



Dear Student

January 2026

National Reference Test 2026

I am writing to you because you have been randomly selected to take a National Reference Test (NRT) in 2026.

You do not need to prepare for this test. The results are anonymised and your score on the test will not be shared with your teachers or school.

The NRT provides a valuable source of evidence which Ofqual uses to understand changes in performance of students at a national level over time. Each year the results of the NRT are considered by exam boards when setting grade boundaries in GCSE English language and maths. Your participation in the NRT is very important to ensure that the results are representative of the GCSE student population.

Your school will tell you the date and time of the test, which will take place between **20 February and 9 March 2026**. No extra work or revision is required to prepare for the test, and you will be entered into a draw for a prize of a tablet computer. There is one national prize draw for students doing the English test and one for students doing the maths test.

Ofqual has asked the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to develop and administer the NRT. A member of staff from NFER will visit your school to administer the tests. All test administrators have enhanced DBS checks. For more information about how NFER administer the tests please visit National Reference Test – NFER.

Why have I been selected to take part?

Your school is one of over 330 that is taking part and has provided NFER with a list of all its year 11 students entered for GCSE English language or GCSE maths in summer 2026. You have been randomly selected from this list to take part in the NRT by taking either the English or maths test; **you will not be asked to do both**.

How long will the test take?

The test lasts one hour. You will need to be available for up to one hour and 30 minutes. After the test, you will be asked to complete a short five-minute survey about your experience of the NRT and GCSE studies in general. Please ensure that you arrive at the time that your school has advised so that the test can start promptly.

What is expected of me in the test?

Please ensure you arrive promptly to start the test at the time given to you by your school. The test should be completed using a black pen or sharp HB or 2B pencil. You must **not** use gel pens. If you are completing the test in pencil, please write firmly. If there is anything you are unsure of and you need to ask any questions during the test, raise your hand and a member of staff present will help you. If you normally have access arrangements for assessments, your school will have arranged these for the NRT.

The test will be similar to a GCSE exam in style, and you do not need to prepare for it in advance. It covers a number of curriculum topics and includes questions aimed at students of different abilities. Please do not worry if there are questions that you find difficult or topics that you have not covered in your lessons, as the results will not be shared with your teachers or affect any of your future grades. Just do your best to attempt the whole test and answer as many of the questions as you can. If you finish early, use the remaining time to check over your answers.

Can I talk about the test to other students?

The test is confidential. You must not take test materials out of the exam room at any time during or after the test and you must not discuss the contents with anyone after the test. If you are not sure what you can and can't do, please ask the NFER member of staff for advice.

How will you use data about me?

We will not publish the names of schools or students who take part in the NRT or your answers to any of the questions. The results of this test will not be shared with your school or your parents.

To see the full privacy statement please visit National Reference Test: your information and your privacy - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). If your responses to any of the questions make us concerned about your safety, we may need to share your answers to these questions with your school.

Contact information

For further information about the NRT, please visit National Reference Test: information - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Thank you for your help with the NRT. Your contribution is very much appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns about these tests, you can speak to your teacher, or you can contact NFER by email at NRTkeystage4@nfer.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

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