# UK reforms introduce practical pathway to improve GCSE resits and vocational options



The UK government is introducing a new approach to GCSE resits in English and maths aimed at ending the cycle of repeated failure, particularly among white working-class pupils. The Department for Education plans to roll out a functional skills qualification serving as an intermediary step for students who do not initially achieve a grade 4—the minimum standard equivalent to a low C grade—in these core subjects. Currently, students must keep resitting GCSE English and maths until age 18 if they fail to meet this threshold, but only around one in five succeed on resit attempts.

Under the proposed reforms, students would first take this new qualification that emphasises practical, real-world applications of English and maths skills. Only after passing it would they be encouraged to resit their GCSEs, providing a scaffolded pathway to improve their abilities before attempting the formal exams again. The Department for Education has signalled that this approach is designed to particularly support white working-class learners, given more than 60% of white British pupils eligible for free school meals fail to secure a grade 4 in these subjects. This demographic is therefore significantly more likely to face repeated resits compared to their more affluent peers.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson highlighted the intention to move away from an "overcomplicated landscape" that often labels young people as failures and said the reforms are part of building an education system that aligns better with students’ aspirations and abilities. As part of the plan, colleges will be mandated to provide at least 100 hours of face-to-face teaching in English and maths for those undertaking resits. This additional support aims to address the current shortcomings that contribute to poor pass rates on repeated attempts. Pepe Di’Iasio, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, welcomed recognition that a new approach is needed, expressing hope that the reforms will replace the "morale-sapping system of mandatory GCSE resits."

Alongside these changes to GCSE resits, the government is overhauling vocational education with the introduction of new ‘V-Level’ qualifications. These are designed for 16- to 19-year-olds and will replace around 900 existing vocational qualifications, aiming to simplify the post-16 qualification landscape. The V-Levels can be taken alongside traditional A-levels and the existing T-levels, offering learners greater flexibility to combine academic and vocational studies. Subjects covered by V-Levels include areas such as Craft and Design, Media and Broadcast Production, Sports and Exercise Science, Digital, and Health and Care Services. Education Secretary Phillipson acknowledged that vocational education had long been treated as an "afterthought" and emphasised that these reforms are part of a broader strategy to provide young people with more meaningful and flexible learning opportunities before specialising.

The government’s wider reform agenda also includes a pause and review of planned funding cuts to applied general qualifications (AGQs) like BTECs, which had faced removal of funding where they overlapped with T-levels. This pause, announced by Phillipson, responds to concerns that such cuts could negatively affect students relying on these qualifications for a broad vocational education. The review aims to ensure that future post-16 qualifications and funding arrangements work better for learners, with findings expected by the end of the year.

Further reforms aimed at strengthening skills development in the UK include the introduction of foundation apprenticeships starting August 2025, focusing on sectors such as construction, engineering, health and social care, and digital industries. These apprenticeships are intended to enable young people to combine paid work with skills training, filling critical gaps in the labour market. The government plans to prioritise funding toward entry-level apprenticeships to facilitate a more flexible and supportive offer for young people transitioning into work.

Overall, the government is signalling a significant shift in its approach to post-16 education, moving towards systems that better support students who struggle with core academic subjects while simultaneously enhancing vocational pathways. The combined focus on functional skills qualifications, vocational flexibility with V-Levels, and reinforced apprenticeships reflects a strategy to create more inclusive opportunities tailored to diverse learner needs and economic demands.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15206873/An-end-GCSE-resit-misery-New-English-maths-course.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15206873/An-end-GCSE-resit-misery-New-English-maths-course.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15206873/An-end-GCSE-resit-misery-New-English-maths-course.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15206873/An-end-GCSE-resit-misery-New-English-maths-course.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/bridget-phillipson-announces-pause-and-review-of-planned-cuts-to-btec-courses-b1172658.html), [[5]](https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2024/07/24/bridget-phillipson-announces-pause-and-review-of-planned-cuts-to-btec-courses/), [[7]](https://www.pearson.com/en-gb/news-and-policy/news/2024/07/secretary-of-state-bridget-phillipson-announces-pause-and-review.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/mp/bridget-phillipson/debate/2025-06-02/commons/written-statements/apprenticeships-and-skills-training)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15206873/An-end-GCSE-resit-misery-New-English-maths-course.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-19/new-v-level-qualification-announced-to-offer-vocational-education-to-students> - The UK government has announced the introduction of a new 'V-Level' qualification aimed at students aged 16 to 19. Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson stated that vocational education has been seen as an 'afterthought for too long'. The V-Level will replace 900 existing vocational qualifications and will be available alongside A-levels and T-levels. This initiative is part of a broader plan to provide students with more flexibility and choice in their education, allowing them to explore key sectors before specialising. The Department for Education plans to publish a white paper on post-16 education and skills detailing these reforms.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/alevels-gcse-english-bridget-phillipson-department-for-education-b1253740.html> - The UK government has announced the introduction of a new 'V-Level' qualification aimed at students aged 16 to 19. Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson stated that vocational education has been seen as an 'afterthought for too long'. The V-Level will replace 900 existing vocational qualifications and will be available alongside A-levels and T-levels. This initiative is part of a broader plan to provide students with more flexibility and choice in their education, allowing them to explore key sectors before specialising. The Department for Education plans to publish a white paper on post-16 education and skills detailing these reforms.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/bridget-phillipson-announces-pause-and-review-of-planned-cuts-to-btec-courses-b1172658.html> - Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has announced a pause and review of planned funding cuts for applied general qualifications (AGQs), such as BTecs. The Department for Education had previously planned to remove funding for post-16 qualifications that overlap with T-levels. This decision follows concerns that the cuts could disadvantage students who rely on these qualifications for a broad study of specific vocational areas. The pause will allow time for a comprehensive review of post-16 level 3 and below reforms, with outcomes expected by the end of the year.
5. <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2024/07/24/bridget-phillipson-announces-pause-and-review-of-planned-cuts-to-btec-courses/> - Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has announced a pause and review of planned funding cuts for applied general qualifications (AGQs), such as BTecs. The Department for Education had previously planned to remove funding for post-16 qualifications that overlap with T-levels. This decision follows concerns that the cuts could disadvantage students who rely on these qualifications for a broad study of specific vocational areas. The pause will allow time for a comprehensive review of post-16 level 3 and below reforms, with outcomes expected by the end of the year.
6. <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/mp/bridget-phillipson/debate/2025-06-02/commons/written-statements/apprenticeships-and-skills-training> - In a recent debate, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson outlined radical reforms to the UK's skills system, aiming to support 120,000 new training opportunities during the current Parliament. The reforms include the introduction of foundation apprenticeships, which will be available from August 2025, focusing on sectors such as construction, engineering, health and social care, and digital. These apprenticeships are designed to provide young people with a route into critical sectors, enabling them to earn a wage while developing vital skills. The government is also prioritising funding towards young people entering the labour market, with plans to move funding away from level 7 apprenticeships to support a more flexible offer at lower levels.
7. <https://www.pearson.com/en-gb/news-and-policy/news/2024/07/secretary-of-state-bridget-phillipson-announces-pause-and-review.html> - Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has announced a pause and review of planned funding cuts for applied general qualifications (AGQs), such as BTecs. The Department for Education had previously planned to remove funding for post-16 qualifications that overlap with T-levels. This decision follows concerns that the cuts could disadvantage students who rely on these qualifications for a broad study of specific vocational areas. The pause will allow time for a comprehensive review of post-16 level 3 and below reforms, with outcomes expected by the end of the year.