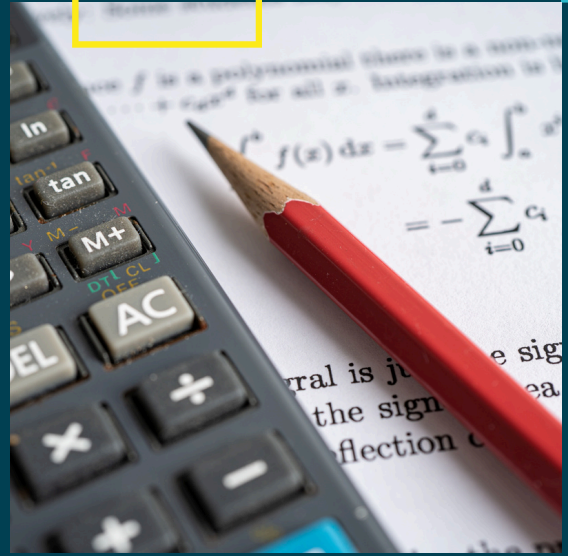




INSTITUTE OF THE
MOTOR INDUSTRY



The IMI's Response to the 16–19 Level 1 English and Maths Qualifications Consultation

May 2026

The professional body for people working
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Introduction

The Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Education's consultation on the introduction of new Level 1 English and maths qualifications for 16–19 learners.

We support the intention to introduce a structured progression route for learners with prior attainment at grade 2 or below, enabling them to consolidate foundational knowledge before progressing to GCSE study. From an employer and professional body perspective, the development of secure literacy and numeracy skills is critical to workforce readiness, particularly in technical sectors such as automotive. In these environments, English and maths underpin essential functions including diagnostics, interpretation of technical information, safe working practices, and effective communication with colleagues and customers.

Overall, we view these proposed qualifications as a potentially important intervention in addressing persistent gaps in attainment and engagement among this cohort, provided they are designed and delivered in a way that supports confidence, progression, and credibility with employers.

Section 1: Cohort & Intended Learners

Who among the 16–19 students under Condition of Funding with a grade 2 or below prior attainment do you think would benefit most from this qualification? Why?

Learners who would benefit most from these qualifications are those with prior attainment at grade 2 or below who have the potential to progress into technical or vocational pathways but have become disengaged from traditional GCSE resit models. This includes individuals who have experienced repeated difficulties in achieving English and maths through conventional approaches and would benefit from a different, more staged route to rebuilding confidence and competence.

In particular, the qualification is likely to support learners pursuing technical careers and apprenticeships, where the practical application of literacy and numeracy is essential. In sectors such as automotive, these skills underpin a wide range of core activities, including diagnostics, interpreting technical information, working with digital systems, maintaining health and safety standards, and communicating effectively with customers and colleagues. A more applied and contextualised approach to learning is therefore likely to be particularly effective for this group.

The cohort also includes learners with practical strengths who respond better to vocationally relevant teaching, as well as those with additional needs or barriers, including learners with SEND, those with English as an additional language, and those who have experienced disrupted education, including alternative provision or home schooling. Given the diversity of this population, and the range of starting points, there is a clear need for a qualification that provides flexibility and recognises incremental progression.

Do you have any views on when or how this information should be provided to work-seekers?

The proposed qualifications present a significant opportunity to re-engage learners who have previously struggled with or disengaged from GCSE resits. By providing a more accessible and staged route, they have the potential to rebuild confidence and support sustained engagement in English and maths.

A key opportunity lies in enabling learning to be more clearly linked to real-world application. For learners on technical pathways, contextualising English and maths within vocational settings can help demonstrate relevance and purpose, supporting deeper engagement. This includes practical applications such as interpreting written instructions, using numerical reasoning in technical tasks, engaging with digital systems, and communicating effectively in a workplace context.

In addition, the qualifications could support improved progression into apprenticeships, vocational study, and employment by strengthening foundational skills that are essential for workforce readiness. They also have the potential to reduce the risk of learners becoming disengaged from education altogether, including those at risk of becoming NEET, by providing a more achievable and meaningful stepping stone towards further learning.

Considering the diverse prior attainment and progress levels within this cohort, what challenges do you anticipate for those students who we envisage would typically complete the qualification within one year before moving to GCSE?

A key challenge is the significant variation in prior attainment, confidence, and learning needs within this cohort. While some learners may be able to progress within a one-year timeframe, others may have substantial gaps in their foundational knowledge, including learning deficits from earlier key stages, which may not be addressed within a compressed delivery model.

There is therefore a risk that a one-year qualification could prioritise short-term preparation for assessment rather than supporting the deep mastery of skills required for progression to GCSE and beyond. Learners who require more time to consolidate learning may struggle to achieve the intended outcomes within the proposed timeframe.

In addition, many learners in this group require wider support alongside academic provision, including pastoral support, confidence-building, and employability skills. Attendance and engagement may also present challenges, particularly within training provider settings where learners may have more complex circumstances. Consideration should therefore be given to ensuring sufficient flexibility in delivery and funding arrangements to support varied learner journeys and reduce the risk of disengagement.

Section 2: Qualification Structure

Do you think these qualifications should adopt a modular structure, or would a linear structure better support achievement and progression? What risks and opportunities do you see with these options, and why?

A modular structure has the potential to support improved engagement and achievement for this cohort by enabling learners to build confidence through incremental progress. For individuals who have previously struggled with high-stakes GCSE assessments, the opportunity to achieve and be recognised for smaller stages of learning may help to re-establish motivation and support retention.

However, this approach must be carefully designed. There is a risk that too many assessment points could increase pressure, particularly for learners who experience anxiety around assessment. In addition, overly fragmented modularisation may reduce the emphasis on developing a coherent and integrated understanding of English and maths, which is essential for progression.

A balanced approach is therefore preferable, where the qualification incorporates elements of modularity but remains manageable in structure and clearly aligned to overall progression outcomes. The priority should be ensuring that the structure supports sustained development of functional literacy and numeracy, as well as readiness for further study and employment.

What challenges do you anticipate there would be in delivering modular qualifications for the identified cohort of students? If such challenges arise, what strategies or mitigations would you recommend to address them?

Delivering modular qualifications for this cohort presents a number of practical challenges. It will be important to ensure that the structure remains simple and easy to understand for learners, providers, and employers. Excessive complexity or a high number of assessment points could lead to confusion, increased administrative burden, and potential disengagement.

There is also a risk that frequent assessment could place pressure on learners and disrupt continuity of learning. In addition, the diversity of learner starting points means that fixed or inflexible progression timelines may not be appropriate for all individuals.

To mitigate these challenges, the number of modules should be limited and clearly defined, with a focus on meaningful progression rather than fragmentation. Providers should be given flexibility to adapt delivery, including the sequencing of content and the pacing of assessment, in order to respond to learner needs. It will also be important to ensure that learners who experience interruptions to their learning can re-engage without penalty, and that the qualification design supports continuity and progression rather than repeated assessment cycles.

Are there particular groups of students who might be particularly advantaged or disadvantaged by either a modular or linear approach?

A modular approach is likely to particularly benefit learners who have previously experienced low confidence or disengagement from education, as it allows for smaller, more achievable steps and recognition of progress along the way. This can be especially important for learners who require reassurance and tangible evidence of improvement in order to remain motivated.

However, some learners may find frequent assessment challenging, particularly those who experience anxiety or who prefer to work towards a single, consolidated goal. For these individuals, a more linear approach may be more appropriate.

Given the diversity of the cohort, it is important that the chosen structure supports accessibility and engagement for a wide range of learners. Flexibility in delivery and assessment approaches may therefore be necessary to ensure that no group is disproportionately disadvantaged.

Section 3: Content

Should the subject content be organised to reflect a similar structure to the future GCSE subject content requirements...?

There is value in aligning subject content with GCSE requirements, as this supports progression and ensures continuity in learning. However, alignment alone is not sufficient. The design of the content should also explicitly address gaps in foundational knowledge, which are common within this cohort and often present a barrier to further progression.

In addition, content should be organised in a way that supports application as well as knowledge acquisition. For learners in technical and vocational pathways, it is particularly important that English and maths are taught in ways that reflect how these skills are used in real-world contexts. This includes interpreting information, solving practical problems, and communicating effectively.

An approach that combines structured alignment with GCSE content alongside targeted foundational learning and contextualised application is likely to be most effective in supporting both progression and engagement.

What should these qualifications include to help teachers teach effectively and support good learning?

To support effective teaching and learning, the qualifications should include a clear and structured approach to content sequencing, alongside flexibility for providers to adapt delivery to meet local and learner needs. Teachers will benefit from guidance that supports the integration of foundational skills with applied learning, particularly in vocational contexts.

Contextualised teaching approaches are likely to be particularly effective for this cohort, as they help learners to understand the relevance of English and maths within everyday and workplace situations. This can support improved engagement and retention, as well as the development of transferable skills.

In addition, the qualifications should support the development of key skills such as communication, problem-solving, and the ability to interpret and use information. These are critical not only for progression to GCSE, but also for wider employability and participation in further learning.

Section 4: Qualification Achievement & Grading

Do you agree that the qualifications should recognise a level of attainment equivalent to a GCSE grade 3?

There is broad agreement that aligning the qualification to a level equivalent to a strong GCSE grade 3 provides a clear and meaningful benchmark for progression. This level of attainment can act as a credible indicator that learners are ready to move forward to GCSE study with a realistic prospect of achieving a grade 4.

It is important, however, that the qualification is recognised and understood by employers, providers, and learners as a valid and meaningful step within a broader progression pathway. Its value will depend not only on the level at which it is set, but also on how clearly it is communicated and positioned.

Do you think that achievement below this level should also be recognised?

It is important that the qualification recognises achievement below the level broadly equivalent to grade 3, as many learners in this cohort will make meaningful progress from their starting point even if they do not reach this threshold. Recognising such progress can help to maintain engagement and reinforce a sense of achievement.

However, the grading structure should remain clear and straightforward, ensuring that it can be easily understood by learners, parents, and employers. Overly complex grading systems may risk reducing the clarity and perceived value of the qualification.

What are the key design considerations to ensure value for students who do not progress to GCSE grade 4?

For learners who do not progress to GCSE grade 4, the value of the qualification will depend on its ability to demonstrate meaningful, functional literacy and numeracy that is relevant to employment and further learning. It is important that the qualification provides evidence of work-readiness, including the ability to communicate effectively, solve problems, and apply numerical reasoning in practical contexts.

Clear progression routes into apprenticeships, vocational study, and employment should also be established, ensuring that the qualification is not a dead end but part of a wider pathway. Explicit positioning as an entry point into further English and maths development, as well as technical learning, will be important in supporting its value.

What steps could help ensure the qualification is recognised and valued?

Ensuring that the qualification is recognised and valued will require clear and consistent communication about its purpose and progression routes. It should be positioned as a distinct pre-GCSE qualification that supports progression rather than as a lower-status alternative.

Engagement with employers will be essential in establishing credibility, particularly in demonstrating how the skills developed through the qualification align with workplace needs. In addition, clear articulation of progression opportunities into further study and employment will help reinforce its value to learners, parents, and providers.

Should attainment in individual modules be reported?

Reporting attainment at the level of individual modules has the potential to support learner motivation by recognising incremental progress, particularly for those who may not achieve the full qualification. It can provide a more detailed picture of learner achievement and demonstrate areas of strength.

However, there is a risk that increased complexity in reporting could make it more difficult for employers and other stakeholders to interpret outcomes. It will therefore be important to strike a balance between recognising detailed achievement and maintaining clarity and simplicity in how results are presented.

Section 5: Equalities Impact

Equalities Impact

The proposed qualifications have the potential to deliver positive outcomes for a range of learners, particularly those who have previously been disadvantaged by traditional GCSE structures. By supporting more flexible and incremental progression, they may improve engagement and outcomes for learners with SEND, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those at risk of disengagement.

However, there are also risks that should be considered. Frequent assessment may increase anxiety for some learners, and variability in delivery across providers could lead to unequal experiences. There is also a risk that the qualification may be perceived as lower status, which could undermine its intended purpose.

In addition, there may be regional disparities in access to high-quality provision, as well as challenges related to funding and provider capacity.

What action could help reduce negative impacts?

To mitigate potential negative impacts, it will be important to ensure that delivery models are flexible and responsive to learner needs. Strong pastoral support and appropriate provision for learners with SEND will be essential, alongside high-quality careers information, advice, and guidance.

Initial assessment processes should support appropriate placement of learners, and providers should be able to tailor delivery accordingly. Engagement with employers will also be important in maintaining the credibility and relevance of the qualification.

Clear progression pathways into further learning and employment should be established, ensuring that learners understand how the qualification supports their longer-term goals.

Are there any other equality-related impacts to consider?

Additional factors that may affect equality of access and outcomes include regional variation in provision, digital access and resources, and transport barriers, all of which can influence participation and progression. It will also be important to ensure that the qualification is accessible across a range of providers, including further education colleges as well as independent training providers.

Finally, care should be taken to avoid unintended stigma associated with alternative routes, ensuring that the qualification maintains parity of esteem with other pathways and is recognised as a valid and valuable component of the education system.

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