

English and maths GCSE resits

Bill Watkin, SFCA Chief Executive

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Among the many difficult decisions facing Sixth Form Colleges at this turbulent time, one of the most immediate concerns the **English and maths GCSE resits**.

Already, colleges are considering, for example:

1. Is academy status the right option?
2. Should we become an academy as part of a MAT, or as a SAT?
3. Should we merge? With whom?
4. Can we secure the resource and capacity needed to transform failing schools?
5. What should our entry level requirements be, as we move to GCSE grades 9 – 1?
6. Should students choose four subjects or three at the start of Y12?
7. Is there a future for AS?
8. What will be the impact of the Ebacc on curriculum breadth?
9. What will the Skills Plan mean for Applied General qualifications?
10. How can we secure, with funding levels set so low, effective provision for Prevent, enrichment, employability and pastoral support?

and . . .

11. What is the right GCSE resit course in English and maths for students who have arrived with an E or lower in their GCSE?

Of course, if they arrived with a D, colleges have no choice: these students must, as a condition of funding, sit the GCSE again. But if they arrived with a grade E, F, G or even U, they do not have to do the GCSE; they could do a functional skills course which might be more suited to their learning aptitudes and programme of study and which counts towards the new level 2 English and maths measure in Post-16 Performance Tables. History would suggest that E-U students following a level 2 functional skills course are more likely to enjoy success, while those resitting GCSE are less likely to pass their retake. But this does not necessarily reflect what is happening in colleges, where some E-U students are entered for GCSEs, despite the evidence that they have very little chance of passing.

Dr Becky Allen at Datalab, shows they have almost no chance (1%) of converting their initial grade E or below to a grade C within a year.

Maths GCSE resits for 17 year olds in 2015, by 2014 GCSE grade achieved

Maths GCSE grade in 2014	% who resit in 2015	% of resits that led to higher grade	% achieving a C or better by 2015	Number of pupils
U	5%	38%	0%	16644
G	7%	41%	0%	19872
F	10%	49%	0%	24519
E	18%	47%	1%	31322
D	51%	34%	18%	61919
C	2%	29%	100%	177843
B	0%	32%	100%	108023
A	0%	37%	100%	64834
A*	0%	0%	100%	38428
Total	8%	37%	74%	543404

As Becky Allen says, “we don’t know *why* they are re-attempting the GCSE just one year later, rather than studying functional skills qualifications. It may be the student’s choice; in which case perhaps they need stronger guidance about their prospects of passing. They may be at institutions that do not offer functional skills classes. Or their institution itself might judge that re-attempting the GCSE over multiple years is a better route to eventual success. Even if this were true, it must be very demoralising for students.”

Of course, Sixth Form Colleges are also faced with the challenge of getting these students, who had struggled with English and/or maths through all their school years, up to the required level after only two terms.

However, it is reassuring to know that the government’s analysis of 2014/15 shadow measures does show that Sixth Form Colleges are the best provider type for English and maths progress and for tech level completion and attainment. Early data returns this week appear to bear this out and that is something to celebrate long and loud.