



Department
for Education

A world-class education system

The Advanced British Standard



A World-Class Education System

The Advanced British Standard

**Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Education
by Command of His Majesty**

October 2023

CP 945



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Print ISBN 978-1-5286-4478-5

E02997225 10/23

Printed on paper containing 0% recycled fibre content

Printed in the UK by the Department for Education on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

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Foreword from the Secretary of State for Education

Every child, wherever they live, wherever they come from, deserves an education that sets them up for success. No child should be written off – potential in this country is everywhere, but opportunity is not.

More than anyone, I know the impact that the right opportunity or the right teacher can have – mine changed the entire course of my life by teaching me engineering and technical drawing when girls couldn't learn these subjects at my school.



But a child starting school today at the age of five will step into adulthood facing a labour market that is almost unrecognisable.

Tomorrow's workers who will deliver the green skills, the life sciences advances, or the advanced manufacturing that will drive our prosperity will need STEM skills, as well as literacy. And if you look around the world – the approach is clear – students need to keep their options open, not narrow them down.

There is strength in breadth as well as depth.

So, the question before us is simple. We owe it to our children to ensure that they are prepared to succeed. Do we do that with honesty and determination, or do we let these era-defining changes pass us by and hope we can keep everything the same?

No business would look at this challenge and choose to stand still. Neither will we.

Because if we are bold and determined about the aspirations we have for our children, we can change lives.

Since 2010, our education reforms have led to over 88% of schools being good or outstanding, up from just 68% when we came into office. They have been underpinned by record investment also: school funding per pupil in 2024-25 will be the highest ever by any government in real terms.

The results speak for themselves: we have driven up standards in schools, and boosted the quality of teaching. Our 9 and 10 year-olds are now the best in the West at reading, ranking 4th out of 43 countries that assessed children of the same age, ahead of other major developed economies like France, Germany and Spain. 15 year-olds' maths performance in England has improved since 2015 and all of reading, maths and science are significantly higher than the OECD average.

We have also reformed technical education – creating new Higher Technical Qualifications, new Institutes of Technology, and making changes to champion new high-quality apprenticeships which have changed attitudes – with 40% of UCAS applicants now interested in taking them up. This has been accompanied by investment in skills training, and the creation of new high-quality technical routes in the form of T levels.

But the truth is that we still haven't reached a position where for most schools, students, and employers there is genuine parity of esteem between technical and academic education. Well documented problems continue to persist, as they have done for decades over successive governments – red and blue.

Our 16-19 year-olds spend less time in classrooms than their international peers, and study a narrower set of subjects.

To meet future challenges something needs to change, and we want to build on the success of our reforms and use the principles that drove them to change 16-19 education.

Those reforms worked precisely because we were willing to take the long-term decisions, and to act even if change might take a decade to come to full fruition.

The same is true today, because if we make the right decisions, our children will have a brighter future ahead of them.

So, we will create a new qualification that places equal value on technical and academic knowledge and skills by harnessing the best parts of both A levels and T levels. Under this qualification, known as the Advanced British Standard, students will be able to take a mix of technical and academic subjects, giving them a greater degree of flexibility over their future career options.

The new qualification will also give students the freedom to study a wider breadth of subjects, rather than being forced to specialise at 16. For the first time, every student will study some form of maths and English up to the age of 18. Crucially, we are also increasing the time that students spend in the classroom, bringing us into line with our international competitors. Not only will this create more time to study more subjects, but it will disproportionately benefit the students who need the most support, by increasing the time they spend with their teachers.

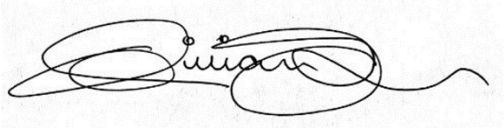
Our plan represents real, meaningful reform and won't be delivered overnight. It will require careful consultation with the parents, pupils, higher education (HE), employers and the teaching profession, as well as new investment.

But there are some things we can start straight away, with three immediate steps to support the people and places that will help to bring this plan to reality. We are investing over £600 million to provide a boost to teachers in further education (FE) colleges and schools, strengthen the support available to those who need to resit GCSE maths or

English and spread teaching excellence throughout our schools and colleges, especially in maths.

I look forward to working constructively with teachers, unions, academia, business and others to deliver this agenda in the most effective way possible. It is important that we get it right because the prize on offer is too great to miss out on; a country where every young person is equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to reach their potential and live a happy and fulfilling life.

I am determined that we do not let this opportunity pass.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Keegan', with a stylized, cursive script. The signature is set against a light grey, textured background.

Gillian Keegan

Secretary of State for Education

Executive summary

This Government's education reforms are one of its proudest achievements. Since 2010, we have been motivated by a simple concept: we should have the highest possible aspirations for every individual, in every school, and in every college. Our reforms, made possible by hardworking teachers, lecturers and leaders, have seen results.

- Our 9 and 10 year-olds are the best readers in the Western world, ranking 4th out of 43 countries that assessed children at the same age¹. Our fifteen year-olds have climbed 10 places in the international league tables in reading and maths².
- 88% of schools and colleges are rated good or outstanding^{3,4}, and we have created over 700 free schools.
- In the eight years before the pandemic, we narrowed the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers by 13% in primary schools and 9% in secondary schools⁵.
- We have transformed the way we train our school teachers and leaders at every stage in their career, putting evidence at the heart. We will have provided 500,000 training and development opportunities by the end of 2024.
- We established the independent Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in 2011, providing us with a world-leading evidence base of 'what works'. The EEF has pioneered globally the use of randomised controlled trials in education, conducting over 200 trials to date and reaching over 1.8 million young people⁶.
- We have developed new, high-quality and employer-driven Apprenticeship Standards, with 680 standards currently available⁷, including 167 degree-level apprenticeships.
- We have created over 5.5 million apprenticeships since 2010⁸, 21 new Institutes of Technology⁹ and 18 new T levels.

We have achieved this progress by drawing on four simple principles: policy and practice must be based on the best available evidence; the most important factor that boosts attainment is quality of teachers and teaching; knowledge builds understanding and

¹ [PIRLS 2021: national report for England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101421/pirls-2021-national-report-for-england.pdf)

² [PISA 2018 England national report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101421/pisa-2018-england-national-report.pdf)

³ [Main findings: State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 December 2022 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/main-findings-state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2022)

⁴ [Main findings: Further education and skills inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/main-findings-further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2022)

⁵ [Statistics: key stage 2 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-2) & [Statistics: GCSEs \(key stage 4\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gcse-key-stage-4)

⁶ [EEF-Annual-Report-2022.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](https://www.eef.org.uk/annual-report-2022)

⁷ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/>

⁸ [Apprenticeships and traineeships, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/apprenticeships-and-traineeships)

⁹ 19 already open to learners, with two more Institutes of Technology, covering Cheshire and Staffordshire, opening in September 2024

enables children to hone their skills; and a broad, balanced education is a good education. These principles run through each fibre of our reforms.

In 16-19, these principles have led us to improve quality, ensuring each technical and academic qualification prepares young people for adult life. We have increased the rigour of A levels and designed prestigious T levels, pushing for our qualifications to be knowledge-rich and rooted in the technical skills that employers need. We have followed the evidence, including evidence from employers and universities about the content students need to cover to support progression.

But the traditional parallel structure of A levels and technical qualifications has constraints. It limits the breadth of young people's education and prevents full parity across technical and academic routes. For our 16-19 year-olds, removing these constraints will let us go further still in applying the four, simple principles that have served us so well elsewhere: evidence, high-quality teaching, knowledge-rich approaches, and a broad and balanced curriculum. This is particularly key as changes in technology continue to transform our economy and society in ways we cannot always predict: we must ensure that our education system is set up to support the developments of the next decade and beyond.

There are immediate challenges facing the system which demand attention. Though we have seen considerable recovery of lost education, the Covid-19 pandemic slowed progress with attainment and left challenges in its wake. Schools and colleges are doing everything they can to support young people's achievement, including support for growing mental health needs, absence rates and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) caseloads. It is tempting to focus solely on these immediate challenges: we know that the system needs support now, and we are providing it. But we also know there are further steps necessary to unleash the next surge in attainment and aspiration, and it is not right to settle for less than the best for our young people.

So we believe that the time has come to build on our reforms so far and take these next steps, by addressing the structure of our post-16 system:

- We still have academic and technical paths that were designed in silos, and do not offer parity of esteem. T levels and our simplification of technical qualifications are a big step forward in standards, but technical routes are still less well-understood than traditional academic pathways.
- Our 16-19 year-olds have far fewer hours of teaching than those in other countries, which particularly hurts the most disadvantaged students who have fewer resources for independent study.
- Too many students leave education and training without a good pass in English and maths GCSE (or an equivalent), leaving them without the basic skills needed to succeed in life.

- Our 16-19 year-olds study a much narrower range of subjects than their international counterparts – which will not prepare them as well for a world that demands breadth and agility.

These final years of education shape aspiration and achievement for the rest of a young person's educational life. Being able to see clear, high-quality post-16 options are a motivating force for pre-16 education too.

We are therefore setting out ambitious proposals to introduce the Advanced British Standard for 16-19 year-olds, a new Baccalaureate-style qualification that takes the best of A levels and T levels and brings them together into a single qualification. It will:

- Remove the artificial separation between technical and academic qualifications, and create a single, unified structure for all 16-19 year-olds. It will replace all other non-apprenticeship qualifications at this level for this age group, building on the rigour of both A levels and T levels: the depth and knowledge-rich content of A levels; and the high-quality, employer-led occupational standards of T levels.
- Increase the number of taught hours by an extra 15% for most 16-19 students, against the current average funded time, moving us closer to international norms and helping more children to succeed.
- Ensure every young person studies some form of English and maths to age 18, raising the floor of attainment and bringing us into line with international peers.
- Increase the number of subjects that students take, to provide greater breadth. Students will choose a combination of bigger and smaller subjects – called majors and minors – from both technical and academic options, and will typically study a minimum of five subjects.

This is a long term reform: it will take a decade to deliver in full. It will need careful development, in partnership with students, teachers, leaders, schools, colleges, universities and employers, as well as the public. We will consult extensively, and in detail, over the coming months on the design of the new qualification, informing a White Paper next year setting out our plan for delivery.

This reform will also need to be properly resourced, including extra funding for the additional taught hours the Advanced British Standard will involve. We will start investing in our vision now. Our immediate priorities are to: recruit and retain teachers in shortage subjects; ensure better attainment in maths and English; and invest in resources for teachers and pupils. In doing so, our funding will support disadvantaged pupils most of all.

We will therefore invest over £600 million across the next two years, to:

1. **Improve the recruitment and retention of teachers of key shortage subjects.** We will invest c.£100 million each year, doubling the rates of the Levelling Up

Premium and expanding it to cover all further education (FE) colleges. All teachers who are in the first five years of their career, teaching shortage subjects and working in disadvantaged schools and all FE colleges, will be paid up to £6,000 per year tax-free.

2. **Support those students who do not pass maths and English GCSE at 16 to gain these fundamentals**, with an additional c.£150 million per year. This will increase investment for those students studying at Level 2 or below on their 16-19 course and who are retaking English and maths GCSE, as well as for apprentices who have not gained their Level 2 qualification. This will raise the floor of attainment now, particularly benefiting FE colleges, who we know play a vital role in helping close the attainment gap by 19.
3. **Improve the quality of maths teaching and the wider evidence base for closing 16-19 attainment gaps**. We will invest an additional £40 million in the EEF, to create and share high-quality evidence of what works in 16-19, particularly focused on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. We will also invest c.£60 million over two years to improve maths education, including through: expanding teaching for mastery approaches across the country, using our Maths Hubs; and increasing access to Core Maths through provider incentives and an expanded digital tuition platform.

This early investment will pave the way for this pivotal change to our system and is a downpayment on our future commitment.

Education is the closest thing we have to a silver bullet. It is the best economic policy, the best social policy, and the best moral policy. Increasing educational attainment boosts wages, increases life chances, and gives young people the best chance to succeed in life. This new approach to post-16 is the right thing to do for young people today, and the right thing to do for the country in the long term.

In summary, the Advanced British Standard means that 16-19 year olds will:

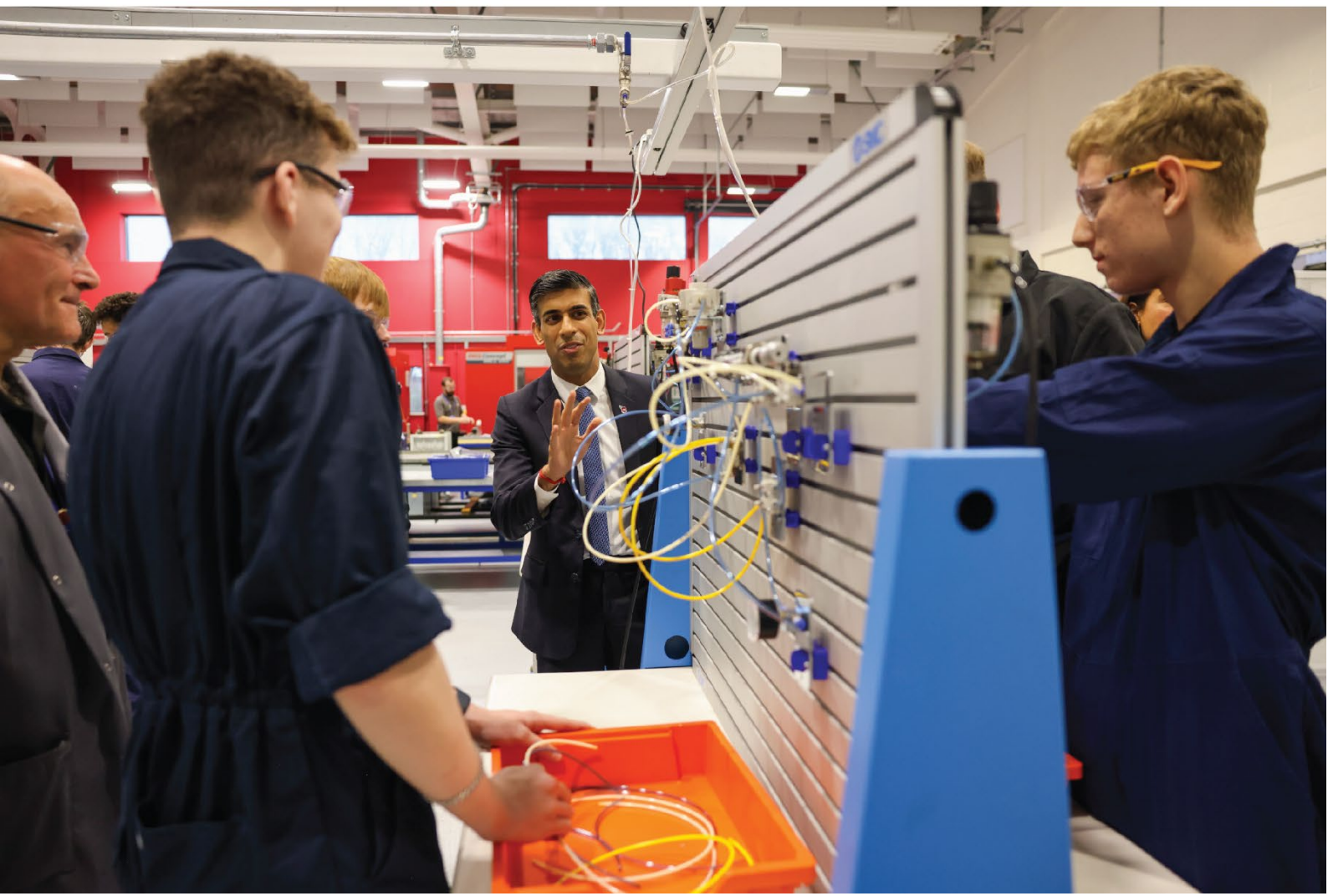
Receive **more teaching hours**, closing the gap with international counterparts.

Study **a broader mix of subjects**, whilst maintaining the depth needed for progression to further study and employment.

Study **maths and English** to age 18, improving core skills and employability.

Be able to **follow an academic, technical or mixed pathway**, with the same prestige.

Have a **simpler choice** at 16, rather than the current complicated landscape.



Our educational vision and track record

Over the last decade, we have transformed educational attainment in schools by rolling out knowledge-based frameworks and investing in what works. We have also rebuilt academic and technical qualifications post-16, pushing to transform quality within two parallel structures. We now need to go further. We need to be more ambitious in how we set up our 16-19 system to be world-leading, so that every child, regardless of background, leaves education with the knowledge and skills to thrive in a world-leading economy.

What education needs to deliver

We are unapologetic about our ambitions to continue to transform the education system over the long-term. We need our schools and colleges to:

Level up opportunity for individuals so that every child has a chance to succeed.

Wherever they grow up, and whether they want to pursue an academic or technical path, everyone should have the opportunity to study the ‘best of what has been thought, said and done’, expanding their horizons through a broad and balanced education, valuable for its own sake. We want to make sure that everyone, regardless of challenges they may face or the shape of their ambitions, receives an education that helps them to thrive. The best way to achieve this is through a compulsory education which includes both the core knowledge that is the birthright of every child, and the specific knowledge and technical skills needed to succeed on their chosen path.

Support a competitive, dynamic economy. This means building a talent pipeline based on the knowledge and technical skills that individuals and employers need, now and in the future. Even when societies and economies change, some education fundamentals remain a strong predictor of success: the ability to understand and work with numbers, to absorb information well, and to communicate powerfully. We must also ensure that our workforce is internationally competitive. We want a labour market that is the envy of the world in its skillset and productivity, and which can drive global innovation.

How far we have come

We have made huge strides in the last decade in driving up standards, insisting on a rigorous, knowledge-rich education – and we are seeing the results, which are globally significant. Our 9 and 10 year-olds are now the best in the Western world at reading, ranking 4th out of 43 countries that assessed children of the same age¹⁰. 15-year-olds’

¹⁰ [PIRLS 2021: national report for England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/84444/pirls-2021-national-report-for-england.pdf)

maths performance in England has improved since 2015 and scores in all of reading, maths and science are significantly higher than the OECD average¹¹.

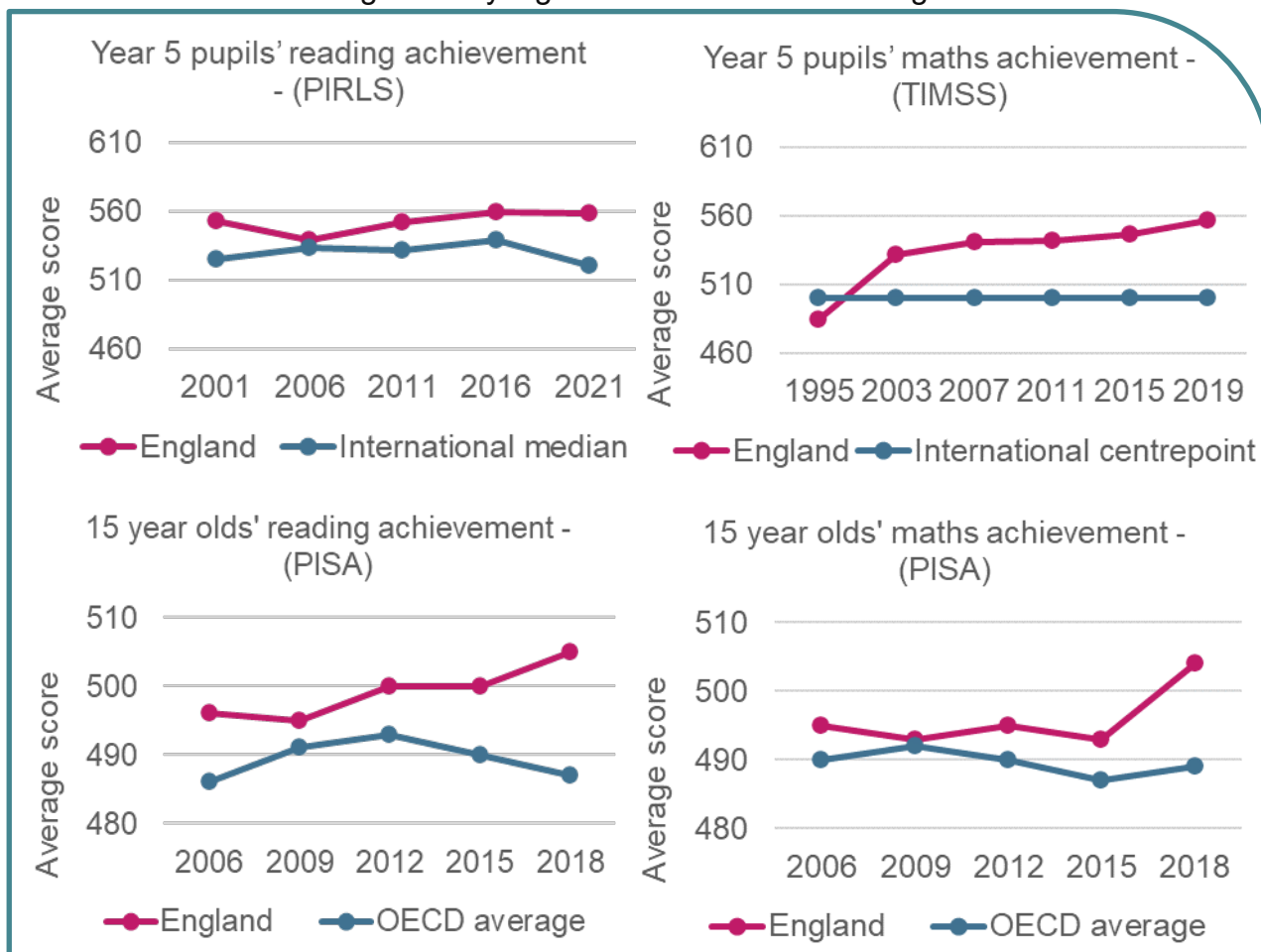


Figure 1: Trends in England's English and maths performance in international assessments¹²

This progress has been informed by four simple, fundamental principles:

1. Policy and practice must be based on the **best available evidence** of what works in the UK and around the world.
2. The most important factor in determining how well children do is the **quality of teachers and teaching**. Great leaders build great teachers.
3. **It is knowledge that builds understanding** and enables children to fine tune their skills, not the other way round.
4. **A broad education is a good education**: it is the basis for a child's cultural inheritance and too narrow an education can narrow a child's life chances.

¹¹ [PISA 2018 England national report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672112/pisa-2018-england-national-report.pdf)

¹² [PIRLS 2021: national report for England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672112/pirls-2021-national-report-for-england.pdf); [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2019: England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672112/trends-in-international-mathematics-and-science-study-2019-england.pdf) – 1995 score was an average of year 4 and year 5 pupils; [PISA 2018: national report for England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672112/pisa-2018-england-national-report.pdf); earliest available data used

Our success to date means we have

Levelled up school standards, by:

- transforming what children learn, rooted in a commitment to a knowledge-rich education;
- focusing on fundamental English and maths at an early age, using evidence-based teaching approaches like phonics for reading and mastery for maths;
- placing great teachers at the heart, with a golden thread of evidence-based training to support them; and
- investing in additional support for those who need it, insisting on high ambitions for all children, regardless of the barriers they may face.

Rebuilt technical education and supported better progression, by:

- starting to simplify an overly-complex technical landscape, ensuring courses offer excellent technical options to students;
- working with employers to raise standards and make sure qualifications, like T levels, Higher Technical Qualifications and apprenticeships, deliver the skills that employers need; and
- protecting and building on our world-class higher education system, while bearing down on any courses that produce poor outcomes for students

Invested in good leadership, and support for teachers, by:

- continuing to support the growth of high performing Multi Academy Trusts and free schools, which bring strong leadership to the system;
- making sure the education system is properly funded and teachers' work rewarded; and
- continuing to address the challenges teachers face, including support with workload and wellbeing.

We have levelled up school standards

We have transformed what children learn, rooted in the commitment that every child should benefit from a broad, ambitious, knowledge-rich curriculum. We have:

- Created the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), in 2010, to encourage schools to offer a broad set of GCSE subjects at 16 and ensure everyone has a firm grip on the essential knowledge that keeps young people's options open for future study and careers (English, maths, sciences, geography or history and a language). Almost 40% of pupils are now taking the EBacc subjects, up from just over 20% in 2010¹³ - and our ambition is for this to rise to 90%.

¹³ [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

- Introduced a new National Curriculum in 2014 to raise expectations of what all children should be taught, embedding knowledge at the core.
- Reformed GCSEs and A levels to increase rigour in both what children learn and how it is assessed.
- Created Oak National Academy in 2020, to support teachers to access high-quality resources and pedagogy that help delivery of our knowledge-rich curriculum.

While encouraging breadth, we have also supported children, from a young age, to develop the fundamental literacy and numeracy that unlocks the rest of their education careers. We have:

- Introduced the Phonics Screening Check, in 2012, to make sure every primary school child is being taught to read in the most effective way possible. Since then, the percentage of year 1 pupils meeting the expected standard has risen from 58% to 82%, with 91% achieving this standard by year 2 in 2019¹⁴. Whilst this has fallen to 75% for year 1 pupils and 87% for year 2 pupils in 2022 after the pandemic, it still represents a substantial improvement since 2012.
- Introduced the multiplication tables check in 2017, helping schools to determine whether year 4 pupils can recall their times tables fluently, which is essential for future success in maths. In June 2022, the average score was 20 correct answers out of 25¹⁵.
- Set up our dedicated English and maths hubs, supporting schools to teach literacy and numeracy excellently, continuing our emphasis on mathematics mastery and systematic synthetic phonics. The work of these hubs is showing results: schools supported intensively by our English hubs outperformed other schools by around 7 percentage points, when comparing the change in Phonics Screening Checks results between pre-pandemic and 2022¹⁶.

We have ensured great teachers are at the heart of our reforms, given this is the single most important in-school factor in improving outcomes for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds¹⁷. We have:

- Transformed the way we train and support our teachers and leaders. Every school teacher and leader now has access to a golden thread of high-quality, evidence-based training and professional development at every stage in their career.

¹⁴ [Key stage 1 and phonics screening check attainment, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

¹⁵ [Multiplication tables check attainment, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

¹⁶ [Early analysis of English Hubs phonics attainment: 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) showing change in Phonics Screening Check results from pre-pandemic to 2022.

¹⁷ J. Hattie. Visible Learning. 2009.

- Provided 500,000 teacher training and development opportunities to be delivered by the end of 2024. This includes £184 million for a refreshed set of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), based on the best available research and evidence. Almost 65,000 teachers participated in a reformed NPQ in the last two academic years¹⁸.
- Published an ambitious teacher recruitment and retention strategy in early 2019, working with the profession to set out key areas of focus to support the teaching profession. Though ensuring we have sufficient teachers remains a challenge given increasing pupil numbers, we now have 468,000 FTE teachers in England, 27,000 (6%) more than in 2010¹⁹. We need to keep doing more – so we will keep working to improve teacher recruitment and retention, and will publish a refreshed 5 year follow up strategy later this year.

We have invested significantly in additional support for those who need it, and have high ambitions for all children and young people. We have:

- Published, early this year, our ambitious SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, setting out our plan to improve outcomes for children with SEND and bolster parents' confidence in the system.
- Increased high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND to £10.5 billion in the next financial year - a 60% increase on 2019-20 allocations.
- Consulted earlier this year on our planned reform of children's social care, to ensure some of the most vulnerable children in our society are protected at home and supported to thrive in education.
- Introduced the pupil premium, which this year alone is sending almost £3 billion direct to schools to support the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.
- Created the EEF in 2011 as our independent what works centre for education, ensuring schools understand the best-evidenced approaches to support disadvantaged pupils. 7 in 10 senior leaders in schools use the EEF's teaching and learning toolkit to support pupil premium spending and 9 in 10 schools use EEF resources to support decision making and delivery^{20,21}.

¹⁸ [Teacher and Leader development: ECF and NPQs, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#) & [Teacher and Leader development: ECF and NPQs, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ [School workforce in England, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁰ Sutton Trust - [School Funding and Pupil Premium 2023](#)

²¹ DfE - [School and college panel: March 2022 wave](#), p.54

What do we mean by knowledge-rich, and why is this important?

Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools

Sometimes discussions of education – particularly of its future – suggest that knowledge is becoming less important, promoting the teaching of generic skills. They may suggest that knowledge can be provided by the internet or AI. Knowledge-rich approaches to education are based on evidence showing that:

- **It is very difficult to teach generic, transferrable skills, and most are based on key knowledge.** For example, it is possible to learn scientific methods in the abstract, but a successful scientist has to know what an ‘anomalous’ result in their field looks like, which relies on deep knowledge.
- **Working memory is limited, and it is hard to reason in a sophisticated way with shallow information.** Looking several things up and then trying to combine and operate with them is far harder than using information that is securely known. Deep thinking requires knowledge and understanding.
- **Operating successfully in the world depends on having the knowledge that most people assume others will have.** For example, authors of most books for adults will assume readers will know that Paris is the capital of France, and that a ‘schooner’ is a type of ship. Studies show that knowledge-rich approaches are particularly important for closing disadvantage gaps, as disadvantaged children are less likely to acquire all this knowledge unless explicitly taught it.
- **Knowledge is ‘sticky’ and often sequential.** It is easier to learn things that ‘attach’ to knowledge you already have. Giving every young person a strong, comprehensive and broad framework of knowledge helps them learn more, and make sense of future facts and ideas they encounter.
- **Having a comprehensive framework to ‘attach’ new knowledge to is the best preparation for an agile and changing world** – rather than teaching an up-to-the-minute skill which will become outdated. For example, the best programmers are not those who learnt a particular programming language at school, but those with secure core mathematical skills which can be deployed onto new programming languages as they develop.

A knowledge-rich curriculum also unlocks skills of problem solving, reasoning and critical thinking, doing so on a foundation of knowledge rather than in isolation. Having prior knowledge helps young people solve problems by freeing up space in working memory (if you know $5 + 5 = 10$, multiplications that build on this become easier). Problem solutions and complex ideas also reside in memory, acting as an ‘easy access’ supply of solutions to help accelerate thinking.

Knowledge-rich curricula pay careful attention to what is taught, but also to *how*: in a careful and coherent sequence, with secure links made within and across subject disciplines to create the framework for future understanding and learning.

We have rebuilt technical education, with clearer progression into further study

We have started to simplify an overly-complex technical landscape, ensuring courses offer excellent technical options to students. We have:

- Introduced 18 T levels for 16-19 year-olds: high-quality, employer-based technical qualifications - based on the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE's) rigorous approach to technical routes to employment. They have shown how to deliver stretching, classroom-based technical education that prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship or higher technical study.
- Started streamlining the post-16 qualifications landscape, removing qualifications with low take up, that overlap with higher quality qualifications or that are not supporting young people's progression. This is vital to ensuring parents, young people and employers can understand our system and the courses on offer. As of August 2022, we had removed 5,500 qualifications with low or no enrolments²², and we have also published a list of qualifications that overlap with waves 1 and 2 T levels and therefore will have 16-19 funding removed in August 2024²³.
- Built strong progression pathways for technical education post-18. We have created new high-quality Higher Technical Qualifications to sit alongside apprenticeships and degrees; and started transforming the post-18 student finance system by putting in place plans for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, which will allow people to develop new skills and gain new qualifications at a time that is right for them.

We have worked with employers to raise standards and make sure qualifications, like apprenticeships, deliver the skills that employers need. We have:

- Reformed apprenticeships to increase standards, making sure that apprentices receive high-quality training in the occupational skills needed for their job. We created IfATE and introduced employer-led standards to improve what apprentices learn, mandating a minimum of 20% off-the-job training and that apprenticeships must last a minimum of 12 months. This means that apprentices receive high-quality training over a sufficient time period to master their skills. Apprenticeships now give individuals access to fantastic careers from bricklaying to nursing, or even training to be a space systems engineer. We are also putting apprenticeships on the UCAS system, alongside university courses.
- Introduced the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 to create long term sustainable funding for apprenticeships, and incentivise employers both to provide high-quality

²² [Guide to the post-16 qualifications landscape at level 3 and below for 2025 and beyond \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

²³ [Qualifications that overlap with T Levels - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

apprenticeship training for their own staff, and to invest in the design apprenticeships for the benefit of the system as a whole.

- Created over 5.5 million apprenticeships since 2010, with 680 new, higher quality and employer-driven apprenticeship standards currently available, including 167 degree-level standards²⁴. Apprenticeships offer positive wage returns and good job outcomes for the individual. In our 2021 Apprenticeships Evaluation (Learners) survey, 96% of those surveyed remained in employment or education after completing their apprenticeship²⁵.

We are protecting and building on our world-class higher education system, while bearing down on any courses that produce poor outcomes for students. We have:

- Created the Office for Students to improve outcomes in higher education and introduced new quality measures to ensure universities are supporting students to stay in and progress on from higher education. The Office for Students is working with universities to boost access and participation and to ensure they are delivering for the most disadvantaged students.
- Boosted university participation for the most disadvantaged: on Results Day 2023, an English 18 year-old from a disadvantaged background was 73% more likely to go to university than at the same point in 2010²⁶.

We have invested in good leadership, and support for teachers

We have built the institutions and infrastructure, right across the country, that can best support teachers to deliver. We have:

- Encouraged innovation and high standards in our schools through our academies and free schools programmes: more than 7 out of 10 sponsored academies which were found to be underperforming as a Local Authority (LA) maintained school in their previous inspection now have a good or outstanding Ofsted rating²⁷.
- Improved the standard of both our schools and colleges. The proportion of all schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted increased by 20 percentage points,

²⁴ [Home / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#)

²⁵ [Apprenticeships evaluation 2021: Learners research report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁶ [Results day 2023: Everything you need to know about A level, AS level and T Level results day - The Education Hub](#)

²⁷ DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See Sponsored Academy Ofsted sheet in 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

from 68% in 2010 to 88% in 2022²⁸. In 2022, 88% of our further education colleges were also rated good or outstanding, up from 77% in 2015^{29,30}.

- Established 20 Institutes of Technology (IoTs), business-led providers offering higher level technical education to help close skills gaps in key science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas. IOTs are backed by £300 million and are delivering a radical transformation to technical training from 90 locations across the country.

We have made sure that the education system is fairly funded and teachers' work rewarded. We have:

- Overhauled the school funding system, replacing a system that was unfair, opaque and out of date with one that ensures schools are funded fairly, based on actual need.
- Committed to fund schools with nearly £60 billion in 2024-25, the highest levels ever in real terms per pupil³¹. Colleges, too, are benefitting from an additional £1.6 billion in 2024-25 to support 16-19 year-olds' education in England, compared to 2021-22.
- Accepted the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendations for 2023/24 teacher pay in full, meaning that teachers and leaders in maintained schools will receive a pay increase of 6.5%, the highest pay award in three decades. We will be providing an additional £525 million in 2023-24, and £900 million in 2024-25 - to support schools in implementing this pay award.
- Delivered on the 2019 manifesto commitment to raise the starting salary for school teachers to a minimum of £30,000. This is a competitive salary and will help us continue to build on the record numbers of teachers in our schools.
- Supported outstanding college teaching through significant new investment, including £185 million in 2023-24 and £285 million in 2024-25 to help colleges and other post-16 providers with key priorities including tackling recruitment and retention issues in high-value technical, vocational and academic provision.

We will continue to address the challenges teachers face, including support with workload and wellbeing. We have:

- Seen a five hour a week reduction in school teacher working hours³², alongside our first set of workload reforms and joint action with the sector. We have now set

²⁸ [Main findings: State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 December 2022 - GOV.UK](#)

²⁹ [Main findings: Further education and skills inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-inspection-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2016/further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2016> - Data before 2015 are not comparable to previous years due to changes in methodology.

³¹ Annual report on education spending in England 2022 (ifs.org.uk)

³² [Teacher workload survey 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

an ambition to reduce working hours by a further five hours a week within three years³³, so that teachers are supported to have positive wellbeing, with manageable workload a core part of this.

- Worked with the profession and wider experts to create a wellbeing charter (to which over 2,900 schools have already signed up) and a school workload reduction toolkit.
- Made funding available to support school leaders to access mental health and wellbeing support until March 2024, and committed to expand this support scheme until the end of March 2027.

³³ [New taskforce to tackle teacher workload - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The next stage of reforms

Our focus in 16-19 education to date has been the right one: improving quality, so that each technical and academic qualification prepares young people for adult life. We have taken great strides here, but the traditional parallel structure of A Levels and technical qualifications has constraints: it limits the breadth of young people's education and prevents full parity across technical and academic routes.

We know that there are immediate challenges facing the system which demand attention, from poor attendance, to teacher workload and recruitment, to the growing mental health challenges faced by children. Our focus on these issues will not waver, but neither can we let short-term challenges prevent us from taking bold steps that are necessary to unleash the next surge in attainment and aspiration. For our 16-19 year-olds, removing the constraints imposed by the current structure and set-up of our system will let us go further still in applying the four, simple principles that have served us so well elsewhere: evidence, high-quality teaching, knowledge-rich approaches, and a broad and balanced curriculum.

Through increasing the rigour of A levels and designing high-quality, occupation-specific T levels, we have pushed for our qualifications to be knowledge-rich and rooted in the technical skills employers need. This work has also followed the evidence, including evidence from employers and universities about the content needed in individual qualifications to support progression. But the structures of our system currently limit our ambitions on breadth, and even on teaching quality. Though post-16 teachers in schools have been able to benefit from many of our reforms, there has been less consistent focus on our colleges. In addition, the 16-19 phase has less teaching time than in other phases of education. Only by pushing ourselves to be as ambitious as possible will ensure our education system remains truly world-leading and ensure young people leave education with the breadth of knowledge and technical skills necessary to thrive in a fast-moving, modern economy.

As we aspire to be at the forefront of education globally, we should also look to what our international peers deliver. Each country's system is rightly tailored to their economic and social context, but we are an outlier in some key features of our 16-19 education offer. And the English system has a firm divide between technical and academic study that has contributed to an unacceptable gap in esteem. That means there are four features of our 16-19 system that we want to change for the better, to unleash the potential of all our young people.

There are four features of our 16-19 system we want to change

- 1. We will deliver genuine parity of esteem between technical and academic routes.** We have not yet resolved the unequal status that has dogged technical education. Despite recent streamlining, technical pathways are still too complex, with a confusing and duplicative landscape of thousands of available qualifications and teachers that receive lower pay and recognition than academic routes. Most fundamentally, the divide between technical and academic study perpetuates an unacceptable gap in esteem.
- 2. We will increase quality teaching time.** Currently we have high expectations of independent study and offer students far fewer hours with a teacher than in many other countries. Young people in England spend the equivalent of around 10 fewer hours per week being taught than in, for example, France or many US states^[see footnotes 41,42]. Yet we know that disadvantaged students are less likely to have access to the space and equipment they need for independent study, and stand to benefit the most from a great teacher^[see footnote 43]. We need to do more to increase students' access to and time with high-quality teachers.
- 3. We will embed a core of essential knowledge.** We do not guide all students to focus on essential maths and English, and nor have we worked to drive evidence-based approaches to teaching in 16-19 as clearly as we have done earlier in the system. As a result, too many students – particularly the most disadvantaged – leave education without a clear grasp of the basic skills needed to fulfil their potential. Numeracy and literacy both have strong links to wage returns^[see footnote 54], but more fundamentally both are integral to connected, engaged, fulfilling lives – linked to everything from the ease of developing future interests to ability to identify misinformation.
- 4. We will ensure everyone studies a greater breadth of subjects.** We have not prioritised as broad and balanced a curriculum for 16-19 year-olds as we have pre-16, and are an outlier in not encouraging as much breadth of study as other countries. The average A level student studies around three subjects, whereas across the OECD, students typically study around seven subjects^[see footnote 56]. This holds back students' life chances as well as their education: in a world where technology and the economy move at pace we know that breadth of knowledge can afford students greater flexibility in the labour market.

If we deliver on these aims, we will disproportionately benefit the most disadvantaged. A significant number of 16-19 year-olds are leaving compulsory education without the basic numeracy and literacy to succeed, or high-quality qualifications to support career progression^[see footnote 48]. Disadvantaged students are over-represented in this cohort. Our education system must deliver for all.

Genuine parity between technical and academic

For a long time, governments have claimed technical education is equal to academic, but in practice it is not. It is very hard for it to be equal if it is separate, and even harder if it is over-complicated and poorly understood. We have started to address this already. Since 2010 we have worked with employers to reinvigorate the quality of technical education and training in this country: we have introduced 18 T levels, our high-quality, employer-based qualifications, and removed 5,500 qualifications due to low or no enrolments. We have significantly improved the quality of apprenticeships and are putting them on the UCAS system, alongside university courses. We need to be more ambitious still: we must **end the artificial separation between technical and academic routes, delivering genuine parity**. Our technical qualifications should give young people prestigious qualifications, valued by employers, that help them get great jobs, and the value we attach to technical knowledge and skills should match their value to the economy.

Some 16 year-olds have clear ambitions for their careers. If they want to follow a technical pathway, we have created high-quality, employer-led qualifications through T levels. If they want to apply for a particular course at university, they will be clear on which A level subjects they need to pick. Not everyone is ready, however, to decide their future career path at a young age; and the economy of the future will demand flexibility. For those who are undecided, or want to keep options open, our system presents a false choice: technical, academic or bolt-on mixed routes which sit uneasily in our current system. On the technical side in particular, there is a dizzying array of options.

There were 12,500 qualifications at level 3 and below in May 2020, and we have removed over 5,000. This still leaves a vast number and a large variation in quality. As of September 2023, there were around 7,300 qualifications, at level 3 and below, approved for funding through 16-19 year old study programmes. This is confusing for employers and hard for students to navigate, making it difficult to assess a qualification's quality. Our reforms to the qualifications landscape to date have significantly improved the picture, but we can go much further. We will ensure that all students can choose effectively from high-quality options: it is unfair to allow low quality courses that prevent progression to persist.

This lack of clarity has perpetuated a lack of parity across academic and technical routes. Students should be able to choose from a clear, simple menu of qualifications.

Increased quality teaching time

Between the ages of 16 and 19 our young people benefit from less time with a teacher than their peers in many other countries. On average, we fund 16-19 providers for about 640 hours of structured time per year (1,280 hours over two years, which equates roughly to 17 hours per week). This means our students get approximately a third less teaching time than some other countries. In Italy and all Canadian provinces which

specify minimum hours, students get over 1,700 hours over two years^{34,35}. In France and many US states, students get over 2,000 teaching hours over two years^{36,37}. Students in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland and Sweden also all receive more hours than those in England. **We need to increase students' access to and time with great teachers, which is likely to have particular benefit for disadvantaged students.**

A levels are predicated on a significant amount of independent study time. Typically, school or college guidance is that students taking these academic subjects should spend the same amount of time studying independently as they are taught (so 17 hours per week, on top of the 17 taught hours, for a student taking three A levels). For technical qualifications, it varies. Independent study time in T levels, for example, includes a focus on developing and practicing skills, and expected work-place behaviours. Well-designed and used, independent study time is crucial for complementing and compounding knowledge and technical skills that students pick up in the classroom. It also supports progression for those going to university, helping prepare them for a different mode of study.

However, surveys in England suggest that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have a quiet working space, access to a computer or laptop or a stable internet connection. All of this may affect their ability to focus on independent study, and in turn increase the gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils³⁸.

We also know a great teacher can make the single biggest difference to a child's education, and that this is particularly true for disadvantaged students³⁹. One study found that having a teacher at the 75th rather than the 25th percentile of effectiveness adds almost half of a GCSE point per subject for any given student⁴⁰. These benefits last: year after year, the most effective teachers see the pupils in their classes make faster-than-average progress, and these pupils are likely to go on to enjoy higher lifetime earnings⁴¹. More time in lessons in itself is not a golden ticket, but if we rebalance towards more time with a great teacher, focused on the areas that can make the biggest difference – including English and maths - we will maximise the power of our great teachers to drive up outcomes. And the benefit of this will be even greater for disadvantaged students.

³⁴ [Teaching and learning in general upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁵ [Table C.6.1 Intended instruction time in public institutions, ages 6 through 17, by age, OECD, Canada, provinces and territories, 2020/2021 \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

³⁶ [Teaching and learning in general upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#) & [Teaching and learning in vocational upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁷ [Table 1.1. Minimum number of instructional days and hours in the school year, minimum number of hours per school day, and school start/finish dates, by state: 2020 \(ed.gov\)](#)

³⁸ [Homework | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](#)

³⁹ [1. High-quality teaching | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](#)

⁴⁰ Slater, Davies and Burgess (2009) - [ippr paper 27feb 2009 \(bristol.ac.uk\)](#)

⁴¹ Farquharson, McNally and Tahir (2022) - [Education Inequalities \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)

A strong core of essential knowledge

We should guide young people to develop the core numeracy and literacy (along with detailed knowledge) that they will need in their work and life. On this we have already made some progress. Maths is now the most popular A level subject, and we have made it a condition of funding that all students on study programmes need to spend dedicated time on English and maths if they have not achieved good passes at GCSE⁴². We need to go further, however, to prioritise **a strong, consistent core of knowledge that we know all individuals need to succeed in work and life, including maths and English**. We have already set out our ambition to introduce maths to 18 for all pupils in England, supported by the work of our Expert Advisory Group - but the truth is that it is language as well as maths that are both key.

Almost no other high-performing country gives students 100% flexibility in subject choice and we are an outlier, in particular, in not requiring maths and the native language through to 18. It is the norm in the majority of countries – including France, Japan, Germany and the USA – for young people to study maths and their native language during their upper secondary education. Our international counterparts are giving young people a consistent structure and grounding to help them succeed. The total flexibility we give our students, combined with the limited number of subjects we allow space for, often forces a false choice between following your passions or developing core knowledge. Although maths is the most popular A Level subject, only 15% of the cohort achieved level 3 maths by age 19.

While we rightly require repetition of English and maths at GCSE if the student has not already achieved good passes in those qualifications, there is undoubtedly further we could go to support this cohort. 69% of students now attain Level 2 (equivalent to a good GCSE pass) in English at 16, and 70% do so in maths. But only 60% achieve it in both – leaving 40% who could be being better served⁴³. And this particularly affects disadvantaged students, who are less likely to achieve a good pass in GCSE-level English and maths by the time they leave compulsory education. Whilst we have started to close the gap by 19, about a quarter of students still leave education without good passes in both these foundations⁴⁴. For disadvantaged students this becomes over two fifths.

This has stark repercussions for both the individual and the economy. An estimated 8 million working-aged adults in England have low basic literacy or numeracy, while 5

⁴² [16 to 19 funding: maths and English condition of funding - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

⁴³ This includes students who achieved level 2 in only one of English or maths and students who achieved level 2 in neither subject.

⁴⁴ [Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

million have low skills in both⁴⁵. Individuals with poor literacy are more likely to be unemployed and earn lower wages – in England, 23% of those not in the labour force have very poor literacy rates compared to 13% of those working⁴⁶. Adults with poor numeracy are more than twice as likely to be unemployed at age 30, and the OECD has identified a strong link between basic numeracy and higher wages in England⁴⁷. Conversely, individuals with maths A level are estimated to earn 7-10% more than those without one, but who are otherwise similarly educated^{48,49}. Achieving a good pass in GCSE maths increases the present value of lifetime earnings by 5%, relative to those just below a good pass. For GCSE English, the increase in lifetime earnings is around 3%⁵⁰. Language is also vital to being a successful, engaged citizen and to communicating effectively with others, including at work. We must raise the floor for all students, particularly the most disadvantaged, by ensuring we support them to gain these essential competencies.

Greater breadth of subjects

Our post-16 curriculum is narrower than in most other comparable countries, forcing students to specialise. We need to expand the range of what they are learning, so young people experience the **power of broader knowledge with the right degree of depth to be able to excel in their path post 18**. The quality of our individual qualifications is well-known. A levels are well-regarded for the rigour and knowledge-rich content they offer, providing great preparation for further academic study. T levels are extremely rigorous and grounded in the views of employers, ensuring content is high-quality and occupation-relevant. There is a reason, however, that we introduced the EBacc set of subjects at age 16, with an ambition for 90% of pupils to study them: young people need breadth of knowledge, alongside depth.

A levels were explicitly introduced in 1951 to address the “problem of premature specialisation”, intended to encourage a “gradual tapering off” in the number of subjects⁵¹. In England, however, this taper is far from gradual: most A level students only study three subjects – with no mandatory subjects – whereas across the OECD, students

⁴⁵ OECD Survey of Adult Skills: [building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf \(oecd.org\)](https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf)

⁴⁶ [Poor literacy skills cost workers 18 months in lost earnings | Pro Bono Economics](#)

⁴⁷ National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. (2005) Does numeracy matter more?, p.5. Available at: <http://nrdc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2005/01/Does-numeracy-matter-more.pdf>

⁴⁸ [Expert advisory group on Maths to 18: terms of reference \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁴⁹ The Return on Post-Compulsory School Mathematics Study on JSTOR

⁵⁰ Estimated based on [GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) – Estimated using figures from Table 4 and Figures 6-6 and 6-7 from supplementary tables

⁵¹ Ministry of Education, The Road to the Sixth Form - Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 19 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951), 3–4.

typically study around seven subjects⁵². Students in Japan⁵³, Germany⁵⁴, USA⁵⁵, Canada, Ireland⁵⁶ and Estonia⁵⁷ all study a higher number. In France, students studying the general Baccalaureate take six compulsory subjects, and choose a further three in their penultimate year, dropping one in their final year⁵⁸. On the technical side, occupational specialism is important and this naturally takes up significant teaching time, but other countries still often mandate a common core of subjects. For example, students in France on technical and vocational pathways continue to study compulsory general subjects, in addition to courses on their chosen specialism⁵⁹. The International Baccalaureate Career-related programme requires students to take at least two diploma courses, in addition to their career-related studies and “core”.

Only allowing students to study a small number of subjects has implications for the breadth of contrasting areas they can cover. Studies have found that where students study subjects from more than two subject groups (e.g. science, humanities, arts), this delivers an earnings premium of 3-4%, even after taking into account student characteristics and attainment. Earning differences by age 26 were comparable to factors such as higher education institution attended and socioeconomic status⁶⁰.

Breadth in a curriculum also supports young people to be rounded, balanced individuals. It has the equalising power of ensuring that everyone, regardless of background or barriers, has the opportunity to explore a range of subjects, instilling a love of knowledge and culture.

⁵² <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/158101f0-en.pdf?expires=1694620842&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9F9F82854512E3327CDEB46608BB9AF0>

⁵³ [The design of upper secondary education across OECD countries: Managing choice, coherence and specialisation | en | OECD](#)

⁵⁴ [Teaching and learning in general upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#) - Germany

⁵⁵ [High School Graduation Requirements 2023 - Education Commission of the States \(ecs.org\)](#)

⁵⁶ [Teaching and learning in upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#) - Ireland

⁵⁷ [Teaching and learning in general upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#) - Estonia

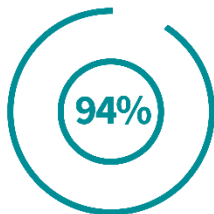
⁵⁸ [Teaching and learning in general upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#) - France

⁵⁹ [Teaching and learning in vocational upper secondary education \(europa.eu\)](#) - France

⁶⁰ https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EPI-Royal_Society-16-19-report.pdf

AT A GLANCE: CURRENT STUDENT STATISTICS

THERE ARE 1.3 MILLION 16 AND 17-YEAR-OLDS



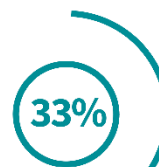
are in education or training.



are in state school sixth forms.



are in independent schools.



are in further education colleges.









are in sixth form colleges.



are in apprenticeships.

PATHWAYS

Academic L3, eg. A Levels	37% 
Technical L3, eg. T Level, BTEC	21% 
Mixed L3	11% 
Below L3	17% 
Apprenticeships	4% 
In employment or other training	4% 

The Advanced British Standard

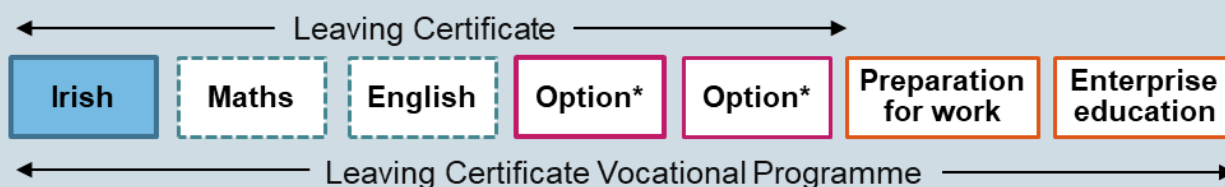
We will change what it means to be educated through to the end of mandatory education, and take the next fundamental step in our reforms by addressing the problems in our post-16 education system that can prevent some young people from reaching their full potential. We have made huge strides reforming 16-19 study, improving the content that students are taught in A levels and creating T levels. But the structure of our post-16 landscape is holding back our next stage of reform. So, we will take the best of our existing qualifications and the principles that have informed our reforms so far – a knowledge-rich, broad curriculum, excellent teaching, and a powerful evidence base – and take this further still by changing the basis of our 16-19 system.

We will do this by introducing a Baccalaureate-style qualification for 16-19 year-olds, taking the best of A levels and T levels and bringing them into a new, single qualification: the Advanced British Standard. We will create a system that is accessible but stretching for all students, delivering genuine parity across the technical and academic landscape. This builds on the far-sighted and bold reform agenda that this government has pursued over more than a decade. We want to go further for our 16-19 year-olds, removing structural constraints to deliver greater breadth and genuine parity between routes. This is an ambitious vision – it will not happen overnight – but one that will keep our education system world-leading.

What is a baccalaureate-style programme?

A baccalaureate is a study programme taken at the end of secondary education. Different models exist around the world – but they all include a broad curriculum, and often make study of maths and the country's main language compulsory. Some baccalaureates bring academic and technical qualifications under a single banner.

In **Ireland**, most students take the Leaving Certificate, which includes academic and technical options. Students must study at least five subjects including Irish (unless exempt) and most also study English and maths (although this is not compulsory). Students usually opt for 6-8 subjects in total. A typical programme is shown below.



*There are 36 subjects available, including languages, sciences, business, engineering and humanities. All subjects are offered at ordinary and higher levels.

We have a vision for what our Advanced British Standard could look like, and we want to work with the experts, including college and school teachers, employers and universities to strengthen our plans. For now, we know the key principles our new system will deliver.

Our Advanced British Standard will:

- **Bring together technical and academic routes into a single framework, taking the best of A levels and T levels** – the academic, knowledge-rich rigour of A levels and employer-based occupational standards at the heart of T levels. Within our new framework, students will be able to study predominantly technical (including an occupational specialist route) or academic components, or a blend of both - and, whichever the combination, all subjects will offer an excellent and rigorous grounding in that domain.
- **Increase the number of taught hours for all students** to at least 1,475 over two years: an extra 195 hours or 15% for most students (equivalent to two and half hours per week). This will allow both breadth and depth of study, ensuring students cover enough content to continue onto higher education or technical study, an apprenticeship or work. Rebalancing toward time in the classroom will disproportionately benefit the most disadvantaged, who are less likely to have access to the space and equipment needed for independent study.
- **Require students to study maths and English**, at least at minor level, so that all young people are equipped with the core of knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in life and work. This will build on our work to date on maths to 18.
- **Offer greater breadth, increasing the average number of subjects students take post 16, with students able to choose a combination of bigger and smaller subjects, called ‘majors’ and ‘minors’**. This will enable students to study a breadth of contrasting subjects. Typically, this would involve a minimum of five subjects - though those choosing to focus on a specific occupation could take a minimum of four, reflecting the additional time students will need to spend on specialist knowledge and high-quality work placements linked to their chosen career. There will also be potential for further ‘stretch’ for those who want it. This will balance increased breadth with enough depth, so that every student should leave well-rounded and well-prepared for university, further education, an apprenticeship or employment.
- **Have a clear offer for all students**, with a dedicated route for those working below Level 3, designed specifically to support more young people to acquire competence in English and maths than they do currently, and progress into their chosen occupation or further study. Apprenticeships will continue to be available for those who wish to move straight into ‘on-the-job’ training.

What would students study in the Advanced British Standard?

A common core:

Every student will study English and maths to at least 'minor' level.

A choice of academic and technical subjects:

Students would be able to choose subjects based on what they want to do in the future, including technical or academic options.

These options will come in different sizes: majors, minors or double majors in specific occupations.

Non qualification time:

Every student will continue to benefit from enrichment, pastoral and employability activities organised by their schools or colleges.

Where relevant, students would participate in an industry placement relevant to their chosen occupation.

How the Advanced British Standard differs from the current system:

Today, students have:	Under the Advanced British Standard, students will have:
Fewer teaching hours than their international counterparts.	More teaching hours , closing the gap with international counterparts.
Fewer subjects studied , typically in a narrower range.	A broader curriculum until 18.
40% of students have not attained both English and maths at age 16 and 25% of students do not have both GCSE English and maths by age 19.	Maths and English studied to 18, with more reaching expected standards.
Less understanding about technical options than academic ones.	Equal choice between technical and academic subjects under the same qualification umbrella.
Confusing and complicated to make qualification choices at 16.	Simpler and more straightforward to make choices at 16.

A system that combines technical and academic routes

We will combine technical and academic routes into one qualification, with students able to study predominantly technical or academic components – or a blend of both. We will:

- Build on the best of A levels: the academic subjects within the Advanced British Standard will be based on the content and academic rigour of A levels, taking the same knowledge-based approach. Our intention is that majors will have comparable depth and rigour to A levels (with at least 90% of the content) so that they support progression, including to university.
- Build on the best of T levels: the technical subjects within the qualification will be based on the content of T levels and occupational standards that employers and IfATE have carefully designed, supporting progression into higher technical education, apprenticeships and employment. Those students wishing to specialise will be able to take both a core major in their chosen sector (e.g. health) and a ‘double major’ in their occupational specialism (e.g. adult nursing). Other students could take the core technical major (e.g. education and childcare or health) combined with academic subjects (e.g. economics and art), offering greater modularity and therefore flexibility than at present. T levels will form the backbone of these technical options, and we will continue their growth and development as part of the path to our new Advanced British Standard.
- Continue our work to radically reduce the number of technical qualifications, scrapping thousands so that under our new approach there is just one simple suite of subjects - all of which are high-quality and clear in their purpose. This will remove duplication, ensuring that all remaining qualifications for 16-19 year-olds work for those students that take them and are easy to understand for students, parents and employers.
- Make sure that there is high-quality advice and guidance to help students identify the right subject options for them, depending on if their next stepping-stone is to university, higher technical education, an apprenticeship or work.

A system that offers more time with a teacher

We will increase teaching time in post-16 to at least 1,475 over two years - which would be an additional 195 hours or an extra 15% for most students. We will:

- Make sure that every student benefits from more time with a teacher, maximising the benefits a great teacher focused on core subjects will have on attainment and accommodating the greater breadth of our new approach.
- Ensure that students will: continue to receive enough hours to develop a deep understanding of select subjects or participate in industry placements, where that is needed to facilitate progression to university or into skilled employment; and maintain space to pursue other subjects in less detail.

- Ensure the students that need the most support, those who are disadvantaged or have struggled to get to the necessary standard at GCSE, get sufficient time with teachers. These students stand to benefit most from increased teaching time.
- This will be achieved by more funded teaching hours. It will not be at the expense of other core elements of education that colleges and schools offer to support young people's growth, like creative activities, physical activity and personal development.

A system that embeds a strong core

Students will be required to study maths and English to at least minor level. We will:

- Ensure that everyone has to study maths and English to the age of 18, raising the floor for all students, including the most disadvantaged. This will build on our work to date on maths to 18, especially the excellent work of the Expert Advisory Group, which gives us a strong understanding of the maths that students need to thrive in life, in their studies and in the world of work. As we have already set out, maths to 18 will be delivered in different ways for different people. For some it will be a major - like an A level. For others it will be a minor - more like the current Core Maths, which we will strengthen and support as part of the pathway to these reforms. For others, it will be about acquiring the basic English and maths they need to succeed in work and life. We will explore whether an essay-based subject could sufficiently develop and demonstrate written communication and understanding of the English language.
- Ensure that both maths and English are available at different levels within our Advanced British Standard, with a clear minimum expectation for all and options for greater stretch or depth for those who want it.
- Expand the evidence-based and internationally successful teaching for mastery method, so that children will not only have more maths teaching, but better maths teaching, particularly at 16-19.

A system that balances breadth and depth

Students will study more subjects at 16-19, with each subject available at 'major' and 'minor' levels – affording different amounts of depth. We will:

- Increase the number of subjects studied, so that 16-19 year-olds can take a range of different subjects, ensuring breadth as well as depth of knowledge. Typically, this would involve a minimum of five subjects - though those choosing to focus on a specific occupation could take a minimum of four, reflecting the additional time students will need to spend on specialist knowledge and high-quality work placements linked to their chosen career. There will also be potential for further

'stretch' for those who want to take 4 majors (replicating routes for those who currently take 4 A levels, including options like Further Maths). Importantly: students will retain sufficient choice over which subjects they study, beyond the mandatory maths and English, so that they can explore their interests and pick the path that supports their progression.

- Design the Advanced British Standard to support progression into employment, further technical education or an apprenticeship, working closely with employers. Those that want to take a primarily technical route, such as structural engineering, could study, for example: a major in building service engineering and a double major in gas engineering, and minors in maths and English. This will retain the route to occupational competency, which is underpinned by our occupational standards. Students will also be able to take technical modules from our T levels without going down the entirely occupation-specific route. By adapting the best of our existing technical qualifications and offering them at different levels, we will end the quality lottery that currently faces many of our most disadvantaged students.
- Design the Advanced British Standard to support progression into university, working closely with higher education providers. Those that want to take a primarily academic route could study, for example: three majors in history, French and English, alongside minors in maths and geography. Or, they could study mixed disciplines: majors in business, geography and maths, alongside minors in English and marketing. Those wanting to study medicine could study maths, chemistry, and biology - depending on what is required by the medical school they wish to attend - alongside minors in English and perhaps a subject they love but might otherwise have had to drop to study medicine, like music or a language.
- Consider carefully how to design the grading that students will receive - making sure that both employers and universities can understand individuals' achievement, both across the whole qualification and in the most relevant subjects to them, and can make the right decision about what is next for them.

A system that has a clear offer for everyone

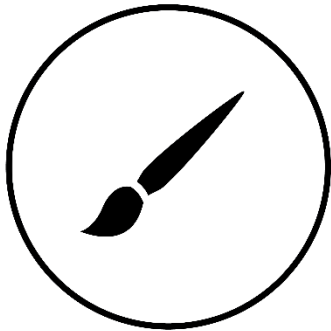
We will ensure there is a supportive and stretching pathway for those studying below Level 3, and we will retain an on-the-job route via 16-19 apprenticeships. We will:

- Offer a dedicated route for those studying at Level 2, that gives them even greater support from teachers, while stretching them to their fullest potential. Students on a Level 2 pathway will have access to the same minimum number of hours - and high-quality teaching - as the Level 3 pathway. We will continue to improve the quality of the offer available to them, removing those technical options that are duplicative or fail to equip students with what they need to know about a given

occupation. We will invest further to support them to gain the essential numeracy and literacy levels that open doors for them; and invest in their teachers.

- We will also make sure there is a clear offer, including increased teaching hours, for those working below Level 2, who are particularly likely to have SEND and might have particular development goals and be in specialist settings.
- Retain apprenticeships for the young people who want to move straight into 'on-the-job' training, ensuring that English and maths study as part of apprenticeships has greater investment. We will ensure apprenticeships remain the gold-standard and deliver for both young people and business.

Many different routes to success



Example subjects to work in creative arts:

Majors

Art & Design

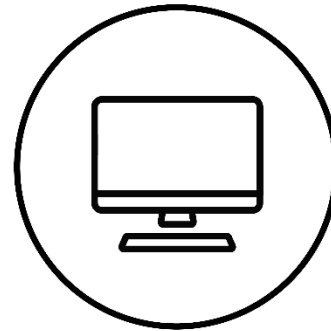
Media, Broadcast & Production

English

Minors

Maths

History



Example subjects to work in computer science:

Majors

Computer Science

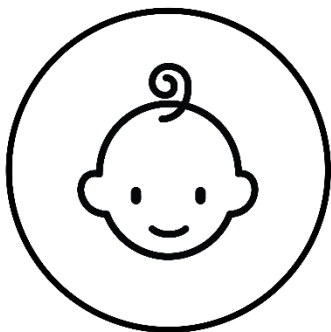
Further Maths

Maths

Minors

English

Business



Example subjects to work in early years:

Double Major

Early years educator

Major

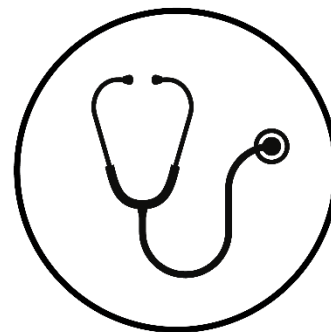
Education & Childcare

Minors

Maths

English

Industry Placement



Example subjects to become a doctor:

Majors

Chemistry

Biology

Maths

Minors

English

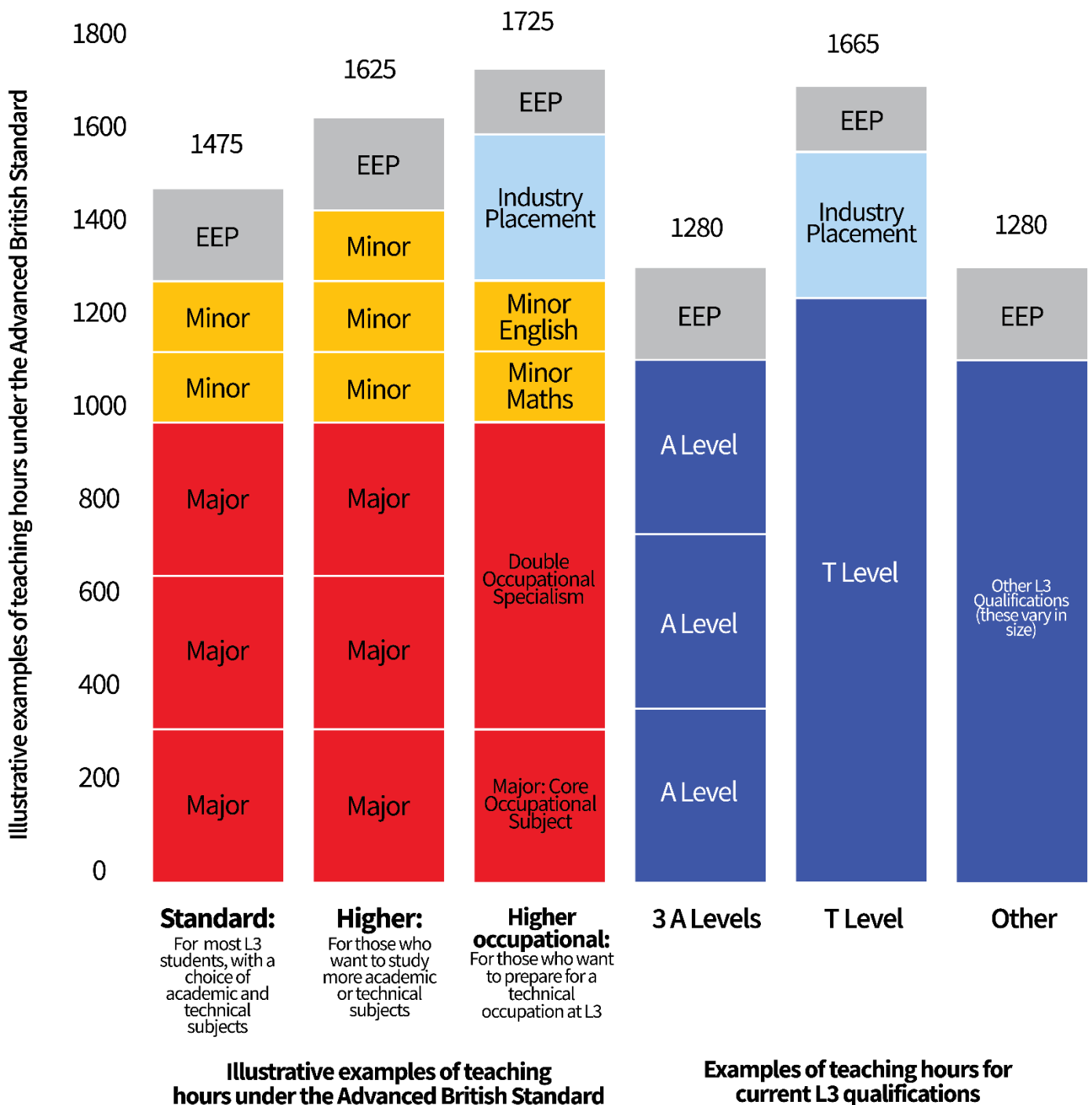
Physics

Music

What could additional teaching hours look like?

The total hours and components of the Advanced British Standard, including the number of employability, enrichment and pastoral (EEP) hours, will be decided after consultation.

One illustrative example of how existing pathways could compare to the new Advanced British Standard is:



Higher pathway students could also take 4 Majors

Next steps and approach to engagement

This document sets out long-term reforms to our education system that will not be achieved overnight. It took 8 years, for example, for our 2011 school qualifications reforms to result in the final set of reformed examinations in 2019. In the meantime, A levels and T levels will remain in place, and we will continue to reduce the overwhelming number of other qualifications, preparing us for the Advanced British Standard. New T levels will continue to roll out as they will provide the technical options for the Advanced British Standard, with employer-developed occupational standards at their core.

Though these reforms are long-term, we are starting the work right now. Every day will take us closer to a system that will give all of our young people the education they deserve and need. Our Advanced British Standard will require a significant investment in our education system – which is itself an investment in our young people. Our approach will also include investment to recruit, retain and develop the teachers that will be so central to delivering it, and work with colleges and schools on how to plan for the new qualification.

Investing now, for the future

We will make an initial downpayment ahead of introducing the Advanced British Standard, focused on building up the great workforce that we need in colleges and schools, and practices that will be so crucial to this reform. Again, we are clear that this will take time, but investing now will ensure that we can start laying the groundwork for the change that is to come. This package of over £600 million over two years will also prioritise spending that will benefit disadvantaged pupils most of all.

First, **we will invest in teacher recruitment and retention by giving those who teach key shortage subjects a payment of up to £6,000, tax-free per year, if they are in the first five years of their career.** We will invest c.£100 million each year to deliver this, doubling the rates of the existing Levelling Up Premium and extending it to those teaching eligible subjects in all FE colleges. This will mean that those teaching key technical such as engineering, electronics and digital, and key STEM subjects, will benefit from the support already given to maths, chemistry, physics and computing teachers in eligible schools. Delivering our new approach will rest on there being enough great teachers in every school and college, and this downpayment is the first step to ensuring that there are.

Second, **we will invest an additional c.£150 million each year to support those who do not pass maths and English GCSE at 16 to gain these qualifications.** We know poor literacy and numeracy holds young people, and our economy, back - so it is right we prioritise raising the floor of attainment now. This investment will mean that if a student is retaking English and maths GCSE while studying at Level 2 or below on their 16-19 course, they will now attract the same funding as those studying at Level 3. This will

particularly benefit Further Education colleges, who we know play a vital role in helping close the attainment gap by 19. We will also invest in English and maths for all post-16 apprentices who have not gained their Level 2 qualification - uplifting the funding rates to match the Adult Education Budget. This will represent a 54% increase on the English and maths funding currently available to apprentices.

To build our evidence base on what works for teaching 16-19 year olds, **we will invest an additional £40 million in the Education Endowment Foundation**, so that they can expand their current efforts, which at present focus more on the under-16s. EEF will act as the independent authority on creating and sharing evidence for teachers and leaders on what works to support outcomes for 16-19 year-olds, with a particular focus on approaches that work best to narrow gaps in attainment.

And finally, we will **turbo-charge the best, evidence-based techniques for maths teaching** ahead of the introduction of the Advanced British Standard: **teaching for mastery in maths**. At the core of this approach is the central idea that every child must understand mathematical concepts and be able to use them securely with fluency and variation, building deep and clear mathematical thinking. Mastery approaches are built on international best practice and are showing success in primary school, and now we must expand them into secondary and 16-19 education. Investing more in teaching for mastery in maths will replicate the success of phonics instruction in transforming literacy outcomes.

We will train more teachers in these techniques by expanding the reach of Maths Hubs, with more specialists overall and a new offer for Key Stage 3. And we will increase funding to colleges and schools so they can deliver maths to more students aged over 16, increasing the Core Maths and Advanced Maths Premium and investing in a digital platform for tutoring in Core Maths. In total **this is £60 million of additional funding for maths education over the next two years**.

Improving GCSEs

As we act to keep our system at the international leading edge, we want to see a broad, coherent, and aspirational pathway for every child from 11 all the way to their final Advanced British Standard examinations. As part of these changes, we will need to look at all the elements of the system that will be affected and which we might need to adjust to make a success of our new approach. That will include making sure that GCSEs prepare students well for their post-16 education.

As we move to this new system, students will gain a clear record of their achievements – both technical and academic – at 18. Many students will still change institutions at 16, and will reduce the number of subjects studied, so GCSEs will remain important. This gives us an opportunity, however, to look at further improvements we can make to the examinations that benefit both pupils and teachers.

Any change to GCSEs will protect the principle that rigorous teaching and externally assessed examinations are the best and fairest way to ensure children learn and retain knowledge. They allow students to move onto their next stage at 16 and are important to accountability, enabling us to understand how well a school is performing, so we can celebrate successes and drive improvement.

We must also build on the success of our GCSE reform to date. We have made great strides in the rigour and breadth of our offer in the last decade, raising standards and better preparing young people for future studies. GCSEs must protect a broad and balanced curriculum, incentivise hard work to reach high standards and provide us with robust data so that the government and parents can understand schools' performance. As we roll out our new approach, ensuring the continued success of our EBacc reforms at GCSE will be vital to ensure children at 16 have a broad and coherent base of knowledge.

However, we recognise that GCSEs can be onerous for students and teachers, which can detract from the time available for teaching and learning time. We will therefore look at where they can be streamlined, while still retaining their inherent rigour.

We will work with the sector, experts and parents to look again at the type and format of GCSE examinations we need at 16. We want to build on the best of the current system - breadth, knowledge and rigour - while considering whether we can:

- Reduce the number and/or length of papers that children sit, thereby saving time spent on exams and on marking.
- Adopt digital solutions, such as on-screen assessment, which would open up new possibilities and allow us to assess performance in more innovative and less onerous ways.

Next steps

It is vital that we work with the front line to understand the implications for schools, colleges and universities, as well as drawing on the views of employers, parents and – most importantly – young people. This is why we will launch a formal consultation on the approach and design of our new qualification, and the accompanying work to strengthen the system to deliver it in the coming months, accompanied by an ambitious programme of stakeholder engagement. This will inform a White Paper to be published next year.

E02997225

978-1-5286-4478-5

A world-class education system

The Advanced British Standard



Department
for Education