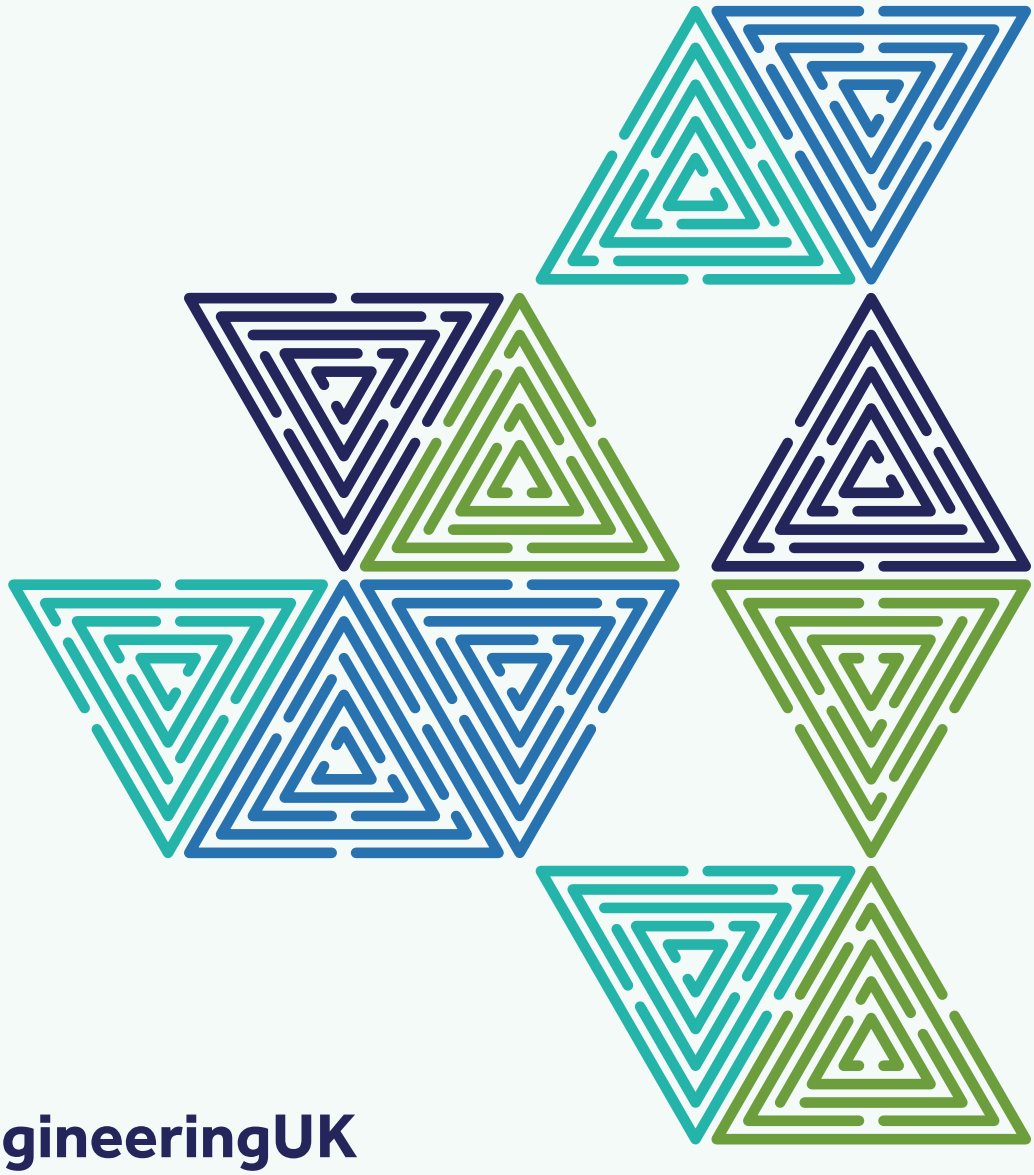
# ENGINEERINGUK PRIORITY SCHOOLS APPROACH

## Academic year 2026/27



EngineeringUK
INSPIRING FUTURES TOGETHER

engineeringuk.com

# Contents


Contents 1

Background to the priority schools approach 2

Priority schools pilot and outcomes 2

Priority schools approach iterations 2

Participant-level data collection 3

Priority school eligibility 4

National differences 4

Secondary school criteria 5

Primary school criteria 7

# Background to the priority schools approach

EngineeringUK's vision is that **the UK has the diverse workforce needed for engineering and technology to thrive and to drive economic prosperity, improve sustainability and achieve net zero.**

The engineering and technology workforce could and should be much more diverse. For example: women make up just 17% of the engineering and technology workforce, compared to 56% across other occupations; 15% of the engineering and technology workforce are from a UK minority ethnic group, compared to 18%; and 14% of the engineering and technology workforce are disabled, compared to 18%[1]. Additionally, young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds find it harder to enter the workforce in any occupations or sectors[2] .

## Priority schools pilot and outcomes

In autumn 2020, EngineeringUK developed a set of 'EDI criteria' to identify schools that we would prioritise for our programmes in order to reach more young people from groups under-represented in engineering and technology. In the first year that we applied this approach, it led to an increase in the proportion of schools accessing our programmes who met these criteria (now known as 'priority schools'). This has continued to be the case in each year since then. For all EngineeringUK programmes, the proportions of priority schools who participate are at least in line with the national proportion of priority schools, and in most cases above. More importantly, analysis of the demographic profile of the young people who participated in our programmes shows that the priority approach works. When working with priority schools, amongst participating students, there were higher proportions of young people from UK minority ethnic backgrounds, those eligible for Free School Meals, disabled young people and those with special educational needs.

## Priority schools approach reviews and iterations

The approach for secondary schools has remained consistent since the approach was established, with one exception. With the under-representation of women and girls in mind, in 2021/22 we sought to ensure that the priority schools approach included girls schools who meet the FSM and UK minority ethnic criteria at a lower threshold (see below for details). By making this minor change, we ensured that the approach reached schools where a proportion of the girls also have intersectionality of being from a lower socio-economic group or from a UK minority ethnic background.

[1] www.engineeringuk.com/keystats

[2] https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/youngpeopleinthelabourmarketbysocioeconomicbackgrounduk/2014to2021

In 2023/24, we also introduced a criteria for primary schools. We tested taking the same approach as secondary schools, and this yielded similar results. This approach has worked well in the 2 years since, and so we are continuing with the same for 2025/26. We will continue to review the criteria for both primary and secondary schools to ensure they are working, and make any necessary amends as required.

In Spring 2026 we reviewed the approach to prioritisation of young people from UK Minority Ethnic Groups. The workforce data shows that all UK Minority Ethnic (UKME) groups are somewhat underrepresented in the engineering and technology workforce, with Black people being particularly underrepresented, especially compared to those working in non-engineering and technology roles. However, there is a general trend of UKME students being overrepresented in STEM education pathways, with some nuances, for example different groups are over and underrepresented in different education pathways. We concluded that schools with more UKME pupils should remain a priority, broadening access to STEM activities and continuing to help address underrepresentation of this group in the engineering and technology workforce.

## Participant-level data collection

This document looks only at school-level data, to assess the inclusion of schools in the priority schools approach. As outlined above, we have also collected data on the demographics of young people who participate in our programmes. This supports us to understand whether we are engaging with young people from groups under-represented in engineering and technology. Some examples of the types of questions asked can be found in the EngineeringUK demographic data question bank[3].

[3] https://www.tomorrowsengineers.org.uk/improving-practice/resources/engineeringuk-demographic-data-question-bank/

# Priority school eligibility

We consider a school to meet our criteria for being a priority school if they are:

- Above average (top 50%) in **both** Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility **and** proportion of UK minority ethnic students
- Significantly above average (in the top quartile - top 25%) of **one** of FSM eligibility **or** proportion of UK minority ethnic students
- A single-sex girls schools who have above average in **one** of FSM eligibility **or** UK minority ethnic students
- In a rural area
- A special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) school or Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

## National differences

The four nations within the UK all have different data and different systems. They are each processed separately, and there are therefore some small necessary differences in the approach.

### England

In England, we use the top 30% rather than top quartile for FSM eligibility. This is because of massive regional disparities in the spread of UK minority ethnic groups.

### Northern Ireland

The data provided on schools in Northern Ireland is less detailed than that of the other 3 UK nations. Most notably, there is no ethnicity data provided. Therefore, there is no ethnicity criteria in Northern Ireland, and we use the top 40% of FSM eligibility. Rural and SEND/PRU eligibility remains the same.

### Scotland

In Scotland, Primary 1 – Primary 5 have universal free meals, and so the proportion of students in Primary 6 and 7 are used for these calculations.

### Regional considerations

It is noted that there are regional variations within each nation for the data provided below (e.g. different proportions of UKME representation). However, it was decided that using national statistics was the best approach, as EngineeringUK focusses on the national picture. We aim to improve the diversity of the engineering and technology workforce in the UK, rather than on a region-by-region basis.

# Secondary school criteria

Based on the criteria listed above, the following thresholds are in place for the 2026/27 school year.

| | National average (median) | Significantly above average |
|---|---|---|
| **England** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | ≥26.5% | ≥35.4% |
| UK minority ethnic students | ≥28.9% | ≥60.0% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Rural area, further from a major town or city[4] |
| **Wales** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | ≥17.5% | ≥25.3% |
| UK minority ethnic students | ≥7.0% | ≥14.7% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Rural area, further from a major town or city[5] |
| **Scotland** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | ≥16.3% | ≥23.4% |
| UK minority ethnic students | ≥13.1% | ≥21.3% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Remote rural areas and remote small towns[6] |
| **Northern Ireland** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | - | ≥26.5% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Rural[7] |

In total (not including special/PRU, as they do not have an assigned school phase):

- 52% of secondary schools in England meet the criteria
- 72% of secondary and middle schools in Wales meet the criteria
- 60% of secondary schools in Scotland meet the criteria
- 53% of post-primary schools in Northern Ireland meet the criteria

[4] Based on the 2021 Census Rural Urban Classification
[5] Based on the 2021 Census Rural Urban Classification
[6] Based on the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020
[7] Based on the report of the inter-departmental urban-rural definition group, statistical classification and delineation of settlements, 2015

# Primary school criteria

Based on the criteria listed above, the following thresholds are in place for the 2026/27 school year.

| | National average (median) | Significantly above average |
|---|---|---|
| **England** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | ≥20.2% | ≥30.4% |
| UK minority ethnic students | ≥22.3% | ≥50.1% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Rural area, further from a major town or city[8] |
| **Wales** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | ≥18.6% | ≥29.9% |
| UK minority ethnic students | ≥8.6% | ≥21.3% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Rural area, further from a major town or city[9] |
| **Scotland** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | ≥34.3% | ≥53.4% |
| UK minority ethnic students | ≥16.6% | ≥29.3% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Remote rural areas and remote small towns[10] |
| **Northern Ireland** | | |
| Free School Meal eligibility | - | ≥25.4% |
| SEND/PRU | - | Special schools/PRUs |
| Rural location | - | Rural[11] |

In total (not including special/PRU, as they do not have an assigned school phase):

- 56% of primary schools in England meet the criteria
- 62% of primary schools in Wales meet the criteria
- 43% of primary schools in Scotland meet the criteria
- 83% of primary schools in Northern Ireland meet the criteria

[8] Based on the 2021 Census Rural Urban Classification
[9] Based on the 2021 Census Rural Urban Classification
[10] Based on the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020
[11] Based on the report of the inter-departmental urban-rural definition group, statistical classification and delineation of settlements, 2015