

Cultural Learning Alliance

Draft English Baccalaureate Consultation Briefing

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The EBacc Consultation

The DfE is currently consulting on some new education reforms concerning the English Baccalaureate.

You can download the consultation form [here](#). It closes on 29 January 2016 at 5:00pm.

What do we need to do?

It is critical that as many people as possible:

1. **send personalised consultation responses to the Department of Education**
2. **send a letter to their [Member of Parliament](#) asking them to write to [Nicky Morgan](#)**, Secretary of State for Education, and [Nick Gibb](#), Minister for Schools, on this issue – copying in [John Whittingdale](#), Secretary of State for Culture, and [Ed Vaizey](#), Minister for Culture, Media and Sport and Digital Industries – on their behalf.
3. **Brief their board, staff, audiences, influential friends and patrons on this issue** – asking them to respond themselves and to use their influence. Organisations could consider using their websites social media or e-bulletins to spread the word further.
4. **Use media opportunities to get this message heard.**

The [Bacc for the Future](#) campaign has prepared a template letter to MPs and a consultation response that you can use if you really do not have time to draft your own (it's better if you do in both cases, even if it's only a few lines).

It is worth noting that the DfE is asking for views on **how** to implement the reforms, not for views on whether they should be made. However, the Cultural Learning Alliance believes that the reforms:

- **are needlessly bureaucratic and will reduce parent and student choice**
- **will have a further, significant detrimental impact on the teaching and learning of the arts in schools**
- **are unambitious and will widen the disadvantage gap**
- **are not based on robust evidence**

- **will materially affect the UK economy, society and our international standing**

We believe that the reforms should not be implemented and are calling on the government to scrap these proposals.

The answer is not to add the arts to the EBacc – we don't want to create more restrictions on schools and teachers in an already desperately crowded accountability system – it's to rethink the accountability system and simplify it so that the arts are supported, championed and taught by qualified expert teachers in every school.

This briefing paper gives you a brief outline of each of our core arguments, with links to data sources and further organisations and information. **Do use it to build and inform your own consultation response.**

We would like this to be a live document, so if you have any further information, links, resources or a differing view then please contact Lizzie@culturallearningalliance.org.uk.

A brief history of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc)

The Coalition Government introduced the concept of the English Baccalaureate in 2010. Schools were required to publish the number of students that achieved A-C grades across 5 subject areas at GCSE level: English, Maths, Science, Modern Foreign Languages and Humanities (History and Geography). These are generally known as the 5 Pillars of the English Baccalaureate. The arts are not included.

This new league table was the first indication of the Department of Education's policy to promote and increase the study of this combination of subjects. They believed it was essential to improving teaching and learning and young people's life chances.

The initial introduction of the EBacc immediately had a significant impact on what children studied at secondary school – an early poll from [Ipsos Mori](#) showed that 27% of schools cut courses as a direct result of its implementation. Historic [analysis](#) from the Cultural Learning Alliance in 2013 revealed that this disproportionately affected arts courses – especially for pupils in disadvantaged areas.

Since 2010 the Education System has seen widespread reform. GCSEs and the National Curriculum have been re-designed to focus on knowledge, rather than skills and understanding. Assessment of subjects has moved largely towards final examination and away from coursework.

In 2016, secondary schools are already being asked to perform against a large number of different measures and the key measure of success is no longer 'five A-Cs

at GCSE'. The Government introduced new measures in 2013: Progress 8 and Attainment 8 (see our [briefing](#) on how they work).

Although we broadly welcomed Progress and Attainment 8 when they were unveiled, as they have the potential to support arts learning, we have noted that the EBacc subjects are given special priority and weighting **within** these measures already (you have to take the EBacc to score highly in both) **and** schools are also already assessed separately on their students' EBacc performance (so schools are currently judged *three times* on the EBacc).

What are the new proposals?

This consultation is on DfE proposals for the English Baccalaureate to become even more central to secondary school education. It is proposed that:

- 90% of pupils in mainstream secondary schools will enter the EBacc
- Schools will have to report as further headline measures:
 - number of pupils entering the EBacc
 - EBacc achievement

In addition:

- The EBacc will take 'a more prominent role' in Ofsted assessment
- New league-tables will be compiled and published on the average EBacc point score of each school

Summary of arguments against the government's current proposals

1. Key argument: this is needless bureaucracy

The DfE proposes to judge secondary schools as many as six times on the same measure (Progress 8, Attainment 8, EBacc numbers, EBacc achievement, Ofsted, EBacc average point score). This cannot be efficient or effective.

The new EBacc proposals are confused, overly complex, duplicate existing measures (we already have Progress 8 and Attainment 8 in place) and **will significantly reduce choice for parents, students and teachers** – who should be able to choose the teaching and learning that they want and which is right for them.

The reforms **directly contradict the Government's initial stated aims for its education reform**: to give schools more autonomy and make accountability more effective.

Evidence

We have made the case a number of times that five EBacc subject pillars does not equal five EBacc subjects. Because of the way that Science and English

are taught, the EBacc is likely to take up 7 GCSEs as a minimum, and students in England typically study 8 subjects.

Under these reforms, schools will be asked to report separately on the number of students achieving in English Baccalaureate subjects six different times – therefore incentivising schools and students to choose more EBacc subjects in these last remaining slots than the required five, as this maximises their chances of success across all six measures (e.g. if students choose History AND Geography they have two opportunities to score highly against Ebacc measures; if they choose Geography and *Music* they only have one).

The very repetition of the EBacc reinforces the notion that it is the only thing that matters.

In a [speech](#) on The Importance of Teaching, the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove said:

‘And it is because the teaching profession is so crucial that our programme of education reform has been designed to empower teachers; to give them more freedom, more power and more prestige’.

In another [speech](#) he stated that accountability should be appropriate and structured so that parents and government understand school performance, and that they could be coupled with school autonomy and parent choice.

The current Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan has also stated her ambition to reduced needless bureaucracy on schools and teachers. In a speech in July 2015 she said:

‘Teachers and leaders told us that much of the work they do every day – such as marking, planning and tracking pupil progress – is essential, but that it’s the volume, duplication, bureaucracy or detail that can prove unnecessary or unproductive.’

2. Key argument: the EBacc has already had a significant effect on the teaching and learning of the arts in schools

The consultation document states:

‘EBacc subjects are only part of a broad and balanced curriculum. The government believes that every child should experience a high-quality arts and cultural education throughout their time at school. This is why the arts subjects are statutory for maintained schools from key stages 1 to 3. PE also remains a compulsory subject at all four key stages in the national curriculum, ensuring that pupils remain active throughout school’.

However:

- Since the introduction of the EBacc we have seen a **14% reduction in uptake of arts subjects at GCSE in secondary schools**. See our [briefing](#) for further information as to how we have calculated these figures and why we disagree with the DfE's presentation of them.
- Department for Education [figures](#) published in July 2015 show that between 2010 and 2014 the **number of hours the arts were taught in secondary schools fell by 10% and the number of arts teachers fell by 11%**.
- The emphasis that Government has placed on GCSE attainment through their accountability reforms has led many schools to teach the Key Stage 4 (GCSE) material over three years. **This robs students of a year of their Key Stage 3 Curriculum (where the arts are statutory), further eroding the talent pipeline into the arts, meaning that vital skills, knowledge and understanding are untaught, and limiting pupils' ability to progress.**
- Although the Government [offers bursaries](#) to new teachers training in all EBacc subjects, **it does not offer any financial incentive for Art, Dance or Drama teachers.**
- Although we have seen a welcome, slight increase to the number of initial teacher training places for arts subjects, we are seeing worrying trends in the number of those places being filled – particularly in Design & Technology and Music. **We believe that these reforms will have a significant detrimental impact on teacher recruitment** as schools, with their increasingly limited budgets, will prioritise appointments of staff in EBacc subjects.

3. Key argument: the EBacc will not ensure social justice for disadvantaged young people

The DfE states that the introduction of the EBacc is about tackling inequality and about social justice, particularly for the most disadvantaged. However, **the EBacc reforms are limited and unambitious**. By squeezing out the arts they only offer the basics to our poorest children. If the arts are simply relegated to after-school, or optional activities, then the government's ambition for social mobility will not be realised. The arts, and all the benefits and opportunities they offer, will become a postcode lottery, or exclusive to those who can afford a private, arts-rich education.

We want a gold-standard cultural education for *everyone*.

Evidence

We [know](#) that studying the arts can materially improve social mobility: students from low income families who take part in arts activities at school

are three times more likely to get a degree, are more employable and tend to stay in their jobs for longer.

If social justice is this government's focus then it should be investing in and prioritising the arts.

We also know that our most successful independent schools prioritise the arts and would not consider delivering an education without culture at its heart. Read our Independent Headteachers' [report](#) here.

'There should be an obligation to deliver a cultural subject in the EBacc. The British liberal tradition is one of breadth of education, with a broad based perception of culture, which is given parity with other subjects. By limiting the subjects that are valued, the EBacc is downgrading and reducing the potential for achievement. We aren't being true to ourselves and are limiting the different ways to express ourselves if all we concentrate on is having to matriculate.'

Tony Little, former Headmaster, Eton College

'We know that, in the world of work, creative vision, entrepreneurial skills and artistic flair are key transformational advantages that derive from studying the arts.'

Peter Green, Headmaster of Rugby School (Telegraph, [Dec 2015](#))

4. Key argument: The government's rationale for its EBacc reforms as a tool to improve student attainment is not robust and is based on a selective reading of the evidence

The government's exemplar, comparative international education systems all teach the EBacc in some form, **but they also teach the arts**. There is no acknowledgement of this in the reform document.

Across the globe, many countries are now looking at valuing and assessing creativity. In 2012 **the PISA international league table ranks the UK as 11th in the world in Creative Problem Solving**. **If we fail to nurture and build on this strength then we risk losing our talent pipeline and our international reputation as a creative and cultural powerhouse.**

There is [no real evidence](#) that shows that the suite of subjects enshrined in the EBacc are the ones that will enable young people to get a job or progress to university. Many employers (including the [CBI](#)) state they want creative young people with a range of both arts and science skills. This is backed up by many organisations such as [NESTA](#), [Creative and Cultural Skills](#) and the [Creative Industries Federation](#), who all join the CLA in calling for a focus on putting the A in STEM to form **STEAM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, **Arts** and Maths) in our education system.

Evidence

The DfE states that: *'Many countries with education systems that perform more highly than England make an academic core of subjects compulsory to 16. Countries such as Finland, Germany and Poland, and education jurisdictions such as Shanghai, the provinces of Victoria in Australia and Ontario in Canada all provide education in core academic subjects until at least 16.'*

However, as the DfE's own Expert Panel pointed out in this [report](#) (see Annex 1 of the report), these countries also make the arts compulsory. In fact Ontario makes the arts compulsory until age 18. There is no evidence at all that a piecemeal adoption of a few of the characteristics of the education systems of some high-performing jurisdictions will raise attainment in our schools, and there has been no analysis by government of the place of the arts in contributing to or driving this success. How can it be sure that the arts are not the common overriding factor?

In 2012 PISA also ranked pupil performance in Creative Problem Solving for the first time (reflecting a global recognition that these skills are essential for both the economy, society and for young people's life chances). The UK was ranked 11th in these tables. The OECD states: *'In Australia, Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea, Macao-China, Serbia, England (United Kingdom) and the United States, students perform significantly better in problem solving than students in other countries who show similar performance in mathematics, reading and science.'*

5. Key argument: these reforms will materially affect the UK economy, society and our international standing

We want an education system that ensures that young people have the skills, knowledge and understanding that our employers need, and which we need as a nation: we want creative, empathetic, entrepreneurial young people to engage with our major national issues (environment, community cohesion, ethics etc.), with technology and to build a stronger society.

This DfE policy is at odds with the rest of government.

In December 2015, George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, [protected](#) the arts budget in the Spending Review because he understood it to be *'one of the best investments we can make as a nation is in our extraordinary arts, museums, heritage, media and sport. £1 billion a year in grants adds a quarter of a trillion pounds to our economy – not a bad return.'* The value of the arts to the UK in terms of our economy, to jobs, to our soft power and international standing is well understood by the Treasury.

Prime Minister, David Cameron made a [speech](#) about Life Chances for disadvantaged young people in January 2016 that recognised the central role

of culture in addressing inequality and that *‘culture should never be a privilege; it is a birth right that belongs to us all.’*

In January 2015 Sajid Javid, then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport [said](#): *‘The UK’s Creative Industries are recognised as world leaders around the globe and today’s figures show that they continue to grow from strength to strength. They are one of our most powerful tools in driving growth, outperforming all other sectors of industry and their contribution to the UK economy is evident to all. Government is determined to continue its support for this most dynamic of sectors as part of our long-term economic plan’.*

There is also an identified need for these subjects to be prioritised. There are significant [skills shortages](#) in the Creative Industries with artists, games designers, musicians and dancers appearing on the Tier 2 Shortage Occupation list.

Susan Anderson, CBI Director for Education & Skills, [said](#):

‘Our creative industries have huge growth potential, but the lack of trained people with relevant skills to meet the sector’s specialist demands is holding it back.

First and foremost we must ensure that all young people leave school with a strong grasp of the basics. Solid maths and science ability is particularly vital.

These companies also expect a more detailed knowledge of IT and benefit from people with broader creative skills, so the Government must adapt the curriculum to meet these needs.’

Conclusion

This set of EBacc reforms is not a coherent accountability strategy, nor is it an evidenced plan to raise attainment or to close the disadvantage gap. The DfE must rethink this approach completely to ensure that it offers a gold-standard STEAM education to all children, meets its own stated aims for reform, and aligns itself with the vision and strategy of the rest of government.