

Key Findings

1. Motivation: This was a particular concern for 16 – 19 year old learners. Some GCSE learners lacked motivation as they had taken the exam three or four (or more) times before. This can have a very demotivating effect on their attitude and confidence. Some thought ‘they just can’t do it’.

2. Factors which affect attendance: For some learners the GCSE is not a priority and this impacts on their attendance as their ‘main’ subject is seen as the important area. Some learners don’t know the learners in their GCSE group. Sometimes the classroom for GCSE is on a different site or away from their own learning environment.

3. Exam nerves and anxiety – ‘going to pieces’
Some learners (particularly 19+ adult learners) find the experience of taking an exam very stressful



This project has been developed and supported by the Foundation's Practitioner-Led Research Programme (2014-2015) and the East Midlands Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (emCETT)



How far can innovative methodologies support 16 - 19 learners and adult learners to achieve English and Maths GCSE?

What is practitioner-led research?

Practitioner-led research is focused on small scale action research projects which can improve practice in terms of understanding and impact on learning (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

Our project is a study of English and Maths GCSE provision within the college with a specific focus on the 16-19 cohort and the 19+ cohort.

A short description: in October 2014 Sarah Mandeno and Pippa Stone submitted this proposal for a project

We have been working with Chloe Clark, Harriet Rafferty and Andy Brewer to think about how best to help students with their Maths and English in new and creative ways to improve their grades. We chose innovative strategies which support active learning with a focus on motivation and dealing with stress and panic.

Why did we decide to do this?

We have a lot of GCSE students! A very diverse GCSE cohort across 16-19 provision and many 19+ learners. With the government focus on Maths/English we wanted to identify areas to develop to help learners succeed.

How did we do this?

We identified 4 groups (a total of 41 students). We established frames of reference in terms of confidentiality and anonymity. We discussed the ethics of research and agreed that all information would be treated as confidential. We asked the students about their attitudes to the subjects and exams. We gave out confidential questionnaires and collated anonymous results. The teachers have shared their own ideas strategies and we have included links to current research and literature to support these innovations.

Figure 1 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk> cited in EmCETT online 2015



Figure 1 Action Research Cycles



The Power of Formative

Type of Feedback to Students	Gain in Performance	Student's Interest in further learning
• Marks	none	Top Students + Bottom students -
• Comments	30%	All Students +
• Both	None	Top Students + Bottom students -

[Butler, R. (1988) *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 58 1-14]

Recommendations:

We are publicising the strategies used in our college newsletter and in our Staff Development.

Next year in English/Maths GCSE Induction Week teachers will be encouraged to address different levels of motivation and/or issues around exams by:

- questionnaires in week one
- icebreakers which address motivation
- a simplified version of Dweck
- mindfulness apps
- group building exercises

Another useful approach is concerned with marking and grading:

There is a lot of discussion about the best way to give feedback to learners. Many of us give grades and are expected to grade work in order for learners to see their progress. An alternative approach is 'comment-based marking' which focuses not on the grade but on the work itself.

- You did this well
- You need to do more of this
- Even better if you did this

Read our full report

