

Editorial

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Welcome to the November 2026 issue of *Research Matters*. We begin this issue by considering theoretical ideas about how people learn, and how such ideas are used to inform educational design. Dominika Majewska and Jo Ireland reflect on three studies relating to learning theories and their use in developing curricula and other educational materials. They note challenges, such as the large number of theories and their abstract nature, and emphasise the need for practical guidance when applying theories to real-life contexts.

While much has been written about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, less research has considered whether such crises may be able to prompt some positive changes in educational contexts. In our second article, Filio Constantinou uses interviews with teachers conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic to explore ways in which a crisis may result in “post-traumatic growth”. The positive effects that were identified relate to emotions and attitudes, behaviours, interpersonal relationships and how education might be reimagined.

Students’ mathematics understanding and skills can be particularly important to their future opportunities. Therefore, in England, those who do not achieve a standard pass (grade 4) in GCSE Mathematics are required to retake their exams. In her article, Alejandra Miranda uses item-level data from GCSE Mathematics exams to explore which topics and skills tend to be more challenging and whether there are particular topics and skills for which grade 4 students perform disproportionately better than grade 3 students. Findings may have implications for supporting students.

A Levels are key qualifications for higher education entry and for employment opportunities. In our fourth article, Carmen Vidal Rodeiro and Tim Gill explore whether students who achieve grades D or below in their A Levels have different progression outcomes and earnings to students who achieve higher grades, using a database that links their educational backgrounds (including exam results) with their employment, earnings, and benefits data.

Our final article focuses on teachers’ data literacy, something that is important to the appropriate use of students’ test results. Annie Vincent, Nicky Rushton and Chris Jellis used a questionnaire and interviews with secondary school teachers to explore teachers’ views on: the importance of engaging with data; skills and confidence in interpreting data; and training needs. Based on the findings, Annie, Nicky and Chris reflect on the need for schools to understand teachers’ data literacy skills and training needs, and the role of assessment organisations in supporting the interpretation of assessment data.