



BRIEFING PAPER

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English Baccalaureate

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One page briefing

A performance measure for schools: 2010

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a performance measure for schools in England, first applied in the 2010 school performance tables. It measures the achievement of pupils who have gained Key Stage 4 (GCSE level) qualifications in the following subjects:

- English
- mathematics
- history or geography
- the sciences; and
- a language

The Coalition Government stated that the principal purpose of the new measure was to increase the takeup of 'core' academic qualifications that best equipped a pupil for progression to further study and work.

The subject composition of the EBacc has been consistent since its introduction, aside from the addition in 2014 of some computing qualifications within the sciences aspect of the measure. Concerns have been raised about the impact on subjects that are not included. The decision not to include religious education was particularly controversial, along with creative subjects such as art and music.

A strengthened EBacc: Developments since 2015

The Conservative manifesto for the 2015 General Election proposed that the English Baccalaureate be made a requirement for English schools.

The Government believes that a compulsory EBacc will enhance the prospects of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, by ensuring they receive a core academic curriculum that allows them to retain options in subsequent education and in the employment market. Concerns have been raised that the EBacc may not be suitable for a significant number of pupils, and that teacher supply, particularly in languages, could pose problems for implementation.

In November 2015 the Government published a consultation setting out the aim that at least 90% of pupils in mainstream secondary schools should be entered for the EBacc, and seeking views on implementation.

The Government response to the consultation was published in July 2017. The response took forward proposals set out in the Conservative manifesto for the 2017 General Election, for 75% of pupils to be entered for the EBacc combination of GCSEs by September 2022 (taking GCSEs in 2024), with 90% of pupils studying the EBacc by 2025 (taking GCSEs in 2027).

English Baccalaureate Certificates

Separately, a new qualification, the English Baccalaureate Certificate, was proposed by the Coalition Government in 2012, but this was not adopted. Reforms to GCSE qualifications were pursued instead.

1. Introduction and development: 2010-2015

1.1 What is the English Baccalaureate?

The English Baccalaureate is a performance measure for schools. The measure shows where pupils have secured a C grade or above across a core of academic subjects at key stage 4 and enables parents and pupils to see how their school is performing. It is not a qualification, although previously the Government had intended to issue certificates to recognise success in the English Baccalaureate. Those plans were subsequently abandoned.

The previous Government said that although the English Baccalaureate was not compulsory, it represented a core of subjects that it wanted pupils to have the opportunity to study, while acknowledging that other subjects and qualifications remain valuable in their own right. However, there is a strong incentive for schools to encourage pupils to take the specified subjects as the school performance tables include the English Baccalaureate.

The [gov.uk website](http://gov.uk) sets out the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate:

- English
- mathematics
- history or geography
- the sciences
- a language¹

A [full list of the qualifications that count towards the EBacc is available](#) from the Department for Education.

Currently, to achieve the EBacc pupils need to attain:

- grade A*-C in English language GCSE and any grade in English literature GCSE;
- grade A*-C in mathematics GCSE;
- grade A*-C in either history or geography GCSE;
- grade A*-C in a language GCSE (modern or ancient); and
- grade A*-C in core and additional science GCSEs; or grade A*-C in GCSE double science award; or pupils need to enter three single sciences and achieve grade A*-C in at least two of them (the single sciences are biology, chemistry, computer science and physics).²

1.2 Announcement and introduction

The English Baccalaureate was announced on 6 September 2010 in a speech given by the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, at

¹ Department for Education, [English Baccalaureate \(EBacc\)](#), 22 June 2015

² Department for Education, [Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#), 3 November 2015, p13

Westminster Academy.³ Further details were set out in the schools white paper, [The Importance of Teaching](#), published in November 2010:

4.21 In most European countries school students are expected to pursue a broad and rounded range of academic subjects until the age of 16. Even in those countries such as the Netherlands where students divide between academic and vocational routes all young people are expected, whatever their ultimate destiny, to study a wide range of traditional subjects. So we will introduce a new award – the English Baccalaureate – for any student who secures good GCSE or iGCSE passes in English, mathematics, the sciences, a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanity such as history or geography. This combination of GCSEs at grades A*-C will entitle the student to a certificate recording their achievement. At the moment only around 15 per cent of students secure this basic suite of academic qualifications and fewer than four per cent of students eligible for free school meals do so⁴. So to encourage the take-up of this combination of subjects we will give special recognition in performance tables to those schools which are helping their pupils to attain this breadth of study.

4.22 Alongside the number of students who secure five good GCSEs including English and mathematics, the performance tables will record the number who secure the combination of GCSEs which make up the English Baccalaureate.

The introduction of the English Baccalaureate did not require legislation; however, it was discussed during the debates on the contemporary *Education Bill* (now the *Education Act 2011*).⁵

Rationale

The then Government set out its rationale for introducing the English Baccalaureate in its response to an Education Committee report on the Baccalaureate in November 2011 (see section 1.4 of this note for information on the report). It stated that the principal purpose of the new measure was to increase the take-up of ‘core’ academic qualifications that best equipped a pupil for progression to further study and work:

2. The Government’s rationale for the establishment of the English Baccalaureate was set out in the written evidence which it provided to the Committee. That evidence was clear that expansion of qualification options, coupled with the “equivalence” attached to different qualifications for performance measurement, had distracted some schools from offering options based on the value of the qualifications for progression to further study and work.

3. There has been a worrying decline in the offer of some core subjects in key stage 4. Pupil GCSE entries in modern foreign language (MFL), history and science GCSEs have been falling sharply in recent years. Around three quarters of pupils attempted

³ [Speech by the Secretary of State for Education, at Westminster Academy, 6 September 2010](#)

⁴ Figures have been produced using the 2009 Key Stage 4 National Pupil Database. Further information on this database can be found on the Bristol University website: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/cmpo/plugin/>

⁵ e.g. see *Education Bill*, House of Commons Second Reading debate, HC Deb 8 February 2011 cc 178, 184, 186, 187 and 197; Commons [PBC 29 March 2011](#) cc721-24; House of Lords, Grand Committee, 1 July 2011 cc218-235GC and 13 July 2011 c312GC;

a MFL in 2002; by 2010 this figure had dropped to just over 43 per cent. Entries have fallen again this year, with French and German down by just over 13 per cent. The number of pupils entered for history and geography GCSE is also declining.

4. The Government introduced the English Baccalaureate to halt and reverse the falls in these subjects. Through the establishment of the EBacc measure in the 2010 performance tables, we have enabled parents and pupils to see for the first time how their school is performing in these key academic subjects, and hope to encourage schools to offer a core of academic subjects and open up opportunities to all of their pupils.⁶

1.3 Subject composition of the English Baccalaureate

The subject composition of the English Baccalaureate has been consistent since its introduction, aside from the recent inclusion of some computing qualifications within the sciences aspect of the measure.

The introduction of the English Baccalaureate was met with concerns that creative and technical subjects – such as art, music and information and communication technology (ICT) – are not included in the measure. The decision not to include religious education (RE) was particularly controversial.

The Education Select Committee report [The English Baccalaureate](#) considered the Government's rationale for the chosen subjects. The Committee's conclusions included:

68. We acknowledge that certain academic subjects studied at A-level are more valued by Russell Group universities than others. The EBac is founded on that university-based curriculum. However, our inquiry has uncovered significant issues with the EBac's current composition, and there are certain subjects and qualifications where we are not clear on the rationale behind their exclusion. A focus on a fairly narrow range of subjects, demanding considerable curriculum time, is likely to have negative consequences on the uptake of other subjects. We encourage the Government to examine carefully the evidence presented to us, and suggest that it reconsiders the composition of the EBac on conclusion of the National Curriculum Review. More importantly, future performance measures must be well thought through.

69. We are glad that the Department for Education has recognised the potential impact of the EBac on teacher supply, and is working on solutions to any adverse effect this might have. However, academic subjects are not the only path to a successful future, and all young people, regardless of background, must continue to have opportunities to study the subjects in which they are likely to be most successful, and which pupils, parents and schools think will serve them best.

In a written answer to a Parliamentary Question on 11 January 2011, Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister said that the precise definition of the English Baccalaureate would be reviewed, and he stressed that the aim

⁶ Education Committee, [The English Baccalaureate: Government response](#), HC 1577 2010-12, October 2011, para 2-4

was to focus on core academic subjects; however, he said that study of other subjects would also be valuable.⁷

The DfE's [Statement of Intent for the 2011 School and College Performance Tables](#), which was published on 21 July 2011, stated that the then Secretary of State was minded to leave the English Baccalaureate subjects unchanged:

20. Last year's publication of the English Baccalaureate (English Baccalaureate) prompted much interest and debate about the range of subjects which it should encompass. After consideration of representations, and to provide schools with certainty, the Secretary of State is minded to leave the subjects unchanged i.e. English, maths, two sciences, history or geography, and an ancient or modern foreign language.

21. However, from this year, AS levels taken in the relevant subject before the end of KS4 will now also count towards the English Baccalaureate. [...]

22. From this year, we will now show more information about each of the English Baccalaureate subject areas. The Performance Tables will show the number of pupils entered for each subject area – English, maths, science, languages and humanities. For each of English and maths, we will publish the percentage of the cohort who have attained grade A*-C (as we would expect every pupil to have been entered for these GCSEs); and for other subject areas, the percentage of those entered who have attained grade A*-C.

The Schools Minister said in evidence to the Education Select Committee (see section 1.4 of this paper for information on the enquiry), that although he considered the purpose of the English Baccalaureate was to try to remedy some of the perverse incentives in the league tables, it would not be an accountability measure, and there would be "no intervention measures from Government for schools that are achieving a low percentage in terms of the English Baccalaureate."⁸

A DfE [question and answer paper](#) noted:

Will you be judging school performance against the English Baccalaureate performance measure?

No. The new measure is just one piece of information in the achievement and attainment tables. We will continue to publish existing measures, including on the achievement of 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C grade, and we will introduce other measures over time to meet our White Paper commitment to make as much information available to parents and tax payers as possible on the performance of every school. We want the English Baccalaureate to encourage schools to offer the subjects included in it to their pupils but neither we, nor Ofsted, will take action with respect to schools on the basis of their performance against that measure.

Is the English Baccalaureate compulsory?

No. We have been clear that schools remain free to offer the curriculum that is right for their pupils. The English Baccalaureate is not compulsory but it does represent a core of subjects we want

⁷ HC Deb 11 January 2011 c291W

⁸ House of Commons Education Committee, Fifth report of Session 2010-12, HC Paper 851, Ev18

pupils to have the opportunity to study. Other qualifications remain valuable in their own right and we will encourage all pupils to study rigorous non-English Baccalaureate subjects and qualifications alongside it so they benefit from a well-rounded education.

Religious education

The previous Government stressed that although the English Baccalaureate does not include RE, the teaching of RE in schools remains compulsory. The following response to a Parliamentary Question from 2013 sets out the Coalition Government's position on the inclusion of RE in the English Baccalaureate:

Elizabeth Truss [holding answer 22 January 2013]: The Department for Education has received correspondence from and had a number of discussions with representatives of faith groups and faith based education establishments, including the Church of England, on the inclusion of religious studies in the English Baccalaureate.

The Government fully recognise the importance of RE, both to pupils' wider knowledge and to society as a whole, and its value as a demanding subject. We know pupils themselves find that RE offers them opportunities to engage with real world issues and to develop their understanding and appreciation of the beliefs and views of others. The teaching of RE remains compulsory throughout a pupil's schooling. There is time in the curriculum for pupils to take a GCSE in other subjects alongside an English Baccalaureate if they wish to do so, including Religious Studies GCSE, which has shown an increase in uptake in recent years.

As RE is a compulsory subject, including it alongside other humanities subjects in the EBacc could reverse the recent increases in the take up of history and geography, which survey evidence suggests has been one of the positive impacts of the EBacc's introduction.⁹

Creative subjects

The Coalition Government's position on the exclusion of creative subjects from the English Baccalaureate is set out in the following response to a Parliamentary Question:

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the omission of creative subjects from the English Baccalaureate on the creative economy. [137577]

Elizabeth Truss: This Government believe that artistic achievement, in all its forms, should be made accessible to every child. The English Baccalaureate measure, which is not compulsory, leaves space for pupils to study creative subjects alongside a strong academic core. We believe good school leaders will continue to make time for artistic and cultural education. We have no reason to believe there will be an impact on the contribution of creative industries to the economy, which amounts to £36 billion. We will continue to monitor take up of creative subjects at Key Stage 4.¹⁰

⁹ [HC Deb 23 Jan 2013 c327W](#)

¹⁰ [HC Deb 25 Apr 2013 c1174W](#)

1.4 Education Committee report (July 2011)

In July 2011, the Commons Education Select Committee published its report, [The English Baccalaureate](#), which stated that the introduction of the measure had been hasty:

...any new performance or curriculum measures affecting schools should only be implemented after proper consultation with key stakeholders and the wider public – something which didn't happen with the English Baccalaureate (EBac).

[...] the Government should also have waited until after the conclusion of the National Curriculum Review before introducing the EBac.¹¹

The report also argued that the Government should reconsider the Baccalaureate's subject composition when the then-ongoing National Curriculum Review was concluded, and that the proposed English Baccalaureate Certificate should be shelved as it might give "too much emphasis to one performance measure."¹²

Government response (November 2011)

In its [response](#) to the Committee's report, published in November 2011, the then Government stated that the Baccalaureate was a "first step" in making data on school performance available, and that it would consult on any future accountability measures that could lead to Government intervention in schools.¹³

The Government rejected any link between the English Baccalaureate and the National Curriculum review:

The English Baccalaureate is very different in purpose from the National Curriculum review and is not necessarily affected by its decisions. The National Curriculum review will determine what subjects should be made compulsory and at what ages, along with any content that should be taught to all young people. The EBacc is not compulsory—the information was made available to help parents find out more about pupils' achievement in key academic subjects, which we know parents themselves value and in recognition of the urgent need to halt and reverse the declining number of pupils who are taking up those subjects.¹⁴

The then Government also said it was considering options on certification of the English Baccalaureate, and would make a decision on how to proceed in due course.¹⁵ This plan was subsequently abandoned (see section 3).

A Library standard note, [SN/SP/6798](#), provides more information on the National Curriculum review.

¹¹ House of Commons Education Committee, [Think again about English Baccalaureate](#), say MPs, 28 July 2011

¹² Education Committee, [The English Baccalaureate](#), 28 July 2011, HC 851 2010-12, para 84

¹³ Education Committee, [The English Baccalaureate: Government response](#), HC 1577 2010-12, para 9-10

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, para 12

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, para 31

1.5 DfE report on the effect of the English Baccalaureate (February 2013)

In October 2012, the Department for Education published a report on [The Effects of the English Baccalaureate](#), carried out by Ipsos MORI; a revised edition of the findings was published in February 2013.

The report found that there had been “no significant change” in the proportion of Year 9 pupils who had chosen to take either the EBacc combination of subjects, or each of the individual EBacc subjects, since 2011, and that few schools had made changes in response to the EBacc, with still fewer planning to do so. The report noted that “virtually all schools offer all EBacc subjects,” and that “most schools (89%) say that their option blocks allow pupils who want to study towards the EBacc to do so,” with low pupil attainment being cited as the reason that pupils typically might not be offered the EBacc subjects.¹⁶

The report also stated:

The qualitative case studies highlighted that the way in which pupils select their GCSEs is largely unchanged by the EBacc: pupils select subjects they enjoy and are good at, and those which will help towards their career choices (if known). Many pupils do not opt for the EBacc combination because their talents and preferences lay elsewhere. From the case study work, the effect of the EBacc was most evident in encouraging pupils to study languages where they would not otherwise have chosen to do so.¹⁷

¹⁶ Department for Education, [Revised :The effects of the English Baccalaureate, February 2013](#), p1

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p2

2. A strengthened English Baccalaureate: Developments since the 2015 Election

2.1 Conservative Manifesto and consultation (2015)

The [Conservative Party manifesto](#) for the 2015 General Election stated that:

We will require secondary school pupils to take GCSEs in English, maths, science, a language and history or geography, with Ofsted unable to award its highest ratings to schools that refuse to teach these core subjects.¹⁸

On 16 June 2015, the then Education Secretary Nicky Morgan made a [speech](#) outlining the Government's plans; a compulsory EBacc would ensure pupils "study the core academic subjects at GCSE, the subjects that keep your options open, and allow you to enter the widest ranges of careers and university courses." The Secretary of State set out the Government's view that a compulsory EBacc would enhance the chances of disadvantaged pupils, highlighting that capable pupils are currently less likely to take history, geography, a language or triple science at GCSE than their peers if they are eligible for free school meals.¹⁹

The DfE [press notice](#) announcing the change stated that the Government intended for pupils beginning Year 7 in September 2015 to study the EBacc at GCSE level, meaning they would take their GCSEs in those subjects in 2020. It noted that 39% of pupils sat the EBacc in 2014, up from 22% taking those subjects in 2010. The announcement indicated that a consultation on the proposals would follow, and that it did expect that the EBacc would not be appropriate for a small number of pupils.²⁰

On 3 November 2015 the then Education Secretary made a [speech](#)²¹ to the think-tank Policy Exchange announcing the consultation on the EBacc. The DfE [announcement](#) of the speech stated:

Today the Education Secretary will announce a consultation on achieving the government's goal for 90% of pupils to be studying the vital Ebacc subjects of maths, English, science, a foreign language and either history or geography. She will also announce plans for the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc to become a

¹⁸ [Conservative Party Manifesto 2015](#), p34

¹⁹ Department for Education, [Preparing children for a successful future through the Ebacc](#), 16 June 2015

²⁰ Department for Education, [New reforms to raise standards and improve behaviour](#), 16 June 2015

²¹ Text at Department for Education, [Nicky Morgan: one nation education](#), 3 November 2015

headline measure used to hold schools to account through Ofsted.²²

The consultation, [Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#), was published on the same day and ran until January 2016.

2.2 Revised targets (2017)

Conservative Manifesto 2017: updated targets

The [Conservative Party Manifesto](#) for the 2017 General Election stated:

We will expect 75 per cent of pupils to have been entered for the EBacc combination of GCSEs by the end of the next parliament [in 2022], with 90 per cent of pupils studying this combination of academic GCSEs by 2025.²³

Government response to the consultation and next steps (July 2017)

On 19 July 2017, the Government published its response to the consultation on [Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#).

The response carried forward the proposals in the Conservative manifesto, and set out the Government's ambition that:

- 75% of year 10 pupils in state-funded mainstream schools will start to study GCSEs in the EBacc combination of subjects by September 2022
- 90% of year 10 pupils studying GCSEs in the EBacc subjects by September 2025.

These children would be taking their GCSEs in the EBacc subjects in 2024 and 2027 respectively.

The response set out the following reasons a child might not be entered for the EBacc:

The decision not to enter a pupil for the EBacc combination of subjects will need to be considered on a case by case basis by each school, and schools will need to take into account a range of factors particular to each pupil. These will include, for example, complex SEN; having spent significant amounts of time out of education; recently arriving in the country; and only being able to take a limited number of key stage 4 qualifications as significant additional time is needed in the curriculum for English and mathematics. We believe that no single factor should automatically exclude a pupil from entering the EBacc.²⁴

The response also set out the following further developments of the EBacc proposals:

- From 2018 the Government will change the headline EBacc attainment measure from the proportion of pupils achieving a grade 5 and above in the EBacc subjects to an EBacc average point score

²² Department for Education, [Nicky Morgan: no tolerance of areas where majority of pupils fail](#), 3 November 2015

²³ [Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2017](#), pg 51

²⁴ Department for Education, [Implementing the English Baccalaureate Government consultation response](#), July 2017, p12

- From 2019 the Department will also publish:
 - how school EBacc entry and achievement rates compare to similar schools; and
 - value added EBacc entry – this will show how a school’s EBacc entry rates compare to those nationally for pupils with similar prior attainment
- University Technical Colleges, studio schools and further education colleges with key stage 4 provision will not be included in the 75% and 90% ambitions
- The Government was developing specific national initiatives to support schools to recruit to priority subjects, particularly languages:
 - Initiatives include subject specialism training in languages for non-specialist teachers that may already have some language skills and for former languages teachers returning to the subject.
 - The Government also anticipate that over time, as EBacc embeds, and the numbers of pupils studying languages at GCSE increases, this will lead to a corresponding increase in those studying languages degrees.

To have more students entering languages subjects by 2022, the Government stated that it would increase language teacher supply in small part by recruiting from other countries.²⁵

Further discussion is provided in the following sections on the consultation and subsequent discussion of the EBacc.

2.3 The 90% target and the EBacc consultation

The Government’s 2015 consultation, [Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#), had made the following central proposals:

- For the EBacc to become the “default option” for all pupils, with schools to determine the “small minority of pupils for whom taking the whole EBacc is not appropriate.” (The consultation subsequently makes clear that the Government intends that “in time, at least 90% of pupils in mainstream secondary schools should be entered for the EBacc.”²⁶)
- That the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc will become a headline measure of mainstream secondary school performance
- That EBacc entry and attainment will be given a more prominent role in the Ofsted inspection framework
- That EBacc entry and attainment data for similar mainstream secondary schools will be published to allow schools, parents, and Ofsted, to understand how they compare
- To add a measure to the additional information published by the DfE showing the EBacc Average Point Score - pupils’ achievements in individual qualifications are allocated performance table points,

²⁵ Ibid., p11-18

²⁶ Ibid., p19

and this measure would give the average point score across the five EBacc “pillars”, with zero for a missing pillar

- That data will be published on the numbers of pupils entering and achieving the EBacc in special schools and alternative provision, although those providers will not be expected to meet the 90% ambition. The consultation asks how the measure should apply to more vocational education providers such as University Technical Colleges, studio schools and further education colleges.²⁷

A TES [article](#) published ahead of Nicky Morgan’s speech stated that the 90% threshold, rather than a compulsory EBacc, meant the initial policy had been “watered down.”²⁸ A *Schools Week* [article](#) cited a Conservative source arguing against this interpretation, with the reduced figure being based on the exemption of pupils with special educational needs and those studying at vocational institutions.²⁹

On future inspection arrangements, the [consultation](#) stated that:

The increased importance of the EBacc will also be taken into consideration when schools are inspected. . . In future, EBacc entry and achievement will be given a more prominent role in determining whether schools are meeting these requirements although, as now, no single measure will determine the outcome of an inspection.³⁰

The Government’s previously stated intention that schools not offering the EBacc would not be able to achieve particular ratings in Ofsted inspections (see section 2.1), was not mentioned in the [consultation](#).

The Government responded to the consultation in July 2017 (see section 2.2).

2.4 Reaction and discussion

Concerns about subject focus and attainment

Early reaction to the changes suggested that the move to a compulsory EBacc would reignite the debate on its subject make-up, the impact on other subjects, and the ability of schools to be flexible in their offer to pupils.³¹

- A [survey](#) of more than 1,600 school leaders conducted by SSAT (the Schools, Students and Teachers Network), conducted after the Secretary of State’s 16 June speech, found that:
 - 17% of respondents said they would make the EBacc compulsory if that were a requirement for an ‘outstanding’ judgement from Ofsted

²⁷ Department for Education, [Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#), November 2015, p11

²⁸ Times Educational Supplement, [Tories to water down pledge to make EBacc compulsory for all](#), 2 November 2015

²⁹ Schools Week, [90 per cent EBacc enrolment pledge not a climb-down, government claims](#), 2 November 2015

³⁰ Department for Education, [Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#), November 2015, p24

³¹ See discussion of the relationship with the new Progress 8 accountability measure in Gifted Phoenix, [Compulsory EBacc: A policy conundrum?](#), 21 May 2015

- 42% were ‘certain that they would not’ make the EBacc compulsory even if it were a requirement for an outstanding grade
 - Some respondents felt that the policy would be beneficial for some pupils, especially middle and high attainers who might not otherwise have picked academic subjects
 - There was an ‘overwhelming feeling’ that the EBacc was not appropriate for all, and that its enforcement would work against schools providing personalised pathways for pupils³²
- HM Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, raised concerns in an [interview](#) with the *TES* that the EBacc would be a problem for some students, and that he could “think of youngsters who would have been better suited to do English, maths and science and a range of vocational subjects.”³³
 - The General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, Brian Lightman, [criticised](#) the “narrow academic focus” of the EBacc for restricting the ability of schools to tailor education to individual pupils.³⁴ Tony Breslin, an Associate in the Creative and Learning Development Team at the RSA, [argued](#) for an ‘EBacc plus’ that made more room for the creative arts.³⁵
 - The Deputy General Secretary of the NUT, Kevin Courtney, argued that it was “irresponsible to introduce measures that are likely to limit achievement for some learners at a time of high youth unemployment.”³⁶
 - The National Society for Education in Art and Design’s [Survey Report 2015-16](#), published in February 2016, found 44% of teachers reporting a decline in time for art and design subjects over the previous five years. Of those respondents reporting a decline in state schools, 93% believed that the EBacc had reduced opportunities for students to select the subjects.³⁷
 - Michelle Donelan, a member of the Education Committee, [wrote](#) to the Prime Minister in July 2016 to support the inclusion of Design and Technology on the EBacc as a single science subject. The letter was co-signed by 87 MPs.³⁸
 - The former Conservative Education Secretary, Lord Baker, criticised the EBacc target in an [Edge Foundation report, 14-19 Education – A New Baccalaureate](#), published in September 2016, stating that “this narrow academic curriculum will severely limit access to technical and creative subjects of the very kind needed in our new digital age.”³⁹

³² SSAT, [EBacc for all? The findings from SSAT’s national survey of school leaders, June 2015: a synopsis](#), 1 July 2015. [Full findings](#) also available on the SSAT website [accessed 9 July 2015]

³³ Times Educational Supplement, [Wilshaw and DfE on EBacc collision course](#), 25 September 2015

³⁴ SecEd, [A compulsory EBacc contradiction](#), 14 October 2015

³⁵ Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, [Time for an Arts-Friendly EBacc plus?](#), 20 October 2015

³⁶ Telegraph, [‘The reforms turning our schools into exam factories’](#), 21 January 2016

³⁷ National Society for Education in Art and Design, [Survey Report 2015-16](#), February 2016, p5

³⁸ Michelle Donelan MP, [Letter to the Prime Minister](#), 29 July 2016

³⁹ Edge Foundation, [14-19 Education: A New Baccalaureate](#), September 2016, p4

- [Results of a survey](#) by the National Union of Teachers and King's College London published in November 2016 included concerns about the impact of the EBacc, with 74% of respondent teachers stating that the EBacc had narrowed the Key Stage 4 curriculum offer in their schools.⁴⁰

Debates on arts subject inclusion and petition; takeup of arts subjects at GCSE and A level

House of Lords debate

The delivery of a rounded curriculum, and in particular the position of the arts in relation to the EBacc was discussed in a brief House of Lords [debate](#) on 4 February 2016. The Earl of Clancarty, a cross-bench peer, stated that:

...an EBacc without the arts should be unthinkable; a core curriculum without the arts will not raise standards but lower them. [...]

The EBacc is a flawed measure. It should either be radically reformed, or dropped entirely.⁴¹

Several other peers also raised concerns about the absence of a creative or cultural subject from the EBacc.

Speaking for the Government, Lord Nash responded:

I reject suggestions that music and arts are not core subjects. We believe strongly that every child should experience a high-quality arts and cultural education throughout their time at school, which is why at key stage 4 all pupils at maintained schools have an entitlement to study an arts subject if they wish.

[...] enabling more pupils to leave school having studying a basic academic core is a commitment of the Government—and why we are doing this—which does not preclude the study of additional subjects, particularly creative ones.⁴²

Petition and Westminster Hall debate

A 2016 [petition](#) on the Parliamentary website for 'expressive arts' such as arts, music and drama to be included in the EBacc received more than 100,000 signatures.

The Government responded that:

The government is committed to improving the life chances of young people and believes all young people should study the core academic subjects that give them the skills to succeed. The EBacc subjects provide a rigorous academic education and help to prepare young people for adult life. The EBacc forms only part of the school curriculum and all schools must deliver a curriculum that is balanced and broadly based.

Last summer's results showed that both the proportion of young people studying EBacc subjects and the proportion studying arts GCSEs increased. Thousands more students took GCSEs in arts subjects in 2015 compared to the previous year.

⁴⁰ King's College London and National Union of Teachers, [NUT and King's College London research into Key Stage 4](#), 14 November 2016

⁴¹ [HL Deb 4 Feb 2016 GC56-57](#)

⁴² [HL Deb 4 Feb 2016 GC70-71](#)

The Government believes that arts subjects are important. That is why art and design and music are compulsory subjects within the national curriculum for 5 – 14 year olds. Pupils also have to study drama, as part of the English curriculum, and dance, as part of the PE curriculum. At key stage 4, the Government does not believe it is right that every student should have to study an arts subject, but all pupils in maintained schools have a statutory entitlement to be able to study an arts subject if they wish (comprising art and design, music, dance, drama and media arts) as well as design and technology.⁴³

The issue was [debated](#) in Westminster Hall on 4 July 2016.⁴⁴ The Schools Minister stated that:

Nick Gibb: We have never said that pupils should study the EBacc subjects and nothing else. All schools will continue to offer a wide range of options outside the EBacc so pupils have the opportunity to study subjects that reflect their individual interests and strengths. The EBacc is limited in size so there is flexibility for pupils to take additional subjects of their choosing.⁴⁵

Catherine McKinnell stated:

While I have listened carefully to the Minister, I feel that the Government's policy and approach at the moment fundamentally risk undermining the benefits that can come from that experience. Many Members have set out powerfully their arguments for including arts in the core curriculum. At the most fundamental level we need these skills for our economy. If we put off children and young people who can flourish in those areas even though they may struggle in some other ones, the evidence shows that that would be a worrying trend.⁴⁶

Teacher supply

Concerns have been raised about the supply of teachers in EBacc subjects, in particular languages, if uptake of these subjects is expanded.⁴⁷ Teacher supply is discussed more broadly in the Library briefing [Teacher recruitment and retention in England](#), CBP 07222.

A [report](#) by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on the training and retention of teachers highlighted particular challenges for EBacc subjects, with potentially adverse consequences for pupil attainment:

Third, trainee entrants to teach some EBacc subjects, such as sciences, languages, and geography, are particularly low compared to target. For example, provisional figures for 2015 show that only 71 per cent of the target number of postgraduate entrants in physics were achieved. DfE figures for 2014 show that a significant number of pupils are being taught by a teacher without a relevant post A level qualification in their subject. This suggests that even where posts are being filled, headteachers may be finding recruitment more difficult.

These difficulties could also have implications for pupil outcomes. On the one hand, in their 2014 review, 'What makes great

⁴³ Parliamentary Petition, [Include expressive arts subjects in the Ebacc](#)

⁴⁴ [HC Deb 4 Jul 2016 c180-222WH](#)

⁴⁵ Ibid., c214WH

⁴⁶ Ibid., c220WH

⁴⁷ Guardian, [There's nothing sadder than EBacc without teachers](#), 16 June 2015; Schools Week, [2,000 more MFL teachers needed for EBacc](#), 19 June 2015

teaching?', the Sutton Trust concluded that the link between teachers' academic qualifications and student performance are weak. On the other hand, they do also report evidence that subject-specific knowledge is related to performance. Measures to recruit and retain teachers of certain subjects, with formal training in those subjects, are therefore important.⁴⁸

A further NFER [article](#) in February 2016 highlighted survey results which indicated that a significantly higher proportion of teachers in some EBacc subjects were considering leaving the profession compared to non-EBacc teachers. While mathematics and English appeared to be in a relatively strong position, the survey highlighted particular concerns relating to computing and languages:

Computing and languages not only appear to have the greatest numbers considering leaving teaching, but these subjects also have some of the greatest shortfalls in new teachers being recruited.⁴⁹

Education Datalab have [estimated](#) that 3,400 extra language teachers would be needed to provide an "EBacc for all". It further stated that "we currently train about 1,500 language teachers a year just to maintain the current stock of teachers."⁵⁰

Government view

The Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, [defended](#) the Government's proposals against the charge that other subjects would be crowded out by a compulsory EBacc:

We should acknowledge that the curriculum always involves trade-offs: more time on one subject means less time on others. Over the years, I've been asked to add scores of subjects - from intellectual property, to Esperanto, to den building - to the national curriculum. Many of these are important and interesting.

The question, though, is always whether they are sufficiently important to justify reducing the time available for the existing subjects in the curriculum, and I make no apology for protecting space for the English Baccalaureate subjects wherever possible.

That is not to say, of course, that subjects outside the English Baccalaureate have no place in schools. The EBacc is a specific, limited measure consisting of only 5 subject areas and up to 8 GCSEs. Whilst this means that there are several valuable subjects which are not included, it also means that there is time for most pupils to study other subjects in addition to the EBacc, including vocational and technical disciplines which are also vital to future economic growth.

[...]

The supposed choice between a core academic curriculum on the one hand, and the study of a broad range of subjects on the other, is a false one. Before they begin to specialise, we have to ensure that all pupils have the chance to establish a solid academic foundation upon which they can build their future.

⁴⁸ National Foundation for Educational Research, [Should I Stay or Should I Go? NFER Analysis of Teachers Joining and Leaving the Profession](#), November 2015, p4-5

⁴⁹ National Foundation for Educational Research, [EBacc teacher recruitment and retention: even more challenging times ahead?](#), 4 February 2016

⁵⁰ Education Datalab, [Revisiting how many language teachers we need to deliver the EBacc](#), 11 March 2016

Several high-performing countries, including South Korea, Japan and the Netherlands, ensure that a core curriculum of academic subjects is studied and then examined at the age of 16.⁵¹

2.5 Impact of the EBacc

Sutton Trust briefing

In July 2016, the Sutton Trust published [Changing the Subject](#), a briefing on how the EBacc and [Attainment 8](#) reforms were changing attainment.⁵²

The briefing assessed the impact on pupils in schools which had significantly adjusted their educational offer following the introduction of these measures. They found that pupils, in particular those on the pupil premium, had benefitted from the changes. The report did, however, also state that head teachers had told the Trust that the Government's 90% target was both inappropriate for many pupils and unachievable due to teacher shortages.

The report set out the following key findings:

- 300 secondary schools – we call them curriculum change schools – transformed their Key Stage 4 curriculum between 2010 and 2013 in response to government policy, achieving a rise in the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc from 8% to 48%.
- We find that pupils at these schools largely benefitted from these changes. They were more likely to achieve good GCSEs in English and maths, refuting claims that the more academic curriculum would distract focus from these core subjects.
- Those pupils who attended the curriculum change schools were 1.7 percentage points more likely to be taking an A level or other level 3 qualification after the age of 16 and 1.8 percentage points less likely to have dropped out of education entirely.
- Pupil premium students benefitted most from the changes at these schools, essentially because low and middle prior attainment students increased take-up of EBacc subjects most. As a result, the pupil premium gap closed a little more than in schools with similar pupil intake demographics, including a six percentage point narrowing of the EBacc gap.
- Nevertheless, pupil premium students still do not have fair access to the EBacc curriculum subjects nationally, compared to students with similar prior attainment. We have identified nearly an 8% gap in languages take-up which translates 11,000 disadvantaged students and an

⁵¹ Department for Education, [Nick Gibb: the social justice case for an academic curriculum](#), 11 June 2015

⁵² Attainment 8 shows pupils' average achievement in the same suite of subjects as the Progress 8 measure. Progress 8 measures students' progress across eight subjects: English; mathematics; three other English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects, or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic, or vocational qualification.

11% gap in humanities, equivalent to 15,000 students missing out.

- Although our evidence demonstrates that schools have successfully moved towards an EBacc aligned curriculum, our survey of headteachers confirms that delivering the EBacc to 90% of students is beyond the reach of many schools given specialist teacher shortages. Moreover, these headteachers believe that it is not appropriate for many students.⁵³

New Schools Network report on the EBacc and the arts

A report by the New Schools Network, [The Two Cultures](#), published in February 2017, argued that the EBacc had not had any discernible ill effect on the take-up of arts subjects, and urged the Government to improve its messaging around the reforms. The report included a foreword from the Schools Minister and the Digital and Culture Minister.

The report cited the following key findings:

Arts education improves students' job prospects: Studying arts subjects correlates strongly with positive academic and labour market outcomes and is vital in supporting the UK's burgeoning creative industries.

There is no evidence that the EBacc has affected GCSE arts entries: Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 individual arts entries rose, with more pupils taking at least one arts GCSE in 2015/16 than in 2011/12.

However, it does appear that schools have misunderstood the intention behind the EBacc, using its introduction to reduce funding for the teaching of the arts: While arts entries have risen, the number of GCSE arts teachers has declined, with schools focusing recruitment efforts elsewhere. Similarly, evidence suggests that less contact time is now being given to GCSE arts entrants.

There is no evidence of incompatibility between attainment in arts GCSEs and attainment in the EBacc, Progress 8 and Attainment 8: Higher participation and performance in the arts goes hand-in-hand with high attainment in the EBacc, Progress 8 and Attainment 8. Because grades in arts GCSEs are typically higher, arts GCSEs add more to Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores than other subjects.⁵⁴

EDSK report: 'A Step Baccward'

In July 2019, the education think tank EDSK published [A Step Baccward](#), a report that criticised the EBacc and questioned its importance following the introduction of the Progress 8 accountability measure for schools.

The report stated that increased take-up of EBacc subjects has "flatlined" since 2012, while non-EBacc subjects were in decline, and

⁵³ Sutton Trust, [Changing the Subject: How are the EBacc and Attainment 8 reforms changing results?](#), July 2016

⁵⁴ New Schools Network, [The Two Cultures: Do schools have to choose between the EBacc and the arts?](#), February 2017, p7

argued that Progress 8 was in any case more significant in encouraging pupils to take EBacc subjects. The report recommended that the EBacc performance measures be withdrawn, as well as the targets for 75 and 90 per cent of pupils to be studying the EBacc subjects by 2022 and 2025 respectively.

The report made recommendations for changes to Progress 8 in light of the EBacc measures' proposed removal, and for EBacc subjects to be instead referred to as 'core' subjects at GCSE level.

The report stated that:

[The logic for introducing the EBacc] has now been turned on its head because since the EBacc was introduced, science, history and geography have thrived while many other subjects – most visibly in the creative arts – have seen their numbers dwindle.

It would be wrong to suggest that removing the EBacc will lead to an immediate upsurge in the number of pupils taking GCSEs in arts subjects. That said, the advent of Progress 8 in 2016 has provided the government with a perfectly sufficient tool for promoting their view of the subjects that schools should be prioritising – effectively negating the need for the EBacc.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ EDSK, [A Step Backward](#), July 2019

3. Pupils entering and achieving the Ebacc

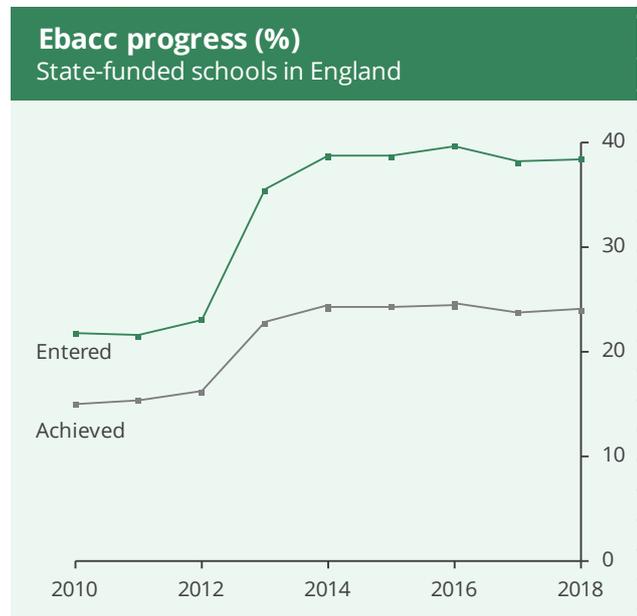
3.1 Pupils entering and achieving the EBacc

In 2010 22% of pupils at the end of key stage 4 in state-funded schools entered all five components of the EBacc and 15% achieved it.⁵⁶ These pupils took their exams before the EBacc was announced by the Coalition Government and pupils in the following two years had either already started their GCSE subjects or chosen their subjects when the announcement was made. Schools/pupils therefore had limited scope to change the subjects they offered/decided to take until 2013. In 2013 the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc increased to 36% and those achieving it to 24%. Since then the increase has been more modest; reaching a peak of 40% entering and 25% achieving in 2016, followed by a small reduction to 38% entering and 24% achieving in 2018.

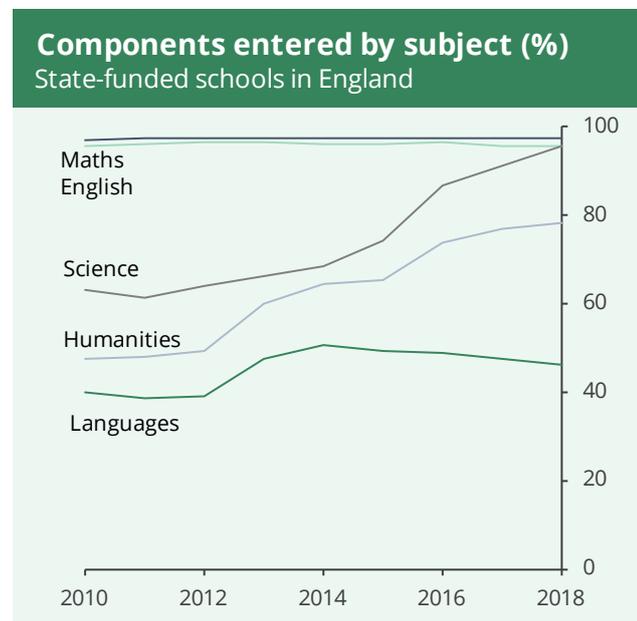
While the proportion of pupils entered for all five of the components of the EBacc has not changed a great deal in the past few years the proportion entering four ('near misses' to entry) has increased from a low of 24% in 2014 to around 47% in 2018. In 2018 around 85% of pupils either entered four or all five of the components, compared to 51% in 2010.

Entry to English and maths GCSE has remained broadly constant since 2010. The increase in EBacc 'entry' has been driven by more pupils taking the other components, in particular Humanities (History or Geography) and Science. Entry to languages has also increased over the period albeit more modestly and has declined since reaching a peak of over 50% in 2014.

Girls are more likely to enter the EBacc than boys (44% compared to 33% in 2018). This gap in entry rates has nearly trebled since 2010. Pupils eligible for free school meals were less likely than other pupils to enter the EBacc in 2018 (24% compared to 41%). Pupils from Indian, Chinese, 'other Asian' backgrounds were more likely to enter. Pupils from Irish traveller or Roma Gypsy backgrounds were the least likely group to enter.



Notes: Methodology changes were made in 2014 and 2016 illustrated by 2 sets of data points in each of those years
Source: [GCSE and equivalent results: 2017 to 2018 Table 1b](#)



Source: [GCSE and equivalent results: 2017 to 2018 Table 1b](#)

⁵⁶ [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2017 to 2018 \(Table 1b\)](#), DfE

In 2018 around 79% of pupils at grammar schools entered the EBacc (this was over double the state sector average); and around 72% achieved the EBacc (just under three times the average).⁵⁷

EBacc entry rates varied to a relatively small degree by region. In 2018 most had overall rates of 34-39%. London was the exception with an entry rate of 52%. There was much more variation by local authority with rates ranging from around 15% to 55%.

Entry and achievement by Local Authority (%)			
State-funded schools in England, 2018			
Ebacc entry		Achieving the Ebacc	
Top 5 Local Authorities:		Top 5 Local Authorities:	
Lambeth	53.5	Harrow	35.7
Bromley	53.7	Ealing	36.7
Ealing	54.3	Wokingham	37.0
Richmond upon Thames	54.5	Southwark	37.4
Sutton	54.8	Bromley	37.5
Bottom 5 Local Authorities:		Bottom 5 Local Authorities:	
Blackpool	15.1	Blackpool	6.9
Doncaster	19.0	Sandwell	10.6
Rochdale	20.6	Rochdale	11.1
Sandwell	20.8	Doncaster	11.5
Middlesbrough	22.4	Knowsley	13.0

Source: [GCSE and equivalent results: 2017 to 2018 \(LA Tables\) Table LA3](#)

3.2 Non-EBacc subjects

There has been ongoing concern about the possible drop in entries for subjects not included in the EBacc. Arts subjects have been a particular focus of this concern.

The absolute number of entries in 'arts' subjects⁵⁸ has declined by nearly 53,000 between 2014 and 2018 (or 18%).⁵⁹ However, over this period total entries across all subjects have also declined (by 1.5 million or 23%). This means that as a proportion of total entries, 'arts' subject entries have *increased* over this period (from 4.9% to 5.3%).

The following GCSE's have followed a similar pattern between 2014 and 2018:⁶⁰

- Art and Design: entries fell by 8.8%, the number of entries as a proportion of total entries has increased (from 2.9% to 3.5%)
- Music: entries fell by 19.4%, the number of entries as a proportion of total entries has increased (from 0.7% to 0.8%)

⁵⁷ [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2017 to 2018 \(Table 2b\)](#), DfE

⁵⁸ Applied/Art & Design, Drama, Media/Film/TV, Music, Dance, Performing Arts

⁵⁹ [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2017 to 2018 \(Subject tables, table S6\)](#), DfE (total entries)

⁶⁰ Ibid.

- Design and Technology: entries fell by 18.7%, the number of entries as a proportion of total entries has increased (from 2.9% to 3.5%)

4. English Baccalaureate Certificates

The November 2010 Schools White Paper, [The Importance of Teaching](#), said that the Government was seeking advice from the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) on changes to restore confidence in GCSEs. The proposed changes included a return to exams taken at the end of the course, and measures to improve the assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The next stage of the reforms was announced on 17 September 2012, when the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, made an oral statement in the House of Commons. This was made against the background of concern about the grading of GCSEs in English. Mr Gove announced that the Government intended to replace GCSEs with new qualifications, to be called English Baccalaureate Certificates (EBCs), which would cover the core academic subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate – English, Mathematics, sciences, history, geography and languages. He also proposed a single awarding organisation in each subject, for a period of five years.⁶¹

Following the Secretary of State's statement, the DFE launched a consultation entitled [Reforming Key Stage 4 Qualifications](#). The consultation closed on 10 December 2012.⁶²

Strong concerns were expressed about the content and implementation of the proposed EBCs. In particular, there was concern about the treatment of creative subjects - such as art, drama, music, and ICT, and sport.⁶³ There was also concern about the single awarding system. These issues were explored in some detail in an Opposition Day debate on examination reform in the House of Commons on 16 January 2013.⁶⁴

The House of Commons Education Select Committee voiced concerns about proposed EBCs in its report, [From GCSEs to EBCs](#), and asked for more evidence that EBCs were necessary, and said that the Government was "trying to do too much, too fast."⁶⁵ The Committee said that the GCSE brand was not damaged beyond repair.⁶⁶ The Government's response was published in April 2013.⁶⁷

⁶¹ [HC Deb 17 Sep 2012 c653-655](#)

⁶² Department for Education, [Reforming Key Stage 4 Qualifications](#), September 2012

⁶³ See, for example, a Guardian article on 10 December 2012: [Education in brief: will EBCs raise achievement for all students?](#)

⁶⁴ HC Deb 16 Jan 2013 c877-938

⁶⁵ House of Commons Education Committee, [Education Committee publishes report on GCSE reform](#), 31 January 2013

⁶⁶ House of Commons Education Committee, [From GCSEs to EBCs: the Government's proposals for reform](#), January 2013, Eighth Report of Session 2012-13, HC 808-I

⁶⁷ House of Commons Education Committee, [From GCSEs to EBCs: the Government's proposals for reform: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2012-13](#), April 2013, Seventh Special Report of Session 2012-13, HC 1116

By the time the response was published, the proposed EBCs had been abandoned. In its response to a consultation on the proposals, the Government stated:

During the consultation period, many argued convincingly that GCSEs themselves could, with comprehensive reform, once again be highly respected qualifications in which pupils, employers and further and higher education institutions can have faith. Therefore, we have decided that GCSEs should be comprehensively reformed in order to command the respect our pupils deserve as reward for their hard work.⁶⁸

The Education Secretary made a statement to the House on 7 February 2013 which stated that the reforms were “a bridge too far... [to] have just one wholly new exam in each subject was one reform too many at this time.”⁶⁹

The Library standard note on [GCSE, AS and A Level reform](#), SN06962, provides information on the Government’s reform of qualifications after the abandonment of EBCs.

⁶⁸ Department for Education, [Reforming Key Stage 4 qualifications consultation: Government response](#), February 2013, p12

⁶⁹ [HC Deb 7 Feb 2013 c441](#)

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