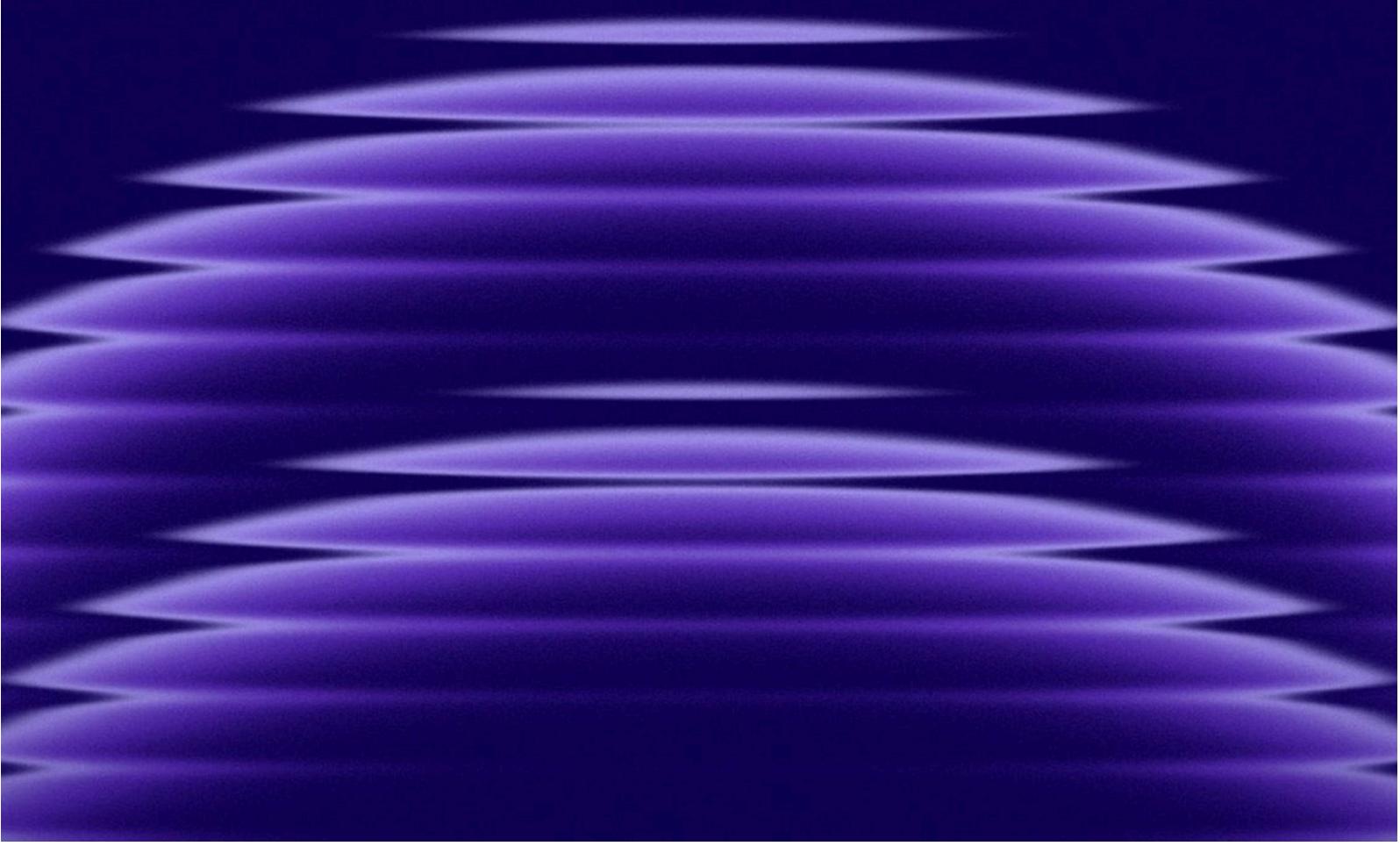




Why GCSE English matters

The conversation so far...



The final instalment in our mini series explores how English can prepare young people for life beyond school. From equipping them with broad literacy and critical thinking skills to ensuring the curriculum reflects the diversity of their lives and future ambitions, we look back on one of the most central themes running through all of our discussions – the purpose of English today.

Since March 2025, we've gathered insights from over 800 secondary English teachers, 1000 secondary students, 1000 college students and 1000 college tutors. Alongside this research, we've hosted 10 national forums, taken part in key industry events and brought teachers and school students together through regional events and visits across the country.

And one thing is clear: **GCSE English matters**. It matters not just for the functional benefits of reading, writing and communicating with others. It underpins success in other subjects and the wider world of work. But English also matters for the way it provides students their own window to their world, improving their understanding of themselves, others and the world around them.

I really enjoy English because it gives me the chance to be creative and express emotions through writing. When I write, I feel free to explore my thoughts and shape them into stories, poems, or even simple reflections. It is a subject that allows me to communicate feelings in a way that is both personal and imaginative. However, I find English challenging when I have limited time. Writing well requires space to think, plan, and develop ideas, and without that, I feel rushed and unable to fully express myself, almost trapped with the fear of getting it wrong or not ticking all the right boxes to get a good mark.

With time and space to learn, English helps me to expand my imagination and discover new ways of expressing myself. At the same time, I'm able to step into the lives of others, experiencing their emotions and perspectives in every new page, poem or scene. This not only makes the subject enjoyable but also helps me to understand people better in real life. English, therefore, is more than just a subject—it is a way of preparing for life by building empathy, creativity, and expression.

Y9 student, South West England

What we've learned so far...

From secondary teachers and leaders:

“We need to prioritise strong foundations in English. With the skills it provides, students have a stronger grasp of learning in other areas.”

Secondary Middle Leader response (The Pearson School Report, 2025)

“English should be a curriculum priority with reading aloud and oracy in every lesson across the school in every year group.”

Secondary Middle Leader response (The Pearson School Report, 2025)

Teachers and leaders consistently highlight **English as the bridge to all other learning**, building the language, thinking, and confidence students need to thrive **across the curriculum**. A strong English education lays the foundation for learning, helping students read widely, think critically, join in discussions and make their voices heard.

“In order to access maths, history and other subjects, you have to be able to communicate, access language and be literate.”

Catherine Sezen, Director of Education Policy, Association of Colleges

From students:

“I want to learn things that will help in my life. I know English is important as it’s what helps you learn to read, write and communicate.”

Secondary student response (The Pearson School Report, 2025)

For many students across all stages, English is recognised as the **essential foundation for learning and life**. They can articulate how English equips them with **the core skills** to read with understanding, express themselves clearly and build the confidence to take part in class discussions and wider society.

“Done right, GCSE English can ensure that they leave school with the skills and the confidence they need to navigate through life by sharing their ideas, by collaborating with others and by engaging in civic conversation.”

Russell Findlay, CEO, Speakers Trust

College students reflect on how these same core skills accessed through English become a **gateway to future opportunities and the world beyond school**. They recognise it as a subject that underpins workplace communication, supports further study and helps them navigate challenges like job applications and interviews – providing the tools that **enable success in schools, careers and everyday life**.

“English has prepared me for the future because it’s helped me learn to write a decent report, and if you’re writing your CV or in an interview, it helps you to be more confident when speaking and writing and talking in general.”

College student, New City College

From college tutors:

“Teaching real-life uses of English helps students see why this subject matters. Showing how these skills help in jobs and daily life makes them care more.”

College tutor response (The Pearson School Report, 2025)

College tutors echo this view of English as a life skill and stress that, particularly for students having to resit, **motivation often comes from understanding why English really matters**. They see first-hand how framing English in terms of its real-world relevance – how it links to jobs, confidence and everyday communication – can transform engagement.



“Shifting the curriculum and assessment to focus on more relevant, real-world applications of English would boost student engagement and illustrate the practical importance of these courses in their future lives and jobs.”

College tutor response (The Pearson School Report, 2025)

“If the curriculum was more engaging, it would help students become invested and see the applicability of English in their own lives. It would also help them recognise how English connects to different careers, such as marketing, advertising, writing and blogging. There isn’t enough of that at the moment, and it would make a real difference.”

Anthony Cockerill, Director of the National Association of the Teaching of English



Read more in [Professor Cathy Shrank’s](#) blog, “Where can studying English take you?” to discover how the skills built in English open doors to a wide range of careers and future opportunities.

From the education community:

“English as a subject is all about us as human beings and our lives, as expressed through the language we speak and write, the texts we read and the ones we create ourselves.”

Barbara Bleiman, English and Media Centre

Education leaders and subject experts describe English as a **space** where young people encounter new ideas and voices, explore meaning, develop empathy and start to understand the world and each other. It brings together **curiosity and creativity**, helping students to think critically, appreciate different perspectives and communicate with confidence.

“The meaning of ‘who’ we are as individuals, as societies, is brought to light through language, because language is where meaning is made. To think about ‘who’ you or we are, and how we should live, means to explore the process and results of that meaning-making: stories and histories, poems, plays, novels, games, media and language itself.”

Professor Robert Eaglestone, Royal Holloway, University of London and English Association

The impact of English is immeasurable and surpasses what can be assessed in one (or two) single exams. And so, at the heart of these discussions lies a broader question - what and how do we most effectively measure English (and its focus on interpretation, analysis, creativity and communication) in the modern world.



Read more from [Professor Robert Eaglestone](#) and [Barbara Bleiman](#) as they explore one of the questions right at the heart of our campaign: “What is English and what is it for?”

Where we go next

English is where we learn to make sense of ourselves and our world – through language, stories, debate and critical thinking. It’s the place where young people learn to explore not just what the world is but who we are in it: how we express ourselves, how we understand others and how we make meaning together.

The conversations from our *Let’s Talk English* campaign reveal a strong appetite among the education community to protect what makes English special, and to renew it for a generation growing up in a rapidly changing world.

“It is what English can offer that makes it so hard to define: it gives us entertainment, enjoyment, wisdom, communication with ourselves and others, escapism and the opportunity to understand differing perspectives. English is for all this – and for truly being ourselves.”

Professor Robert Eaglestone, Royal Holloway, University of London and English Association

The challenge now is to keep English purposeful and relevant in a world that continues to change rapidly. It is the subject where pupils learn to question, interpret and connect – skills that strengthen every other area of learning and shape every future pathway.

Taking the conversation further...

Teachers, leaders, tutors, students and sector leaders have offered rich and powerful perspectives on what English is for – and on the challenges the subject faces today. We’ll continue to share these insights throughout 2026 and support the conversations that will help shape the future of English, staying true to what it is, what it’s for and why it matters.



“English isn’t just a subject in education – it’s a subject for education.”

Professor Robert Eaglestone

“The key point is that we have to embrace English and talk it up, and why it’s important.” Professor Cathy Shrank, The

University of Sheffield

Join the discussion at go.pearson.com/letstalkenglish

*GCSE English refers to both the GCSE English Language and Literature specifications across all awarding bodies