English Baccalaureate implementation - DfE consultation

Date 1 December 2015

Author Kathy Baker
LGIU/CSN Associate

Summary

This briefing is on the DfE Consultation on implementing the English Baccalaureate launched on 3 November. In support, the DfE has published Statistical release: EBacc and non-EBacc subject entries and achievement 2010/11 to 2014/15, a Press Release, Nicky Morgan: no tolerance of areas where majority of pupils fail and a speech, Nicky Morgan: one nation education made by the Secretary of State at a Policy Exchange event also on 3 November.

This briefing will be of interest to elected members and officers with responsibility for school education as well as those with an interest in improving the quality of education including teachers and leaders in schools, governors and parents, particularly the supply of teachers for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects.

The deadline for the DfE consultation on implementing the EBacc is 29 January 2016.

Overview

The DfE press release (2 November) described the consultation as 'the next phase of the Government's education reform package designed to tackle underperformance and deliver on the Government's commitment to give every child an excellent education'. Over the last five years, significant progress has been made with a million more pupils in 'good' or 'outstanding' schools compared to 2010, but there were:

'...too many places...lagging behind, meaning young people in these areas are not being given a fair shot. Latest figures show that more than 20 local authorities are still unable to secure 5 good GCSEs despite an improving picture across the country'.

The measures announced in the speech are therefore designed to ensure that every pupil masters the 3Rs in primary school and studies the core academic subjects in secondary schools. The measures are:

- a new National Teaching Service (NTS) that will by 2020, deploy 1,500 outstanding teachers and leaders for up to three years, to underperforming schools that struggle to attract and retain the professionals that they need;
- further government consideration of the case for tests for pupils aged 7 (in addition to more rigorous end of key stage 2 tests and the new 'reception baseline' being introduced to primary schools) to make sure that they provide a firm basis for calculating progress to Key Stage 2;
- a government consultation on achieving the Government's goal for 90% of pupils to be studying the EBacc subjects of mathematics, English, science, a foreign language and
either history and geography, and plans for the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc to become the headline measure used to hold schools to account through Ofsted.

The EBacc, a school performance measure, was first introduced in 2010 to allow people to see how many pupils get a grade C or above in the five core subjects at Key Stage 4 in any government-funded school. To enter the EBacc, pupils take up to eight GCSE qualifications across five subject ‘pillars’ of English, mathematics, science, languages and humanities. The Conservative manifesto for the 2015 General Election included a commitment to introduce an expectation that every child, who is able, should study the EBacc. In June 2015, the Government announced its intention that all pupils starting year 7 in September 2015 take the EBacc subjects when they reach their GCSEs in 2020. This current consultation is about implementing this commitment.

In 2013, the Government announced that Progress 8 would become a headline measure in the Key Stage 4 performance tables from 2016 onwards. Progress 8 measures the progress that pupils make across 8 qualifications, including English and mathematics; any three other EBacc qualifications; and three other subjects.

According to the Secretary of State in her speech on 3 November, the EBacc is already having an impact:

‘And it’s worked. The seemingly terminal decline in young people studying this valuable combination of subjects reversed, almost doubling in five years...And yet it remains the case that overall just 39% of young people are now studying the EBacc- in some areas it’s as low as 20%’.

Briefing in full

Consultation rationale

The proposals set out in the consultation are part of the Government’s policy to give children the best possible start in life and to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, are entitled to an education that prepares them for adult life and success in the modern economy. A ‘rich academic curriculum’ is seen as the foundation of such an education and the core academic subjects as ‘an educated person's palette’, that provides the basis for more specialised study later and keeps career options open.

The consultation document emphasises that many countries with education systems that perform more highly than England have an academic compulsory core of subjects to 16, such as Finland, Germany and Poland. Additionally, 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. In England, however the number of pupils taking academic subjects at GCSE has declined prior to 2010. In 2000, 32% of pupils took history, 36% of pupils took geography and 76% of pupils took a modern foreign language but by 2010, this had fallen to 31% taking history, 26% taking geography and 43% taking a modern foreign language. The Government therefore concluded that broadening the academic core in England would bring our education system more into line with high performing countries and help young people compete in international job markets. Between 2010 and 2015, the EBacc already gained impact according to the consultation, with the proportion of pupils studying humanities at GCSE rising by 18% and languages by 9%. This is seen as a great improvement but a key government concern is that too many pupils who could benefit from the EBacc are so far missing out.

© Local Government Information Unit/Children’s Services Network www.lgiu.org.uk 251 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NG.Reg Charity 1113495. This briefing available free of charge to LGIU/CSN subscribing members. Members welcome to circulate internally in full or in part; please credit LGIU/CSN as appropriate.

You can find us on Twitter at @LGiU
The consultation cites a Sutton Trust report that found that pupils who were eligible for free school meals and scored in the top 10% nationally at the end of primary school were disproportionately less likely to enter GCSEs in history, geography or languages, when compared with pupils who were not eligible for free school meals also in the top 10%.

The Government believes that since 2010 it has taken decisive action to ensure that more young people benefit from the opportunities which an academic curriculum provides. This includes:

- the introduction of a revised National Curriculum commencing from September 2014 in schools, providing a knowledge-based, structured progression from the basics including reading and arithmetic in year 1 to more advanced content in key stages 3 and 4. In geography, the new programme of study contains a greater focus on locational knowledge and on fieldwork, and in history the focus is on a clear, chronological framework and the core knowledge that supports pupil learning and understanding of the history of Britain from its first settlers;
- new assessments such as the Phonic Screening Check introduced in 2012, that are helping teachers and schools to identify where pupils need additional support. The Government will introduce tests of the new National Curriculum from 2016, raising the standard that pupils have to achieve in order to demonstrate...higher expectations';
- the reform of GCSE and A-levels from September 2015 'to restore vigour and bring standards up to match the best around the world'. The new mathematics GCSE places greater emphasis on mathematical reasoning, and includes new content to improve progression to A-level. For GCSE English Literature, pupils will be required to study a broader range of texts including at least one Shakespeare play and a nineteenth-century novel;
- The EBacc attainment measure first published in 2011, with pupils achieving the EBacc if they secure a good pass in English, mathematics, sciences, history or geography, and a modern foreign language;
- In addition, following the Wolf Review of Vocational Education in 2011, the Government has removed 3,000 'low-value' qualifications from performance tables so that only vocational qualifications 'of real value' to pupils and employers are taught in schools and colleges.

EBacc subjects are part of a broad and balanced curriculum and the Government believes that every child and young person should experience a high-quality and cultural education throughout their time at school. As EBacc, according to the consultation, is ‘a specific limited measure consisting of five subject pillars and up to eight GCSEs, there is time in the curriculum for most pupils to study other valuable subjects in addition...’. Meanwhile, arts subjects are compulsory from key stages 1-3 and are optional post 14. Where a student wishes to take vocational subjects at Key Stage 4, these should complement not replace a common academic core of study, as recommended by the 2011 Wolf Review. From September 2015, the Government has introduced a new category of Key Stage 4 qualifications known as Technical Awards that focus on the development of practical skills and knowledge.

The consultation document provides evidence to support the inclusion of academic subjects in the EBacc. Evidence suggests that young people with good levels of literacy and numeracy are more likely to secure a well paid job. Mathematics, science and computer science are increasingly in demand from employers providing jobs that require analytical and technical capabilities. The Science Council has forecast that an additional 1.3 million people will be employed in science-
based roles by 2030. In addition, the 2014 CBI and Pearson Education Skills Survey found that 65% of companies had a need for foreign language skills. Many students studying EBacc subjects at GCSE progress to further study in these subjects at A-level and these A-levels. These are part of the Russell Group’s list of ‘facilitating subjects’ which are those most often required by top universities for a broad range of courses such as engineering, law or physiotherapy.

Consultation proposals

The Government's goal is that over time at least 90% of pupils in mainstream secondary schools will enter the EBacc. The consultation is therefore focused on six proposals:

1. The EBacc becomes the default option for all pupils, but that schools should be able to determine the small minority of pupils for whom taking the whole EBacc is not appropriate.
2. To support the accountability of mainstream secondary schools for meeting this aspiration, it is proposed that the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc will become a headline measure of secondary school performance.
3. It is proposed that EBacc entry and attainment will be given a more prominent role in the Ofsted inspection framework, although as currently, no single measure will determine the outcome of an inspection.
4. EBacc entry and attainment data for mainstream secondary schools with similar characteristics and intakes will also be published by the Government to allow schools, parents and Ofsted to understand how similar schools compare with each other.
5. An additional measure is proposed for the information being published showing the EBacc Average Point Score. Pupils’ achievements in individual qualifications are allocated performance table points, and this measure would give the average point score across the 5 subject pillars of the EBacc, with zero for a missing area.
6. For special schools and alternative provision, it is proposed to publish data on the numbers of pupils entering and achieving the EBacc, but will not expect them to meet the 90% ambition. For University Technical Colleges (UTCs), studio schools and Further Education (FE) colleges there will be further consultation on how the policy should apply to them.

The proposals are discussed in the sections below:

Pupils in scope of the EBacc commitment (Proposal 1)

This section sets out the Government's proposal for how schools should determine the small minority for whom taking the entire EBacc is not appropriate, and identifies the factors that schools should consider when making the decision. The consultation emphasises that the likelihood of a pupil entering and achieving the EBacc is dependent upon the background and school they attend. Evidence for this includes the finding that only 21% of pupils eligible for free school meals in 2014 were entered for the EBacc compared with 42% of all other pupils, and also only 12% of students with any kind of SEN were entered in the same year compared with 45% of those without any kind of SEN. However, there is a significant variation between students with different kinds of need; 13.5% of SEN students without a statement were entered for the EBacc in 2014 compared to 3.9% of pupils with a statement. It is concluded that these entry rates and gaps between pupil groups are ‘not inevitable’ and the consultation quotes entry rates from a number of schools with disadvantaged pupils such as Denbigh High School in Luton where 75% of the cohort were entered for the EBacc in 2014 and Platanos College where 39% of pupils attending have some form of SEN and yet 84% of pupils were entered also in 2014. These schools are deemed as the
most successful at raising EBacc entry and attainment because they have high expectations for all their pupils.

Pupils who are not entered for the EBacc in the future might include those:

- with complex SEN;
- who have spent significant amounts of time out of education;
- who are recent arrivals in the country;
- who are only able to take a limited number of Key Stage 4 qualifications as they need significant additional curriculum time for English and mathematics.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of factors. Decisions about entry should not become automatic and should be considered on a case by case basis by schools, who will determine which pupils make up the small minority for whom taking the EBacc is not appropriate. In making such decisions, schools should consider the overall impact that EBacc entry might have on pupil performance and progression to post-16 education. Decisions could involve the views of pupils, parents and relevant members of school staff such as the academic co-ordinator and the SEN co-ordinator. Even where a school has determined that the full EBacc is not appropriate, there should be an expectation that all pupils take as many EBacc subjects as possible.

**Accountability for meeting the EBacc commitment: headline performance measures (Proposal 2)**

To hold mainstream secondary schools to account for the Government's 90% EBacc goal, it is proposed that the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc will become a headline measure of secondary school performance. This would mean that from 2016, the headline performance measure set out in the Key Stage 4 performance tables would be:

- Progress 8;
- Attainment 8;
- EBacc entry;
- EBacc achievement;
- % of pupils achieving a good pass in English and mathematics.

Performance table data are split between the headline measures, the most critical indicators of a school's performance and additional measures which set out other important information that should be known about a school. From 2016, Progress 8 will show progress from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school in eight qualifications, and Attainment 8 will show attainment in those subjects. Progress 8 replaces 5 A-C including English and mathematics as the basis of the floor standard, the minimum standard that schools are expected to meet. By focusing on progress, it will be possible to identify high performing schools and low performing schools more accurately. Progress 8 also rewards schools for the good teaching of all their pupils and gives schools a better incentive to provide a broad and balanced curriculum with a focus on an academic core. It emphasises the importance of EBacc subjects but does not require pupils to take the full EBacc.

Currently, the EBacc entry measure is reported in performance tables as additional information about secondary schools. By publishing EBacc entry as a headline measure in the future, the Government would be providing clear information for parents, governors and others on the proportion of pupils being taught these core subjects. By raising expectations and aspirations, and as schools rise to the challenge of teaching EBacc subjects to more pupils, attainment would be
expected to improve. In order to encourage and reward those schools that teach EBacc subjects well, the current EBacc achievement measure will be retained as a headline measure.

Accountability for meeting the EBacc commitment: Ofsted inspection (Proposal 3 and 4)
The increased importance of the EBacc will also be taken into consideration when schools are inspected. Ofsted inspectors already examine whether schools are providing a broad and balanced curriculum that meets statutory requirements and the needs and interests of pupils. In future, EBacc entry and achievement will be given a more prominent role in determining whether schools are meeting those requirements although, as is the current situation, no single measure will determine the outcome of the inspection. Inspectors will take account of schools’ provision and support for the relevant cohorts in preparing them for EBacc and the extent to which pupils attain the EBacc. Inspectors will compare this information with the EBacc entry and achievement rates of schools with similar intakes and characteristics.

Accountability for meeting the EBacc commitment: EBacc Average Point Score (Proposal 5)
It is proposed to add a measure to the additional information that is published, showing the EBacc Average Point Score. Pupils’ achievements in individual qualifications are allocated performance table points, and this measure would give the average point score across the five pillars of the EBacc with zero for a missing pillar. This would ensure that the achievements of all pupils in EBacc subjects are recognised, not just those working at the level of a good pass and above. The consultation concludes that the users of performance tables (parents, governors, school inspectors, local authorities, academy chains, dioceses and Regional Schools Commissioners) are better placed to consider a school's performance in the EBacc and any patterns in entry and attainment.

Accountability arrangements for alternative education settings (Proposal 6)
- Special schools: Some pupils in special schools enter the EBacc and some special schools work in partnership with local mainstream schools to support this. However, the EBacc will be inappropriate for many pupils in special schools who enter fewer qualifications at Key Stage 4.
- Alternative provision: The local authority is required to arrange alternative provision for pupils who are not able to attend mainstream or special school settings, due to complex medical conditions, exclusion from schools or the need to address behavioural issues. Some pupils are dual registered in a school and alternative provision setting and these pupils are recorded in the school’s performance data but not as a separate group. Given the varying needs of these pupils in alternative provision, the EBacc will be appropriate for some of these pupils but not all. Many pupils in alternative provision take fewer qualifications and may, due to their complex educational history, take longer than other pupils to achieve good qualifications.
- UTCs and studio schools: UTCs and studio schools provide a specialist technical and professional education. Pupils attending them choose to specialise in a technical or professional area at age 14. Although many pupils in UTCs and studio schools already enter the EBacc, some will study a smaller academic curriculum to allow time for specialist subjects and fewer EBacc GCSEs as a consequence.
- FE colleges: A small minority of pupils aged 14-16 attend FE colleges full time for Key Stage 4, following a recommendation from the 2011 Wolf Review of Vocational Education. Like pupils attending UTCs and studio schools, these pupils have chosen to specialise in a
technical or professional area from Key Stage 4. Some pupils attending FE colleges will study a smaller curriculum to allow time for specialist subjects and enter fewer EBacc GCSEs as a result.

Implementation

On curriculum planning, the Government has already announced that this policy will start with pupils currently in year 7 and these pupils need to have an effective foundation in EBacc subjects before they study for their GCSEs. Maintained schools are required to teach EBacc subjects at Key Stage 3 and the majority of academies choose to as well. Schools that teach GCSEs over three years are likely to start curriculum planning and timetabling for this cohort during Autumn 2016. Those offering GCSEs in two years, are likely to start the processes in Autumn 2017. For schools that do not currently have high numbers of pupils entering the EBacc, this may involve a redesign of the curriculum to accommodate increased numbers taking humanities and languages. Schools will therefore need to consider how best to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to their pupils enabling pupils to benefit from study and involvement in a wide range of subjects at key stages 3 and 4.

On teacher recruitment and training, the consultation document recognises that the current proposals have implications for increased numbers of teachers of EBacc subjects, particularly for numbers of teachers of languages. The Government is initiating the following, in order to increase teacher numbers, including more language teachers:

- continuing to offer incentives for graduates and career changers to train to teach;
- supporting the recruitment of teachers and trainers from overseas where they have skills that cannot be met from the domestic labour market;
- supporting the retraining or up skilling of existing teachers in the workforce who wish to return to or transfer to teaching priority subjects;
- supporting schools to attract quality teachers currently out of the workforce back into the classroom
- providing subject knowledge training in EBacc subjects for teacher trainees who need to boost their knowledge before they start their training;
- attracting researchers and post-doctoral students to teach in school, where they can inspire pupils and spread their subject expertise amongst fellow teachers.

The DfE will work with schools and school system leaders to explore the challenges and potential situations, which will help the Department to quantify the expected number of teachers required as the take-up of the EBacc increases. The new EBacc commitment can then be factored into the DfE’s teacher requirement modelling, to ensure that it informs the number of new teachers to be trained from the academic year starting in 2017. The consultation invites responses to cover the challenges and issues for consideration by schools, their experiences of teacher recruitment and retention in EBacc subjects and the central strategies that schools would like to see in place for recruitment and training in this area.

Comment

The EBacc consultation raises a number of issues, some positive but others less so. It is not new of course to talk about a common core curriculum as we had in the form of a National Curriculum entitlement for all pupils from 5-16, under the Education Reform Act 1988. However, though the re-emphasis on the current breadth of subjects and on pupil progress is welcome, the EBacc is not
a curriculum model as the other European baccalaureates are or the International Baccalaureate is; it is a performance measure as the consultation itself highlights. Professor Chris Husbands from the London Institute of Education accounts for the Government's ‘use of the assessment system and accountability to achieve a curriculum goal ... Because it ... is in something of a policy mess ... It cannot do the obvious thing which is to reassert the 1988 requirement because it has allowed academies - now half of secondary schools - the freedom to opt out of the national curriculum'.

The result is the continuation of a system where accountability priorities drive what happens in curriculum and assessment in the classroom. The published performance tables are to be populated by a huge amount of overlapping data, with parents and pupils likely to be confused about the relationship between the Progress/attainment '8' and the EBacc '5'.

In fact all pupils, not just the 90% in this consultation, should be entitled to a broad, balanced and stretching core curriculum post 14 and this should involve the flexibility to include other high quality subjects including arts and a mixture of academic and vocational subjects if appropriate. It is pupil learning needs that are paramount here. If the new National Curriculum is as rigorous as the Government claims and is confident that the post-Woolf review vocational subjects have value, it should be confident about recognising the validity of a wider and more flexible subject core.

The changes overall will bring a host of practical problems to schools including curriculum planning, timetabling and additional teacher recruitment and retention issues, particularly in modern foreign languages. The Government does need to listen very carefully to the practical experience that schools bring to this consultation and be prepared to adapt the detail of its proposals accordingly. Schools, local authorities and other partners need to be closely involved in implementing the new National Teaching Service announced by the Secretary of State in her speech, both in the selection of teachers to be deployed in other schools and in dealing with the gaps left in the teaching workforce over a three-year period.

**External Links**

* DfE Consultation on implementing the English Baccalaureate (3 November)
* Statistical release: EBacc and non-EBacc subject entries and achievement 2010/11 to 2014/15 (3 November)
* Press Release, Nicky Morgan: no tolerance of areas where majority of pupils fail (2 November)
* Speech Nicky Morgan: one nation education (Secretary of State speech at Policy Exchange)

**Related Briefings**

* GCSE and AS/A-level reform update (February 2015)
* The impact of accountability measures on children and young people (NUT research report September 2015)
* Secondary school accountability reform: DfE response (November 2013)

For further information visit [www.lgiu.org.uk](http://www.lgiu.org.uk) or email [john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk](mailto:john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk)