

## Implementing the English Baccalaureate

### Response from the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,500 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL has members in more than 90 per cent of secondary schools and colleges of all types, responsible for the education of more than four million young people. This places the association in a unique position to consider the bill from the viewpoint of the leaders of secondary schools and of colleges.
- 2 ASCL strongly believes that a school's curriculum should be determined by school leaders and governors and we welcome the autonomy given to schools to do this. ASCL makes a number of key recommendations in response to this consultation.
- 3 All schools need a challenging curriculum if all our students are to be able to compete globally. We need a curriculum that provides a firm foundation for all students, whatever their backgrounds, enabling them to succeed not just in modern Britain but in the modern world. This curriculum needs to be broad, balanced and motivational.
- 4 ASCL endorses the government's more recent recognition that the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) for 90 percent of pupils is not a requirement on individual schools. This is a welcome sign of greater awareness of how a curriculum should be adapted to the needs of young people. It is also an acknowledgement that headteachers should have discretion over which pupils would benefit from the Ebacc.
- 5 ASCL supports the principle of core academic subjects as being crucial to a young person's future and the equality of opportunity this offers. However, we believe there has been a conflation between what is a core academic curriculum and the narrow range of subjects in the Ebacc. We believe that the proposed set of subjects set out in the Ebacc are important but not sufficient. Following the reform of GCSEs there are other equally valid, rigorous and beneficial subjects that young people could study which would also improve life-chances and maintain broad options post-16.
- 6 ASCL recommends that the reformed Religious Studies GCSE should be in the Ebacc humanities pillar. The new GCSE is an academically rigorous qualification requiring students to study two world religions with a core of mutual tolerance and respect that is highly relevant and appropriate in today's society. This move would increase the uptake of the Ebacc considerably and, importantly, increase the proportion of students studying Islam as one of these two religions in a balanced and factual ways as prescribed by the specification, including in schools with substantial Muslim populations. This has the potential to be a powerful force for moderation and a vehicle for improving religious literacy across schools and build on schools' priorities in relation to promoting British values and educating for liberty, tolerance and mutual respect.

#### **Students in scope**

- 7 ASCL believes that the Ebacc is a valid and enabling pathway for many students. We welcome the government's recognition that the Ebacc should not be mandatory for all

students and is to be a national ambition rather than a requirement or target for individual pupils or schools.

- 8 ASCL believes school leaders should have flexibility in determining who would benefit most from the Ebacc and welcomes the recommendation in the consultation paper that *'the decision not to enter a pupil for the Ebacc should be a positive decision; the alternative options chosen should be significantly more likely to lead to better life chances and maintain broad options for post-16 study'*. ASCL supports the key principle of social justice implicit in this policy and Ebacc entry must not be determined by social background. We also have a duty to ensure the curriculum in all our schools has clear opportunities for students, irrespective of their ability, to study the subjects which enable them to progress to relevant pathways, for example triple science, more than one modern foreign language, or creative and artistic pathways.
- 9 Progression routes for young people are a key consideration implicit in this consultation. Recognition of students' attainment at both Level 1 and Level 2 is available in all GCSEs, but this range of attainment is not covered by the current Ebacc measure. A sound curriculum must ensure suitable and just progression routes for all students regardless of their ability and despite external measures.
- 10 Given that Grade 5 will be the new expectation at GCSE, fewer students will achieve the Ebacc as it stands. This could limit progression opportunities for a large section of the school community and lead to a narrowing of the post-16 curriculum and choices offered.
- 11 ASCL strongly believes that school leaders must reject determinism by social background or by perceived intelligence. School leaders need flexibility to prioritise the needs of their students so that we develop a socially cohesive society that values its educational experience.

### **Accountability**

- 12 ASCL has welcomed the new accountability measures being introduced in 2016 and in particular the introduction of Progress 8 to replace the discredited 5A\*CEM measure as the headline indicator for school performance. This measure was introduced to address several issues: an overemphasis on the C/D borderline, particularly in English and mathematics, an acknowledgement that 5A\*CEM rewarded intake, that the floor standard should better reflect the circumstances of each school, and that 5A\*CEM can mask schools where progress should be higher.
- 13 These three problems are all inherent risks of the current Ebacc measure, particularly if it gains in prominence. Of the four new measures for 2016 Ebacc adds very little extra information for stakeholders which cannot be inferred from the other three, particularly if public reporting on these measures continues to be as helpfully granular and detailed as it has been this year. Much of Attainment 8 is constructed around Ebacc subjects and is a raw attainment measure, albeit points based, which also reflects the levels of entry in those subjects. The Basics measure (%A\*CEM) is a good indicator of the proportion of students likely to achieve good passes in other academic subjects, and is likely to be closely tied to Ebacc pass rates.
- 14 A particular weakness of threshold measures such as Ebacc and 5A\*CEM is their inability to measure trends and gaps effectively because of their binary nature. For example, Progress 8 registers what may be strong progress made by students who nevertheless do not go on to achieve a C (or in the future a 5), and is therefore a more helpful method of analysing the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

- 15 The phasing of GCSE reform will mean the Ebacc measure will be volatile and unreliable for several years. In 2017, when reformed English and mathematics GCSEs become available, there will be an inevitable drop in Ebacc scores as Grade 5 becomes the new good pass, and there will be an internal inconsistency as reformed grades are mixed with legacy grades. A further drop is inevitable in 2018 when other qualifications are reformed. This makes year on year comparison, another important attribute for stakeholders, nigh on impossible.
- 16 We therefore propose that consideration is given to the suspension of the current Ebacc measure from headline indicators over the period of reform, and that discussion takes place about a more effective way of incentivising and measuring change.
- 17 One potential alternative would be a measure based on the sound principles of Progress 8, which adds more emphasis to Ebacc subjects. We believe this could be achieved by increasing the Ebacc element of Attainment 8 to include four subjects, with a corresponding reduction in the 'open' element to two subjects.
- 18 We believe a benefit of this proposal is that it builds progressively on the system change which is already taking place as schools adjust their entry policies to accommodate Attainment 8, and also addresses two of the issues with Attainment 8, namely the lack of incentive for modern languages and a reduction in the significance of the open element, which suffers from an "apples and pears" mix of different types of qualifications with different grading systems.
- 19 This approach to accountability would retain some consistency when grading structures change in 2017 and 2018. It would continue to recognise the progress made by students at all grades and hence would give credit for students who, for example, passed all but one Ebacc subjects with C or higher. Similarly, it would credit changes to entry to address individual students' strengths and interests from the default Ebacc position outlined in the consultation that are nevertheless still desirable and facilitating combinations. For example, it would credit a student who studied two languages rather than a humanities subject (which we believe could be an important step in restoring the supply of language teachers), or who took three separate sciences and computing. A further advantage is that this measure could then be consistently applied to all types of institutions, including those with a highly specialised curriculum.
- 20 This proposal could render a separate measure for Ebacc uptake unnecessary. Entry is already registered by Attainment 8 and Progress 8. Furthermore, it readily lends itself to comparison. Various attempts to define sets of statistical neighbours for schools have often proved unhelpful or flawed. However comparison with pupils of similar ability is a well-defined, unequivocal and rigorous concept accepted by all.
- 21 Languages present a range of particular issues for the Ebacc, including that of harsh grading. We recommend below that a national working group or commission be established to address all these complex issues and propose acceptable solutions.
- 22 ASCL believes that the arrangements for 'exception discounting' in science subjects are now unnecessary. The DfE introduced this concept to ensure that breadth in science was maintained for students studying separate sciences, rather than via routes such as Core Science followed by Additional Science. This currently means students need to pass two separate sciences but take a third, with a grade U or higher, in order to meet the Ebacc requirements. The inclusion of Computing as a subject in the science mix means it is now possible to achieve this without studying Biology, for example. We would maintain that a student getting an A\* in Physics and an A\* in Chemistry demonstrates perfectly well their achievement in Science overall, without any reference to a third subject. This principle has already been recognized in the Attainment 8 measure where a third science subject is

unnecessary for the other two to be counted and hence exception discounting is now an unhelpful and inconsistent distraction.

- 23 ASCL also welcomes the decision that Ebacc entry and achievement should not be a limiting factor in an Ofsted inspection. Whilst ASCL understands that accountability measures related to Ebacc will have more prominence in an Ofsted inspection, we strongly recommend that it does not become a key judgment of any kind and that outcomes continue to be judged on a range of measures of which Progress 8 is key. We strongly recommend that inspection frameworks continue to recognise a rounded approach by considering a range of indicators and that inspectors continue to have discussions relating to the broader implications of Ebacc implementation in a particular context. Whilst some commentary in an inspection report in relation to provision of Ebacc may be appropriate, it must be recognised that any comments are set in the context of an ambition by 2020, not before this.
- 24 In order to ensure equality of treatment across all educational institutions, ASCL believes that any accountability measure should be applied to all maintained schools, including UTCs, studio schools, further education colleges and special schools that are educating pupils full time. If the measure is designed to credit partial Ebacc completion using a points score reporting system, this should not disadvantage any type of school or college.

### **Implementation**

- 25 ASCL remains concerned about the impact on the arts and technology subjects at a time when our creative and cultural industries are the fastest growing of the UK economy, and the creative arts will play a significant role in economic growth in the future. Government figures published in January estimate the creative industries are worth £79.6 billion to the UK economy and account for 1-7 million jobs. Yet Design Technology entries at GCSE dropped from 287,701 in 2010 to 204,788 in 2015.
- 26 It will be important to ensure students' choices in technical and creative subjects are not limited due to Ebacc implementation and the opportunity for students to specialise in this key area will be an important consideration for school leaders in deciding for whom the Ebacc is most appropriate.
- 27 The Ebacc curriculum time is likely to be 70 percent of a student's time in KS4 (a minimum of seven subjects is required to deliver the Ebacc) with a further 10 percent needed for core physical education and personal social and health and citizenship education. This will leave 20 percent (10 percent where GCSE RS is compulsory). The demands of reformed GCSEs, particularly in mathematics, and the discontinuation of combined English, means that, in percentage terms, these subjects have increased in curriculum allocation time.
- 28 ASCL urges the government to be mindful that an unintended consequence of an Ebacc-focused curriculum and limited options for creative arts is that it is likely to result in music and drama becoming the preserve of elite, affluent parents who are able to afford private tuition. We are not recommending more compulsion, rather that academic subjects should be the core of a curriculum, but not its entirety. School leaders must be able to design a curriculum that adequately accommodates options for creative and technical subjects, triple sciences and two languages.
- 29 The DfE has recently confirmed that there is a serious teacher supply shortage across the country and particularly in certain regions. Government recruitment targets for teacher training programmes in secondary subjects have not been met for the last three years (particularly in some Ebacc subjects) and more teachers will be needed over the next few years because of a significant rise in student numbers. ASCL is concerned that schools do not have enough teachers in the Ebacc subjects and that there are insufficient plans in

place to address this shortage. In addition, the supply of good teachers in subjects other than those in the Ebacc may be compromised.

- 30 Whilst ASCL is keen to work with the government to find solutions to this problem and has indeed put forward a number of proposals to date, the regional implications must be borne in mind. The teacher shortage crisis will have a direct impact on the implementation of this policy and consequently there should be a longer term ambition to achieve 90% than the current 2020 vision.
- 31 The current proposal does not provide sufficient lead-in time and is unrealistic given the acute problems in teacher supply. These are most felt in regions where the disadvantaged gap is wider. We therefore urge the government to work with ASCL and others to encourage an equitable distribution of teachers that could ensure that students in these areas have access to high quality teaching in all subjects.
- 32 ASCL acknowledges the government's concern that there has been a diminishing uptake of modern languages and agrees that there are social, political and economic reasons why young people should develop this key skill. However, we believe that making languages part of a performance measure with more prominence is an overly simplistic solution to a more complex problem.
- 33 ASCL would recommend that an experienced commissioned group review the wider issue of continuity and quality of language learning across school phases in the UK, with the aim of developing a long term strategy to improve the supply of modern language teachers. This strategy needs to extend beyond the life of a parliament and needs long term investment if we are to become a nation that embraces and values language learning. This review should encompass the following challenges: teacher supply, teacher expertise, pedagogy, purpose, assessment and grading, treatment in performance tables and RAISEonline, range of languages, transferable language learning skills and very low take up after GCSE.
- 34 The Sutton Trust report 'Developing teachers' published January 2015 recognises the importance of strong subject knowledge in securing outcomes for students "*The most effective teachers have deep knowledge of the subjects they teach. When teachers' knowledge falls below a certain level, it is a significant impediment to students' learning*". We must ensure that we invest in high quality training for teachers' subject knowledge. The government should consider as many incentives as possible to train specialist teachers with expert subject knowledge, particularly in Ebacc subjects, even if this takes a long time.
- 35 ASCL urges the government to recognise the fact that significant investment in professional development and training will be required to implement this policy successfully. The need for training and support for schools in developing effective pedagogies for teaching the Ebacc across the full ability range, appropriate intervention, tracking, behavior management systems and high quality IAG will be essential. ASCL would also envisage the Royal College of Teaching, NCTL and teaching school alliances being instrumental in developing and sharing good practice in these areas.
- 36 ASCL also recognises the ongoing need for professional training for senior and middle leaders in leadership and design of the curriculum so that expertise in designing a curriculum which is values driven, challenging and not restrictive of students' options in areas in which they are keen to specialise can be developed and shared across the profession.

## **Protected characteristics**

- 37 ASCL recognises the importance in considering the impact of this policy on young people with protected characteristics and we strongly recommend that the government undertakes an impact equalities assessment on this policy. For example the growing gender divide for entrance to university is a concern that would need including in an equalities assessment.

## **Conclusion**

- 38 Our informal survey of members showed that the majority of school leaders are concerned that the current proposals in this policy are too rigid. Our members also feel strongly that accountability measures should be based on the sound principles of Progress 8 with more emphasis added to Ebacc subjects as outlined above. We would be very happy to work with the government further to make sure that all young people have access to rigorous and academic qualifications which suit their needs in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

## **With reference to your specific questions**

### **Question 1**

- 39 See paragraphs 6-12.

### **Question 2**

- 40 See paragraphs 12-23.

### **Question 3**

- 41 See paragraph 24.

### **Questions 4-8**

- 42 See paragraphs 25-36.

### **Questions 9 & 10**

- 43 See paragraph 37.

- 44 I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Martin Ward  
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Association of School and College Leaders  
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