

Lead teacher guide: college cohort 2025-26

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the second year of the Observatory's longitudinal cohort study. We are delighted to be working with your school/college again for this ground-breaking research project.

This guide has been created for the lead teacher at our research partner sixth form schools/colleges that teach A level Mathematics. The lead teacher is responsible for coordinating the project from the research partner end.



“Welcome to the second – and final - cycle of the colleges cohort study. I hope you managed a good break over the summer. Here at the Observatory, we are delighted to be working with you again for the coming year.

There was a quite remarkable response from partner schools last year. Over 50,000 surveys were completed by learners, teachers and parents/guardians in primary schools, secondary schools and sixth form colleges in England. Our team have been analysing the responses from your school/college along with the A level mathematics students and teachers from sixth forms in secondary schools and have gained new insights into advanced level mathematics learning and teaching. The headlines will be published in the Review of Mathematical Education 2025 in November, and we are meeting with the Department for Education in late September to share the initial results.

Whilst last year was an amazing effort by everyone who took part, the real value of the research is in tracking changes across the two years of A level study. This means that it is crucial to the study for students and teachers to complete surveys again this year, and I very much appreciate your support in helping us to secure as many responses as possible. We could not do this important work without you, so I would like to express my thanks to you as the lead teacher for your continued and invaluable support.”

Dr Catherine Gripton, Associate Director (Cohort Studies) for the Observatory for Mathematical Education and Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham

In this guide, you will find:

- An overview of the study, its purpose and aims.
- A summary and detailed breakdown of activity in the second year of the study (2025-26).
- The responsibilities of the research partner school/college.
- Contact details for the Observatory team.

We recommend you read through this document at the start of the year and then refer to key sections as needed.

There are a couple of changes to the research activities this year, so we encourage you to read through everything, even if you were the lead teacher last year.

2. Study overview

The Observatory is following three cohorts of pupils in schools and colleges across England. The pupils in these cohorts are largely the same as those that were surveyed last year.

- Primary cohort: Starting with pupils in Reception, this cohort will be followed until the end of Year 6. This cycle, the cohort is in Year 1.
- Secondary cohort: Starting with students in Year 7, this cohort will be followed until the end of Year 11 or Year 13. This cycle, the cohort is in Year 8.
- A-level cohort: Starting with students in Year 12, this is the final year for this cohort study. This cycle, the cohort is in Year 13.

The cohort studies form the largest ever longitudinal study of mathematics education in England. Over 7 years, the Observatory will build a picture of maths education in England through detailed exploration of a number of areas of interest, including thorough review of pupil attainment, attitudes, progression and experiences.

2.1 Purpose

We all know the importance of mathematics education for children's future lives and employment. Within the complexities of the education system in England, many factors contribute to a child's mathematics education. The Observatory is taking a longitudinal, cohort approach, collecting data on attitudes and experiences from the same group of pupils over several years in a representative sample of schools across England. The data will be analysed to identify trends across different approaches, resources, school types and pupil groups over time.

We will build a picture of the maths education landscape from a range of viewpoints: students, teachers, subject leaders and parents/guardians.

2.2 Aims

There are two broad aims to this study:

1. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current maths education landscape in England. This means seeking to understand patterns in children's attainment, attitudes, experiences and progression in mathematics.
2. To identify how these patterns vary by region, school and classroom; and for different groups of children (ethnicity, gender, SEND, language and socio-economic status). This will provide understanding of the impact of curriculum and teaching choices which will inform maths education policy and practice in the future.

3. Year 13: September 2025 – August 2026

This section provides an overview and a detailed breakdown of the research activities in the final cycle of the study.

3.1 Cycle two overview (Year 13 students and teachers)

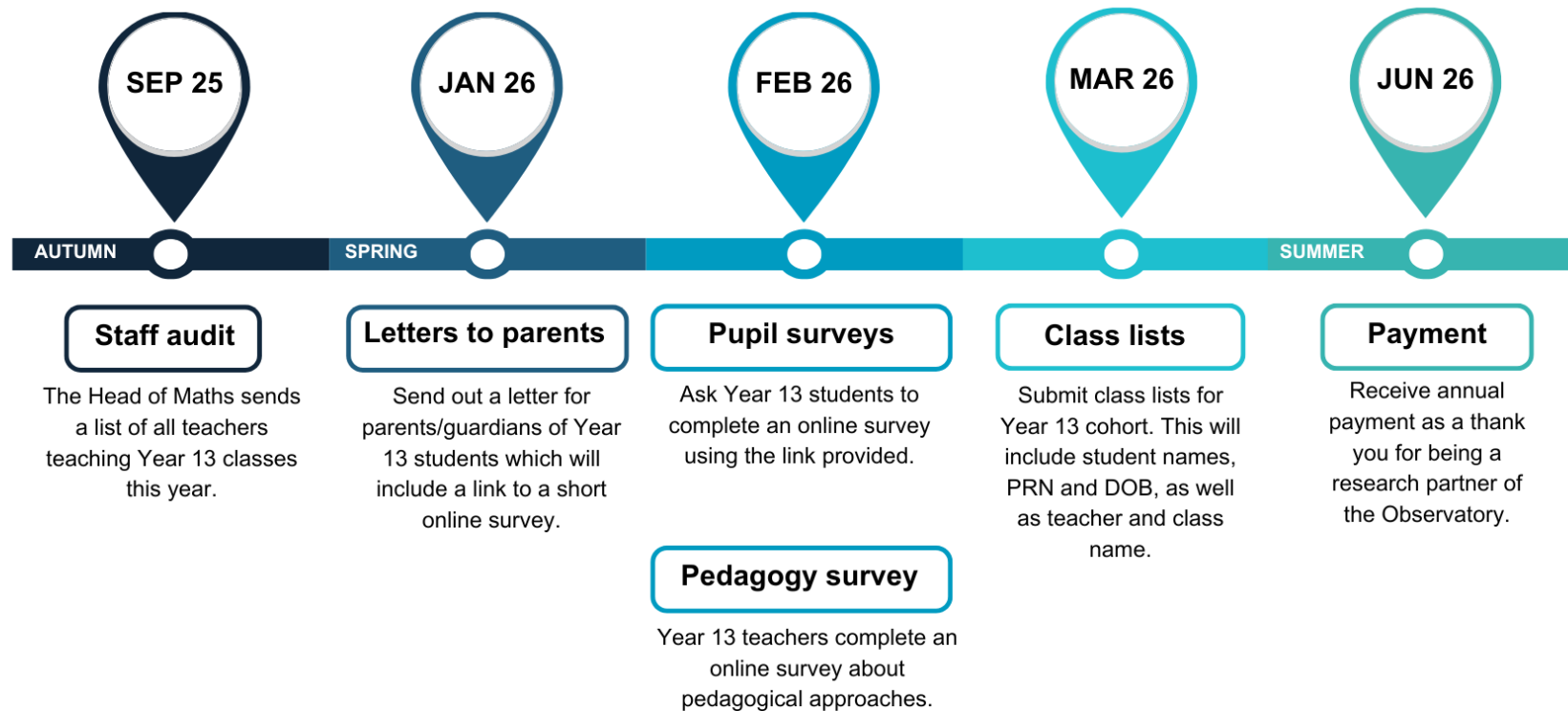
On the next page, you will find a timeline outlining the key research activities in cycle two (2025-26). The key differences from cycle one (2024-25) are:

- The **staff audit** will **only** ask for details of **Year 13 A level Mathematics teachers**.
- There will be **no teacher** survey if your school/college completed this last cycle.
- The **Year 13 pupil surveys** will take place in **February**.
- There will be **no Head of Maths survey** if this was completed last cycle.

Activities for Year 13 students and teachers are only for those studying/teaching A level Mathematics. Students/teachers of other qualifications (including Core Maths) should not complete these activities.

COLLEGES COHORT STUDY TIMELINE

Year 13, 2025-26



3.2 Cycle two planner 2025-26

Month	Activity	Who	What
September 2025	Staff audit	Lead teacher	We will email you an Excel spreadsheet template. Fill this in with the name, work email address and class name of Year 13 A level Mathematics teachers and share it with us by secure upload ¹ .
January 2026	Letter to Year 13 parent/guardian	Administrative contact	Send a letter from the Observatory to the parent/guardian of all Year 13 A level Mathematics students. The letter includes a link to a short online survey for parents/guardians. The letter should be sent using your usual method.
February 2026	Year 13 pupil surveys	Year 13 A level Mathematics students	Ask all Year 13 A level Mathematics students to complete an online survey using the link provided.
February 2026	Year 13 pedagogy survey	Year 13 A level Mathematics teachers	We will email your Year 13 A level Mathematics teachers a link to complete an online survey about the pedagogical approaches they use in their teaching. If you are a Year 13 teacher, you should also complete this.
March 2026	Year 13 class list	Administrative contact and data manager	We will ask the administrative contact for the details of your data manager, or other appropriate colleague, who can provide the class list information for the Year 13 students that complete the survey. ²
June 2026	Incentive payment	Finance contact	Your school/college will receive a payment by bank transfer from the Observatory. This payment is to thank you for being a research partner. We will ask your finance contact to confirm bank details and raise an invoice for this payment.

¹ Instructions for how complete a secure upload will be provided.

² Pupil name, date of birth, unique pupil number, class name and teacher name. Your school/college has consented to this in a data sharing agreement.

3.3 Administering the pupil surveys

The Year 13 pupil survey is completed online. The link for the survey will be emailed to you to share with your Year 13 A level Mathematics students (not Core Maths or Further Maths). We suggest sharing the link in a maths lesson and it should take your students about 10 minutes to complete. In the survey, the students will be asked to consent to the Observatory requesting some information about them (class list) from the school/college. We will contact the administrative contact at your school/college to arrange the transfer of this data after the survey has closed.

Our team will be on hand to help with any queries about completing the pupil surveys (see section [4. Information and support](#)).

4. Information and support

We appreciate you are busy people with many demands on your time. We want to make your participation in this research as easy as possible.

Here's what we will do to help you:

- ✓ Provide as much notice as possible for when to expect research activities.
- ✓ Make our email subjects clear and indicate when you need to action something.
- ✓ Keep emails brief and instructions clear.
- ✓ Make copies of documents and information available on our website, where possible.
- ✓ Respond to your emails as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Have our phone lines open Monday-Friday, 8.30am-4.30pm.

To make your participation straightforward, we ask you to help us by:

- ✓ Reading emails from us carefully.
- ✓ Completing the actions we request (or letting us know who else to speak to).
- ✓ Asking for clarification if something is not clear.
- ✓ Contacting us if you are concerned about meeting a deadline (with as much notice as possible).
- ✓ Contacting us if you have any concerns about your involvement with the research.

4.1 Our contact details

You can send us an email at any time, and we will aim to reply in 1 working day.

You can call to speak to someone in the office Monday-Friday, 8.30am-4.30pm.

Email: mathsobservatory@nottingham.ac.uk

Telephone: 0115 95 14426

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with any questions – our team are always happy to help.