



## English Baccalaureate

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This note provides information on the introduction, composition and development of the English Baccalaureate. It applies to England only.

The English Baccalaureate 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 qualifications in the following subjects:

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

The Government 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.

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. Concerns have been raised about the impact on subjects that are not included in the measure. The decision not to include religious education has been particularly controversial, along with creative subjects such as art and music.

A new qualification, the English Baccalaureate Certificate, was proposed by the Government in 2012, but this was not adopted and alternatively reforms to GCSE qualification were pursued.

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### 1 Introduction

#### 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 Government has said that the English Baccalaureate is not compulsory but represents a core of subjects that it wants pupils to have the opportunity to study, while acknowledging that other subjects and qualifications remain valuable in their own right. However, there will be a strong incentive for schools to encourage pupils to take the specified subjects as the school performance tables will 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 language

A [full list of the qualifications that count towards the EBacc is available](#) from the Department for Education. Qualifications that are regulated by [Ofqual](#) and [approved by the government for inclusion in key stage 4 performance tables](#) count towards the EBacc measure if they:

- are in an accepted EBacc subject

- enable progression to relevant A level subject(s)
- are graded in the same way as GCSEs (A\* to C for level 2, D to G for level 1)

To pass the English element of the EBacc pupils either need to:

- get an A\* to C pass in English GCSE
- get an A\* to C pass in English language GCSE and achieve a grade in English literature GCSE

To pass the science element of the EBacc pupils either need to:

- get an A\* to C pass in core and additional science
- take 3 single sciences (from biology, chemistry, computer science and physics) and get an A\* to C pass in 2 of them
- get A\* to C passes in science double award

Computer science GCSEs will be included in the science element of the EBacc for the first time from 2014. Only the following qualifications will be eligible in 2014:

- AQA level 1/2 GCSE in computer science
- OCR level 1/2 GCSE in computing

The following qualifications will also be eligible for the EBacc from 2015:

- Pearson Edexcel level 1/2 GCSE in computer science
- WJEC level 1/level 2 GCSE in computer science

## 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 Westminster Academy.<sup>1</sup> 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 so<sup>2</sup>. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [Speech by the Secretary of State for Education, at Westminster Academy, 6 September 2010](#)

<sup>2</sup> 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/>

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. Those schools which succeed in giving their pupils a properly rounded academic education will be more easily identified. This will provide a powerful incentive for schools to drive the take-up of individual science subjects, humanities such as history and, especially, foreign languages.

4.23 The proportion of young people studying a modern language at GCSE has fallen from 79 per cent in 2000 to just 44 per cent in 2008 and 2009.<sup>3</sup> The introduction of the English Baccalaureate will encourage many more schools to focus more strongly on ensuring every student has the chance to pursue foreign language learning to the age of 16.

4.24 The English Baccalaureate will be only one measure of performance, and should not be the limit of schools' ambitions for their pupils. Schools will retain the freedom to innovate and offer the GCSEs, iGCSEs and other qualifications which best meet the needs of their pupils. Pupils will of course be able to achieve vocational qualifications alongside the English Baccalaureate. With the proper structures in place through the reform of the National Curriculum and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate schools will have the freedom and the incentives to provide a rigorous and broad academic education.

The introduction of the English Baccalaureate did not require legislation; however, it has been discussed during the debates on the *Education Bill* (now the *Education Act 2011*).<sup>4</sup>

The English Baccalaureate was first applied to the 2010 school performance tables with about 15% of pupils that year achieving the measure. In 2013 this figure had risen to 23%.<sup>5</sup>

### **Rationale**

The 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 a MFL in 2002; by 2010 this figure had dropped to just over 43 per cent. Entries have

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Education and Employment, GCSE/GNVQ and GCE A/AS and Advanced GNVQ Results for Young People in England 1999/2000 (Provisional), DCSF, GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2007/08 (Revised). DCSF, GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2008/09 (Revised).

<sup>4</sup> 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;

<sup>5</sup> [PQ 206611, 22 July 2014](#)

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.<sup>6</sup>

### 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, the Schools Minister said that the precise definition of the English Baccalaureate would be reviewed, and he stressed that the aim was to focus on core academic subjects; however, he said that study of other subjects would also be valuable.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, he said that he would publish information on all measures to be included in the 2011 performance tables (including the composition of the English Baccalaureate) in the DFE's Annual Statement of Intent, which would be published before the summer break:

**Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he plans to make a decision on the inclusion of religious education within the English Baccalaureate for the purposes of the 2011 school performance tables. [38975]

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<sup>6</sup> Education Committee, *The English Baccalaureate: Government response*, HC 1577 2010-12, para 2-4

<sup>7</sup> HC Deb 11 January 2011 c291W

**Mr Gibb:** I intend to publish information on all measures to be included in the 2011 performance tables in our annual statement of intent, which will be published at

[www.education.gov.uk/performancetables](http://www.education.gov.uk/performancetables)

We have not set an exact date for publication, but it will be before the summer break.<sup>8</sup>

And:

Question

Asked by **Baroness Jones of Whitchurch**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they are conducting reviews of the subjects currently making up the English Baccalaureate.[HL9974]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Lord Hill of Oareford):**  
The English Baccalaureate will encourage schools to offer a broad set of academic subjects to pupils aged 16-English, mathematics, the sciences, history or geography, and a language. It aims to increase the opportunities for all pupils-especially those in disadvantaged areas-to study a set of subjects that will allow them to progress to further study or employment.

We are considering the make-up of the English Baccalaureate from 2011, and will announce the final composition before the end of the school term.<sup>9</sup>

The DFE's *Statement of Intent for the 2011 School and College Performance Tables*, which was published on 21 July 2011, stated that the 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.

Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister said in evidence to the Education Select Committee (see section 1.4 of this paper for information on the enquiry), that while the purpose of the English Baccalaureate is to try to remedy some of the perverse incentives in the league tables, it will not be an accountability measure, and there will be 'no intervention measures from

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<sup>8</sup> HC Deb 10 March 2011 c1231W

<sup>9</sup> HL Deb, 21 June 2011 ccWA277

Government for schools that are achieving a low percentage in terms of the English Baccalaureate.<sup>10</sup> The [question and answer paper](#) (referred to above) notes:

**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 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 Government has 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 sets out the 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.<sup>11</sup>

***Creative subjects***

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

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<sup>10</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, Fifth report of Session 2010-12, HC Paper 851, Ev18

<sup>11</sup> [HC Deb 23 Jan 2013 c327W](#)



**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.<sup>12</sup>

#### 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.<sup>13</sup>

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."<sup>14</sup>

#### **Government response (November 2011)**

In its [response](#) to the Committee's report, published in November 2011, the 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.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [HC Deb 25 Apr 2013 c1174W](#)

<sup>13</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Think again about English Baccalaureate](#), say MPs, 28 July 2011

<sup>14</sup> Education Committee, [The English Baccalaureate](#), 28 July 2011, HC 851 2010-12, para 84

<sup>15</sup> Education Committee, [The English Baccalaureate: Government response](#), HC 1577 2010-12, para 9-10

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, para 12



The 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.<sup>17</sup>

We are grateful to the Committee for its consideration of certification of the English Baccalaureate. We are considering the options for awarding certificates and issues associated with those options, and will make a decision on how to proceed in due course.

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

## 2 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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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."<sup>22</sup> The Committee said that the GCSE brand was not damaged beyond repair.<sup>23</sup> The Government's response was published in April 2013.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, para 31

<sup>18</sup> [HC Deb 17 Sep 2012 c653-655](#)

<sup>19</sup> Department for Education, *Reforming Key Stage 4 Qualifications*, September 2012

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, a Guardian article on 10 December 2012: [Education in brief: will EBCs raise achievement for all students?](#)

<sup>21</sup> [HC Deb 16 Jan 2013 c877-938](#)

<sup>22</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, *Education Committee publishes report on GCSE reform*, 31 January 2013

<sup>23</sup> 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

<sup>24</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, *From GCSEs to EBCs: the Government's proposals for*

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.<sup>25</sup>

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.”<sup>26</sup>

The Library standard note on [GCSE, AS and A Level reform](#), SN/SP/6962, provides information on the Government’s reform of qualifications after the abandonment of EBCs.

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*reform: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2012–13*, April 2013, Seventh Special Report of Session 2012-13, HC 1116

<sup>25</sup> Department for Education, *Reforming Key Stage 4 qualifications consultation: Government response 12*, February 2013, p

<sup>26</sup> [HC Deb 7 Feb 2013 c441](#)