

# Improving performance in post-16 GCSE English

Case studies providing tried  
and tested ideas from post-16  
educational leaders.





# Contents

Improving performance in post-16 GCSE English	5
How collaboration can improve performance	6
Linking GCSE English with vocational courses for performance gains	9
Teaching GCSE English in an adult learning environment	12
Improving reading skills in post-16 students	15
The benefits of teaching post-16 GCSE English with us	18
Contact us	20



# Improving performance in post-16 GCSE English

We understand the challenges you have when teaching GCSE English Language to post-16 students. Managing large cohorts with varying levels of engagement, skills and knowledge gaps, in limited teaching time is never easy. To help inspire your teaching and learning we've worked with experts in post-16 education to bring you these four new case studies.

From engaging students through reading clubs and working with writers' groups, to tweaking the timetabling to allow linkages with vocational courses, each one is packed full of ideas and inspiration to help motivate and engage your students.

Providing tried and tested ideas from experienced post-16 educational leaders, these case studies show strategies that you can bring into your school or college to boost your students' confidence and improve performance.

# How collaboration can improve performance

Jonny Kay has been a leader in post-16 education since 2017 and is currently Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment at a college in the North East of England. He's previously worked as Head of English and Maths in Further Education settings and is the author of *Improving Maths and English in Further Education: A practical guide*.

Here, Jonny shares his experience in improving student performance in post-16 GCSE English, and explains how collaboration is key in achieving that improvement.



## Use a range of initiatives

My team and I develop ideas to help increase student performance by defining the challenges we face as teachers, along with those faced by students, and identifying where else these challenges exist. In doing this, we're able to tap into best practice in other settings, other sectors and, in some cases, internationally.

We apply any new strategies and innovations through pilots across the college, collaborating regularly to tweak and refine our approach. It's trial and error, but enormously collaborative.

The main initiatives that have shown success are the use of low-stakes journals (in which students spend the opening of all lessons writing about a topic of their choice) and regular low-stakes assessment or quizzes. These are something that I've known to work extremely well with all students. Being consistent and explaining how and why it's being used is really beneficial to all students, at all levels. Both of these projects motivate students because they don't have that sense of failure they've experienced in the past and are able to either see rapid improvements, or enjoy the project.

The main challenges faced when introducing these projects will be familiar to all post-16 educators; there's some initial scepticism from students and, therefore, limited buy-in from

them. We slowly build trust around the projects through asking teachers to complete them. Giving each teacher a journal and completing a low-stakes quiz at the beginning of lessons goes a long way to building positive relationships. Students also appreciate the freedom to choose their own journal from a list of over 25.

In the academic year that we trialled these initiatives, we achieved the best progress rates in the North East, ranking in the top 10% for English in the country.

Teaching methods did have to change to implement these projects – very little with the journals, but more so with the quizzes. We reflected that our assessment had not always been as robust as it could have been, and, as a team, developed a range of more effective assessments. These were built into everything that we did and required a curriculum redesign. It wasn't easy, but we worked tremendously hard to do this and the results are seen in students who progress or leave college feeling as though they can achieve in English, whether it be in that year, or in the future.

Some of the other ideas trialled include:

**Sending regular motivational texts to students to support and improve attendance.**

These texts were sent weekly. There was mixed



reception at first but a number of students appreciated the texts and said that they had done exactly what they were intended to do: provide a reminder and also generate motivation.

### **Holding prize-giving evenings for successful engagement**

For department prizes and prize-giving evenings, achievement, attendance and progress were taken into account, but the element with the highest value was student attitude. Those who had actively engaged and given their best effort throughout were rewarded over those who achieved higher, but gave lesser effort.

For the yearly college award, the parameters were similarly straightforward: teachers nominated the student they felt was most deserving, and the merits of each student were discussed at a team meeting. Once narrowed down to three students, the relevant teachers wrote a 200 word case for each student, and these were submitted to the Principalship for final decision.

There was limited additional achievement as a result of prize-giving and awards, mainly because this was done close to exam season. However, this was never the intention. We did this because it was the right thing to do and the resilience, determination and effort students showed was deserving of awards in many cases.

### **Engaging with local, regional and national partners to share best practices**

In finding other establishments to share best practices with, we targeted colleges we had existing links with as a starting point. We visited local colleges and used social media and email to invite them to visit us, to ask for help where we needed it and to share our strengths.

Although meetings were sometimes of an irregular frequency, we made the effort to meet whenever we could, and wherever possible, in person. We discussed feedback and assessment methods and processes and how our counterparts attempted to resolve the many challenges of post-16. More than anything, we learned that many colleges had the same challenges and had trialled the same remedies, and often also found an initiative which had

worked very well which we could adapt and make our own. It was a fantastic process and many of those relationships continue to this day.

### **Holding weekly meetings to identify students at risk**

These meetings followed the same agenda, looking at those 'at risk' students in terms of behaviour, attendance and performance etc and discussing strategies to support them.

Interventions ranged from taking students through competency to arranging additional bursary to setting up interviews with them to get to the heart of attendance issues. These meetings had mixed results due to the differences in reasons, contexts and challenges affecting each students' attendance – some simply didn't want to attend, while others required significant additional support. As with many of the trial initiatives, we did it just as much because it was the right thing to do, as we did to improve achievement.

### **Support your ideas with resources**

We've developed our own resources to support both teaching and learning. Working closely with the vocational faculties, we developed resources for English that those teachers could use in their lessons. This created consistency in how English is taught across the college which is a huge benefit to the students.

We produced a full year of lesson materials. I provided initial resources to model expectations and benchmark what would become our standard (using resources from my own practice, as well as resources from staff from across the department and the college). We worked with vocational lecturers to produce resources for them around the topics being covered in vocational areas – this also ensured a consistent approach to topics being covered in both vocational and English classrooms. Additionally, we've created assessment tracking resources that are easily understood by all lecturers and leaders cross-college, not just English specialists. This allows lecturers to have in-depth and meaningful conversations about English in tutorials and one-to-ones.

## Use the available resources from AQA

AQA's sample [scheme of work](#), [planning](#), [teaching](#) and [assessment](#) resources and associated information were enormously useful alongside our home-made resources. We used these resources to inform our own curriculum as well as providing a template on which to base our resources, timings and assessment windows.

The [sample assessment materials](#) are very valuable and we used them to help develop our own bespoke assessment materials, providing regionally relevant texts to support students in accessing our assessments before giving them more traditional texts.

Attending the Hubs and [training events](#) also provide real insight that helps with resource development and teaching, allowing us to network with like-minded teachers.

## Overcoming barriers through consistency

The biggest barriers to improving student performance are the most familiar: attendance, the prior negative experiences that some students have suffered, engagement after these negative experiences, the amount of contact time teachers have with students, and funding.

Collaboration with vocational lecturers, developing great relationships with students and supporting them on their terms, for example, using technology to signpost revision opportunities and using techniques to give them more ownership of their progress, really helps to overcome this.

The most important aspect of improving student performance is maintaining consistency in everything that you do. What I've found works particularly well is linking what's happening in English classrooms to what's happening in vocational classrooms and outside of college.

## Achieving improved performance

In Further Education, more so than in any other sector, there is always an immediate 'bounce' in which results are seen fairly quickly. The challenge here is to maintain that and continue to engage students. The additional challenge is in ensuring you don't regularly change approach, as students need consistency and stability in lessons: if starting a new initiative every few weeks, students will likely show little engagement after a short period of time.

The biggest piece of advice I could give other centres looking to improve their post-16 student performance would be to collaborate. Work with local, regional and national partners; identify what you specifically need and find those colleges who are doing this successfully and join forces.

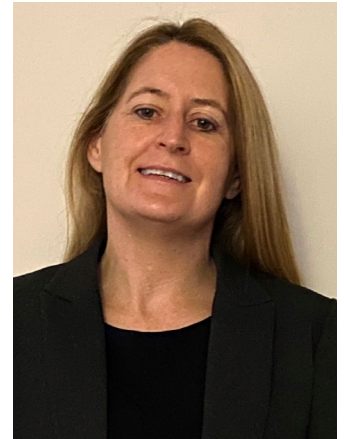
The power of collaboration in Further Education cannot be understated. This is happening sector wide, and it's great to see, but is usually through conferences or Teach Meets when it is not always possible to fully discuss challenges and solutions. For me, collaboration has always come into its own when contacting colleagues in and outside of your region and investigating the possibility of visiting another setting. Completing collaborative visits in the spirit of openness and honesty can really provide fantastic insights into the great work going on in the sector.





# Linking GCSE English with vocational courses for performance gains

Debbie Wallis (pictured), Head of Study Programmes, along with Genn Cowlan, GCSE English and Maths Coordinator, and Jayne Brown, Lecturer of GCSE English, explain how they've improved attainment in post-16 English by linking it with vocational courses.



Lincoln College is a general Further Education college based in three sites across Lincolnshire (Gainsborough, Newark and Lincoln). It offers courses in a wide range of vocational areas and levels. The college currently has around 5,500 enrolled students, made up of 1,500 apprentices, 400 in higher education, and 2,500 in provision for 16–19 year olds. They've taught our GCSE English Language specification for 10 years.

## Identifying the need for improvement

In recent years our results have been in-line with the national average for FE colleges. However, student motivation and attendance has been an ongoing issue that hinders potential student achievement. Our students choose college because of their passion for a vocational subject, therefore, it's a challenge to get them engaged and inspired by English.

We decided to try and make lessons more meaningful for students by bringing vocational links into our English lessons. A key learning and teaching focus of the wider college is collaboration. Golden hour is a common hour for all educators; it's scheduled each week during term time and is based on the concept of communities of practice. The timetabling of GCSE English at Lincoln College enabled groups of discrete vocational areas. All sessions were delivered remotely and we were using technologies like Microsoft Teams, opening up new methods of communication. So, the

conditions were perfect for collaborating with vocational tutors and trying out new approaches in cross-curricular learning.

Historically, we built activities with a vocational theme before sharing those with tutors. We designed activities based on our assumptions and preconceptions regarding how vocational content could be linked with English. We gave these to tutors during learning and teaching workshops, for them to deliver in their vocational areas but found that this wasn't particularly successful. English was shoehorned into lessons without impact. However, we did enjoy working together with vocational tutors and learning about their subjects during the workshops and this was something we wanted to do more of – but in a more effective way.

During 2021 we've used our golden hour sessions to ask vocational tutors about the topics they taught and the challenges with English that their students faced while carrying out activities or assessments. We were able to quickly adapt our online lessons to incorporate the same vocationally relevant content.

## How we link English to vocational units

This new approach supports the vocational tutor by taking the responsibility of delivering English with vocational links and, in turn, develops a cooperative, collaborative working relationship. It's a bespoke strategy which can be adapted to any vocational area, dependent upon need. On-going discourse with tutors is the key ingredient for our initiative – this was facilitated by golden hour, giving us that opportunity to come together.

Results were seen immediately. Having already covered the topic in their vocational lessons, students started to blossom in their confidence and creativity in tackling English. For example, we were able to discuss with the Beauty Therapy students how they differ their treatment plans depending on the needs of the differing clients. They were then able to demonstrate skills of inference and character analysis and provide more detailed responses. The Learning and Skills Lead for Hair and Beauty commented on the positive change in student progress in her area.

When students saw their vocational topics come up in English, they became immediately motivated to engage with the learning and put effort into the tasks. Communicating about something they were passionate about, and a topic they were familiar with, helped their confidence to soar. We immediately began to see a brighter, creative and imaginative side of them that had previously been held back in English classes. Our student feedback was reflective of this. The lightbulb moment came when talking to vocational tutors about their units and our objectives, and sharing cross curricular knowledge and skills. We used to think, understandably, that vocational links were a challenge because as English tutors, we were unable to envisage how the cross-curricular links could be made so comfortably. It was fascinating to see lots of surprising parallels emerge between vocational subjects and English.

Several students began to produce more in-depth and imaginative reading responses, attempting more complex and subtle ideas. This confidence developed as more vocational topics

were brought into English and continued to grow further as final assessments approached. Students made great progress by applying their newly acquired skills to their English and vocational assessments and improved in GCSE English grades.

## Supporting learning with resources

We used learning and teaching workshops across the college and golden hour to share our units and discuss their links. We use resources provided by the vocational area and make use of technology such as Microsoft Teams to call vocational tutors for quick informal chats when necessary.

[Exampro](#) is great for practice papers and examples of what a good one looks like (WAGOLL). Additionally, the set format of AQA's [exam papers](#) provide familiarity for students so they know exactly what to expect in the exam. Alongside the papers, the [mark schemes](#) are easy to use, and the [examiner reports](#) are so useful to help understand where students can improve.

We also make use of our great AQA [Relationship Manager](#) (RM) who inspires and motivates us with support and positivity.

## Putting the strategy into practice

As English lecturers, we've learnt aspects of vocational subjects in order to incorporate these into our lessons in a meaningful way, for example, learning a bit about beauty consultations and the key success criteria for a treatment plan. We've had to take the time to talk to individual vocational tutors more and be approachable and supportive with each other. These were five-minute conversations in passing initially, but we've since come together more in golden hour. We've observed each other's lessons by recording them on Microsoft Teams and sometimes have visited vocational lessons in person.

Timetabling hasn't been affected, however we'd already decided to group students in vocational groups and classes were already set up like this. So English teachers would have a whole class

of hair students, another class of construction students, another class of child care students, and so on.

One particular student had faced more barriers to English than most. Numerous operations had affected her language skills and she had very little self-belief in the subject. Partly owing to this approach, alongside intervention, she began to improve in confidence and eventually progressed from a U grade to a grade 2. She told us recently that on receipt of her grade she cried with happiness all day. She had previously failed every single English test, assessment or exam she'd ever taken and couldn't believe that she had achieved, thinking it would never happen. That, to us, was one big success.

We've also found that this initiative helps students also progress in vocational areas which subsequently motivates vocational tutors to work with us and spend time developing the strategy.

## Our advice

If we were to offer any advice to other establishments looking to link GCSE English to vocational courses, we'd encourage you to firstly take the time to get to know your college's vocational tutors. Let them take the lead, ensuring they know that your collaboration will allow students to progress in their vocational units, not just in GCSE English.

Allow activities to grow and develop organically. Don't force an activity where there doesn't need to be one.

Be prepared to take risks but do it with an open mind; there are more vocational links than you'd can imagine – even in subjects that seem very different.



# Teaching GCSE English in an adult learning environment

Caroline Greatorex is the Adult English Coordinator at Derby College and has been teaching English in the Further Education post-16 sector since 1986. Derby College has a variety of cohorts studying GCSE English including:

- students aged 16–18, with the majority having recently studied GCSE English at school
- students aged 19 and over who have either been out of education for some time, or who didn't complete their education
- students who are studying an apprenticeship.



Caroline provides insight on her experiences of teaching GCSE English in an adult learning environment and shares what strategies have worked in her college.

## Using tailored strategies to meet student needs

It goes without saying that students within a post-16 college have different needs to those in schools. Our 16–18 year old students are usually studying a vocational course or apprenticeship, and GCSE English forms part of their main programme on site at college. Most of these students failed to gain the grade they needed previously at school. For our adult, 19+ year old students, GCSE English might be the only subject they're studying. They often have to juggle studying with jobs and children and attend college for less than three hours a week. Some may not even do that if they're learning remotely.

Balancing these differing needs can be a challenge and to help, we've trialled a package of methods and strategies to increase students' understanding, performance and success rates within GCSE English. However, the one size fits all approach doesn't work in the adult learning sector and so teaching and learning needs to be adjusted frequently, depending on the cohort.

We've found that we need to tailor the lesson content on the needs of the group being taught, taking into account their position and length of time in the college and wider society. Many tactics are similar: tapping into their motivations, linking their knowledge into main vocational programmes, work, future employment or producing ideas for parents to support their children in completing homework. Some tactics are different, for example, older students tend to be more organised which is a result of employment, bringing up families, more life experience in general, so are able to take more responsibility for their own learning.

In the case of our younger students, many of them just need to revise and brush up on their areas of development. They haven't long left school and their knowledge is more recent and fresh, but many of our 19+ students need completely new learning due to the length of time they've been away from the classroom, or indeed, they may be new to the country.

Additionally, for 16–18 year olds, we make targets on areas of individual improvement. Through feedback from the teaching staff,



students are aware of where they need to improve and what they need to do to get there.

Both groups, though, need exciting and vibrant learning opportunities.

Implementing strategies to make learning and achievement more successful means that different students' performance is boosted in the way that suits them. To improve GCSE performance, we try a range of strategies – not all are mandatory – so the students have a choice over which strategies suit them:

### Reciprocal reading

We've brought in reciprocal reading to encourage textual analysis. This allows students to engage in the text in more detail and to gain meaning from it more effectively. An added benefit of reciprocal reading is that weaker students are able to learn from the more able.

We encourage students to read more by promoting the local library and giving them books on World Book day – this is really well received as they love having a book to call their own.

### Vocabulary work

Introducing word of the week and dictionary work helps develop the students' vocabulary. These are introduced in the lesson and students have to try and use the word of the week in conversation with their family and friends. We've seen evidence that students use these words in Question 5 work later on. One student used the word 'ubiquitous' with her family and they asked if she'd swallowed a dictionary! The student shared this experience with the class and they were able to discuss the changes they felt occurred from using different vocabulary in different situations.

### Creative writing course

We've implemented a six week creative writing course for our 19+ students to help with Paper 1, Question 5. This takes the form of a traditional lesson, workshops and discussions. Students produce a story or description on a given theme, for example, the garden, and the students are invited to critique each other's stories. The course attracted some students

who were already studying English with us and some who came in externally to study for leisure purposes. One student had previously struggled to achieve the required GCSE grade at school and wanted to improve her job prospects (she has found employment since taking the course). Once on the course, she discovered she really enjoyed writing and loved the encouragement and praise received and she achieved a grade 9 in her resit.

### Tips from writers

This year, we've liaised with a local writers' group, who've given some tips to our students to encourage them to progress as writers (again, useful for Q5). As we're pushed for time in lessons, it hasn't been possible for the students work with the group, but it's something we're considering, either by adding to the creative writing course or having a one-off session outside of lesson time.

### Recorded online lessons

During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdowns, like many education institutions, we provided online lessons. Recording these lessons allowed our older students to access them at a time that suited them, knowing that many would have spent the day home-schooling their children, or working remotely.

### Knowledge sharing with colleagues

At Derby College, we're fortunate to have a teaching and learning hub for staff, where good practice is shared, and research and experimentation encouraged. Examples include recorded sessions on enhancing the qualities of developmental feedback in assessment, use of Microsoft Teams and inclusive learning practices and expectations.

### Using AQA's support and resources

AQA's [GCSE English specification](#) is clear and simple for students, with both papers having a different focus. Students know the skills and the format they will be examined on, so can logically build up these skills. For most of our older adults, we teach the skills needed for each of the questions on both papers before they



understand what they are doing. Therefore, mock exams for them come later in the year than for the 16–18 year olds, most of whom have already had this input from their previous institutions. We often use [past papers](#) and their [mark schemes](#) along with the insight reports to help understand where intervention might be required.

We find the [training](#) and support materials, in particular the Preparing to teach materials

useful to staff new to teaching GCSE English, and the learning hubs are also helpful. We make use of the ability to [contact the English team](#) when we've had queries.

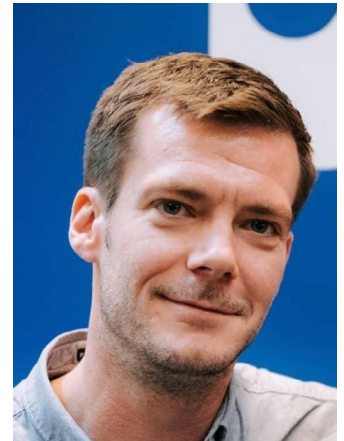
My advice to other post-16 establishments would be to keep trying many different strategies to help students improve and progress, and to not be afraid of trying new things!



# Improving reading skills in post-16 students

Keith Thomson is Curriculum Lead for GCSE English and Maths at East Sussex College in Hastings. While working at South Gloucestershire and Stroud College in Bristol in 2019, Keith implemented a project to improve reading skills in post-16 English and is looking to introduce a similar initiative at East Sussex College. He has taught AQA's GCSE English specifications since 2010.

Here, he shares how the project was formed and what results were achieved.



## Developing our reading skills programme

Our English programme was developed over several years to ensure a strong focus on reading and comprehension skills both in the classroom and out.

The aim of the project was to investigate whether increased reading inside and outside the classroom can improve students' literacy skills and their overall achievement. My contribution focused on the impact that structured, extra-curricular reading groups could have on reading and comprehension.

Very quickly we started to see results in terms of confidence and fluency, particularly in terms of speed, accuracy and comprehension. Students also commented that they felt more confident and enjoyed reading more, and the test results carried out at the end of the project revealed that several participants identified as having a low average reading ability improved to an average reading score, while one improved from being significantly below average to low average, suggesting that, over time, they could have improved further.

With the reading club working alongside other approaches, my department achieved 40% grades 4–9 for post-16 students. In 2019, this rose to 60%.

## Reading activities

We introduced more dedicated time to guided reading activities in class, and we developed a weekly online reading homework programme. This involved using reading strategies such as reciprocal reading (where students actively participate in interrogating a text and establishing comprehension as a group), and thematic reading (where students move from a general gist of a text to a more specific and detailed analysis, or move from specific details in a text and move outwards to understand the overall meaning and themes).

## Using online resources

For the online reading homework, we adapted AQA resources for use on our virtual learning platform as digital texts that accompanied multiple-choice questions focused on comprehension and language and structure skills and knowledge.

We also used [Educake](#), an online platform that provides, among other things, ready-made reading and comprehension tests based on exam-style texts and skills.

These approaches formed part of the foundation of the reading project and is something that I have carried forward into the course I lead now, where again, active and thematic reading strategies are central to classroom practice.

## Running the programme

The programme was run over an eight week period and students chose to read I Am Malala from a list of texts.

- Each week, students were set the target of independently reading five pages a day, increasing to 10 pages after four weeks.
- Hour-long sessions were run every week based on reciprocal reading strategies guided by a teacher or tutor. These sessions provided opportunities to discuss the text and clarify anything the participants did not understand, such as themes, narrative events or vocabulary.
- Each session consisted of four or five students and a teacher, and began with a brief discussion of what they had read. This moved into more structured reading with questioning and comprehension checking where students could clarify aspects they did not understand, offer predictions about the text, question things they had learned (and each other) and develop their ability to summarise meanings and key ideas.
- It involved very little written work – students would note definitions of new words or make very brief summaries of a key narrative event, but the focus remained on reading throughout the project.

## Assessing improvement

Each student was assessed at the start and end of the project using Wordchain assessments used by our SEND/ALS team. The standardised scores from these assessments were converted to psychometric scaled scores the team uses to identify reading, processing and comprehension needs and exam access arrangements (EAA).

All of the participants were 16–18 years old who hadn't achieved higher than a grade 3 at school and they were looking to improve to a grade 4 or above for progression on to further education courses or employment. None of the students had identified learning difficulties or were granted EAA, such as a reader. The results showed that all students improved their reading and comprehension, and several of the participants went on to achieve a grade 4 in the summer exams.

## Using resources to strengthen the strategies

As a team there was more focus in our lessons of using a variety of different strategies and we supported this with several [CPD courses](#) and other training, such as AQA's Stretching Grades 3–4 course and various courses provided by the Education and Training Foundation on post-16 English teaching and improving reading. The embedding of digital resources into the course, such as using [Moodle](#), Google Forms and Microsoft Forms to support reading outside of the classroom, also involved some additional training and support. Students would be set a task for homework of reading a text (such as those found in [AQA's post-16 reading support resources](#)) which was embedded into a Moodle assessment or Google Form that had a series of questions that assessed comprehension and knowledge of language and structure features. We also introduced students to assistive technology to support on-screen reading, such as Read and Write Gold, and Office 365 and Chrome apps. When I joined East Sussex College, a similar approach (using Educake instead of producing these reading assessments from scratch) was taken when developing a new scheme of work and training the team to deliver it.

In both colleges, we've used AQA's post-16 reading sources, exam texts from [Centre Services](#) and a range of texts chosen by the team. For the project, we offered the participants several well-known fiction and non-fiction texts, such as The Hunger Games and I am Malala. The texts are used in class for anything from starter activities and short quizzes, to forming the core of a lesson that develops reading skills or the analysis of language and structure or the evaluation or comparisons of texts. We also use them to inform fiction and non-fiction creative writing lessons, such as using them for inspiration or as examples of good practice. By mostly using the resources provided by AQA, it ensures our students are familiar and confident with the type of texts they will encounter in their exams. [Past papers](#) are used throughout the year to assess students, and the course is informed throughout by the Assessment Objectives and criteria, either by outlining the intent of a

lesson or specific activity, or when students are assessed formatively and summatively, so our students are clear on how they are assessed and what they need to do to achieve success.

The clarity of AQA's exam papers, Assessment Objectives and criteria make their resources useful, but above all the support they provide through various sources, whether face-to-face events or the huge range materials available on [Centre Services](#) enable us to support our post-16 students in the best way possible.

## Advice for setting up a reading group

Whilst successful and demonstrating huge potential for what such an approach can make, the reading project was small-scale and required significant resources in terms of hours and staffing. However, it showed what an impact that supporting learners specifically with their reading in a guided, structured environment can have. Although better suited to small-group contexts, so that more support and attention can be given to individuals, many of the principles and approaches that informed the project can be used effectively for entire classes, where reciprocal reading can underpin group work or whole-class reading, and thematic reading approaches can be taught to all students to support their everyday reading and reading for the exams. If you have the staff and the time, it is certainly worth doing and persevering with, and can have really positive benefits as an intervention strategy but also as a way of developing confidence and improving already fluent and capable readers.



# Our long-established GCSE English Language qualification provides the best opportunity for students to show what they can do.

---

## The benefits of teaching post-16 GCSE English with us

---

### Accessible papers

Our papers are designed for all students, providing appropriate stretch and challenge whilst ensuring, as far as possible, that the assessment and texts are accessible to the full range of students. The design of our papers supports equality of access and through this, inclusivity. Across both papers there is a clear incline in difficulty throughout the reading section with higher order skills assessed towards the end of the section.

### Exam paper design to support positive student experience

Our questions have a single Assessment Objective focus so students know what they are being assessed on. Each paper has a simplicity and symmetry in providing a learning scaffold for students and helps develop progression.

The writing tasks are also thematically linked to reading sources to support students in the structure and content of their own writing.

### Skills-based approach

The specification offers a skills-based approach to the study of English language. Questions are designed to take students on an assessment journey through lower tariff tasks to more extended responses.

### Making the required 19<sup>th</sup> century texts relevant

All students are required to read 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century texts. In our papers, students are presented with 19th century texts as a piece of non-fiction. Each paper has a distinct identity to better support high quality provision and engaging teaching and learning. Paper 1, Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing, looks at how writers use narrative and descriptive techniques to engage the interest of readers. Paper 2, Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives, looks at how different writers present a similar topic over time. By comparing a 19<sup>th</sup> century non-fiction text to a more modern text on the same theme we make it more accessible

### Embracing diversity

Equality, diversity and inclusion are important to our qualifications. We have a commitment to include diverse writers in our unseen texts and we check papers for the content of texts chosen to ensure they don't exclude through the choice of subject matter.

The post-16 reading support booklets for [paper 1](#) and [paper 2](#) have been developed to support post-16 and are engaging, age appropriate and diverse.



## Resources to support your teaching over one year

Our new [one year teaching plan](#) contains two potential route maps through the course based upon clear systematic approaches. We regularly run CPD courses for post-16 teachers. All course materials are available on Centre Services.

For all our resources specific to post-16 resits and further education visit our [post-16 resits and further education](#) page

# Contact us

T: 0161 953 7504

8am – 4pm Monday to Friday

E: [english-gcse@aqa.org.uk](mailto:english-gcse@aqa.org.uk)

W: [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Twitter: @AQAEnglish