



Department
for Education

16-19 Level 1 English and Maths Qualifications

Government consultation

Launch date 10 March 2026

Respond by 2 June 2026

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Purpose of this consultation

The Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy White Paper set out our plans to introduce new 16-19 English and maths level 1 qualifications, designed to consolidate the foundational skills and knowledge needed to prepare lower prior attaining students (grade 2 or below) before they then enrol directly onto a GCSE. This consultation document gathers views on the design and delivery of the new qualifications, as informed by the Curriculum and Assessment Review (hereby referred to as 'The Review'), including views on:

- **Cohort:** The aim of the new Level 1 English and maths qualifications is to enable 16-19 students (and 19-25 students with an EHCP on a Study Programme) with prior attainment at grade 2 or below in GCSE English and maths to make progress towards achieving level 2 (GCSE grade 4+) during 16-19 education.
- **Qualification Structure:** This consultation considers whether modular and other structures would improve engagement and motivation.
- **Content:** This consultation sets out that content will be aligned as necessary with GCSE subject content and reflect future GCSE reforms and seeks initial views on how the content could be structured.
- **Qualification Achievement and Grading:** This consultation proposes that the new qualifications will be graded and that the grading structure will include recognition of attainment that is broadly equivalent to the attainment of students who achieve a grade 3 at GCSE, which would be likely to indicate that students are ready to progress to the GCSE. The consultation also seeks views on recognition of attainment below that level and partial achievement.

Future stages of the qualification design process will include a more detailed subject content consultation led by DfE, and separate consultations from Ofqual on its regulatory requirements on how the qualification must be designed, assessed and awarded, where there will also be opportunities in feed in views. Awarding Organisations will develop specifications for the new qualifications based on nationally set subject content and Ofqual's conditions and guidance.

Who this consultation is for

The consultation is for anyone with an interest in post-16 education and training for 16–19-year-olds in England. This includes but is not limited to:

- students
- parents and carers
- employers
- awarding organisations

- schools, academies, further education colleges, sixth form colleges, university technical colleges
- universities and other higher education providers
- independent training providers
- headteachers and college principals
- teachers and lecturers
- careers advisers
- regulatory bodies
- equality organisations, including those representing the interests of students with special educational needs
- local, regional, city and combined authorities and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- representative bodies, including employers' representative bodies and trade unions
- governors of education and skills providers

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 10 March 2026.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on: 16-19L1englishmathsqual.consultation@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk, telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in 2026.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#) to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request an alternative format of the form.

By email

16-19L1englishmathsqal.consultation@education.gov.uk

By post

16-19 English and Maths Essential Skills Unit
Department for Education
Great Smith Street
SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes at 11:59pm on 2 June 2026.

16-19 English and Maths Policy

Progress towards and attainment of level 2 English and maths is essential for helping students by allowing them to seize opportunities in life, learning, and work. Achieving level 2 is strongly linked to sustained destinations, higher earnings, and progression to level 3 qualifications and employment.¹

That is why we have the [English and maths Condition of Funding \(CoF\) policy](#), which requires providers to support students on 16–19 study programmes who have not yet attained a GCSE grade 4 or above in English and/or maths, enabling them to make progress and, wherever possible, achieve level 2. Since the introduction of the CoF policy, over 500,000 students have achieved level 2 English and over 350,000 have achieved level 2 maths², with many others making progress below this level.

The [Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper](#) set our intent to do more to support students to make progress towards and achieve level 2 in English and maths by:

- introducing new level 1 stepping stone ‘preparation for GCSE’ English and maths qualifications to give lower-attaining students (grade 2 or below, including unclassified or no recorded grade) the time they need to build their foundational knowledge before resitting GCSEs (the focus of this consultation)
- making changes to the accountability framework to ensure it recognises providers’ efforts to progress all students toward level 2, no matter their starting point, and that it incentivises providers to enter students into exams only when they are ready to make progress, and
- strengthening the dissemination of best practice, including through a new effective practice guide produced by the FE Commissioner.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review’s final report [Building a world-class curriculum for all](#) recommended that the Government introduce new level 1 stepped qualifications for maths and English Language at 16-19, to enable students to make progress towards achieving level 2 in these GCSEs during 16-19 study. The Review Panel recommended that these qualifications be:

- One-year, level 1 qualifications for 16-19-year-olds with prior attainment of a grade 1 or 2 at GCSE.
- Designed to focus teaching on mastery of the foundational knowledge, addressing gaps from earlier key stages in steps and enabling students to build confidence in all areas of the GCSE up to the equivalent of grade 3.

¹ [16-18 destination measures, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

² [Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

- Assessed in a modular way to allow students to build up and ‘bank’ their progress, giving accreditation for modules students have passed.
- Graded to the equivalent of a strong GCSE grade 3, thereby putting students who have achieved this level 1 qualification in a strong position to resit the GCSE the following year and achieve level 2 during 16-19 study

The [Government Response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review](#) recognised that the [Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper](#) had signalled Government agreement with the Review’s assessment of the benefits the qualifications could deliver in conjunction with wider reforms.

The Review has recommended key design features for the new qualifications and their consideration will be central to the development process, beginning with this consultation.

The new level 1 qualifications will not be available to students in their final year at school, as GCSEs remain the standard route for pre-16 students. Schools will continue to support students to achieve a grade 4+ in English and maths before leaving that stage of education. GCSEs are well respected, valued qualifications and form an important part of our education system. The Review’s final report also notes that English and maths will remain core subjects for all pupils under 16, highlighting their role in literacy, numeracy, and future employability and recommends various improvements. Our government response to the Review set out that we will update GCSEs in national curriculum subjects and religious studies in line with the Review’s recommendations. We are also introducing a statutory reading test for all pupils in Year 8 and will expect schools to assess pupil progress in writing and maths. We believe that pupils have to develop sound reading skills by this stage so that they can access and engage with the rest of the curriculum, in particular knowledge heavy subjects such as the sciences and humanities. These recommendations are highly relevant to the 16-19 English and maths cohort, as gaps in these foundational skills that are not resolved pre-16 often persist into post 16-education.

Our aim is that reformed GCSEs in national curriculum subjects, as well as religious studies, are ready to be taught from 2029 or 2030. We will want the development of the new level 1 qualifications, including the content, to align as necessary with the reforms to English language and maths GCSEs and provide consistency for students. We will give a further update on potential first teach dates in the Government response to this consultation.

We are also providing support to students whilst the qualifications are being developed. In addition to the changes outlined above in the [Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper](#) we are strengthening the support these students receive in English and maths by requiring Institutions to offer a minimum of 100 teaching hours per subject and bringing more students under this requirement. These changes are backed by increased funding. We have increased the English and maths funding rate by 11% for

academic year 2025/26, and the disadvantage block 2 funding rate (which these learners are also eligible for) by 7%, as part of [£190 million additional investment](#).

The Review also recommends that the accountability system for 16-19 English and maths is strengthened, in particular to ensure that it accurately recognises the progress students make in these subjects, including where this progress may be below a GCSE grade 4. It recommends that the Government explore changes to the system that ensure all students are given sufficient time to consolidate knowledge prior to being entered into exams and clarifies expectations of who should be entered for GCSE resits. We have agreed to revise the 16-18 English and maths progress measure, and the qualification achievement rates, to ensure they reinforce the need for sufficient time to be given to students to consolidate learning prior to exam entry. We will be engaging with the sector on these measures prior to making any changes.

Cohort

The purpose of the new 16-19 level 1 English and maths qualifications is to support 16-19 students (and 19-25 students with an EHCP on a Study Programme) who achieved grade 2 or below (including unclassified or no recorded grade) in these subjects to make progress towards level 2 (equivalent to GCSE grade 4) during their post-16 study. We expect that these new qualifications will be able to be undertaken within the minimum hours as set out in [the maths and English Condition of Funding guidance](#).

These qualifications are intended to prepare 16-19 students (and 19-25 students with an EHCP on a Study Programme) for GCSE study by consolidating the foundational skills of those with lower prior attainment (grade 2 or below). They are not a replacement for GCSEs; rather, they provide an essential foundation, with most students expected to progress to resitting the GCSE in the following year, as shown in the example in Figure A, and subject to the rules that would be set out in the Condition of Funding guidance for the relevant academic year. Students who achieved grade 3 would continue to work directly towards GCSE, as they are typically closer to achieving a level 2 pass and could progress to the required standard while in post-16 study.

Figure A

An example of part of a student's journey, using the new level 1 English qualification, alongside their wider study programme:

- Student achieves a grade 2 in their English Language GCSE at the end of Year 11

First Year of 16–19 Study

- Student enrolls on the new level 1 English Language qualification.
- Student studies and achieves the level 1 qualification at the end of the year.

Second Year of 16–19 Study

- Student consolidates knowledge and studies additional relevant content in advance of retaking their English Language GCSE.
- Student takes their English Language GCSE at the end of the year and achieves a grade 4 or higher.

We would expect the majority of participating students to sit the new level 1 qualifications within their first year of 16-19 provision. We will consider in due course if there could be a case for some students to continue studying the alternative qualifications currently allowed in the Condition of Funding guidance. There may also be students with an EHCP who will continue to study English and maths beyond three years. Most students will consolidate their skills and knowledge before progressing to GCSE study in the following year. Providers and teachers will use their understanding of individual students, alongside performance in this qualification, to determine the most appropriate point for GCSE entry. In most cases, this will be the end of their second year, after a full year of level 1 study followed by a full year of GCSE preparation, rather than entering students for a November exam in their second year, immediately after completing the qualifications.

We will also consider the case for whether students could continue with the level 1 qualifications into their second year before moving on to GCSE partway through that year. Conversely, there may be a case for students who progress more quickly to

complete the level 1 qualifications early and begin GCSE study within the same academic year.

As we develop the qualifications we will want to work with providers and other relevant stakeholders to confirm how students who then move onto the GCSE can best be supported that following year, so they have the best opportunity to achieve a grade 4+. We will consider at a later stage, in light of this consultation, and in further engagement with the sector, what the policy expectations or requirements over entry for these qualifications should be

We believe that level 1 and Entry level English and maths Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) will remain an appropriate option for some students. We also believe that level 2 FSQs may have a role for some students. This is in line with the Condition of Funding guidance. FSQs will also remain a valuable qualification for many adults and apprentices.

These new level 1 qualifications are intended to prepare students for GCSEs and will reflect GCSE content. They are not intended to be applied qualifications such as FSQs.

The 16-19 English and maths cohort can often be impacted by common barriers such as low motivation and confidence, which can often affect lower-attaining students who have in many cases fundamental knowledge gaps from earlier key stages. As a result, a modular structure as suggested by the Review and relevant content may be helpful; these are described at more length in the subsequent sections on Qualification structure/modularity and Content.

Alignment with Study Programmes, including new Level 3 and below pathways

As set out in the [Post 16 Level 3 and below pathways consultation](#), which closed in January 2026, studying a high-quality two-year level 2 programme gives students the time and support they need to strengthen their understanding and build confidence in English and maths. This approach helps learners secure these essential qualifications while deepening their subject knowledge, helping them achieve in their vocational or technical qualification and setting them up for success as they progress to higher levels of study or into the workplace.

The Post 16 Level 3 and below pathways consultation set out proposals for a new one-year Further Study pathway and a two-year Occupational Pathway at level 2. It explicitly recognises that many students may need to continue working toward their level 2 English and maths as part of their programme of study. The new English and maths qualifications may be particularly relevant to many students on level 2 or below study programmes.

Question: 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?

Question: What opportunities do the proposed qualifications present for 16-19 students?

Question: 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?

Qualification Structure

The Curriculum and Assessment Review recommended a modular assessment approach to allow students to build and 'bank' progress. Breaking content into modules may give students more frequent opportunities to demonstrate progress both externally, as they continue their education or move into employment, and internally, to improve their own self esteem. However, we also recognise that modular examinations could have the opposite effect for some students, particularly those who may feel overwhelmed by frequent assessments or could perceive each module as a high-stakes event and may inadvertently increase anxiety for learners who prefer a single, consolidated assessment.

A further potential issue is the tension with the aim of mastering core foundational skills and knowledge. A modular structure can encourage students to focus on discrete sections of content rather than developing a joined-up understanding across the subject. This risks promoting a 'learn and forget' approach, where knowledge and skills gained in one module are not retained for future learning, which could undermine preparation for GCSE resits.

Given the limits of the teaching year, if a modular approach was taken, we would not expect these qualifications to comprise a large number of modules. Our aim is to ensure that content can be broken down in a meaningful way, while avoiding an excessive assessment burden on students and providers, and taking account of timetabling challenges associated with frequent assessment windows. For example, we do not consider it is feasible in one year for content to be broken down by both topics within English and maths and also by difficulty, as this would result in an impractical number of modules and/or assessments.

Another structural issue is whether, if the qualification is modular, modules should be taken in a fixed, prescriptive order, or whether centres should have flexibility in sequencing. A prescriptive structure, where all students follow the subject content in the same order could support appropriate sequencing of the content for teaching and learning and could support qualification level standard setting. However, students have different strengths and weaknesses, and providers may prefer the option for students to be able to take modules in an order that suits their learning needs. Greater flexibility could also allow more opportunities for learners to resit modules they do not pass on the first attempt. That said, given the expected size of these qualifications, there will likely be limits to the degree of flexibility possible.

There are also approaches that include modular assessments but require students to cover some of the course in a final exam, which could offer a better balance. This might provide opportunities for incremental progress while ensuring that learners develop a more integrated understanding of the subject. Alternatively, a linear qualification remains an option, which would avoid the risks associated with frequent testing but may feel more high stakes for learners who benefit from staged recognition of progress

which would help with motivation and engagement. We welcome views on which structure may best support achievement and progression for this cohort.

An approach where modules would be assessed throughout the teaching year could offer benefits, such as giving students more opportunities to demonstrate and bank progress. However, this raises questions about the assessment model: should modules be assessed at fixed points for all learners, through multiple scheduled windows, or on demand as students complete each module? Each approach has implications for managing cohorts at different stages, ensuring fairness and consistency, and maintaining sufficient teaching time. We are seeking views on the feasibility and impact of these options for both students and providers and Ofqual will be consulting on the qualification design including the approach to modularity.

Question: 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?

Question: 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?

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

Content

The content of these qualifications will be nationally prescribed, ensuring a level of consistency across all Awarding Organisations. Any organisation developing specifications will be required to cover set content, which will be aligned as necessary with, and support progress towards, the relevant GCSE subject content (English Language or maths) and reflect any future GCSE reforms.

For English GCSEs, the Review proposes a clearer focus on the nature and expression of language and the development of critical analysis across a wider variety of text types and genres. For maths GCSE, the Review recommends resequencing earlier curriculum content to strengthen number fluency and proportional reasoning. It also stresses the need for deeper mastery in KS3, improved problem-solving, and better alignment between primary and secondary phases, all of which aim to reduce the learning deficits that many students in this cohort experience before entering post-16 study.

The Government intends to publish a detailed subject content consultation setting out the proposed content for these new level 1 English and maths qualifications. How this content is specified will have significant implications for any potential modular approach for the qualifications, including the number and structure of modules. Following this, the Government will confirm its position on the policy for the qualification, including on modularity, to Ofqual, who will reflect on this in setting and consulting on the detailed assessment arrangements.

We are considering the extent to which the qualifications should reflect the full breadth of the relevant GCSE English Language and maths subject content for the grades covered by the qualifications, rather than requiring selective inclusion of certain topics. This approach would allow students to build and consolidate knowledge across all areas, putting them in a strong position to progress in the following year towards achieving a GCSE grade 4+.

Many of the intended cohort may have knowledge gaps from KS2 and KS3 learning that are considered an essential foundation for further study. Addressing these gaps is a key aim for these qualifications. We would expect this to be reflected in the teaching approaches to the qualifications and to also be underpinned by the qualification design which will consider how this subject content could be addressed. In particular, we will consider whether effective teaching would be supported by some explicit sampling of specific elements of KS2 and KS3 level content and whether this could be reflected in the subject content for the new level 1 qualifications.

We will consult on how this could be achieved in future consultations focused on content and curriculum.

Whilst the cohort will not have a grade 4 or above in GCSE English language, they may have previously secured the speaking and listening element of the GCSE and would not be required to retake it when they resit their GCSE. As such, we will consider whether it

is appropriate for the new qualifications to prepare them for this specific element of the GCSE.

Question: Should the subject content be organised to reflect a similar structure to the future GCSE subject content requirements as set out in the GCSE subject content and assessment objectives (current versions can be seen here) for a) [English language](#) and b) [Mathematics](#), with the addition of additional foundational content as necessary? If not, is there an alternative way of organising content that would be more suitable? Please explain the reasoning for your suggested approach. This is to inform only; decisions on content and organisation will not be taken until explicitly consulted on by DfE and Ofqual respectively

Question: What should these qualifications include to help teachers teach effectively and support good learning e.g. a specific approach to structure? Please tell us why you think your suggested approach would work well.

Qualification Achievement and Grading

The Review recommendations state that the new qualifications should be graded to the equivalent of a strong GCSE grade 3. This approach is intended to put students who had prior attainment of a grade 2 or lower in Year 11 in a strong position to resit the GCSE the following year and gain a grade 4 or higher.

These qualifications will be assigned a 'level'. As GCSE grades 1-3 are to level 1, and GCSE grades 4-9 are level 2 (see Figure below), these new qualifications will therefore be level 1. Achieving a grade in these qualifications that is identified as recognising a broadly equivalent level of attainment as a GCSE grade 3 would therefore represent positive progression for these students.

Figure B

Qualification levels	Qualification levels
Level 1	GCSE - grades 3, 2, 1 or grades D, E, F, G
Level 2	GCSE - grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or grades A*, A, B, C

It is recognised that there will be a wide spectrum of prior attainment across the cohort taking these qualifications ranging from unclassified or no recorded grade to a grade 2. Whilst one of the aims of these qualifications is to build learner confidence, the qualifications still need to be rigorous so we would anticipate that not all students will achieve a level of attainment that is broadly equivalent to that achieved by students who get a grade 3 at GCSE. Grade 3 covers a wide range of performance; from students who are within touching distance of a grade 4, to those who are still developing core skills in some areas.

It is intended that these qualifications will recognise the performance of students who have continued to engage with learning since achieving a grade 2 or below in the subject at GCSE and have improved their attainment such that it is broadly comparable to that typical of students who achieve a grade 3 at GCSE. If the standard of the key grade for progression of the new qualifications was set below this, we could expect that pass rates would be increased but it is unlikely that students would be prepared as well to progress on to a GCSE grade 4. Depending on where the standard of the key grade for progression is lowered to, a lowered pass rate would not represent progress as most of the cohort will already have a grade 2 or below.

There is also the potential for the grading scale for these qualifications to recognise where students maintain their level of attainment at a grade, and to recognise those that make smaller amounts of progress from the starting point of a grade 1 or an unclassified result. The exact scale, number of grades and approach to grading will be considered at a later date as this consultation is primarily focused on the standard of the level of attainment that is considered most conducive to progression.

Question: The Review recommended that the qualifications should be graded to the equivalent of ‘a strong GCSE grade 3.’ Do you agree that the qualifications should recognise a level of attainment that is equivalent to the level of attainment that students with a grade 3 in GCSE have?

Question: Do you think that achievement below the level broadly comparable to that typical of students achieving a grade 3 at GCSE should also be recognised in the grades awarded for these qualifications?

While many employers, further education providers and parents value and understand the achievement of a level 2 qualification and/or a GCSE at a grade 4 or above in English Language and maths we recognise that the new level 1 qualifications may be the highest qualifications that some students achieve. We want to consider how achievement of these new level 1 qualifications could be best valued by groups who will want to understand the benefits of the qualifications, such as parents and employers, including considering how the qualifications can have value for those students who may want to move directly into employment.

Question: What are the key design considerations to ensure these qualifications have value for students who pass the level 1 qualifications but may not then progress on to gain a GCSE grade 4?

Question: Are there other key steps we could take to ensure that the qualifications are recognised and valued by employers, parents and other external audiences as a separate qualification to the GCSE? What might they be?

The Review recommended that these qualifications are assessed in a modular way to allow students to build up and ‘bank’ their progress, giving accreditation for modules students have passed. This could be achieved in different ways.

If students make progress in their learning but do not achieve the full qualification, having nothing to show for that progress could lead to further disengagement. In any modular structure there could be recognition of achievement of any individual units, and in linear qualifications it is possible to provide recognition of performance in individual components. The form this may take is to be consulted on further at a later date.

Question: Do you think that as well as the overall qualification result being reported a student’s attainment in any individual modules or components should also be reported on? What do you think are the benefits and risks of this approach?

Equalities Impact

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Ministers must have “due regard”, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to protected characteristics. The DfE has been taking this requirement into account in developing these proposals and will use findings from this consultation to develop a full assessment. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Question on equalities

21. Could any of the proposals have an impact – positive or negative – on people with any of the following protected characteristics?

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

22. What action could help reduce any negative impacts you identified in the previous question?

24. Are there any other equality-related impacts you think we should consider?

Annex – Privacy Notice

Privacy notice

For the purposes of your response, other than where we may request, on a voluntary basis, contact details for the purpose of clarification, or demographic information about yourself for the purposes of equality impact assessment, we do not seek provision of personal data from which you or others can be identified. Your responses, including any personal data, may be shared with a third-party provider, or other government department or organisation acting on behalf of the DfE under contract or an equivalent agreement, for the purpose of analysis and summarising responses for us, for which a data processing agreement will be in place, and may use technology, such as artificial intelligence. If this technology is used, it will be done to exclusively assist with analysis, summarisation, or categorisation of responses, and appropriate safeguards will be set in place to ensure fairness, accuracy, and security. If this technology is used, it will not be used for automated decision-making that might affect individuals. An anonymised version of responses in a list or summary of responses received, and in any subsequent review reports, may be published. We may also share your personal data where required to by law. You can leave out personal information from your response entirely if you would prefer to do so. For further information on how DfE processes personal data, please see: [Personal information charter - Department for Education - GOV.UK](#)

Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, may be subject to publication or disclosure e.g. under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential. If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it confidential will be considered, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, in and of itself, be regarded as binding on the DfE.



Department
for Education

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