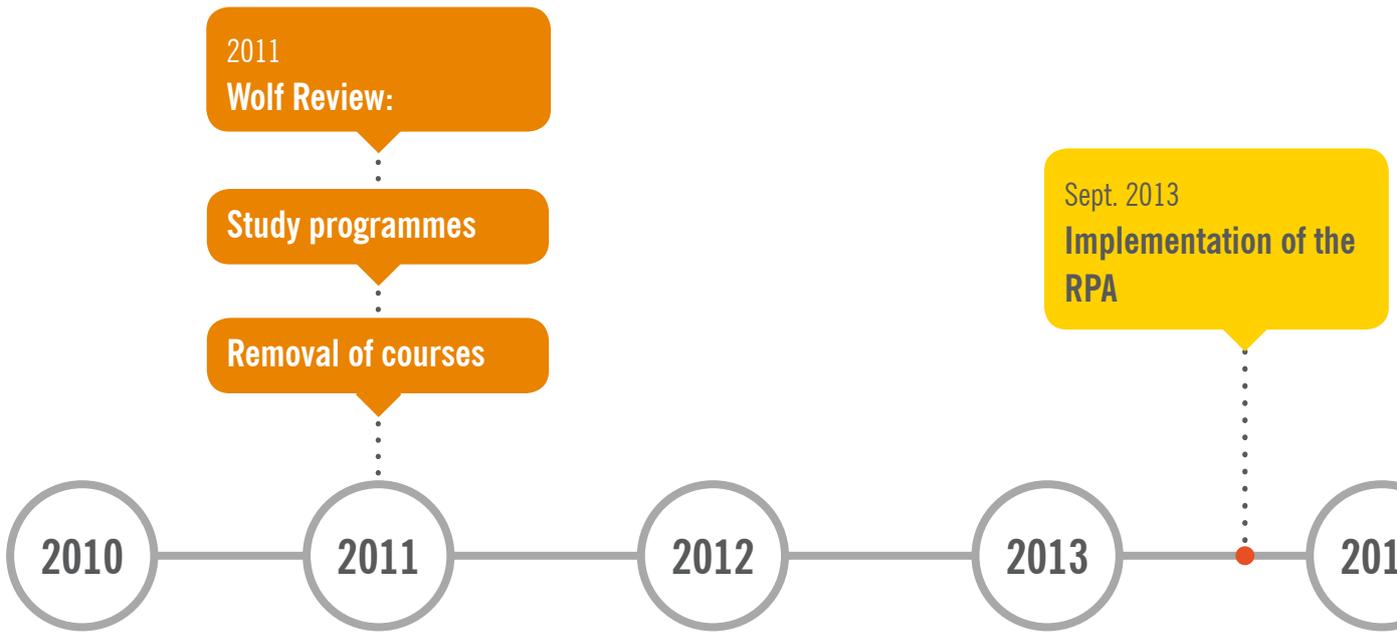
To capture the journey from 16-19 of a full cohort of students, we analysed data from students who completed their GCSEs in 2012/13, began their post-16 education in September 2013 and observed them taking additional qualifications during the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years.

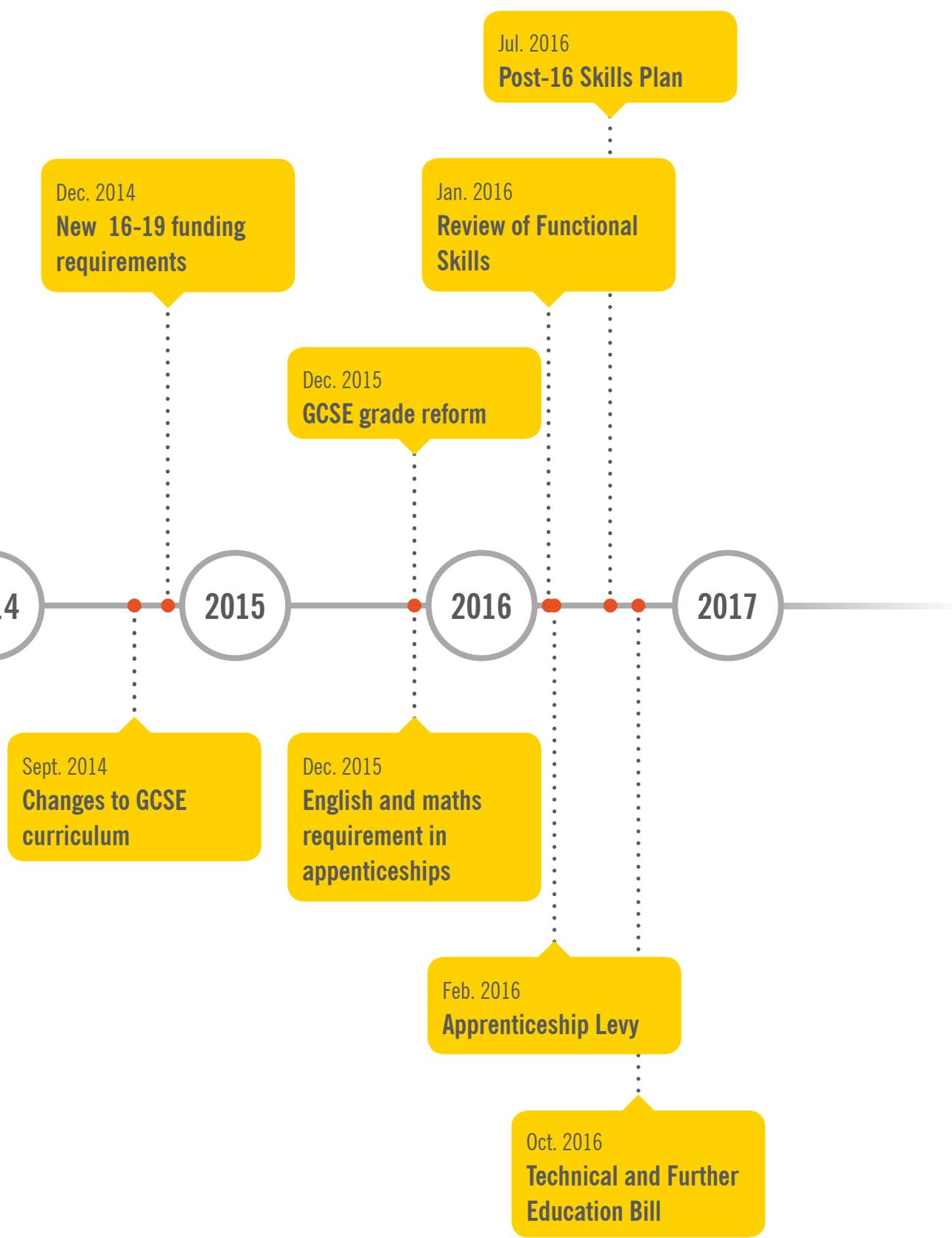
While this cohort was only partially impacted by the RPA, the findings give us a good idea of the trajectory of students post-16 and the impact of the institutions they attend.

We also wanted to get a better understanding of the challenges faced by post-16 providers in delivering these courses and to identify whether there are pockets of good practice which could be scaled across the sector.

To achieve this, we interviewed a number of stakeholders from across the post-16 sector, including college leaders, teachers, independent providers and learners themselves, as well as relevant civil servants and our charity partners.

Reforms to post-16
education since 2010





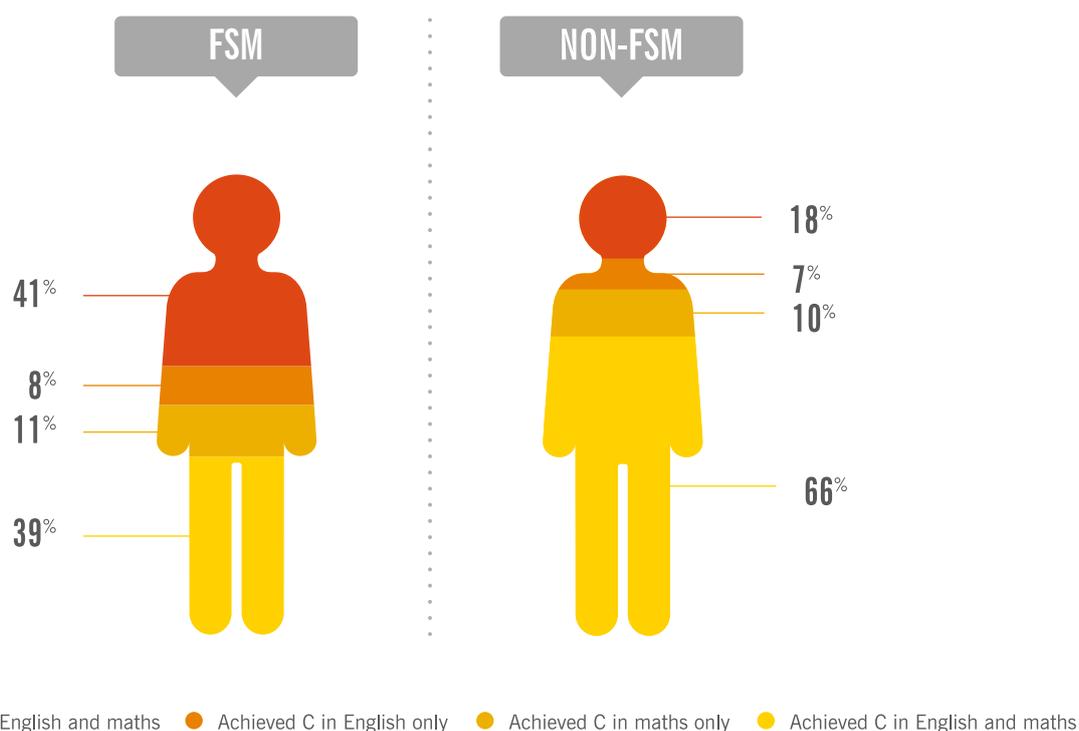
Our findings

GCSE catch-up provision is not working: the majority of students who do not attain English and maths at 16 have not caught up by 19 irrespective of their socio-economic background, prior attainment, where they live, or the institution they attend. Most of the students who do catch up do so through Functional Skills.

Disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately likely to need catch-up provision: almost twice as many students eligible for FSM (61%) fail to attain a C or above in their English and maths GCSEs at 16 than their peers (34%). They are also more likely to get a grade below a D.

Figure 1.

Young people achieving a grade C or above in English, maths or both at 16 by FSM Vs non-FSM

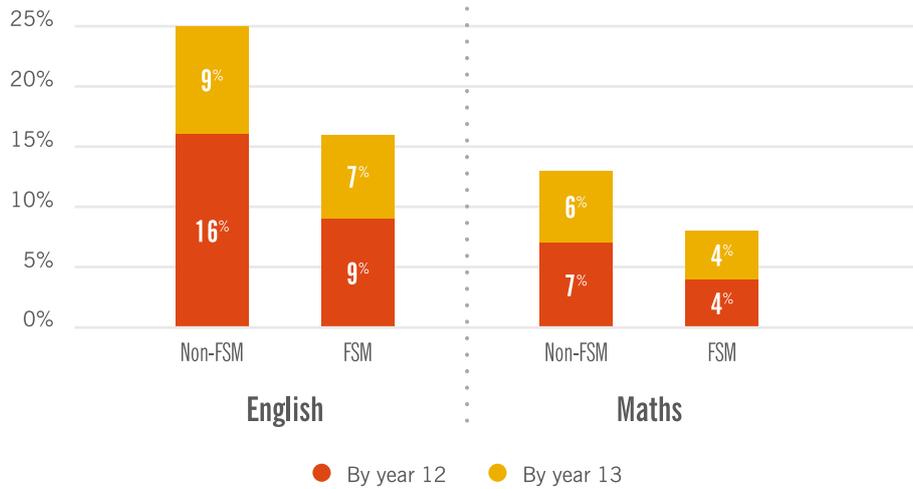


Catch-up rates by background

The gap between young people eligible for FSM and their peers is narrower when looking at catch-up students than when looking at GCSE students – but this is not a positive story. Overall catch-up success rates for students of all backgrounds by 19 are poor, with maths proving the more difficult subject to achieve success in.

Figure 2.

Catch-up rates in English and maths by FSM Vs non-FSM



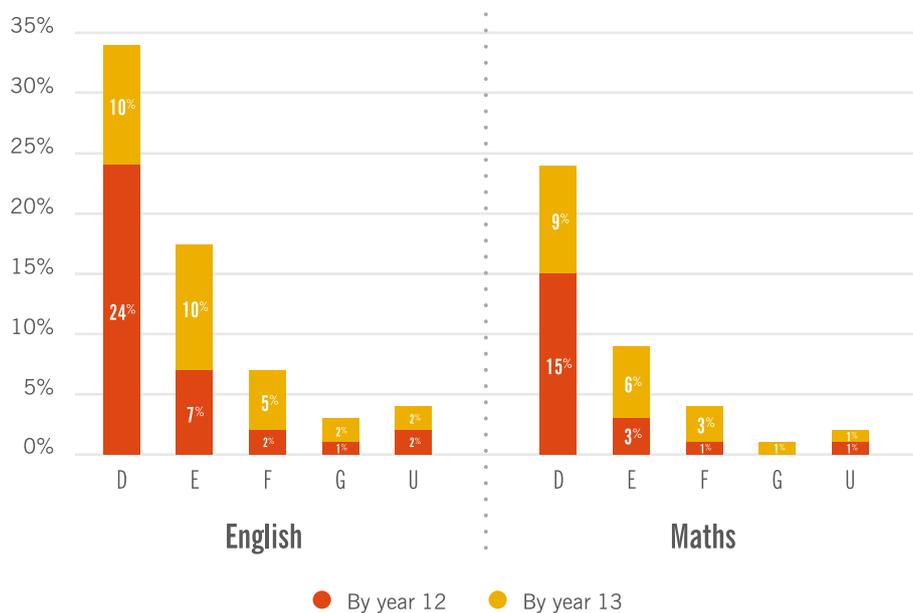
Higher prior attainment does not make the significant difference that might be expected. While students who attained at D in English and maths do catch up at a better rate than those achieving below a D grade at 16, the success rates are by no means exceptional.

In English, only 34% of students who achieved a D at 16 managed to attain an A*-C or equivalent by year 13. In maths the figure is 24%.

For students attaining a grade below a D in either English or maths at 16, this pattern of poor progression is consistent.

Figure 3.

Catch-up rate by grade achieved at 16



Where a young person comes from in the country also does not make a great deal of difference. All regions experience poor catch-up rates, as shown in Figure 4.

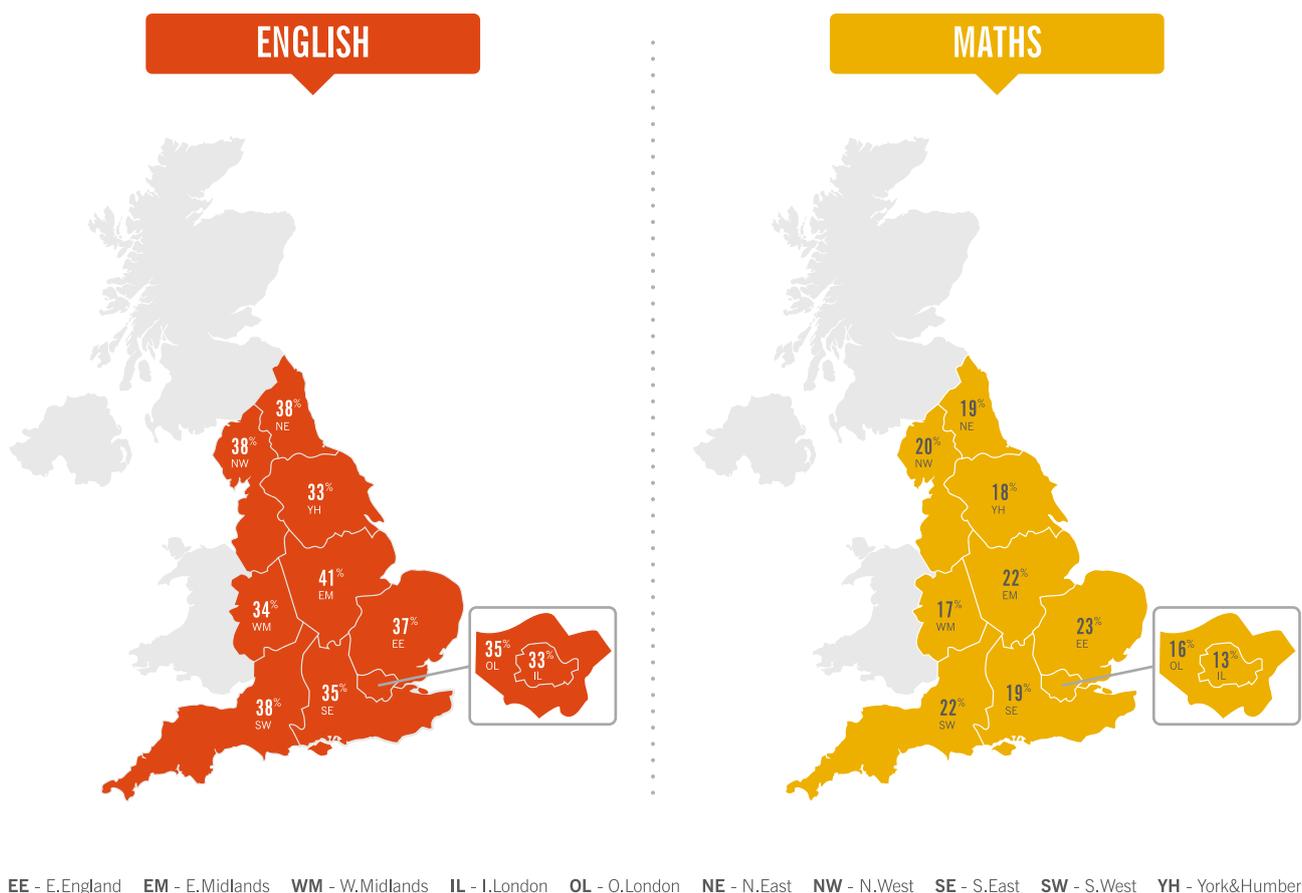
London, which has the highest (61%¹¹) attainment rate for 16 year olds achieving five A*-C GCSEs including English and maths nationally, has the worst catch-up rate in maths (13% inner London, 16% outer London) and some of the worst catch-up rates in English (33% in inner London and 35% in outer London) in the country.

It is not possible to know all the reasons for this. It might be assumed that the high pass rates (A*-C grades attained the first time around) experienced by London schools at 16, means that those left are of a lower ability or face other challenges, compared to peers who need to catch up in the rest of the country.

There can also be a case made that the success experienced by institutions at age 16 in London leads to post-16 institutions having a wide pool of high-attaining students to select from, meaning they are less likely to admit students who need to catch up in English and maths.

Figure 4.

Catch-up rate by 18 for those who did not achieve a C at 16 by region



Catch-up rates by post-16 institutions

There are three main types of post-16 providers; school sixth form colleges, standalone sixth form colleges and further education (FE) colleges.

The majority of catch-up students enrol at a FE college. These institutions have a catch-up cohort (124,982) three times bigger than school sixth form colleges (38,657) and ten times bigger than sixth form colleges (12,924).

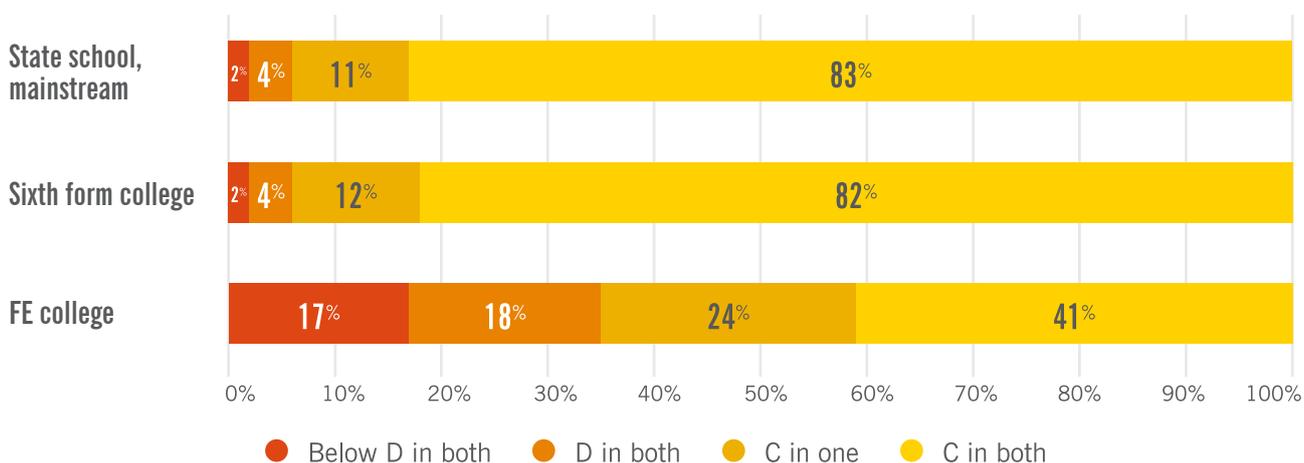
FE colleges serve a wide-ability range of catch-up students while the majority of catch-up students in schools and sixth form colleges have achieved grades at 16 which suggest they are closest to catching up.

Figure 5a.

	Below D in both	D in both	C in one	C in both	Total
State school, mainstream	5,413	8,869	24,375	186,997	225,654
Sixth form college	1,472	3,000	8,452	59,597	72,521
FE college	36,096	37,223	51,663	86,556	211,538
Other, incl special and private	5,320	195	283	631	6,429
Not known/NE	15,538	9,620	11,181	16,592	52,931
					569,073

Figure 5b.

Destination of students by grade achieved at 16



The institutional catch-up rate of students by the end of year 12 shows they all struggle to deliver effective provision.

Schools and sixth form colleges have higher-attaining cohorts therefore it is no surprise that their overall catch-up rates are better than those experienced by FE colleges. However, the overall school pass rates of 26% in English and 11% in maths and overall sixth form college pass rates of 32% in English and 18% in maths by the end of year 12, are a poor return for institutions more academic in nature.

The catch-up rates achieved by FE colleges (13% in English and 5% in maths) by the end of year 12 are even poorer.

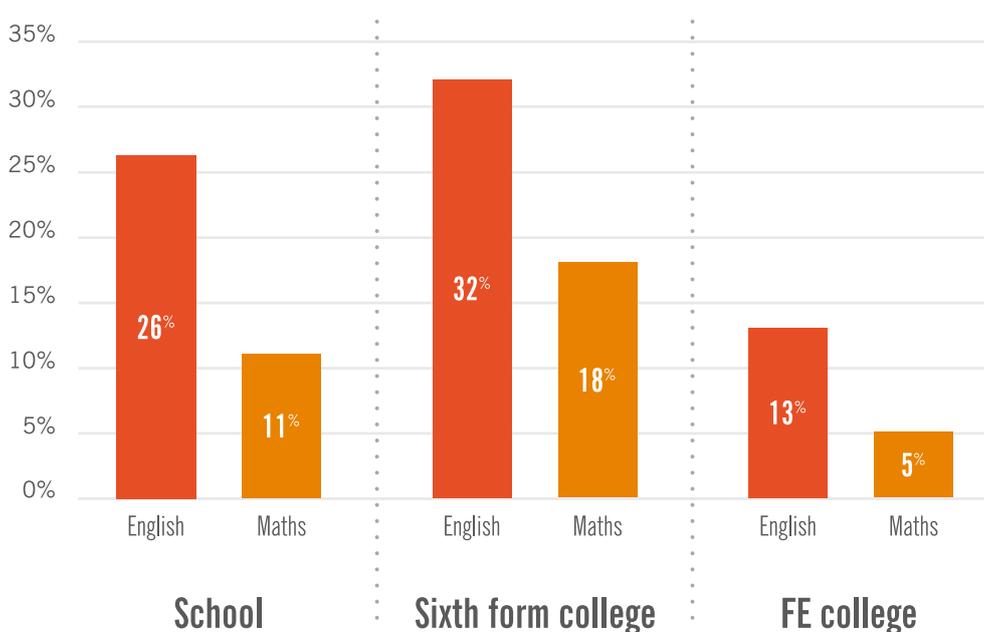
These rates should be considered with reference to the various disadvantages faced by these institutions and the students they serve. These challenges will be explored in greater depth in a later section.

“They just have to re-sit their exams – that’s it really. And that’s the approach that schools take because we don’t have time to reinvest in them resitting their exams... some of them shouldn’t be resitting... if you have a D or an E the first time it’s unlikely you’re going to have a C within a couple of months. And we have outstanding teachers in our school.”

- School English Teacher, London

Figure 6.

Institutional pass rate at the end of year 12



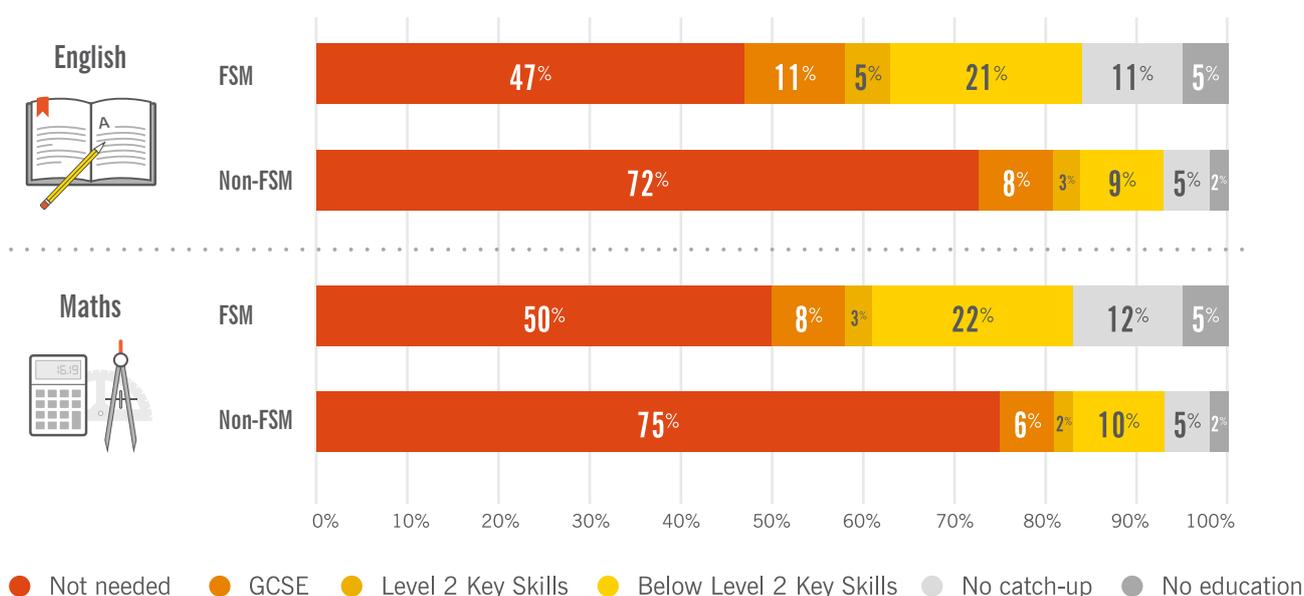
Catch-up rates through Functional Skills

The majority of students who need to catch up in English and maths at 16 are either taking courses below Level 2, are not enrolled in catch-up provision or are not recorded in education at all. In English this amounts to 62% of the catch-up cohort and in maths, 71%.

For those retaking English and maths at Level 2, while GCSEs remain the more popular route, there are a growing number of students taking other qualifications to catch up, like Functional Skills.

Figure 7.

Type of English and maths catch-up taken in year 12



Functional Skills are a relatively new qualification designed to equip students with the everyday English and maths skills needed to progress in education or employment. Level 2 Functional Skills is counted as an equivalent to a good pass at GCSE and students who attain less than a D at 16 are able to enrol in Functional Skills as their catch-up qualification.

As a result, Functional Skills play a significant role in overall catch-up rates recorded by post-16 institutions. While the majority of students who catch up by the end of year 12 in English and maths do so through GCSEs, by the end of year 13, more students attain a Level 2 in English through Functional Skills with similar numbers catching up through Functional Skills in maths.

Functional Skills are becoming popular with providers. However, GCSEs possess a greater currency amongst employers. Without data that measures the progress experienced by students taking these courses, it is difficult to assess the long-term value of these qualifications at this point.

“If you have GCSEs as a gold standard, what sits below that? Functional Skills have a problem in that not many employers know about them, even though their reputation with the employers who use them is generally good. There is essentially a cultural barrier with Functional Skills as employers are more likely to be familiar with GCSEs, yet Functional Skills are by no means easy qualifications (particularly at Level 2) and more employers might like them if they knew what the course involved.”

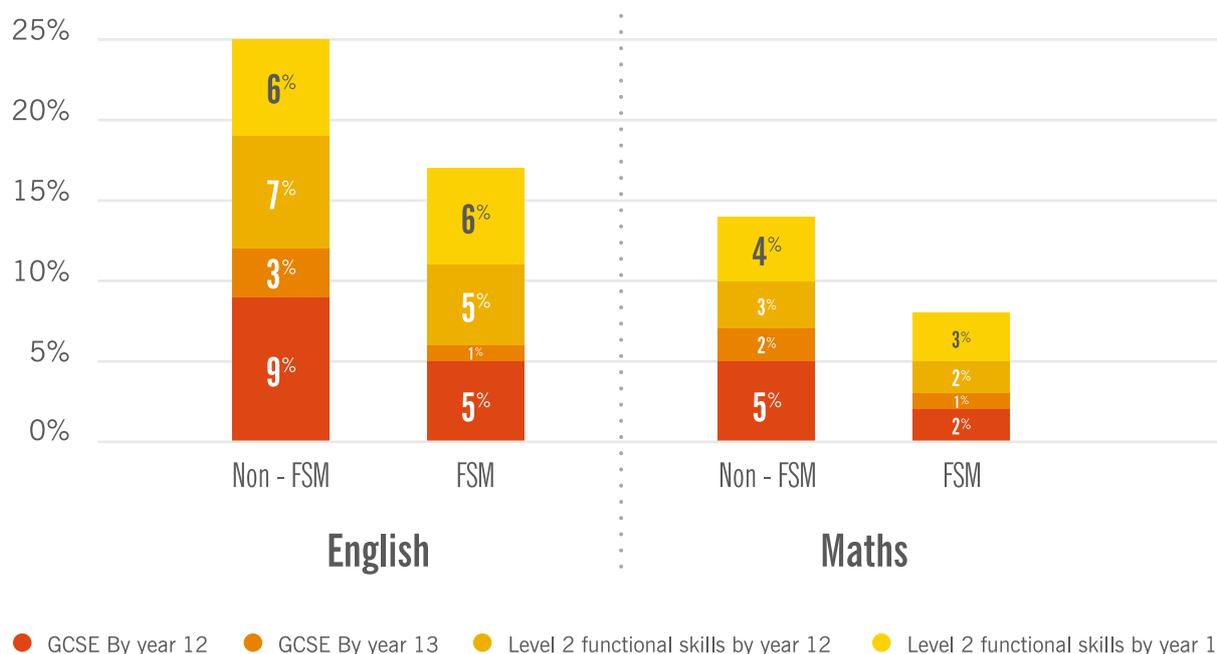
- Former Department for Education Official

“I think it has more to do with the teachers than functional skills that will help prepare you for life... At the end of the day you're not going to learn unless you're taught, and unless you're taught well you're not going to learn anything.”

- City Gateway Focus Group

Figure 8.

Catch-up rate by GCSEs and Functional Skills



For low-attaining students, their routes to progression are poor. This is particularly true for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, all catch-up students experience high drop-out rates and struggle to transition to higher level courses.

Other courses studied by catch-up students

There are only small differences between disadvantaged young people and their peers in terms of catch-up rates in English and maths. However, the course choices made by these students in year 12 differ significantly.

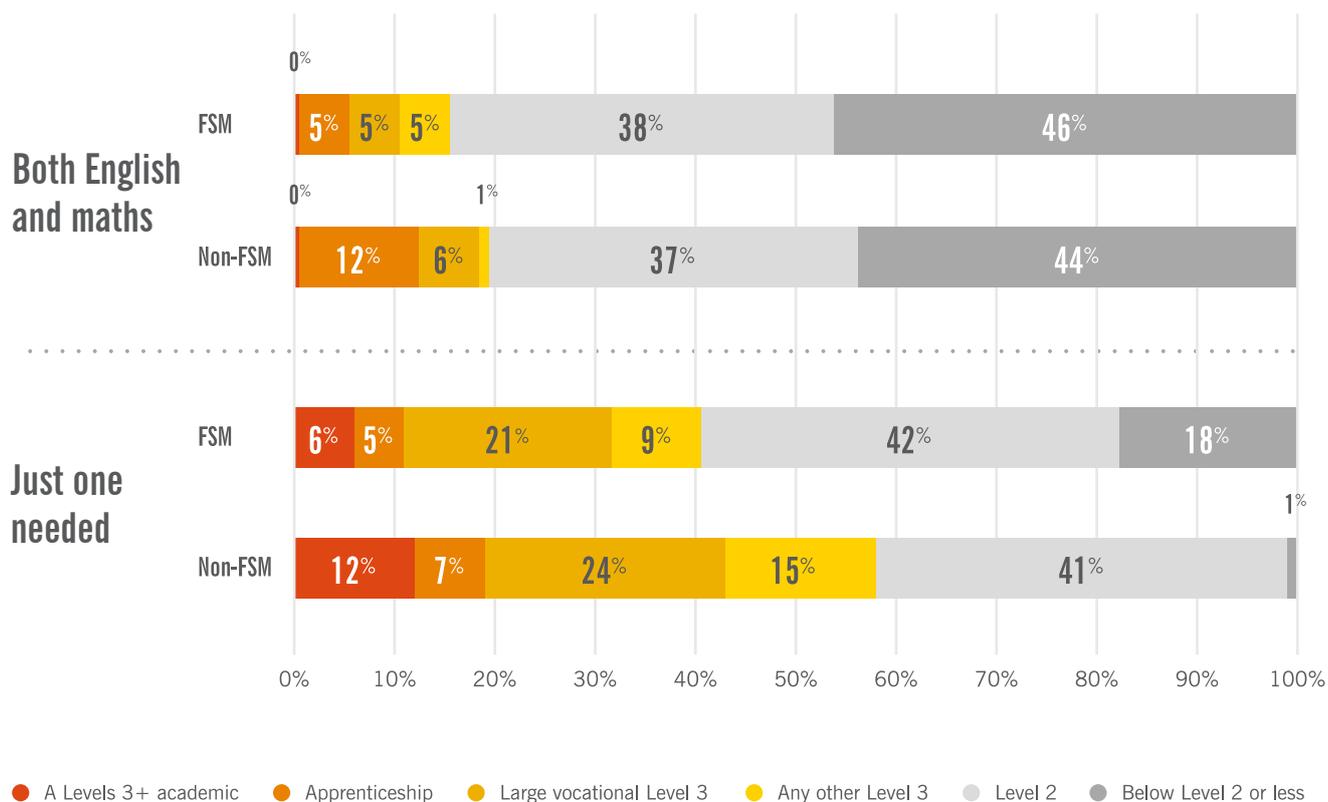
FSM students requiring catch-up provision are half as likely to be studying A-Levels or undertaking an apprenticeship alongside their resit provision compared to their peers (both 6% vs 12%).

These small percentages reflect the fact that the majority of all students requiring catch-up are taking lower-level courses alongside, as Figure 9 shows. However, FSM students who need to catch-up in one subject are 18 times more likely than their peers to be studying a below Level 2 course alongside their resit provision.

This suggests higher-attaining FSM catch-up students are enrolling on lower-level courses alongside their resit provision. This is a concerning trend.

Figure 9.

Courses studied alongside maths and English catch-up in year 12



Drop-out rates for catch-up students

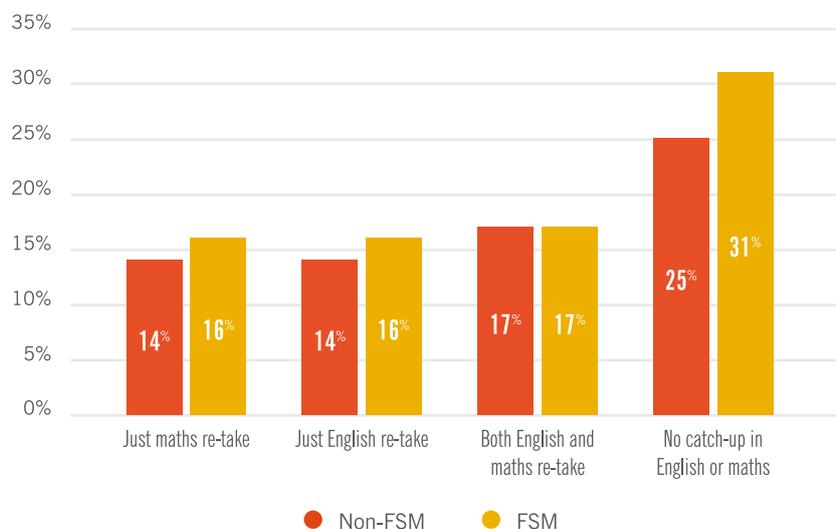
Many young people requiring catch-up provision, regardless of background, drop out at the end of year 12. Of those who need to catch-up in both English and maths, 17% of FSM and non-FSM students fail to enrol on a course in the first term of year 13 while similar rates are experienced by students catching up in only one subject.

Students who need to catch up at the end of year 11 but are not recorded as enrolling on a resit course, are the most likely to not return in year 13. This equates to 31% of FSM students and 25% of non-FSM students.

Whilst some of these young people may enter employment, without a Level 2 in English and maths, it is likely that many of these young people end up not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Figure 10.

Non-enrolment rates in year 13 for those who failed to catch-up in year 12



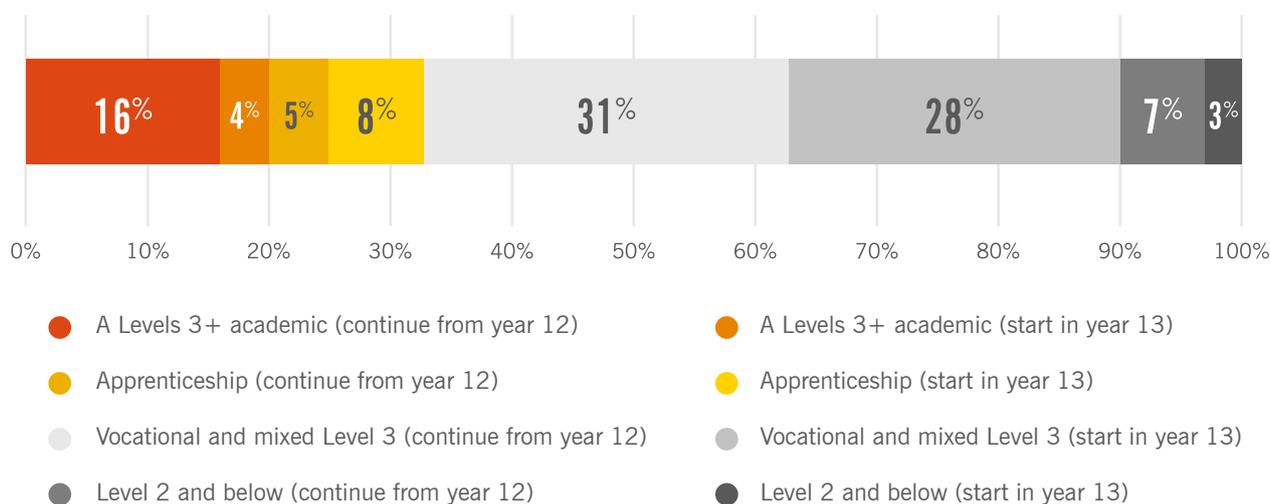
Catch-up students transitioning to higher-level courses

Catch-up students who enrol on vocational or mixed (combination of vocational and academic) Level 3 pathways in year 12 are much more likely to continue studying towards (31%) them in year 13. This compares to only 16% of students who enrolled on A-Levels in year 12 continuing these pathways in year 13.

Only 4% of catch-up students gain the grades in English and maths in year 12 and start A-Levels in year 13. Many more students (28%) manage to start a vocational or mixed Level 3 pathway in year 13 having caught up in English and maths

Figure 11.

Course transitions for those achieving a Level 2 in English and maths in year 12



FE colleges face significant challenges which inhibit their ability to drive progression, and we explored these through qualitative interviews. Some students who drop out of FE colleges enrol on programmes such as those delivered by our charity partners.

FE colleges identify three challenges; teaching, timetabling and space

The new resit requirement and the very large catch-up cohorts now enrolling means many colleges are having to recruit additional teachers or upskill the staff that they already have.

This is against a backdrop of 15,000 fewer people teaching in FE colleges than six years ago,¹² a general teacher recruitment problem, (particularly in maths,¹³) and the inability of FE colleges to compete with schools in terms of attracting quality teachers and offer equal or better wages.¹⁴

The level of qualifications held by teachers in FE colleges versus those in school and sixth form colleges is also a concern.

In schools it is common for a teacher to have a PGCE in the subject being taught and a relevant, if not subject specific degree. In the FE sector, there are a number of GCSE English and maths teachers whose highest qualification is a GCSE or other Level 2 in the subject they teach. Some have lesser qualifications.¹⁵

Timetabling is another considerable challenge, made more difficult by the requirements of the study programme, which dictate that students who need to catch up in English and maths spend six of their 16 hours of learning doing these subjects.

Simply finding space for the increased cohort can be difficult. The movement to all-in summer exams means colleges are having to find space, in many cases, for thousands of students. Some FE colleges have to take over all the classrooms and hall space they have, meaning cancellation of other classes, for a week or more. Others have to book external space which comes at a cost and causes logistical issues such as ensuring students can travel to these spaces.

“In terms of staffing, colleges are finding it a struggle to recruit, particularly in maths. It is important they are the right staff to support and motivate this group of learners. The emphasis at college is on engagement and building confidence. Not that school teachers don’t do this, but the focus does need to be different. Colleges are in competition with other providers and schools to find these teachers. Colleges need staff who are attracted by the challenge of the resit offer.”

- **Catherine Sezen, Senior 14-19 Policy Manager, Association of Colleges**

“There is a lack of teaching capacity within colleges to meet the increased demand for GCSE re-sits. Many providers are redirecting vocational teachers to teach Functional Skills or, in some cases, GCSEs. A lot of these folk won’t have a Level 2 in these subjects themselves. There is a widespread need to support FE teachers with their own skills as well as their teaching approaches.”

- **Sue Southwood, Head of Maths and English, Education and Training Foundation**

“In 2012 we had 240 students studying English and maths. In 2013 – 683. In 2016, 1,452. This year 2,100. It’s a massive escalation. I had one maths teacher and one English teacher when I started in 2012. We’ve had to consolidate things. We’ve now gone to 10 teachers of each. We run 60 classes a week. The issue with that isn’t just the teachers it’s the room – we manage it with great difficulty. A crucial question is where do we put them all.”

- Head of Learning for Maths and English, FE college in the South East

Motivating students

Low-attaining students often fail to appreciate that Level 2 English and maths qualifications are a gateway to higher level study. We know from interviews with post-16 providers that these students tend to be disengaged with learning and struggle with motivation to continue studying subjects they have failed to master in five years of secondary education.

The introduction of the RPA has seen increases in the number of students enrolling in post-16 provision, but providers have little by the way of incentives or sanctions with which to ensure good learner engagement and attendance in both classes and exams.

Some of these students have behavioural issues and trouble with attendance and therefore require significant support to engage in education.

Many students who fail to stay in mainstream provision end up either not in education, employment or training (NEET), or on a programme delivered by organisations like our charity partners.

“The impact of resitting has a big impact on learner experience. They usually come to college because they want to do something vocational. When they learn they need English and maths, it has a negative impact on them. Mainly because they are seeking to move on from their school experience and do something different.”

- **Trudie McGuiness, Director of Learner Journey, South Staffs college**

“If you don’t make the lessons very engaging and appealing for students, they just won’t come in. Unlike when they were at school, had to be there and there were serious sanctions in place if they didn’t. I’ve got no detentions to give or meaningful letters to send home. Most of my students are adults (18) therefore there is very little I can do.”

- **John Cooper, Maths Teacher, Sussex Downs college**

“We work really hard for 36 weeks and put in loads of resource and in one exam, there was only a 54% turnout. The government needs to consider whether this is value for money. And there is potential this might change next year. Because it will continue to have an impact on the headline results every summer.”

- **Senior Leader, FE college in West Midlands**

The young people served by our charity partners

Organisations like our charity partners have a significant job on their hands to re-engage, build confidence and drive progress for learners who are low-attaining and very often from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“The vast majority of learners come to us having either dropped out of or having been excluded from college. Colleges will make a judgement on some students, based on their attendance and behaviour in the first six weeks of the course, and refer them to us if the learner doesn’t meet the college’s minimum requirements. The process which colleges use in determining which students to keep can be unfair. In the first few weeks there will be issues – low confidence and behavioural. It is not motivating for these students – a critical issue which TwentyTwenty then have to combat.”

- Sean Stock, Functional Skills Teacher, TwentyTwenty

These learners join our partners with low-ability. The vast majority, on initial diagnosis, have entry Level competencies akin to literacy and numeracy levels expected of primary school children.

That these young people have completed 11 years of mainstream education and possess such weak literacy and numeracy skills is an indictment of pre-16 provision.

Case Study - TwentyTwenty

Most come to TwentyTwenty with low attainment, complex needs and multiple personal barriers to engagement: the majority of students enter with the capability of Entry Level 2 (the standard expected of 7-9 year olds) or at Entry Level 3 (9-11 year olds). On leaving TwentyTwenty 90% have achieved an accredited qualification in maths and 73% in English. In a recent analysis, 43% of them have been previously excluded from school, further evidencing a profound disengagement with education. 59% have an offending history, 41% are on free school meals and 26% are in care or care leavers. Over the last year, 45% of the young people TwentyTwenty worked with were from designated ‘troubled families’ and 55% from households officially ‘in poverty’. Despite all these challenges, after leaving TwentyTwenty 80% of young people make a successful transition to work or FE college.

Our recommendations

“We have set a clear expectation that having a good level of maths and English should be the norm. It’s vital that these young people are given the support that they need to gain a sound grasp of English and maths by age 18 and, if possible, to secure GCSEs at grade C or above. . . It is also clear that we need a credible, high-quality option for students for whom GCSEs are not appropriate or achievable. This is why we are reforming functional skills to make sure that they are genuinely relevant to employers, and consequently have credibility and prestige in the jobs market.”

- Robert Halfon at Association of Colleges Conference 2016

This report has argued that it is imperative that all young people develop literacy and numeracy skills to progress in education, in work and in life.

Despite disappointing findings about the poor levels of catch-up currently, we do not believe that now is the time to take a step back from this ambition. With the right level of support and quality teaching, the overwhelming majority of young people, regardless of background and prior attainment, can attain an A*-C GCSE or equivalent in English and maths. These recommendations chart a way forward to achieve this.

1

We recommend that the government retain its ambition for everyone to attain a Level 2 (GCSE or equivalent) in English and maths by 19.

- We believe that every young person should have access to high-quality provision which enables them to achieve good GCSEs in English and maths at 16.
- For those who fail to attain the equivalent of an A*-C in English and maths GCSE (under the incoming 1-9 scale,) at this stage, high-quality options should be available to them which enable them to progress to higher-level study.
- This means that students closest to achieving the gateway grade to Level 3 study under the new 1-9 grade system should continue working towards this level through GCSEs. All other lower-attaining students should have the option of working towards a good GCSE or high-quality and well-recognised equivalent.
- These equivalents must enable students to progress towards studying a Level 3 vocational course. If they wish to pursue an academic pathway, they should continue working towards a GCSE pass.

Study programmes changed the playing field for post-16 providers, particularly the codification of English and maths as a core element.

Delivery of English and maths is not new for college providers. What is new is the resit requirement and the overhaul of the funding structure without the injection of additional resources.

Further education colleges in particular have struggled to finance the recruitment of teachers and the infrastructure to house increased cohorts.

The 16-19 sector experienced a 14% cut in real terms between 2010–11 and 2014–15,¹⁶ and currently, FE colleges are in the midst of area-based reviews, designed to find further savings. Our findings suggest they need greater levels of support.

The government must ensure FE colleges have the resources to meet the English and maths challenge.

2

We recommend that the government create an ‘Excellence in English and maths fund’: committing an extra £935 per pupil retaking English and maths, with half of the payment awarded to providers up front and the other half conditional on attainment, to drive innovation.

- We recognise the challenges to public funding. But the current system is failing everyone. Whether attending a school, sixth form college or FE college, too few students, regardless of background, are catching up in these important subjects.
- The ‘Excellence in English and maths fund’ would be a funding incentive that provides colleges additional money based on the amount provided to secondary schools through the pupil premium.
- Full funding should be made available to students who need to catch-up in both subjects and half of this amount for students who need to catch-up in one. Half of the funding would be made available on enrolment and the other half on successful completion of a Level 2 English and/or maths course.
- This will help equip and incentivise colleges to draw on robust evidence and develop methods of promising practice. The government should work with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to highlight and disseminate such work.

Presently, there is no information that shows progression rates for Functional Skills, nor do they currently enjoy the same currency as GCSEs in the workplace.

In a 2015 review of Functional Skills, the Education and Training Foundation stated: 'Functional Skills are gaining widespread recognition across small and large employers. Employers who know about them like the approach they embody e.g. applied skills, flexible assessment and problem solving.'¹⁷

This is promising. As a qualification, they are growing in terms of recognition and quality. But judgement should be reserved until results show whether they drive progression into further study or employment.

The measure of success for functional skills is whether they are driving progress to Level 3 study.

3

We recommend that the government and all relevant stakeholders commit to developing Functional Skills into a high-quality and valued qualification, measured on progression rates and employment outcomes.

- Functional skills are the most common route taken outside of GCSEs, but we know little about how effective they are in driving progress.
- Attainment rates of students achieving Level 2 English and maths, specifically through Functional Skills, should be better publicised and progression rates to Level 3 study programmes or into work should be published to enable us to demonstrate and assess their value.
- This commitment should be fronted by a campaign designed to increase awareness of the qualifications so that businesses, parents and students are well-informed of their potential.

The teacher recruitment crisis cannot be ignored. In his last speech as Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw said:

'I accept it is not easy to recruit or retain teachers. The triple whammy of a growing economy, public sector pay restraint, and the still comparably low status of teaching in England means it is hard to attract the right people into the workforce.'¹⁸

This challenge is greater for FE colleges, who struggle to attract quality staff willing to teach low-attaining cohorts and, often, for lower salaries than schools and sixth forms.

In 2014, the Education and Training Foundation developed a Premium Graduate Programme, designed to prepare candidates for teaching and/or management careers in the FE sector and, in particular, the teaching of English, maths, science, engineering and technology. The programme has been deemed a success at pilot stage.

If the government wants more young people to gain high-quality qualifications in English and maths, it must support the FE sector to recruit staff who can meet this challenge.

4

We recommend that the government test ways to increase the supply of qualified English and maths teachers in the FE sector

- Successful programmes like Teach First are well supported by government. The Education and Training Foundation have completed a ‘positive’ Premium Graduate scheme to attract new teachers to the FE sector. To prove impact, a second and expanded trial should be supported.

All young people, irrespective of their background, should be able to access high-quality education and skills which enrich their lives and their long term prospects.

Too few disadvantaged students in particular transition from Level 2 to Level 3 study. Disproportionate numbers of FSM students end up in FE colleges. The majority study a Level 2 vocational subject alongside English and maths but fail to progress to a higher level.

The *Post-16 Skills Plan* has proposed the creation of 15 high-quality vocational routes. Presently, very few young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are gaining the qualifications which would enable them to enrol in and complete such routes.

The potential of a ‘transition year’, also proposed in the skills plan, is encouraging, but more information regarding who it is for and what kind of provision it will include is critically required.

High-quality technical education and work-based training has the ability to act as a vehicle for social mobility. We believe that this should be explicit in the remit of the new Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

5

We recommend the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education monitor and report on key ‘social mobility indicators’ such as the gap in access, completion and progression between disadvantaged young people and their peers entering technical routes and apprenticeships.

- Presently, too few young people from disadvantaged backgrounds transition from Level 2 to Level 3 academic, technical or work-based education. Alongside the English and maths gap, FSM students are half as likely to access and successfully complete a Level 3 apprenticeship.¹⁹
- The Institute should be required to measure the gap between students entering for Level 3 technical education and apprenticeships and publish findings and mitigation plans on an annual basis.
- Finally, we recommend that the government designs a high-quality transition year, as cited in the *Post-16 Skills Plan*, to facilitate access for all students without GCSE English and maths to high-quality catch-up provision and careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG)

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Appendix

To understand the journey taken by students who need to catch up in English and maths post-16, we commissioned Education Datalab to link data available through the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individual Learner Records (ILR) of post-16 education.

The data includes information looking at the grades achieved by students at the end of year 11 (those completing their GCSEs in 2012/13,) the destinations of these students post-16 (starting in September 2013), the level of English and maths qualifications studied by those needing to catch up, the courses these students study alongside their resit provision, the catch-up success rate of these students at the end of year 12 and 13, and their course transition in this period.

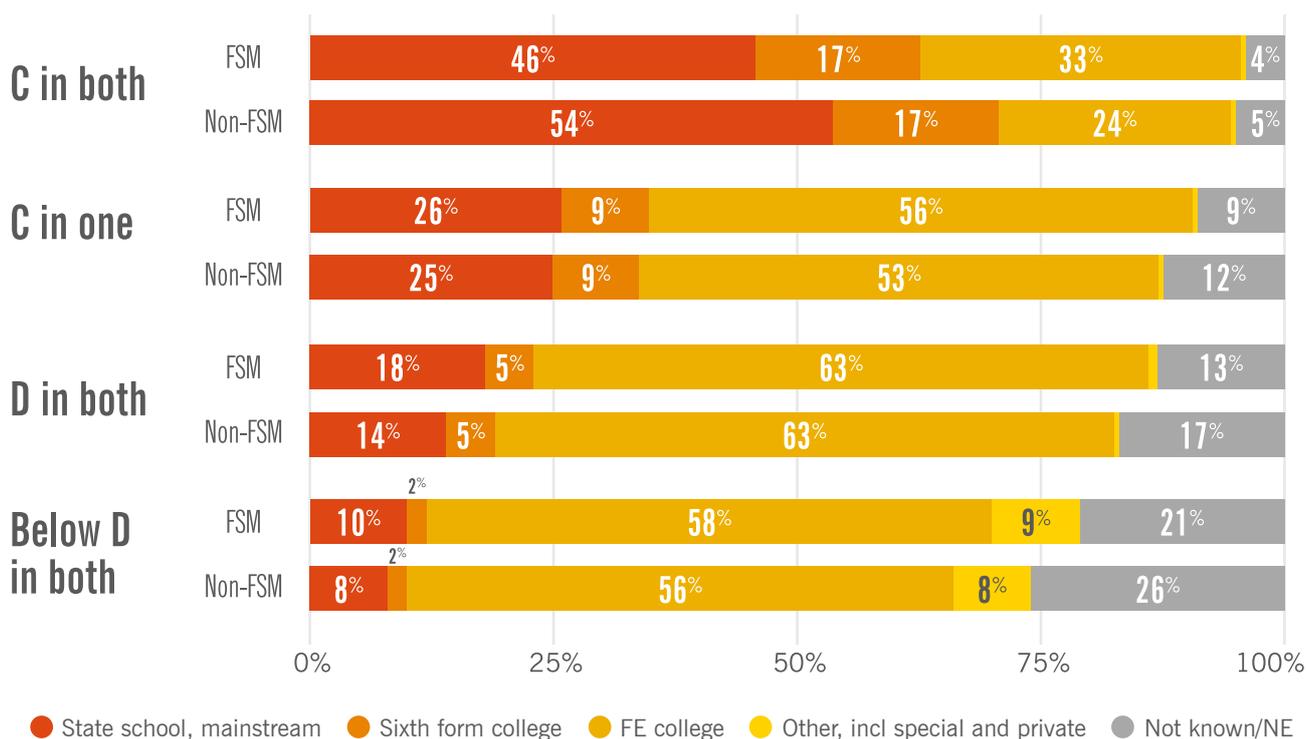
The variables we looked at include:

- Socio-economic background (by eligibility for Free School Meals in secondary education)
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Geography

Post-16 destination

The majority of students requiring some form of catch-up provision, regardless of background, enrol in a further education college at the end of year 11.

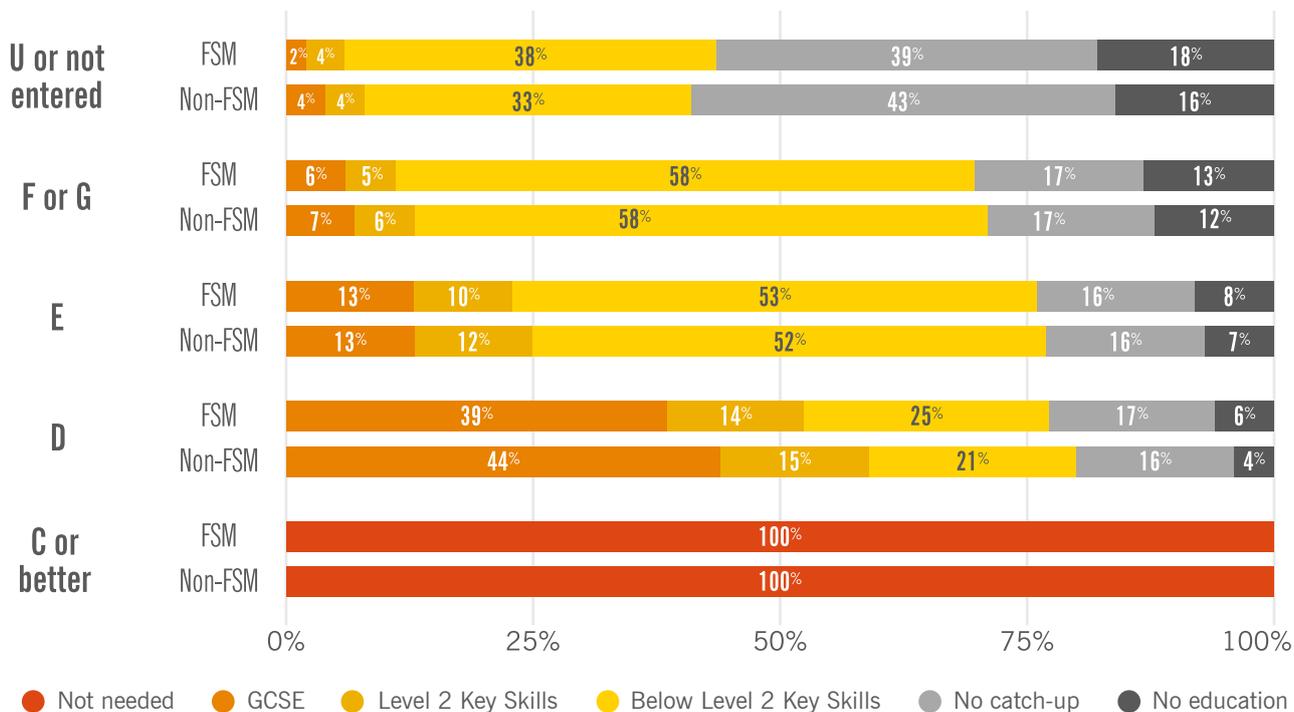
Differences in post-16 institutional destinations, by FSM status and GCSE results in English and maths



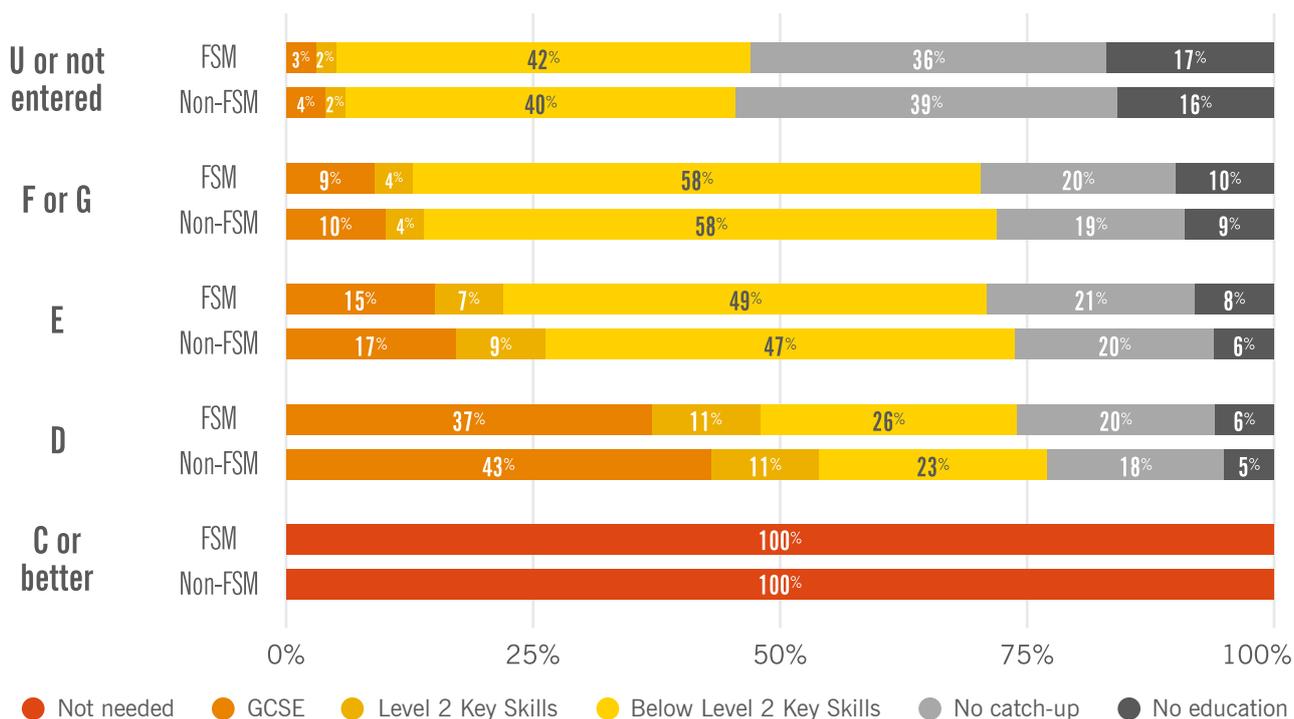
Catch-up courses taken by grade achieved at 16, by region, gender and ethnicity

For students achieving a D in English and maths at 16, GCSEs are the most common catch-up qualification. For those achieving below this grade, routes are varied.

Type of English catch-up taken, by FSM and age 16 GCSE grade

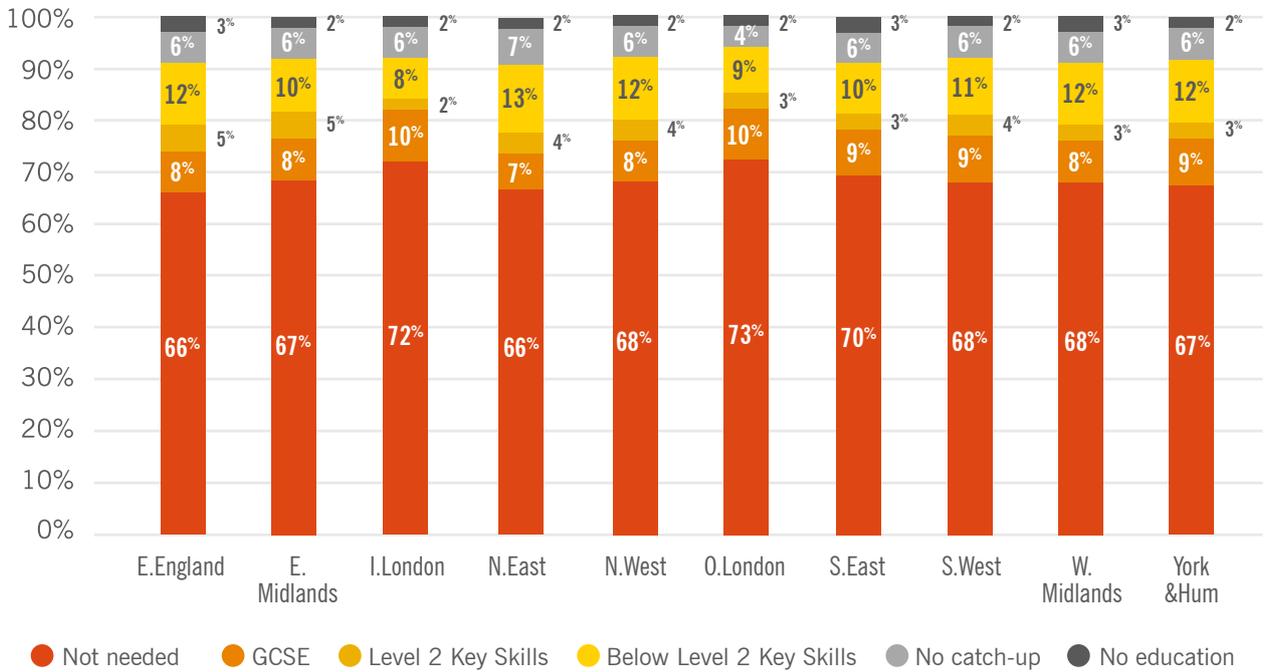


Type of maths catch-up taken, by FSM and age 16 GCSE grade

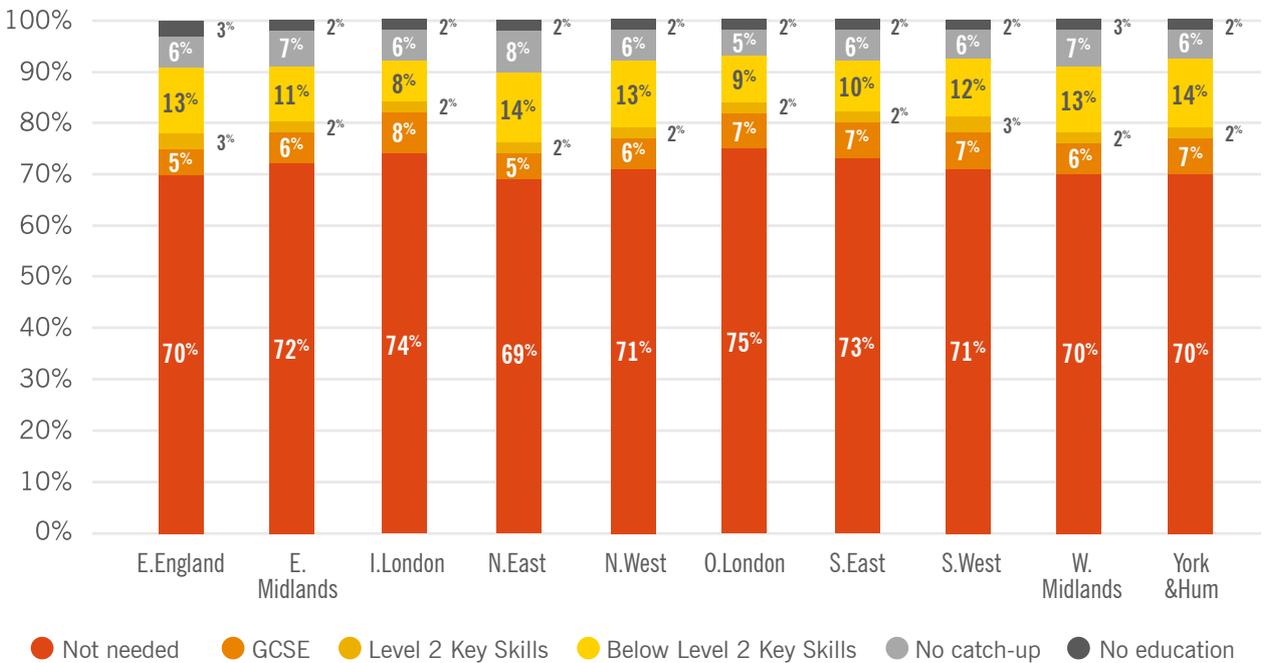


There are few regional differences in the levels of catch-up courses taken. London students are marginally more likely to be resitting GCSEs having failed to attain an A*-C at 16 in both English and maths.

Type of catch-up in English (by region)

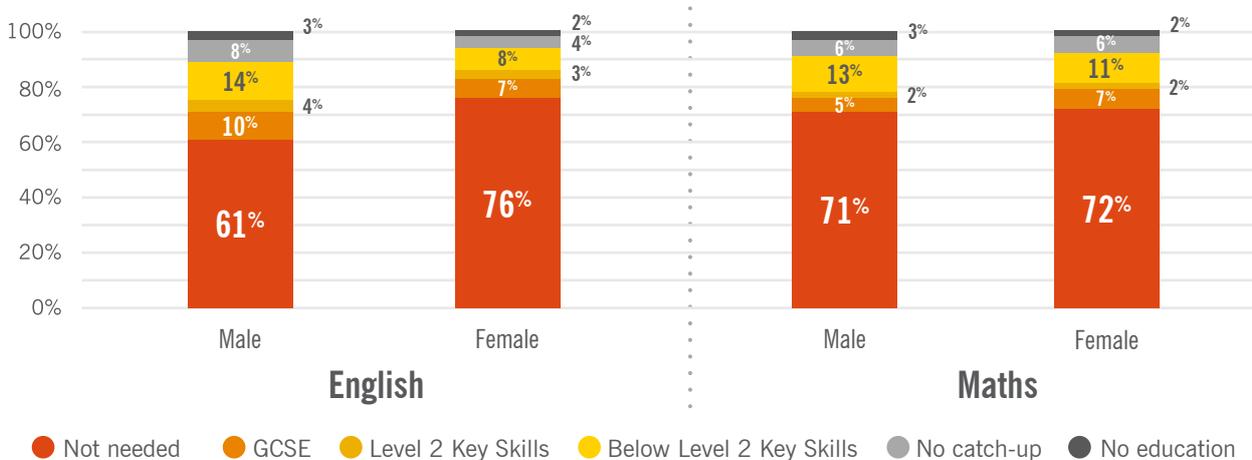


Type of catch-up in maths (by region)



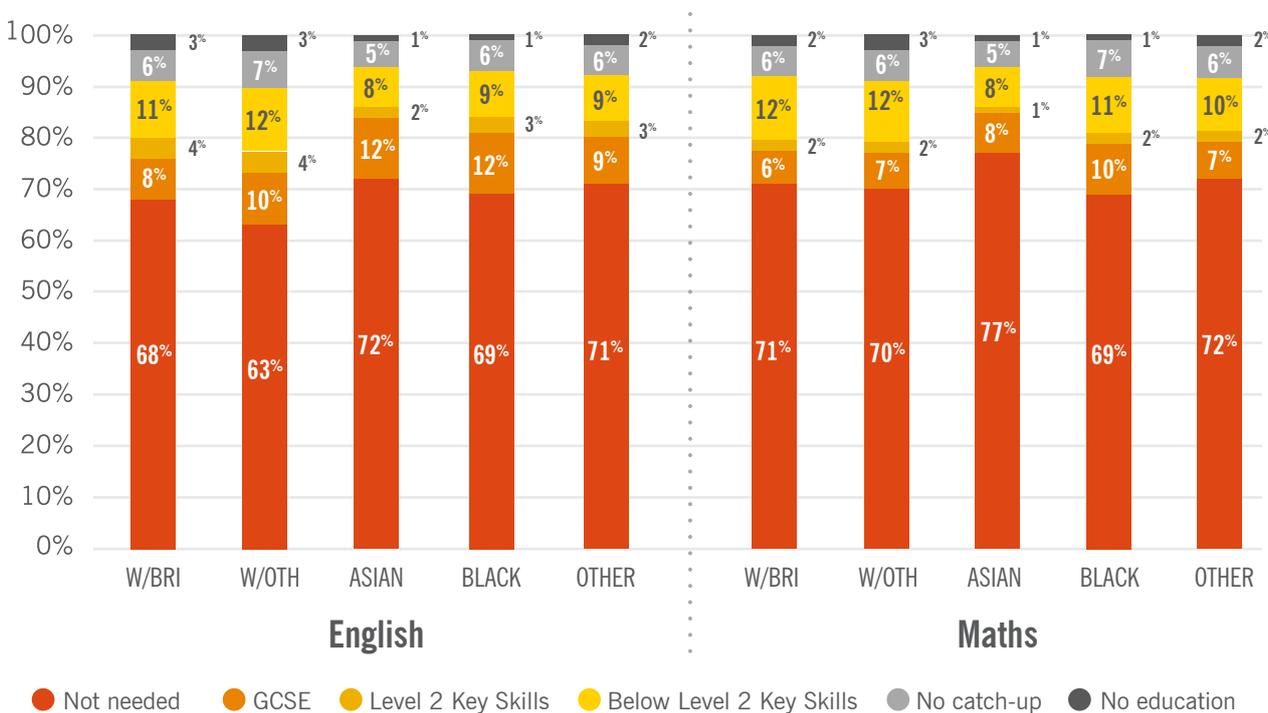
In English, females significantly outperform males at 16, meaning fewer are retaking GCSEs post-16. Boys are also twice as likely to be studying below Level 2 courses. In maths, the picture is more consistent across the board.

Catch-up courses taken (by gender)



The level of catch-up course taken by ethnicity is consistent in both English and maths. Asian and Black students are more likely to be resitting GCSEs than White British students.

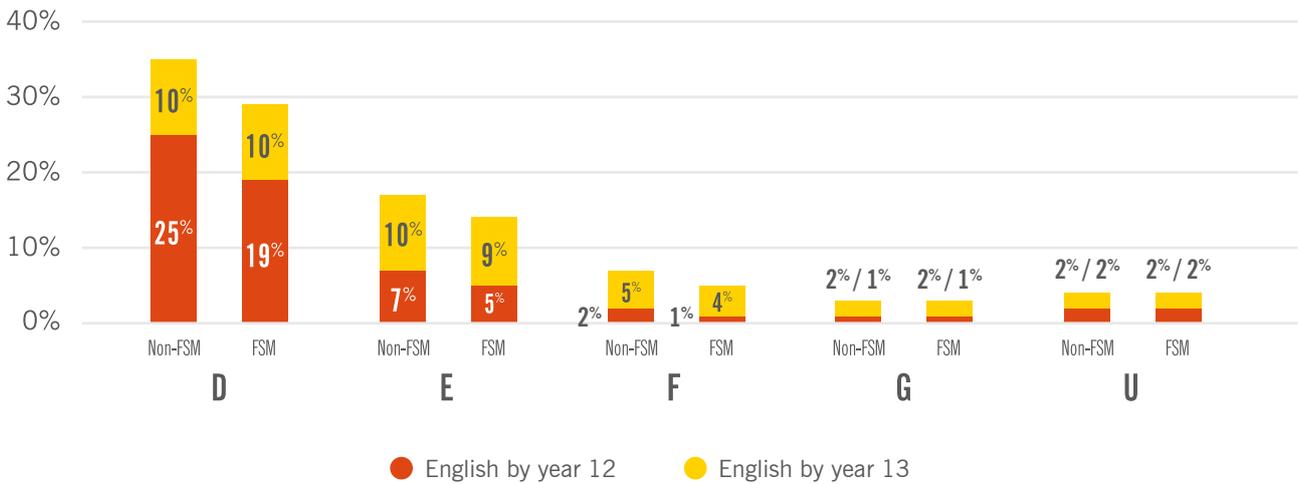
Catch-up courses taken (by ethnicity)



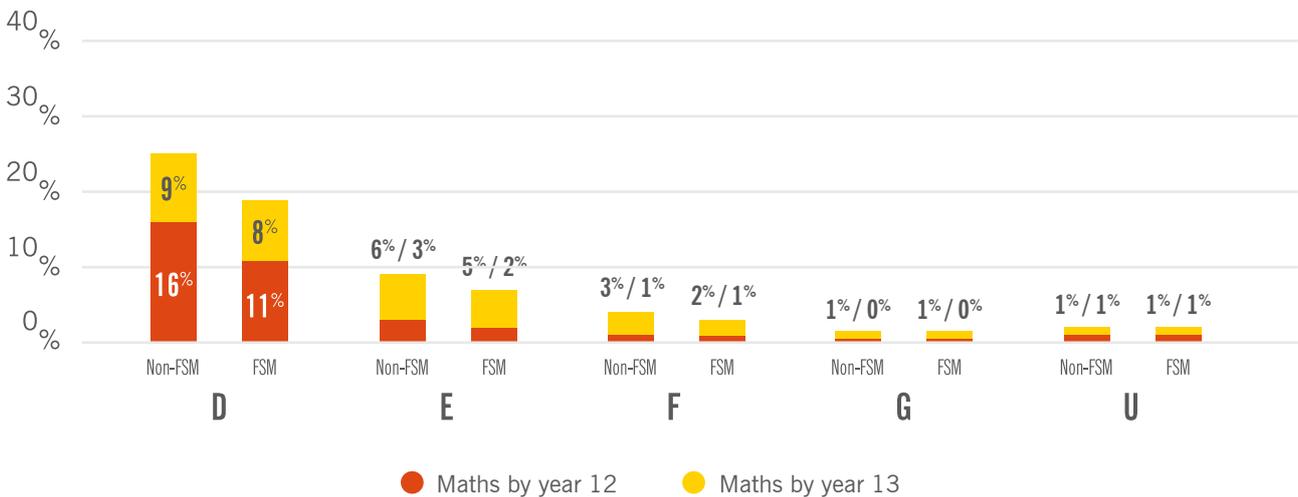
Catch-up rate by grade attained at 16, other courses studied, gender and ethnicity

Students who achieved a D at 16 are more likely to achieve an A*-C or equivalent in English and maths by the end of year 12. Students achieving lower than a D experience very low rates of catch-up success in both subjects by the end of year 13.

English catch-up rates by grade at 16

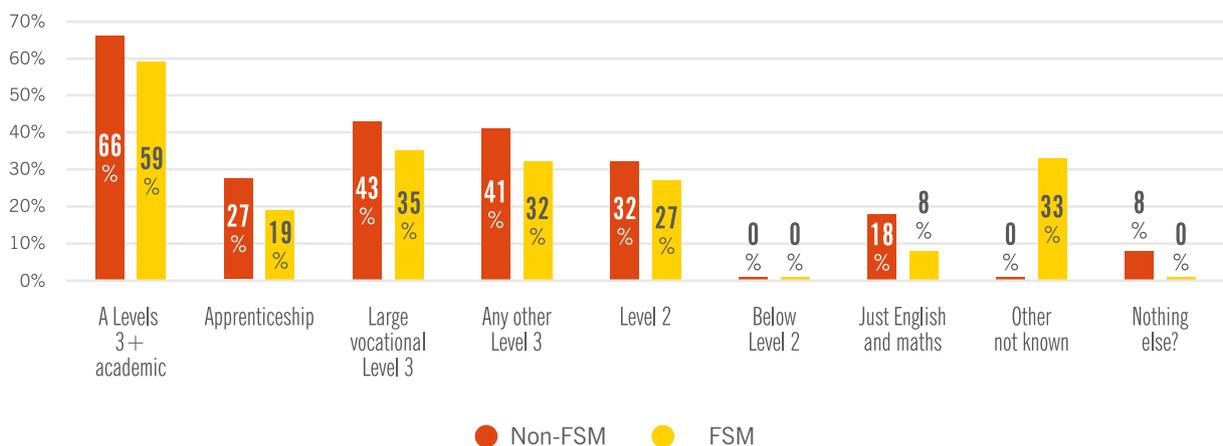


Maths catch-up rates by grade at 16

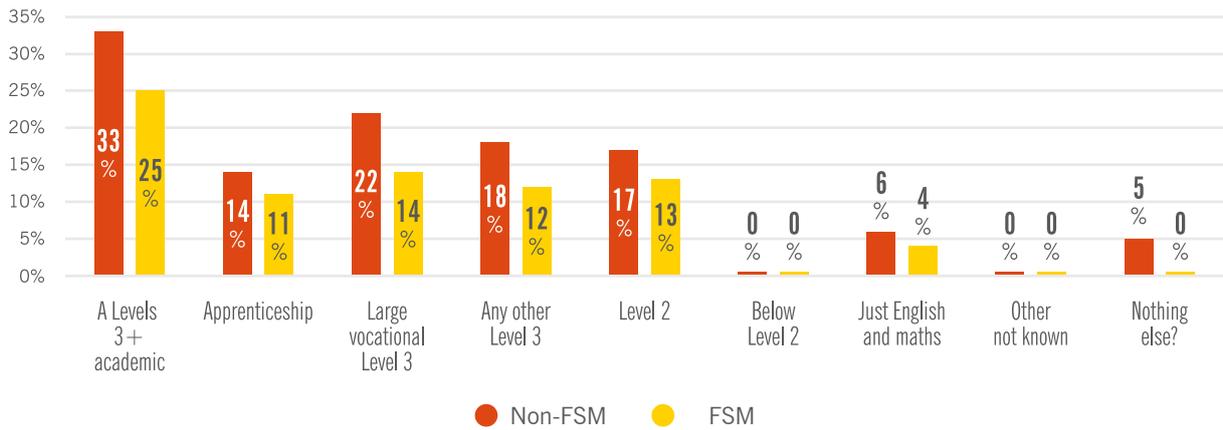


Students studying A-Levels and other Level 3 courses alongside English resit provision experience significantly higher catch-up rates than their peers studying A-Levels alongside maths catch-up provision.

English catch-up rate by year 12 according to other courses studied

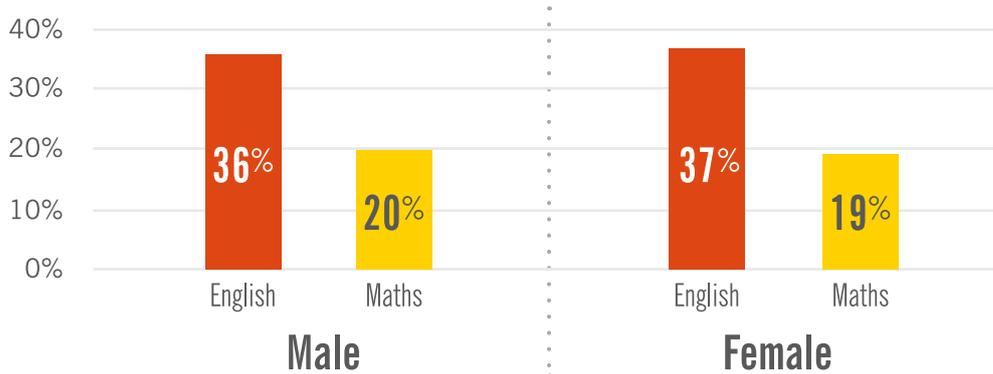


Maths catch-up rate by year 12 according to other courses studied



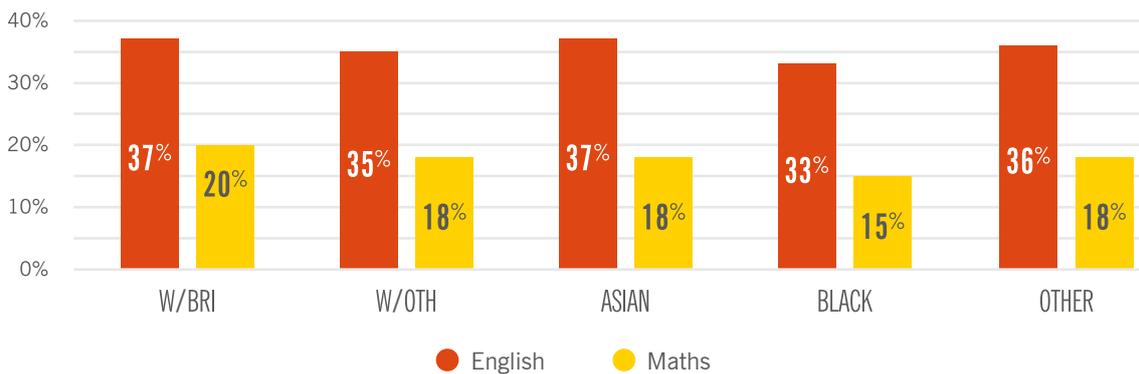
Girls and boys experience similar levels of catch-up success in both English and maths, with all students almost twice as likely to succeed in English than maths.

Pass rates by age 18 for young people who did not achieve a grade C at 16 (by gender)



There is little variance in English catch-up rates between ethnicities, with White British and Asian students slightly outperforming all other ethnicities. In maths, Black students are less likely than other students to catch up.

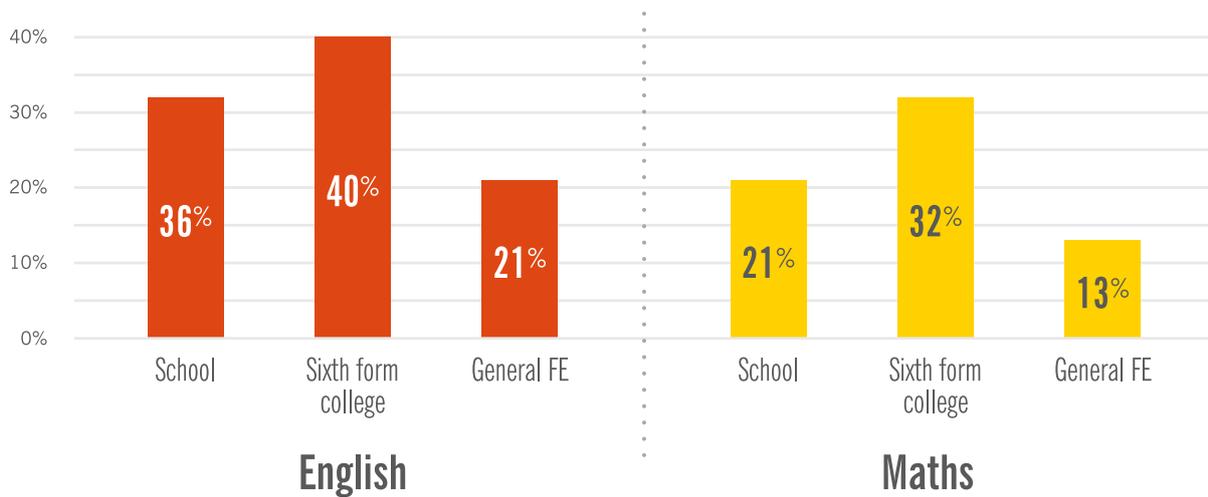
Pass rates by age 18 for young people who did not achieve a grade C at 16 (by ethnicity)



Institutional pass rates for students achieving a D at 16

Students achieving a D in English at 16 who go on to attend a school or sixth form college experience almost double the success rates to those who attend a FE college. In maths, standalone sixth form colleges outperform schools and are significantly more successful than FE colleges and driving catch-up success.

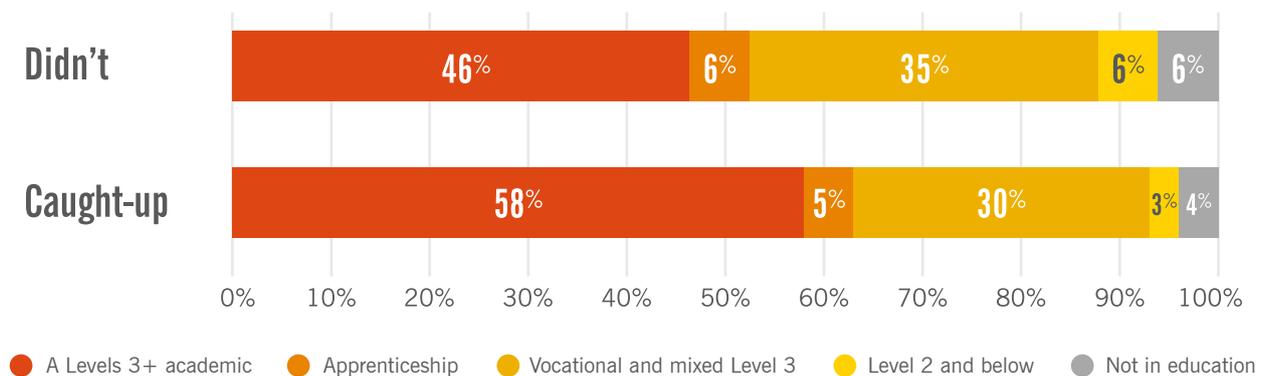
English and maths catch-up rates for those with a grade D at 16 by the end of year 12



Year 13 pathways for catch-up students enrolled on A-Levels in year 12

A significant number of students who catch up while enrolled on A-Levels in year 12 decide not to continue studying towards them in year 13. A surprisingly high number of students enrolled on A-Levels in year 12, but who fail to catch-up in English and maths, are allowed to continue studying their A-Levels in year 13.

Courses studied by catch-up students enrolled on A-Levels in year 13 based on catch-up success in year 12



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