



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

Looking ahead – how can data, research and evidence support policy and practice?

School to college transition

Catherine Sezen, Director Education Policy
19 March 2025





The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents 98% of FE colleges and 52% of sixth form in England.

English colleges educate over 1.6 million students every year and employ approximately 133,000 staff.

Colleges help people of all ages and backgrounds to make the most of their talents and ambitions. Rooted in local communities, colleges are crucial in driving social mobility and providing the skills to boost local and regional economies.

Our report [100% Opportunity](#) details the important role that colleges play in delivering skills training to support economic growth, whilst highlighting ongoing challenges and making recommendations for change.

Background

Background – The challenge

Context

- 16 to 24 NEET - nearly 1m
- Highest numbers post 18, but young people don't just suddenly become NEET
- Prevention is much easier than intervention. And prevention is not easy!

Focusing in on transition

- Primary to secondary and HE transitions are managed
- Transition at 16 = unmanaged

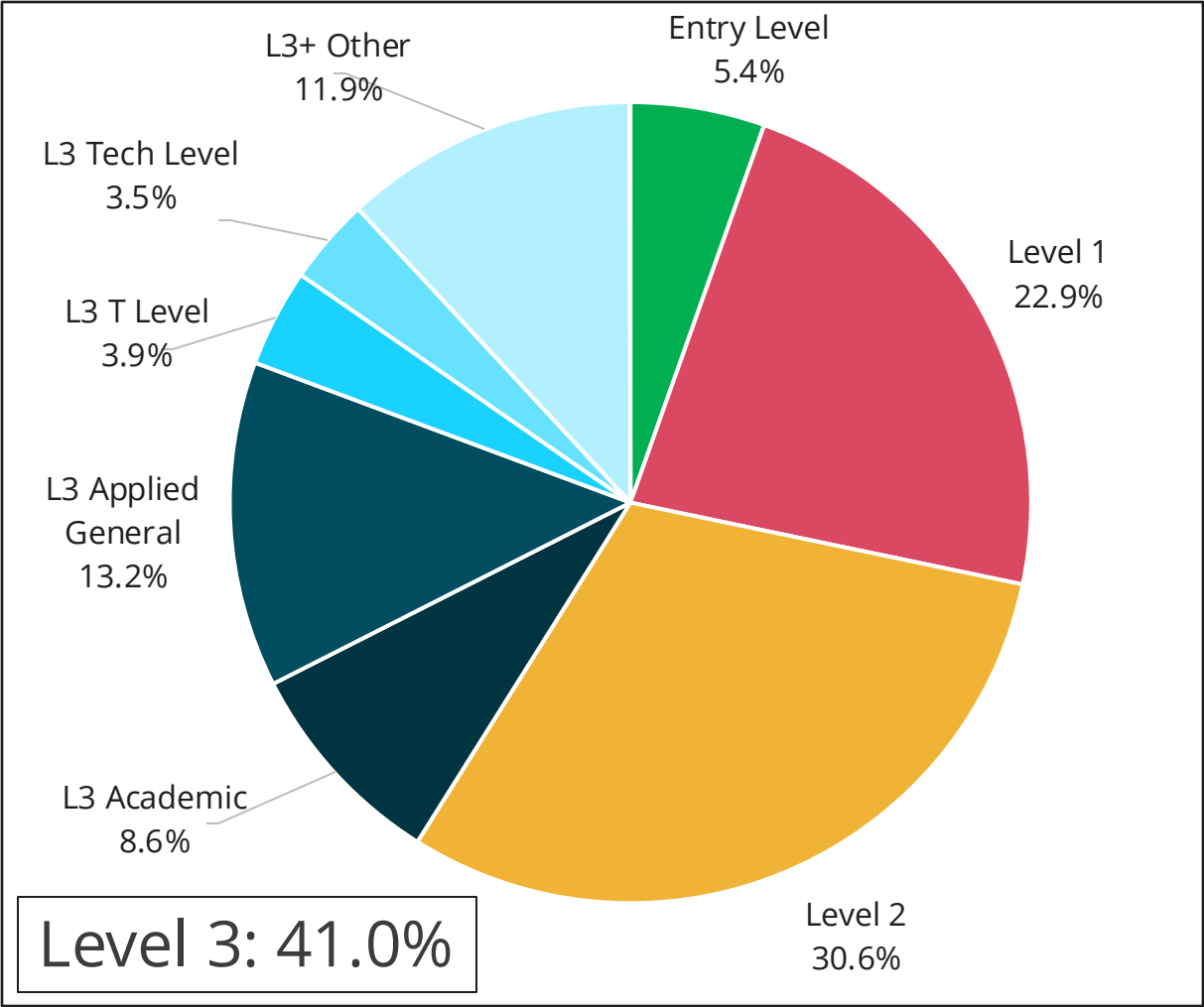
Why is this important?

- 16 and 17-year-olds:
 - 38% in state school sixth forms*
 - 41% in FE and sixth form colleges
 - 4% apprenticeships
 - 17% studying at below Level 3
- Transition information is scant and difficult to access

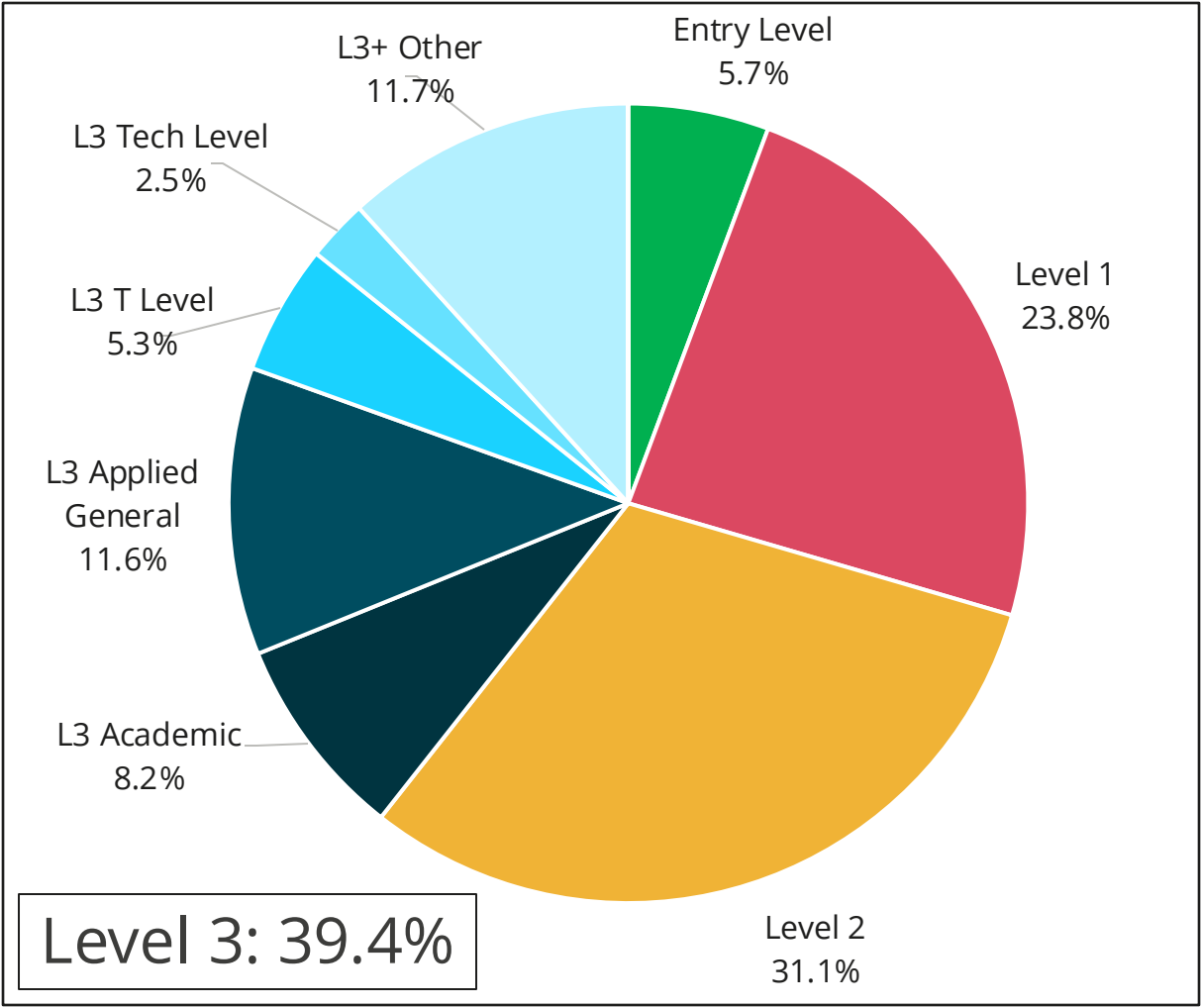
* ABS policy document, DfE (2023)

Learners by Level – 16-Year-Olds

2023/24 (R04)



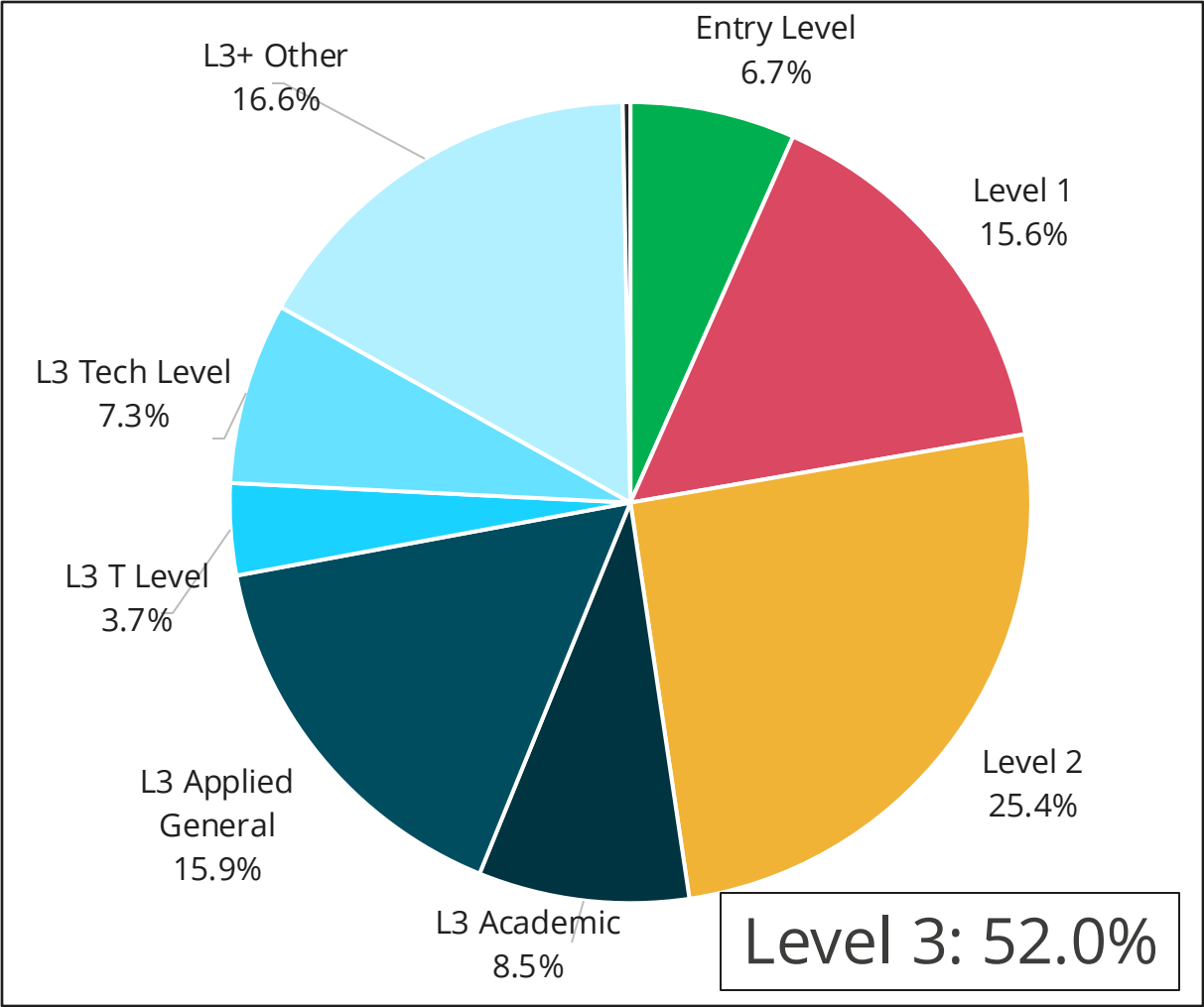
2024/25 (R04)



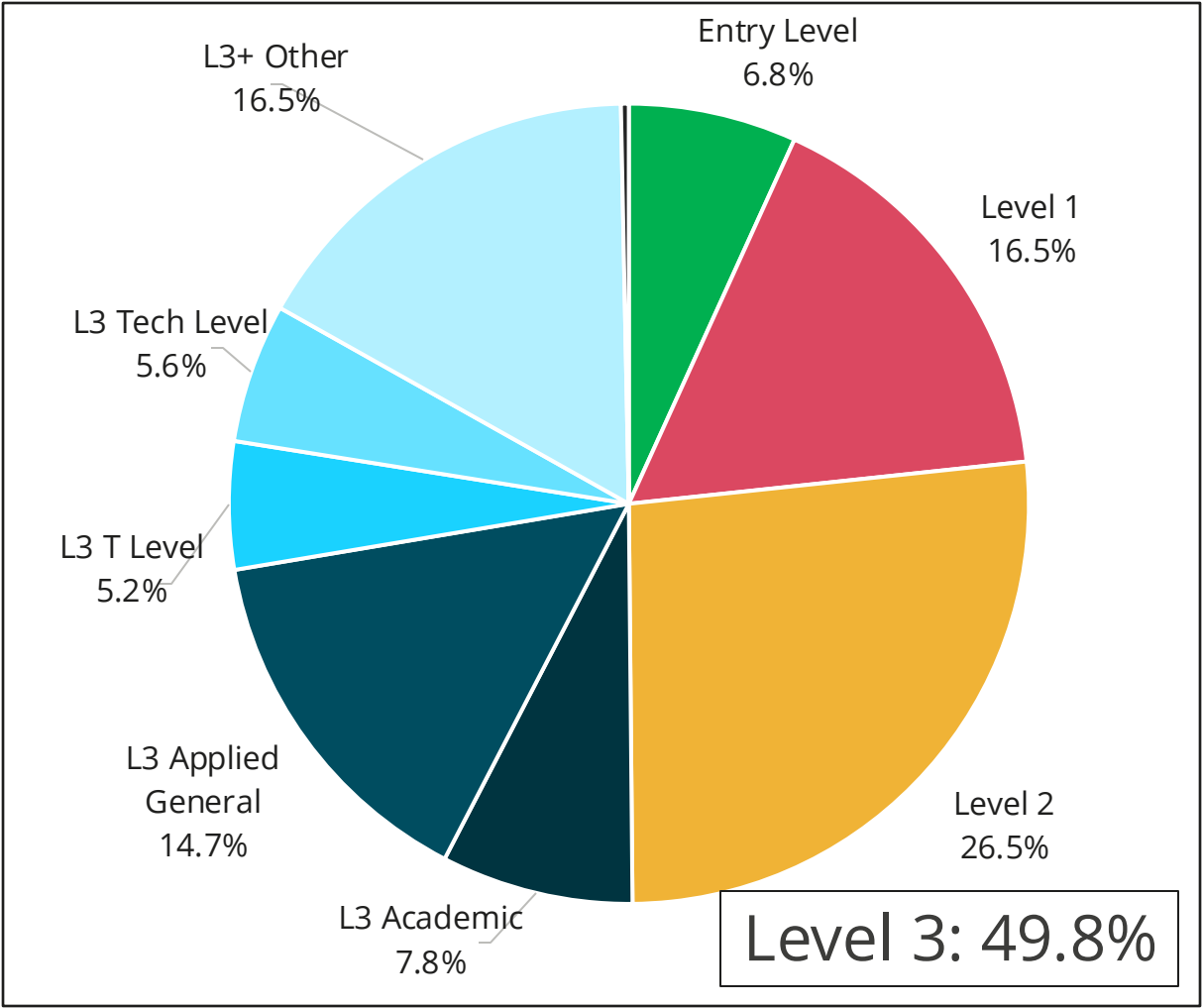
Source: MiDES ILR 2023/24 (R04) & 2024/25 (R04) – GFE and Land-based Colleges only – Level based on Core Aim

Learners by Level

2023/24 (R04)



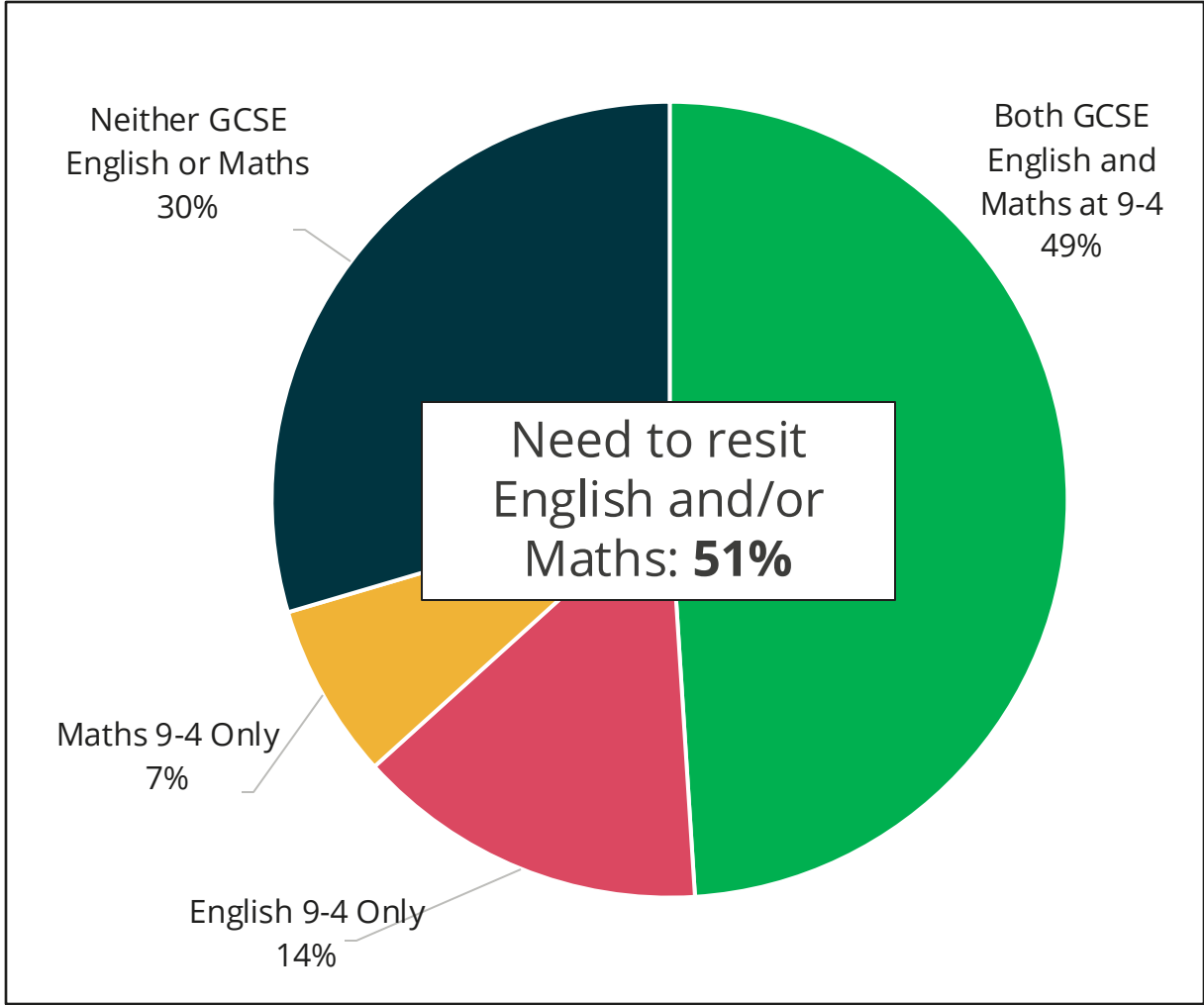
2024/25 (R04)



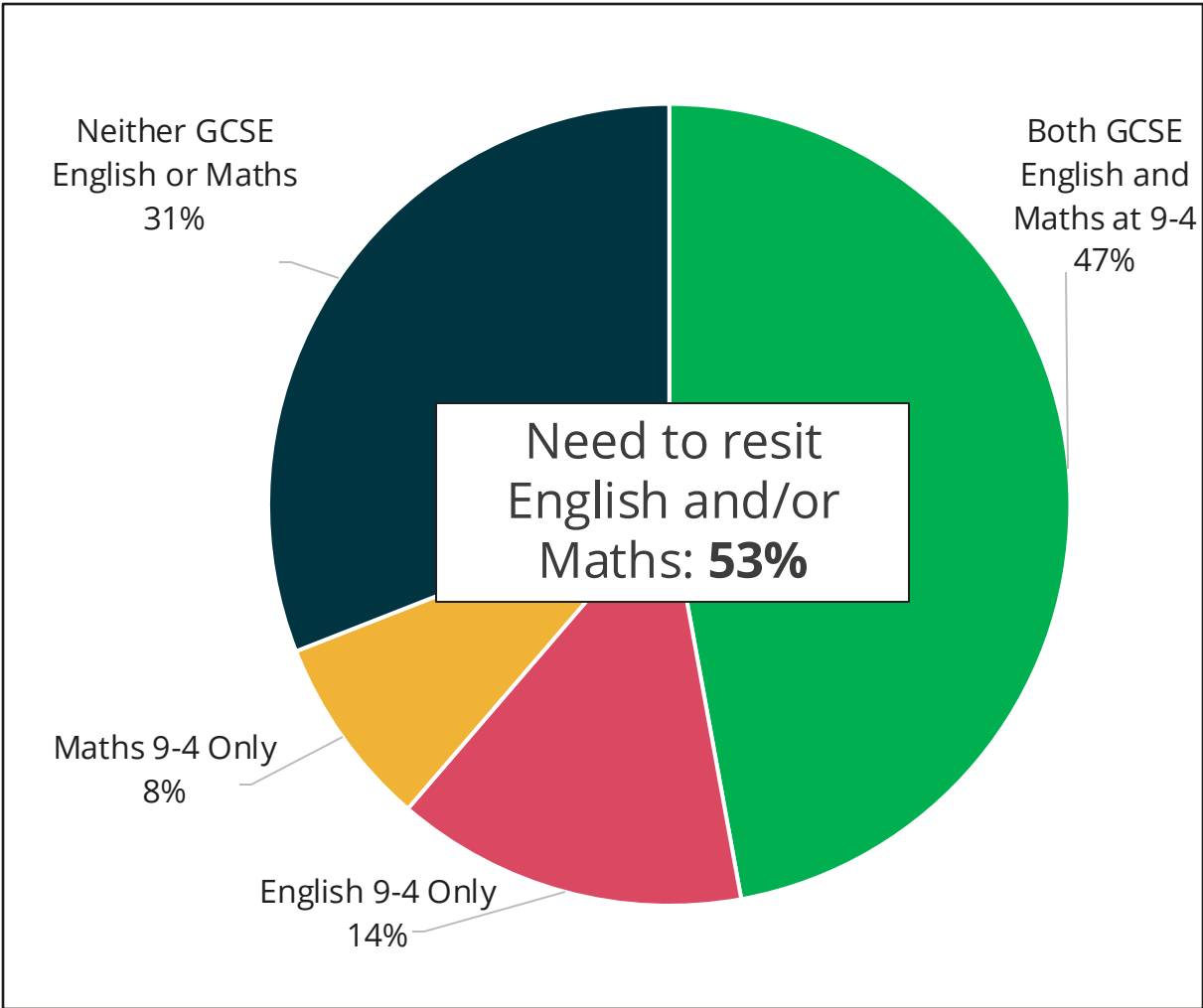
Source: MiDES ILR 2023/24 (R04) & 2024/25 (R04) – GFE and Land-based Colleges only – Level based on Core Aim

Learners by GCSE English/Maths On Entry

2023/24 (R04)

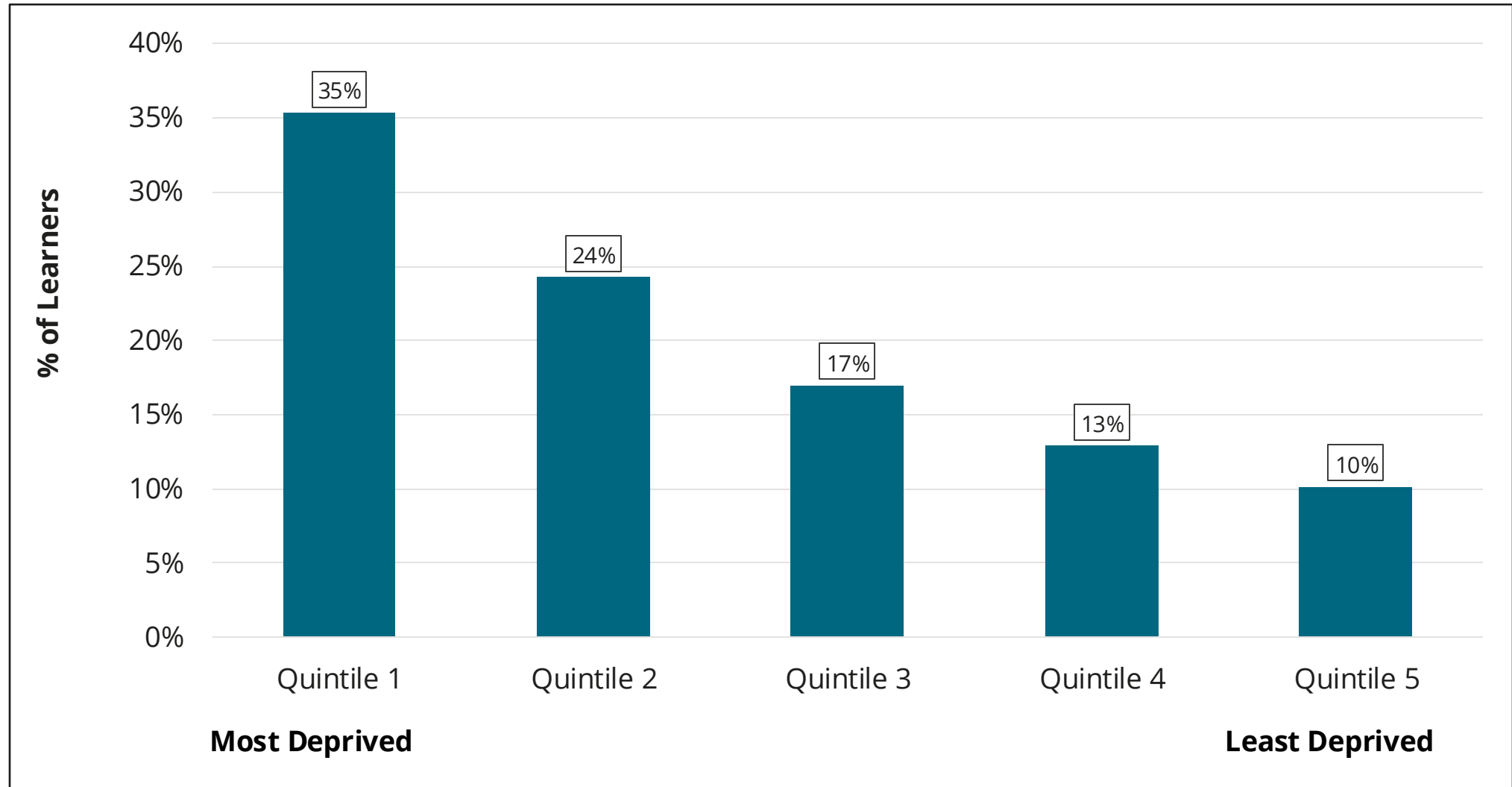


2024/25 (R04)



Source: MiDES ILR 20213/24 (R04) & 2024/25 (R04) – GFE and Land-based Colleges only

Learners by Deprivation



Solutions

Solutions

- Youth Guarantee – 18 to 21
- Pre-18 recommendations: Reintroduce RONI and bring in transition plans
- Colleges do brilliant work on transitions – everything from taster days to SEMH bridging courses
- But to make transition really work there needs to be system change – not just local initiatives:
 - Possible destinations explored and monitored from year 9
 - Greater implementation of PAL: Lots of information about different colleges and options
 - Visits/tasters to help decide
 - Place confirmed so student and family can be confident
 - This does happen for some – so why not all?

**Case study: The educational
provision for 14 to 16-year-olds in
further education colleges in
England**

**AoC and IoE, UCL's Faculty of
Education and Society, Nuffield
funded project**

Key themes

- 14 to 16-years-old at college (AP, DE, EHE) – c10,000 students - heterogenous group
- Mainstream school wasn't working for these young people:
 - issues or concerns that schools did not seem able to address such as bullying, mental health or SEND,
 - or school curriculum lacking vocational and technical options that students
- Good progression rates post 16 supported through CEIAG:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AP	83%	82%	81%	80%	81%
DE	85%	85%	87%	86%	84%
EHE	81%	80%	80%	80%	81%

- Students on vocational qualifications “two years ahead” of mainstream peers.
- Change in self-perceptions from one of failure to opportunities for success:

“My family thinks it's a great improvement from the school I was at previously and they think my grades have shot up and I am more myself and actually enjoy the things I do more.”

Recommendations: Policy and practice

- Working with schools and colleges, **all LAs should assess the suitability of 14 to 16 provision to meet the needs of all young people within their communities** to ensure they are given the opportunity to thrive and progress into adult life and work.
- **Key stage 3 and 4 curriculum** should be reviewed to allow students the option of studying fewer subjects at greater depth including a **wide range of vocational and technical qualifications at a range of levels** to meet each student's starting point.
- Providing funded opportunities for young people to attend college for vocational options during the school week could mean that some young people would remain in school, but also benefit from the broader options colleges offer. This could also support transition at 16.



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

Thank you

catherine.sezen@aoc.co.uk

