HOUSE OF LORDS

Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee

Report of Session 2023–24

Requires improvement: urgent change for 11–16 education

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Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee

The Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee was appointed by the House of Lords on 31 January 2023 to consider education for 11 to 16 year olds with reference to the skills necessary for the digital and green economy.

Membership

The Members of the Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee were:

Lord Aberdare
Lord Baker of Dorking CH
Baroness Blower
Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
Baroness Garden of Frognal
Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Chair)
Lord Knight of Weymouth
Lord Lexden OBE
Lord Mair CBE
Baroness Massey of Darwen
Lord Storey CBE
Lord Watson of Invergowrie

Declaration of interests

See Appendix 1.

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests:
https://members.parliament.uk/members/lords/interests/register-of-lords-interests

Publications

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Q in footnotes refers to a question in oral evidence

SUMMARY

The 11–16 phase of education is a crucial stage in a young person's life. During this time, most young people will work towards national qualifications, usually GCSEs, and make important decisions about their future education and training. Our inquiry focused on whether the current system effectively equips young people with the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to progress to the next phase of their education, and to flourish in the future.

The Committee received extensive evidence about the 11–16 system in England from pupils, teachers, school leaders, academics, exam boards, trade unions and subject associations, among others. The evidence left us in no doubt of the need for urgent action. Our conclusions recognise that the 11–16 curriculum must be revised to incorporate a greater emphasis on technical, digital and creative areas of study. We are convinced that the burden of GCSE assessment on pupils and teachers should also be eased, by reconsidering the quantity of content studied and the number of subjects assessed externally. This approach is supported by our range of recommendations.

The need for reform

Reforms to the 11–16 system initiated by the Government since 2010 have been guided by an emphasis on knowledge acquisition and academic rigour. Education in this phase now prioritises a restricted programme of academic learning, delivered through a narrow set of subjects and teaching styles. We heard repeatedly that this approach fails to take account of wider societal and economic shifts. Technological advances have transformed the way we learn, work and live. These, combined with the transition to net zero, mean the demands of the UK labour market are also evolving rapidly.

Today's 11 year-olds will leave school in the 2030s. They need change to be made urgently. While it is difficult to predict what jobs will be available when they enter the workforce, digital, creative and technical skills are likely to be in even greater demand. Skills such as collaboration, creativity and problem-solving are also expected to become increasingly important. Opportunities to develop these skills have, however, been squeezed out of the 11–16 phase.

We were told that the Government's focus on a 'knowledge-rich' approach has resulted in an overburdened curriculum that necessitates narrow teaching methods such as rote learning and 'cramming' subject knowledge, particularly when pupils are studying for their GCSEs. There is also little scope to engage with topics beyond the curriculum or apply learning to real-world issues such as climate change, with pupil engagement suffering as a result.

Young people also have insufficient opportunities in this phase to develop and apply the essential skills they need to thrive in the future, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Each year, around a third of pupils in England do not secure a 'pass grade' in GCSE English and maths, which often leads to more limited opportunities in the post-16 phase. A greater focus on other core skills, such as oracy and digital literacy, should be incorporated into the 11–16 curriculum.

Witnesses also told us that the pressure created by the current assessment system has become unsustainable. Pupils are now tested purely via exams in many GCSE subjects. Sitting 25 to 30 hours of exams at the end of year 11 is a stressful experience for many pupils, and those who do not excel in this type

of assessment have few other opportunities to demonstrate their achievements. This exam burden is disproportionate when all young people must now remain in education or training until the age of 18.

We heard compelling evidence that intense exam pressure is felt by schools and teachers, as well as pupils, since GCSE results underpin the majority of the Government's school performance measures for the 11–16 phase. Several of these measures, particularly those based on the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), incentivise a focus on a limited set of traditionally academic subjects. Schools have accordingly adjusted their timetables and resourcing to promote these subjects to pupils and maximise their performance against these metrics.

As a result, subjects that fall outside the EBacc—most notably creative, technical and vocational subjects—have seen a dramatic decline in take-up. Opportunities to experience more practical, applied forms of learning have become increasingly limited, even though many pupils enjoy, and excel in, this way of acquiring knowledge and skills.

The Government's ambition is to see 90% of 14 to 16 year-olds taking the EBacc subject combination, despite the fact that some pupils would be better served by studying other qualifications. A broader subject range is also critical to inspiring and equipping pupils to pursue the full range of post-16 options, including the technical courses and apprenticeships that the Government wishes to prioritise.

Action for reform

This inquiry was established in response to growing concerns that the present 11–16 system is moving in the wrong direction. Several recent reports into the secondary system, including those by the Times Education Commission and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, have called for extensive reform within this phase.

The evidence we heard persuades us that major change is necessary. In this report, we assess proposals for long-term reform, while also setting out a package of measures that we believe can be delivered in the shorter term. We are convinced that change must be undertaken without delay and recommend the following priority areas for attention:

- Reduce the amount of content in the 11–16 curriculum, particularly in GCSE subjects. A revised curriculum should enable schools to offer a more varied range of learning experiences, with the aim of promoting the development of a broader set of knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Ensure there is an adequate set of literacy and numeracy qualifications available to pupils aged 14 to 16, focused on the application of these skills in real-world contexts. Sitting alongside GCSE English and maths, these should provide increased opportunities for all pupils to demonstrate their attainment and remove barriers to progression into post-16 education.
- Create additional pathways to support the development of pupils' digital skills, through the introduction of both a new applied computing GCSE and a digital literacy qualification.
- Initiate a programme of reform aimed at reducing the volume and lowering the stakes of exams taken at age 16. In the shorter term, improvements

could be made by increasing the use of coursework or other forms of non-exam assessment, including project-based qualifications.

- Abandon the EBacc school performance measures and review the other measures in the 11–16 phase. Schools must be given greater flexibility to offer the subjects and qualifications that would best serve their pupils, based on a balanced curriculum including the study of creative, technical and vocational subjects.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 2: The 11–16 curriculum

1. It is vital that pupils experience a wide range of subjects and curriculum content up to the age of 14 to keep their future options open, inform their subsequent choices and ensure they receive a broad and balanced education. Although it is helpful for schools to have some flexibility over their curriculum, this should not extend to 'squeezing' key stage 3 into two years or dropping foundation subjects entirely. The growing number of academies in 11–16 provision brings into question the appropriateness of the current national curriculum's status, as it is no longer mandatory for the vast majority of schools. (Paragraph 43)

2. *The Government should conduct a review of the national curriculum's status, with the aim of ensuring that all mainstream, state-funded schools are teaching a genuinely broad and balanced curriculum throughout a three-year key stage 3. The proposal for a mandatory national curriculum that ensures a common entitlement for all pupils should be considered in this context. The review should consider the impact of any curriculum changes on specialist schools, to ensure that innovative approaches are not undermined where they are to the benefit of pupils.* (Paragraph 44)

3. The Government's emphasis on a knowledge-rich approach has led to an 11–16 curriculum which is overloaded with content, particularly at key stage 4. The extent of the material to be covered hampers pupils' understanding of core concepts and stifles engagement. (Paragraph 51)

4. *The Government should reduce the overall content load of the 11–16 curriculum, focusing particularly on GCSE subject curricula. It should undertake a review to establish how this can be achieved, and publish its findings.* (Paragraph 52)

5. Supporting pupils to achieve a basic standard of literacy and numeracy should remain a core purpose of the 11–16 system. These skills are essential for young people to progress in their education and to succeed in life and work. The stubbornly high proportion of pupils who do not achieve a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths each year must be addressed. (Paragraph 69)

6. *The Government should determine why around a third of pupils do not secure a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths each year, and publish its findings.* (Paragraph 70)

7. *We recommend that high-quality level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications should be available for pupils to take during key stage 4, and that attainment in these should be recognised in school performance measures. Such qualifications should be genuinely distinct from the discipline-based English and maths GCSEs and should focus on the application of essential skills. We invite the Government to launch a consultation to assess whether the existing English and maths functional skills qualifications could fulfil this purpose, or whether the development of new qualifications is required.* (Paragraph 71)

8. Oracy is an essential skill for pupils to develop in preparation for their future life and work, but it may not be being consistently prioritised by schools in the 11–16 phase. (Paragraph 75)

9. *As part of a wider review of the key stage 3 and GCSE curricula, the Government should embed opportunities for oracy and communication skills development.* (Paragraph 76)

10. We heard persuasive evidence that an applied computing GCSE should be introduced, to provide an alternative to the more academically focused computer science GCSE. This could help to address the declining uptake of digital qualifications at key stage 4 and support us to meet the growing demand for a wide range of digital skills across the economy. (Paragraph 89)

11. *Working closely with stakeholders, the Government should take steps to develop and introduce a new GCSE in applied computing as soon as possible.* (Paragraph 90)

12. All pupils should have the option of taking a digital literacy qualification in the 14–16 phase. This would support the development of core digital skills, particularly for those who do not choose to take a computing qualification at key stage 4. (Paragraph 93)

13. *The Government should explore introducing a basic digital literacy qualification that can be taken at key stage 4, to ensure that all pupils have an opportunity to develop the basic digital skills needed to participate effectively in post-16 education and training, employment and wider life.* (Paragraph 94)

14. Secondary education must support young people to develop the knowledge, skills and agency they will need to live in a world affected by the impacts of climate change. We welcome the actions relating to climate education set out in the *Sustainability and climate change strategy* published by the DfE, particularly the recognition that providing effective support, training and resources for teachers will be critical to the delivery of high-quality climate and sustainability education to all pupils. It is essential that the Government meets the commitments detailed in this strategy. (Paragraph 103)

15. We also welcome the new natural history GCSE and the opportunities it will afford for pupils to learn about the natural world as part of their key stage 4 studies. However, without reform to embed nature, climate and sustainability education more widely across the 11–16 curriculum, particularly at key stage 3, the qualification risks becoming a 'subject silo'. It could also see low take-up, as pupils may be less likely to select a GCSE in a subject to which they have previously had limited exposure, and not all schools will have the necessary resources to deliver it. (Paragraph 104)

16. *The Government must ensure that a core purpose of future reviews of the key stage 3 and 4 curricula, and GCSE content specifications, is to identify and incorporate opportunities to educate pupils about climate change and sustainability across a wider range of subjects. This is necessary to avoid the persistence of 'subject silos' and to ensure that teaching on such topics is available to all.* (Paragraph 105)

17. Proficiency in modern languages is an important asset, both in individual relationships and for career pathways. The low take-up of GCSEs in modern foreign languages, despite the inclusion of languages within the EBacc subject combination, is therefore concerning. We heard that a number of different factors contribute to this. (Paragraph 112)

18. *The Government should explore innovative ways to encourage schools to promote language learning, whether or not as a GCSE subject, and to address practical barriers, including the limited supply of suitably qualified teachers.* (Paragraph 113)

19. Pupils must have genuine, substantive opportunities to study creative and artistic subjects at key stages 3 and 4. This is vital to enable them to develop creative skills and to support a diverse talent pipeline for our creative industries, which are a key sector of the UK economy, and the many other businesses that are crying out for creative skills. We have heard that the delivery of these opportunities is increasingly difficult in the current context due to funding constraints and the deprioritisation of creative subjects due to accountability measures. (Paragraph 127)

20. *A principal aim of future adjustments to key stage 4 school accountability measures, including those called for in this report, should be to reverse the impact of the current measures on the take-up of creative subjects at GCSE.* (Paragraph 128)

21. There has been a significant decline in recent years in the number of pupils taking up technical subjects during key stage 4. This is coupled with a wider decline in the opportunities available throughout 11–16 education for pupils to develop practical skills. The current system is overly focused on academic pathways and changes are needed to ensure that there are clear and coherent routes from key stage 4 into post-16 technical education. (Paragraph 146)

22. The collapse in take-up of design and technology requires the urgent attention of the Government. The expansion of technology and engineering learning at key stage 4 is essential to opening up opportunities for young people and nurturing core talent for the future economy. (Paragraph 147)

23. We support the ambition of the MBacc and UTC sleeve proposals in seeking to promote the status and availability of technical education in the 11–16 phase of education. We recognise, however, that careful consideration is needed to ensure that any changes of this nature can be effectively and equitably delivered within the current system. (Paragraph 148)

24. *The Government should set out how technical and vocational education opportunities can be promoted to a greater number of pupils during the 11–16 phase, with the aim of enabling all pupils to study at least one technical or vocational subject should they wish. The Government should engage closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's proposal to offer, as an alternative to the EBacc, a key stage 4 subject combination focused on technical careers, and the Baker Dearing Educational Trust's proposal for a "UTC sleeve", and publish its response to these suggestions.* (Paragraph 149)

25. We are encouraged by the House of Commons Education Committee's conclusion that reasonable progress towards improving careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in secondary schools has been made over the past decade. We heard that an even greater emphasis on CEIAG is needed in the 11–16 phase, and that this can be enhanced through meaningful engagement between schools and employers. (Paragraph 157)

26. *Careers education, information, advice and guidance in the 11–16 phase must give equal status to the full range of post-16 pathways, including technical and vocational qualifications, such as BTECs, and apprenticeships. We support the House of Commons Education Committee's call for the Government to develop potential solutions to the problem of schools being overly incentivised to encourage pupils to follow academic routes.* (Paragraph 158)

Chapter 3: Assessment

27. We have heard that the high-stakes nature of key stage 4 assessment in England necessitates an emphasis on terminal, exam-based testing. Witnesses have suggested that the current focus on exam-based assessment places considerable pressure on pupils and can have a detrimental impact on their learning experiences in the 11–16 phase. While there remains a need for some kind of formal assessment at 16, given the number of pupils who change institutions at this age, the current exam burden is disproportionate, since pupils must now remain in education or training up to 18. (Paragraph 177)

28. We recognise that radical reform of GCSEs would constitute a major shift in the current secondary assessment system. This transition would need to be made as part of a long-term programme, alongside changes to the post-16 phase, and extensive consultation would be critical. This clearly goes beyond the Committee's remit for this inquiry and so we have not made detailed recommendations in this area. We do, however, support recent proposals to move towards a slimmed-down form of assessment at 16, with externally validated assessment used across a smaller set of subjects. (Paragraph 178)

29. *We urge the Government to consider proposals to reduce more dramatically the amount of external assessment undertaken at age 16, as it reviews options for a less onerous GCSE assessment model. The Government should set out further details of its proposed review of GCSEs in its response to this report.* (Paragraph 179)

30. There is some evidence to suggest that non-exam assessment produces less reliable grades than traditional exams. However, we heard that non-exam assessment supports the development of knowledge and skills that are more difficult to assess in an exam context. Witnesses suggested that, used alongside exams, it can lessen the pressure of assessment for pupils, by reducing the significance of terminal exams to their overall grade, and help to capture the full range of their achievements. We are persuaded that an increase in the use of non-exam assessment at GCSE would bring benefits for pupils. (Paragraph 196)

31. Concerns about reliability, plagiarism and the impact on teacher workload mean that an increase in the use of non-exam assessment should be approached cautiously. Careful consultation with teachers and schools will be vital to ensure that any increase in the use of non-exam assessment at GCSE is manageable to deliver. Increasing take-up of the Higher Project Qualification would enable more pupils to experience the benefits of non-exam assessment at key stage 4, without requiring any significant changes to the current suite of GCSEs. (Paragraph 197)

32. *As part of a longer-term review of qualifications at 16, the Government should introduce a greater proportion of non-exam assessment at key stage 4. In the short term, the Government should set out how greater take-up of the Higher Project Qualification at key stage 4 could be encouraged, to enable more pupils to undertake an extended project qualification alongside their GCSEs.* (Paragraph 198)

33. Paper-based exams that require pupils to write for extended periods are increasingly out of alignment with the experiences and tasks young people will encounter in their education, life and work. On-screen testing represents a more modern approach and offers huge potential to enhance the assessment experience for learners. We welcome Ofqual's initial investigatory work in

this area and support its future vision of a mixed model combining on-screen and paper-based assessment. (Paragraph 216)

34. We recognise that there are numerous barriers to delivering a greater proportion of on-screen assessment within national exams at the end of key stage 4, including the need to develop school infrastructure and ensure pupils are equipped with the necessary digital skills. It is imperative that the transition towards on-screen assessment at GCSE is managed in a way that ensures fair treatment of all learners. (Paragraph 217)

35. *The Government should lead on ensuring that the transition towards on-screen assessment at GCSE is implemented successfully. In its response to this report, the Government should summarise the steps it is taking to support progress towards a greater proportion of GCSE assessments being undertaken on-screen in future.* (Paragraph 218)

36. It has been suggested that the system for determining GCSE grade boundaries requires a fixed proportion of pupils to 'fail' their English and maths GCSEs each year. However, we are persuaded that it does not set quotas for the number of pupils who can be awarded each grade. (Paragraph 225)

37. Where external assessment is used, it is vital that GCSE grades are, and are perceived to be, accurate reflections of a pupil's performance. This is particularly important given that, at present, a pupil's GCSE results can have a direct impact on the post-16 options they are able to pursue. Robust processes must be in place to assure the reliability of grading. These should be kept under review, including in light of the potential enhancements that emerging technologies such as AI may bring to marking. (Paragraph 232)

38. We heard that taking steps to increase the reliability of GCSE assessment would be likely to entail more extensive testing of pupils, or moving to a more limited set of question types. Such changes could have a detrimental impact on learners and would run counter to efforts to transition to a more varied and less onerous assessment system at key stage 4. (Paragraph 233)

39. *The Government should instead prioritise lowering the stakes of assessment at 16, to ease the pressure for testing at this age to meet such high reliability standards, and reduce the present emphasis on exam-based assessment at the end of key stage 4.* (Paragraph 234)

Chapter 4: School performance measures

40. The interplay between Ofsted's inspection regime and the collection and publication of school performance data relating to the 11–16 phase results in an accountability system that places intense pressure on schools. Its overreliance on key stage 4 attainment figures disproportionately raises the stakes of assessment in this phase and also pressurises teachers and pupils. (Paragraph 246)

41. *The Government must ensure that the type and volume of school and college performance data it publishes balances the needs of users against the risk of undesirable outcomes, such as disproportionate pressure on schools and pupils. Taking forward the recommended reforms to specific key stage 4 accountability measures set out in this report presents an opportunity for the Government to conduct a wider review of the data it publishes for this phase, to ensure that an appropriate balance is being struck.* (Paragraph 247)

42. The Government's ambition that 90% of pupils in state-funded schools should enter for the EBacc sends a strong message as to which subjects should be prioritised, which is echoed by the references to the EBacc in Ofsted's handbook and recent school inspection reports. Faced with the pressures of a high-stakes accountability system and stretched resources, schools have understandably organised their curricula in line with the EBacc's requirements, often deprioritising creative, artistic and technical subjects as a result. (Paragraph 268)

43. Core subjects such as English, maths and science should form a central part of the key stage 4 curriculum, and all pupils should have the opportunity to pursue traditionally academic subjects at key stage 4 should they wish. Nonetheless, the EBacc subject combination is overly restrictive and demotes to second-tier status subjects that bring breadth and balance and enable the development of essential skills. (Paragraph 269)

44. There is a continued connection between the EBacc's composition and the facilitating subjects list previously used to designate the A-level subjects most often required for entry to high-tariff universities. This gives undue prominence to the university route and is no longer justifiable given the Russell Group's withdrawal of this classification. (Paragraph 270)

45. *The Government must immediately abandon the national ambition for 90% of pupils in state-funded mainstream schools to be taking the EBacc subject combination. The EBacc subject categorisation, and the EBacc entry and EBacc average point score accountability measures, should also be withdrawn in their entirety, and all references to the EBacc in the Ofsted school inspection handbook removed.* (Paragraph 271)

46. Progress 8 is an improvement on the previous headline accountability measure and was introduced with the valuable aim of capturing the average level of progress pupils in a school make during key stages 3 and 4 across a range of subjects. We welcome the emphasis it places on supporting pupils of all abilities to increase their attainment. (Paragraph 287)

47. The dominance of EBacc subjects within the Progress 8 measure limits flexibility around subject choice and incentivises schools to focus their resources on a narrow set of academic subjects. This constricts in particular the take-up of creative and technical qualifications, and compounds the impacts of the EBacc described earlier. Withdrawing the EBacc subject classification would change the composition of Progress 8 by removing the requirement for pupils to take three additional EBacc subjects, alongside English and maths. This presents an opportunity for further refinement of the measure. (Paragraph 288)

48. In the short term, we favour adjustments to Progress 8 that would enhance the flexibility and choice it offers, while reducing the disruption and risk of unintended consequences that changing the number of subject slots which comprise it might cause. A reformed Progress 8 could be structured around the core subjects of English, maths and science, complemented by up to four open slots. It should give schools greater flexibility to offer the subjects and qualifications that would best serve their pupils, based on a balanced curriculum that includes scope for creative, technical and vocational subjects. (Paragraph 289)

49. A revised Progress 8 should also record results gained in English and maths functional skills qualifications, to ensure that even if pupils do not take

English and maths GCSEs, their attainment in literacy and numeracy is recognised. (Paragraph 290)

50. *We call on the Government to review the current set of headline accountability measures, particularly Progress 8, in light of evidence that the existing measures are failing to support schools to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. The review should examine how, following the withdrawal of the EBacc, Progress 8 can be further refined to ensure that schools maintain an appropriate level of focus on the core subjects of maths, English and science, while enabling them to promote a broader range of subjects to pupils at key stage 4. Consideration should also be given to how results achieved in functional skills qualifications in English and maths would be incorporated into the measure.* (Paragraph 291)

51. Although we are sympathetic to the idea of increasing the prominence of destination data in the key stage 4 accountability system, further investigation is necessary to determine the benefits of doing so and the best approach by which to achieve this. As with any adjustment to performance measures, changes should be approached cautiously to avoid increasing pressure on schools and inappropriately driving behaviour. A consistent approach to school performance measurement across key stages 3, 4 and 5 is essential to ensuring that efforts made to promote technical qualifications and apprenticeships in the 11–16 phase are not undermined by the impact of performance metrics used at key stage 5. (Paragraph 297)

52. *The remaining headline accountability measures, including the percentage of pupils staying in education or entering employment, should be re-evaluated as part of a wider review of the key stage 4 school performance measures published by the Government. The Government should also review the key stage 5 destinations measures, including the entry to Russell Group universities metric, and adjust or withdraw these as required to ensure that performance incentives for schools and colleges are coherent across the 11–16 and 16–19 phases.* (Paragraph 298)

Requires improvement: urgent change for 11-16 education

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The inquiry and the work of the Committee

1. The House of Lords Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee was appointed in January 2023 to "consider education for 11–16 year-olds with reference to the skills necessary for the digital and green economy", and to make recommendations. Our inquiry has therefore centred on the key stage 3 and 4 phases, which cover years 7 to 11.

Table 1: Overview of key stages 3 and 4

Child's age	School year	Key stage	National assessments
11–12	7	3	
12–13	8	3	
13–14	9	3	
14–15	10	4	Some pupils take GCSEs
15–16	11	4	Most pupils take GCSEs or equivalent qualifications

Source: Department for Education, 'The National Curriculum': https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum *[accessed 7 November 2023]*

2. The Committee met for the first time on 9 February 2023. A call for written evidence was issued in March 2023, and is reprinted in Appendix 3. Over the course of our inquiry, we received 101 written evidence submissions and heard from 41 witnesses in 15 oral evidence sessions. We are very grateful to all those who took the time to provide us with evidence. A list of those who gave us written and oral evidence is included in Appendix 2 and is available on our website.[1]

3. It was vital to our inquiry that we heard the views of teachers and pupils on the issues we were examining. The Committee held two roundtable sessions in September 2023, at which we spoke to teachers and pupils from schools across England.

4. We are very grateful to our specialist adviser, Tom Richmond, founder and director at EDSK. His expertise has assisted us greatly in our deliberations during the course of this inquiry.

1 See 'Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee': https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/647/education-for-1116-year-olds-committee/ [accessed 29 November 2023]

Key themes and areas of focus

5. The Committee's terms of reference invited a focus on the role of secondary education in England[2] in preparing young people to enter employment in a future, low-carbon economy. Skills shortages in relation to digital and green roles are well recognised. The Government acknowledged when publishing its 2022 *UK Digital Strategy* that "over 80% of all jobs advertised in the UK now require digital skills", but that employers say the lack of available talent is the single biggest factor holding back growth. It is estimated that the digital skills gap costs the UK economy as much as £63 billion a year in potential GDP.[3] The 2021 Green Jobs Taskforce report suggested that the extent of the skills gap it identified pointed to the "need to significantly increase the size of the green workforce to deliver net zero."[4] Evidence to this Committee suggested that as we work towards national decarbonisation targets, over the next five to 10 years, more than 200,000 jobs could be created in energy efficiency[5] and the retrofitting of buildings alone could require the training of 45,000 technicians each year.[6]

6. Alongside specialist skills, recent research has emphasised the increasing importance of transferable, 'soft' skills. The Skills Imperative 2035 programme undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research identified six "essential employment skills" that are predicted to be those "most heavily utilised in the labour market in 2035": communication; collaboration; problem-solving; organising, planning and prioritising work; creative thinking; and information literacy.[7]

7. The impact of technology and the transition towards net zero on the skills demands of our economy is clear, and ensuring that the country can meet its future workforce needs is unarguably a core purpose of the education system as a whole. Recent reports have suggested that "bold reform" of secondary education is required to ensure that future skills demands can be met.[8] We agree with this assessment. Indeed, much of the evidence we heard reaffirms the conclusions and recommendations reached by other organisations.

8. The Committee did not limit this inquiry, however, to assessing the effectiveness of the 11–16 system in preparing young people to enter

2 Education, training and skills are devolved matters. Much of the evidence we received, and the corresponding conclusions and recommendations we have drawn, therefore focus on the situation in England. We did, however, take evidence on education policy in other parts of the UK, particularly the reform programmes currently being undertaken in Scotland and Wales.

3 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 'New Digital Strategy to make UK a global tech superpower' (13 June 2022): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-strategy-to-make-uk-a-global-tech-superpower [accessed 4 October 2023]

4 Green Jobs Taskforce, *Report to government: industry and the skills sector* (July 2021), p 45: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1185360/green-jobs-taskforce-report-2021.pdf [accessed 4 October 2023]

5 Written evidence from UCL Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education (EDU0065)

6 Written evidence from EngineeringUK (EDU0092)

7 Information literacy is described as being "closely related" to critical thinking and involving "accessing and examining data or facts to determine appropriate actions or recommendations, discerning and evaluating arguments, and making and defending judgements based on internal evidence and external criteria." National Foundation for Educational Research, *An analysis of the demand for skills in the labour market in 2035: Working paper 3* (May 2023), pp 73–78: available at https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/the-skills-imperative-2035-an-analysis-of-the-demand-for-skills-in-the-labour-market-in-2035/ [accessed 8 November 2023]

8 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England* (August 2022), p 4: https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/1nrrxVUPtZzMdI5U3ER4Ep/2f86cc94b653ab7992a35917560814b9/Ending-the-Big-Squeeze-on-Skills-How-to-Futureproof-Education-in-England.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

employment. We recognise the challenges of attempting to define the job opportunities that will be available to young people in the future, given the pace of technological and societal change. We were advised not to "chase today's skill requirements in the 11–16 curriculum"[9]—today's 11 year-olds will not enter the workforce until the 2030s.

9. We also sought to keep a clear focus on the role of the 11–16 phase within the wider education system. Given that all young people must now remain in some form of education or training until 18,[10] pupils do not need to be 'work ready' on completion of key stage 4. Post-16 education will generally be the most suitable time for young people to develop the sector-specific skills and knowledge that will enable us to address existing and future skills needs.

10. We took evidence on how the 11–16 phase can play a preparatory role, laying the groundwork that enables pupils to progress to the next stage of their education and training, across the full range of post-16 options.[11] We examined to what extent pupils have access in the 11–16 phase to a broad and balanced education that provides opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills and behaviours in different ways, both within and across subject disciplines. We also assessed how the current system supports young people to develop core literacy, numeracy, communication and digital skills, which will be critical to success in whichever pathway they go on to pursue.

11. Across the evidence we received, criticism of the state of 11–16 education centred around several concerns. The system is underpinned by a 'knowledge-rich' approach, which has led to a significant expansion of the content pupils are expected to learn in this phase. This has been accompanied by a renewed emphasis on exam-based testing of knowledge at GCSE. These changes, coupled with the pressure schools feel to achieve good scores against headline performance measures, has led to a system that is disproportionately skewed towards academic study. Witnesses suggested that the current system has negative consequences for the take-up of creative, artistic and technical subjects in particular, and could be limiting opportunities for pupils to develop practical, creative and technical skills.

Reforms to 11–16 education since 2010

12. In 2010, the coalition Government published a Schools White Paper, *The importance of teaching*. This set out plans to reform the national curriculum, with the aim of slimming down content and giving teachers greater flexibility and control over what they taught.[12] A revised "forward-thinking, knowledge-

9 Q 72 (Sir Jon Coles)

10 The Education and Skills Act 2008 made it compulsory for all young people in England to participate in education or training until the age of 18. The requirement came fully into effect in 2015.

11 In the 16–19 phase, pupils can remain in full-time education, studying academic qualifications (A-levels) or vocational technical qualifications (such as T-levels or BTECs); start an apprenticeship; or work or volunteer for 20 hours or more a week while undertaking part-time education or training. These routes can be followed at various institutions, including school sixth forms (part of a secondary school) and separate 16–18 colleges, which may have a technical or academic focus. Department for Education, 'School leaving age: Can you leave school at 16 and what are your options?' (24 April 2023): https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/04/24/school-leaving-age-can-you-leave-school-at-16-and-what-are-your-options/ [accessed 2 November 2023]

12 Department for Education, *The importance of teaching: the schools white paper 2010* (November 2010): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b4029ed915d3ed9063285/CM-7980.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

rich national curriculum" was introduced in 2014.[13] It was said to "embody high expectations" for pupils and aimed to combine elements adapted from high-performing school systems around the world, such as those in Finland, Hong Kong and Singapore.[14]

13. The concept of a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum derives from the work of Professor E. D. Hirsch. According to the Department for Education (DfE):

> "Hirsch argues that it is crucial to provide all pupils with access to a core of broadly shared, societal, 'communal' knowledge to help them develop the intellectual and cultural capital they need to succeed. Hirsch explains that subject specific knowledge forms a foundation for new knowledge to 'stick' to, making it easier for pupils to commit new information to long-term memory. Pupils who have more relevant prior knowledge therefore find it easier to learn new information, compared to pupils who have less."[15]

Under this approach, knowledge acquisition is considered to be the primary aim. The Government argues that a knowledge-based curriculum is necessary to tackle the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers, who "have accumulated more of this knowledge at home and therefore find learning easier at school."[16]

14. Alongside introducing the new curriculum, the Government undertook a series of reforms to GCSE qualifications, aimed at increasing their rigour.[17] Assessment in most subjects is now by exam only, with non-exam assessments such as coursework being used only when this is essential to assessing skills "intrinsic to the subject".[18] GCSEs were also made linear, with assessments normally taken at the end of the course. Tiered papers were removed from most subjects.[19] A new grading system was introduced, which uses the numbers 1–9 to identify levels of performance, with 9 being the highest grade. The GCSE curricula were also reviewed. The amount of content to be covered in many GCSE courses increased—by "about 25%" in some cases, according to teachers.[20]

15. In 2010, the Government also introduced a new school performance metric, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). It measures the achievement of pupils who have been entered for GCSEs in English, maths, the sciences, history or geography, and a language. The Government stated that the principal purpose of the new measure was to increase the take-up of "core" academic qualifications.[21] In 2017, the Government announced its "national ambition"

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13 Department for Education, 'New curriculum will make education system 'envy of the world'' (4 September 2014): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-curriculum-will-make-education-system-envy-of-the-world [accessed 23 October 2023]

14 *Ibid.*

15 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)

16 *Ibid.*

17 HC Deb, 11 June 2013, col 161

18 Ofqual, *Reforms to GCSEs in England from 2015* (November 2013): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f0f8540f0b62305b84d33/2013-11-01-reforms-to-gcses-in-england-from-2015-summary.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

19 *Ibid.*

20 Ofqual, *GCSE reform in schools* (December 2019): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5df24a02ed915d093cec08e6/GCSE_reform_in_schools_-_FINAL196556.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

21 Department for Education, 'Michael Gove to Westminster Academy' (25 November 2010): https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/michael-gove-to-westminster-academy [accessed 23 October 2010]

that 75% of year 10 pupils should be studying the full suite of EBacc subjects by 2022, rising to 90% in 2025.[22]

16. A further school performance measure, Progress 8, was introduced in 2016. This aims to report the progress a pupil makes between finishing primary school and the end of year 11. As with the EBacc, the raw data that inform Progress 8 calculations are the grades pupils achieve in their GCSEs.[23]

Considerations on further reform

17. The combined impact of the current curriculum, assessment model and school accountability system has led bodies such as the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change and the Times Education Commission to call for radical reforms to secondary education.[24] The Times Education Commission, for example, called for the wholesale replacement of GCSEs.[25]

18. In scrutinising possible options for reform, the Committee was acutely aware of the existing pressures schools are under. We recognise that managing any change to the education system places demands on school leaders and teachers, as well as on pupils themselves. Responding to the growing calls for extensive reform of GCSEs and A-levels, the Institute for Government argued that an "assessment revolution" would present challenges for schools as they continue to deal with "the after-effects of the pandemic and ever tighter funding".[26]

19. These after-effects are extensive and are still being felt acutely in the sector. A 2022 research review by the Education Endowment Foundation concluded that "COVID-19-related disruption has negatively impacted the attainment of all pupils".[27] It also noted that "there is evidence that suggests the pandemic has negatively impacted children's mental health" and that "teachers have identified mental health as a significant challenge in the classroom."[28] Of particular concern are the elevated rates of absenteeism

22 Department for Education, 'Ambition for vast majority of students to study core academic GCSEs' (19 July 2017): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambition-for-vast-majority-of-students-to-study-core-academic-gcses [accessed 23 October 2023]

23 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 13: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

24 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England* (August 2022), p 3: https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/1nrrxVUPtZzMdI5U3ER4Ep/2f86cc94b653ab7992a35917560814b9/Ending-the-Big-Squeeze-on-Skills-How-to-Futureproof-Education-in-England.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

25 Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 94: https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times%20Education%20Commission%20final%20report.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

26 Institute for Government, *The exam question: changing the model of assessment reform* (August 2022), p 1: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/exam-question.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

27 Education Endowment Foundation, *The impact of COVID-19 on learning: a review of the evidence* (May 2022), p 3: https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/guidance-for-teachers/covid-19/Impact_of_Covid_on_Learning.pdf?v=1698316077 [accessed 29 November 2023]

28 *Ibid.*, p 14

among school pupils, which remain above pre-COVID levels.[29] On funding, a recent report by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that two-fifths of secondary schools in England had or were expecting an in-year deficit in 2022–23.[30]

20. Schools are also struggling with a shortage of teachers as, over the past decade, the overall number of qualified teachers in state-funded schools has not kept pace with increasing pupil numbers.[31] This issue affects secondary schools in particular, with recent data showing that recruitment levels for trainee teachers in the 2022–23 cycle fell below government targets in 13 out of 17 subjects.[32] The House of Commons Education Committee established an inquiry into teacher recruitment, training and retention in March 2023. In view of this, and recognising that we could not do justice to the complexity of this issue within the scope of our remit, we do not cover these issues in detail in this report. However, we acknowledge that addressing the challenge of teacher supply is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of any future reform, as well as the overall sustainability of our secondary system.

21. We also heard that recommendations for reform must be considered in the context of the education system as a whole. This was emphasised in the evidence we took on the experience of education reform in Scotland and Wales.

22. The Welsh Government is currently undertaking a substantial programme of education reform, which will make changes to the primary and secondary curriculum; national qualifications, including GCSEs; and the school inspection system. This arises from a review of the Welsh education system, conducted by Professor Graham Donaldson, which resulted in the *Successful Futures* report, published in February 2015. The report concluded that "the current national curriculum and assessment arrangements no longer meet the needs of the children and young people of Wales".[33] Taking forward recommendations from the report, the Welsh Government identified four guiding purposes for the new curriculum, which are underpinned by development of the following skills:

    - Creativity and innovation;
    - Critical thinking and problem-solving;
    - Personal effectiveness; and

29 The latest DfE attendance statistics for a complete academic year are for 2021–22, when the absence rate for any reason was 8.5%. This is much lower than the previous year when absence was affected much more by the pandemic (25.9% absence rate for any reason in 2020–21). However, it is higher than in the six years prior to the pandemic (when absence ranged between 4.5% and 4.8%). These figures were cited in House of Commons Library, School Attendance in England, Research Briefing, Number 09710, 29 September 2023.

30 National Foundation for Educational Research, *Cost-of-living crisis: impact on schools* (September 2023), p 8: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/j1qbbzwk/cost_of_living_impact_on_schools_school_provision.pdf [accessed 2 October 2023]

31 House of Commons Library, Teacher recruitment and retention in England, Research Briefing, Number 07222, 8 December 2022

32 National Foundation for Educational Research, *Teacher labour market in England annual report 2023* (March 2023), p 9: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3jrpvnet/teacher_labour_market_in_england_annual_report_2023.pdf [accessed 6 October 2023]

33 Welsh Government, *Successful futures: independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales* (February 2015), p 11: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018–03/successful-futures.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]

- Planning and organising.[34]

Literacy, numeracy and digital competence are positioned as "cross-curricular skills".[35] Pupils must be given opportunities to develop these across all areas of the curriculum.

23. From September 2023, all year 7 and 8 pupils will follow the new 'Curriculum for Wales' and, by the 2026–27 academic year, it will be followed by all secondary school pupils. Alongside the new curriculum, a new suite of GCSEs will be introduced. Changes have also been made to the role of Estyn, the school inspectorate. The Welsh Government suggested that it will now focus more on identifying "strengths and areas for improvement for schools", rather than reaching summative judgements on school performance.[36]

24. Scotland introduced its 'Curriculum for Excellence' in 2010. It emphasises interdisciplinary learning, skills development and teacher autonomy. A review of Scotland's education policy conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), published in June 2021, concluded that while the curriculum "continues to be an inspiring example equated with good curriculum practice internationally", there had been issues with its implementation.[37] These included "misalignment" with the qualifications system, which then "became a barrier" to its implementation in secondary education.[38]

25. The Scottish Government accepted all of the recommendations made in the OECD's review. It then commissioned several further reviews and has already committed to introducing a new qualifications body and school inspectorate.[39] The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills made clear in June 2023 that Scotland's approach to reform will "be holistic and reflect a clear expectation that all elements of the education and skills system will work together as one single system".[40]

26. A recent report prepared by Professor Bill Lucas for the Edge Foundation sets out other international examples of curriculum reform.[41] Australia, for example, introduced the first iteration of its current curriculum in 2010. The curriculum recognises seven 'general capabilities', which are addressed across all learning areas "where they offer opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning":

- Literacy capability;
- Numeracy capability;
- Information and communication technology (ICT) capability;
- Critical and creative thinking capability;

34 Written evidence from Welsh Government (EDU0101)
35 *Ibid.*
36 *Ibid.*
37 OECD, *Scotland's curriculum for excellence* (June 2021), p 11: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/bf624417-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/bf624417-en [accessed 29 November 2023]
38 *Ibid.*, p 12
39 Written evidence from Scottish Government (EDU0103)
40 *Ibid.*
41 Professor Bill Lucas, *Beyond the baccalaureate: learning from across the world* (July 2023), pp 17–21: https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/432/Edge_RA_Principles_for_a_Baccalaureate_PROOF4.pdf [accessed 1 November 2023]

- Personal and social capability;
- Ethical understanding capability; and
- Intercultural understanding capability.[42]

27. We heard from many witnesses that reform on a scale similar to that described above is required to address the issues currently facing 11–16 education in England. Our report therefore considers some potential options for longer-term and more significant readjustment of the current system. However, we acknowledge that change of this kind is a significant undertaking. We are clear that such options would require further consideration and consultation, and would need to be reviewed within the context of the education system as a whole, taking account of areas which fall beyond the Committee's focus on the 11–16 phase. Our report therefore focuses primarily on recommendations aimed at facilitating immediate change—measures that we believe could realistically be delivered in the shorter term. The evidence we have heard convinces us of the urgent need for reform, despite the challenging environment in which schools are operating.

42 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 'General capabilities (Version 8.4)': https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-year-10/general-capabilities [accessed 29 November 2023]

CHAPTER 2: THE 11–16 CURRICULUM

The national curriculum and academies

The national curriculum

28. The national curriculum was first introduced following the passage of the Education Reform Act 1988. It has since been revised several times, with the current version introduced in 2014 alongside reforms to General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) taken at the end of key stage 4 (year 11). The DfE told us:

> "We want all children to be inspired, confident and motivated at school. A broad, ambitious knowledge-rich curriculum not only achieves this by fostering competence and mastery in each subject, but also inspires pupils by introducing them to the best that has been thought and said, opening up access to their intellectual, cultural and scientific inheritance."[43]

29. The national curriculum for key stage 3 (years 7 to 9) contains an extensive list of subjects. There are five compulsory 'core' subjects in all state-funded schools: English, maths, science, religious education and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE). An additional nine are known as 'foundation' subjects and are not mandatory in most schools. At key stage 4, the core subjects remain the same, but the number of foundation subjects is reduced to just computing, citizenship and physical education. The remaining foundation subjects (as well as many others) can be chosen by pupils to study as a GCSE or Technical Award[44] but are not mandatory in any school.[45]

Table 2: The national curriculum

Subject	Key stage 3	Key stage 4
English	M	M
Maths	M	M
Science	M	M
Art and design	F	
Citizenship	F	F
Computing	F	F
Design and technology	F	
Languages	F	
Geography	F	
History	F	
Music	F	

43 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)
44 See para 129.
45 Local authority maintained schools must provide access to a minimum of one course in each of the four entitlement areas (arts, humanities, design and technology, and modern foreign languages) and the opportunity for pupils to obtain an approved qualification in all four areas, should they wish. Department for Education, *The national curriculum in England* (December 2014), p 7: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840002/Secondary_national_curriculum_corrected_PDF.pdf [accessed 3 October 2023]

Subject	Key stage 3	Key stage 4
Physical education	F	F
Religious education	M	M
RSHE	M	M

Key: M = Mandatory in all schools; F = Foundation subject, only mandatory in community schools; Blank = Non-mandatory in all schools.

Source: Written evidence from the Department for Education (EDU0085)

Academisation of secondary schools

30. State schools in England are usually academies or community schools.[46] Community schools, also known as local authority maintained schools, are funded by the local authority. They are required to follow the entire national curriculum. Academies are run by not-for-profit academy trusts that are independent of the local authority and funded directly from central government. Most academies are part of multi-academy trusts (MATs) that manage multiple schools. Academies have more freedom and flexibility than community schools, including the right to teach their own curriculum. Academy trusts can also manage free schools.[47]

31. Academies are required to teach only the five core subjects and do not need to include all of the foundation subjects in their curriculum; the latter are mandatory for community schools only. Over 80% of secondary schools in England are now part of an academy trust,[48] which means that the vast majority of schools no longer have to teach most of the national curriculum. This proportion has dramatically increased since 2011, when just 11% of secondary schools were academies.[49] It seems likely to increase further, with the ambition set out in the recent Schools White Paper that by 2030 all schools should be part of a "strong multi-academy trust" or have "plans to join or form one".[50]

Academies and curriculum flexibility

32. Academies are expected to teach a curriculum that is comparable in breadth and ambition to the national curriculum, and all schools are required by the DfE to publish their school curriculum by subject and academic year online. They must offer a curriculum that is "balanced and broadly based", "promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society," and "prepares pupils at the school for

46 Other types include foundation schools and voluntary schools, which are funded by the local authority but have slightly more freedom than community schools and are sometimes supported by representatives from religious groups such as churches. There are also grammar schools, which select pupils based on academic ability. These can be run by an academy trust, foundation body or the local authority.

47 In practice, free schools are very similar to academies. The primary difference is that they are newly established schools, whereas academies have generally converted to that status having previously been a community school.

48 FFT Education Datalab, 'The size of multi-academy trusts': https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2022/05/the-size-of-multi-academy-trusts/ [accessed 24 October 2023]

49 Department for Education, 'More than 1 in 10 secondary schools now academies with many more in the pipeline' (6 January 2011): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-than-1-in-10-secondary-schools-now-academies-with-many-more-in-the-pipeline [accessed 24 October 2023]

50 Department for Education, *Opportunity for all* (March 2022), p 43: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62416b59e90e075f0c9bd1a9/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child__web__-_accessible.pdf [accessed 24 October 2023]

the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life."[51] According to the DfE, many academies choose to teach the full national curriculum to achieve these expectations, but "schools have considerable flexibility to organise the content and delivery of the curriculum".[52]

33. We heard several examples of schools that have used this flexibility to develop innovative approaches. Jamie Portman, Trust Instruction Lead at XP Trust, told us that their schools follow the national curriculum, but that it is taught through interdisciplinary "expeditions". These are designed to be "purposeful and authentic learning experiences". They are usually focused on real-world issues and result in outcomes such as "publishing a book, creating artwork or doing a performance".[53]

34. Mark Marande, Principal of The Petersfield School (part of Bohunt Multi-Academy Trust), told us that they follow the national curriculum but "aim to go considerably beyond its demands to give our students a real experience that they can take into the workplace". They primarily do this through placing outdoor learning "at the absolute centre of the curriculum". He stressed that they are also "big believers in interdisciplinary learning" and ensure that all pupils experience cross-curricular opportunities. Mr Marande argued that there are "so many things that you just cannot learn in a traditional classroom" and that their approach helps pupils develop the "four Cs—collaboration, creative thinking, critical thinking and communication", which are "what employers want".[54]

35. However, witnesses also suggested that some academies are moving away from the national curriculum requirements, by removing curriculum content or even completely dropping foundational subjects. Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive, Independent Society of Musicians, told us of "schools where music has entirely disappeared at secondary stage or is taught as just part of performing arts".[55] Sir Jon Coles, Group Chief Executive, United Learning, noted that his multi-academy trust has taken on schools that have "got into difficulty" and "done things like drop music from their key stage 3 curriculum".[56]

Squeezing key stage 3

36. A significant number of academies have used their freedom to start teaching the GCSE curriculum during key stage 3, instead of the much broader national curriculum. The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change noted that, as of 2019, "56% of schools had started teaching GCSEs for most or all subjects in year 9 (some even begin doing this as early as year 7)".[57] Research published by Ofsted in 2017 concluded that around a quarter of pupils were having to choose their GCSE options at the end of year 8, meaning that "a

51 Department for Education, 'National curriculum in England' (updated 2 December 2014): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4 [accessed 24 October 2023]
52 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)
53 Q 1 (Jamie Portman)
54 Q 1 (Mark Marande)
55 Q 43 (Deborah Annetts)
56 Q 73 (Sir Jon Coles)
57 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England* (August 2022), p 39: https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/1nrrxVUPtZzMdI5U3ER4Ep/2f86cc94b653ab7992a35917560814b9/Ending-the-Big-Squeeze-on-Skills-How-to-Futureproof-Education-in-England.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

considerable number of pupils will be experiencing only two years of study … possibly never to study [some] subjects again".[58]

37. The practice of shortening key stage 3 was criticised by numerous witnesses. Sir Jon Coles asserted that it was "straightforwardly wrong".[59] Olly Newton, Executive Director, Edge Foundation, described key stage 3 as "sacrosanct" and stated that "the third year needs to be part of it". He argued that key stage 3 "should be a golden time" when pupils can "get excited about the whole range of things they could do", but that it is often just a "different part of the treadmill".[60]

38. Rt. Hon. Nick Gibb MP, then Minister of State for Schools, told us that:

> "it is wrong to reduce key stage 3 to two years. Young people need that broad array of subjects for those full three years. The GCSEs were designed to be taught in two years and it is not fair to young people to extend those GCSE courses".[61]

39. Amanda Spielman, Chief Inspector, Ofsted, agreed and noted that a number of schools "have now reversed" their decision to shorten key stage 3.[62] The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change highlighted that following changes made to the Ofsted inspection framework in 2019, which shifted the focus more towards the breadth of the curriculum, there are "tentative signs that some schools have moderated some of the blunter forms of crowding out they were previously practising".[63] Chris Russell, National Director for Education, Ofsted, confirmed that there had been some improvement, but that "no one is suggesting that things are perfect".[64]

40. In 2021, Ofsted confirmed that no judgement during inspections "should be based solely on the length of a school's key stage 3" and several schools have been graded 'outstanding' despite shortening their key stage 3 to two years.[65] Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that many schools still teach a shortened key stage 3, as confirmed by several subject associations,[66] and that Ofsted and the DfE are allowing this to happen despite widespread criticism.

A "common entitlement"

41. We heard from Tom Middlehurst, Curriculum, Assessment and Inspection Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), that:

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58 Ofsted, 'HMCI's commentary' (11 October 2017): https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmcis-commentary-october-2017 [accessed 24 October 2023]
59 Q 73 (Sir Jon Coles)
60 Q 48 (Olly Newton)
61 Q 156 (Nick Gibb MP)
62 Q 112 (Amanda Spielman)
63 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England* (August 2022), p 39: https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/1nrrxVUPtZzMdI5U3ER4Ep/2f86cc94b653ab7992a35917560814b9/Ending-the-Big-Squeeze-on-Skills-How-to-Futureproof-Education-in-England.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]
64 Q 112 (Chris Russell)
65 Ofsted, 'Schools and early education update: September 2021' (updated 21 December 2022): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-and-early-education-inspection-update-academic-year-2021-to-2022/schools-and-early-education-inspection-update-september-2021 [accessed 24 October 2023]
66 Including by Dr Geoffrey Readman, Chair of National Drama (Q 44), and in written evidence from British Science Association (EDU0089).

> "If, increasingly, all schools are academies … there should be a common entitlement for all young people … set out by a national curriculum that every state-funded school should have to follow."

This would be "slimmed down", compared to the national curriculum, to maintain flexibility. Mr Middlehurst suggested that ASCL had not received an unfavourable response to this proposal from the academy sector, even though it would undermine academies' current freedom over the curriculum.[67]

42. However, ASCL's proposal may be deemed inappropriate for some specialist free schools and academies, particularly those that start at year 9. For example, London Design and Engineering school is a university technical college (UTC)[68] in Newham that specialises in technical education for pupils from year 9 to 13. It offers a range of technical options at key stage 4 that are rarely available in mainstream schools. To support pupils to make an informed choice, it runs a 'subject carousel' for the first two terms of year 9, in which pupils experience all the available key stage 4 subjects.[69] This approach would not be possible if all schools were required to teach even a slimmed down key stage 3 national curriculum up to the end of year 9.

43. **It is vital that pupils experience a wide range of subjects and curriculum content up to the age of 14 to keep their future options open, inform their subsequent choices and ensure they receive a broad and balanced education. Although it is helpful for schools to have some flexibility over their curriculum, this should not extend to 'squeezing' key stage 3 into two years or dropping foundation subjects entirely. The growing number of academies in 11–16 provision brings into question the appropriateness of the current national curriculum's status, as it is no longer mandatory for the vast majority of schools.**

44. ***The Government should conduct a review of the national curriculum's status, with the aim of ensuring that all mainstream, state-funded schools are teaching a genuinely broad and balanced curriculum throughout a three-year key stage 3. The proposal for a mandatory national curriculum that ensures a common entitlement for all pupils should be considered in this context. The review should consider the impact of any curriculum changes on specialist schools, to ensure that innovative approaches are not undermined where they are to the benefit of pupils.***

An "overloaded" curriculum

45. The current 11–16 curriculum has been shaped by the Government's focus on a 'knowledge-rich' approach. We have heard that, as a result, there is too great an emphasis on the teaching and learning of individual facts and concepts. Evidence has suggested that this has "left our young people with heads full of data committed to short-term memory—a diet perfect for examinations but wholly inadequate for life."[70] Charles Tracy, Senior Adviser for Learning and Skills at the Institute of Physics, told us that the curriculum in his subject "can leave the impression that physics is a large compendium of disparate facts." He called instead for a curriculum that "develops a deep

67 Q 65 (Tom Middlehurst)
68 See paras 143–44.
69 London Design and Engineering UTC, 'Frequently Asked Questions': https://www.ldeutc.co.uk/key-info/about-us/frequently-asked-questions.aspx [accessed 19 October 2023]
70 Written evidence from Design and Technology Association (EDU0026)

understanding of the discipline … built on a smaller number of big ideas and explicitly including the practices and ways of thinking".[71]

46. Evidence suggested that the emphasis on knowledge acquisition means that "covering content at pace" has to take precedence over developing pupils' understanding of the core concepts that underpin subject knowledge.[72] We heard that this is especially the case at key stage 4, where the increase in the size of GCSE curricula following the 2015 reforms[73] has led to "complete content overload".[74] The Historical Association told us that "the current history GCSE qualification is overloaded with content, with little allowance for students to go beyond a content gallop of each unit". Their surveys of teachers show that only 20% agree that "the level of content in the current history GCSE is manageable".[75]

47. Data from the survey platform Teacher Tapp found that 76% of teachers felt there was too much content to cover in their GCSE classes[76] and that 57% were unable or only "just about" able to complete teaching their course prior to exam season.[77] A history teacher who attended our roundtable sessions told us that the GCSE course is so extensive they feel they are "letting down" pupils who are less academically able, whose attainment would be higher if they were required to learn a more reasonable amount of content.[78] We heard from a science teacher that many pupils are "turned off" by the large number of facts they are expected to learn, and that there is no scope for additional, engaging topics, such as space travel, to be taught.[79] At our roundtable with young people, several participants spoke of teachers being unable to take questions during a lesson, because there was so much material to get through. They suggested that this stifled curiosity and opportunities for deeper learning in the classroom.[80]

48. Dr Mary Bousted, then Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, told us that many schools reduced the number of subject options available for pupils to choose in response to the increased content in the reformed GCSEs.[81] Indeed, the percentage of pupils taking nine or more GCSEs fell from 51.1% in 2014 to 41.5% in 2023. The percentage of pupils

71 Q 28 (Charles Tracy)
72 Written evidence from Christopher Collins (EDU0003)
73 Analysis by Ofqual suggested that as a result of these reforms, some GCSE curricula increased in size by up to 25%. Ofqual, *GCSE reform in schools* (December 2019): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5df24a02ed915d093cec08e6/GCSE_reform_in_schools_-_FINAL196556.pdf [accessed 23 October 2023]
74 Q 64 (Dr Mary Bousted)
75 Written evidence from Historical Association (EDU0075)
76 Teacher Tapp, 'What changes would teachers make to their subject's KS4 curriculum?': https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/what-changes-teachers-would-make-to-their-subjects-ks4-curriculum/ [accessed 24 October 2023]
77 Teacher Tapp, 'Attendance, time travel and GCSE content...': https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/attendance-time-travel-and-gcse-content/ [accessed 24 October 2023]
78 Roundtable discussion with teachers (14 September 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42296/documents/210207/default/
79 *Ibid.*
80 Roundtable discussion with pupils (20 September 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42298/documents/210209/default/
81 Q 64 (Dr Mary Bousted)

taking 10 or more GCSEs dropped even more dramatically, from 32.8% to 14.2%.[82]

49. On the key stage 4 foundation subjects, the Association for Physical Education told us:

> "A significant number of schools have reduced key stage 4 time allocated to core PE to one hour or less which is insufficient time to cover the content required in the national curriculum programme of study".[83]

Similarly, the Association for Citizenship Teaching told us that citizenship teachers are "constantly battling for curriculum time".[84] BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, has expressed concerns in relation to the coverage of computing.[85] However, we did not receive evidence to suggest that the key stage 4 national curriculum requirements themselves needed to be altered, as these are already fairly limited in scope.

50. Mr Gibb emphasised that the reforms to GCSEs in 2015 were undertaken following "a very thorough curriculum review". He also commented that:

> "I am reassured and confident that the specification of the exam boards is of a quantum that is on par with high-performing jurisdictions around the world."[86]

On the Government's emphasis on a content-rich curriculum, he argued that this underpins the development of subject-specific skills: "If you want those skills—how to work scientifically, how to behave like a historian—you need sophisticated knowledge."[87]

51. **The Government's emphasis on a knowledge-rich approach has led to an 11–16 curriculum which is overloaded with content, particularly at key stage 4. The extent of the material to be covered hampers pupils' understanding of core concepts and stifles engagement.**

52. ***The Government should reduce the overall content load of the 11–16 curriculum, focusing particularly on GCSE subject curricula. It should undertake a review to establish how this can be achieved, and publish its findings.***

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82 Cambridge Assessment, *Uptake of GCSE subjects 2014* (April 2015), p 2: https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/222143-uptake-of-gcse-subjects-2014.pdf [accessed 24 October 2023] and Ofqual, 'Infographics for GCSE results, 2023 (accessible)': https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infographic-gcse-results-2023/infographics-for-gcse-results-2023-accessible [accessed 24 October 2023]. These declines may also have been prompted by changes to the headline key stage 4 accountability measures, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

83 Written evidence from Association for Physical Education (EDU0048)

84 Written evidence from Association for Citizenship Teaching (EDU0063)

85 In its response to the Ofsted Inspection Framework consultation in 2019, BCS argued that: "The national curriculum states clearly that at key stage 4 'All pupils must have the opportunity to study aspects of information technology and computer science at sufficient depth to allow them to progress to higher levels of study or to a professional career.' Yet all the evidence we have is that this commitment is essentially ignored in practice." BCS, *Non examined subjects at key stage 4—especially computing* (March 2019), p 3: https://www.bcs.org/media/2936/scac-ofsted-response-0419.pdf [accessed 24 October2 023]

86 Q 158 (Nick Gibb MP)

87 Q 159 (Nick Gibb MP)

Literacy, numeracy and oracy

Literacy and numeracy in the 11–16 curriculum

53. The DfE highlighted the importance of literacy and numeracy to a well-rounded education, as well as to future opportunities for pupils. They told us that "the cornerstones of a broad, academic, knowledge-rich curriculum are high standards of literacy and numeracy" and that "securing the basics of literacy and numeracy are the gateway to further educational attainment, and fulfilling experiences".[88] Many other witnesses commented on the importance of literacy and numeracy as core skills for education, employment and life in general. Pearson noted that numeracy and literacy skills are a requirement to access higher technical education.[89] The Fair Education Alliance highlighted that improving literacy and numeracy has a significant impact on a pupil's later employment and earnings.[90]

54. During key stage 3 and 4, literacy and numeracy skills are taught almost exclusively through English and maths. These subjects receive additional weighting in school performance measures.[91] As a result, they increasingly dominate timetables as schools attempt to improve their performance, as defined by the DfE. Impington Village and International College suggested that an appropriate balance between different subjects in the timetable is difficult to strike, due to performance measures being "massively skewed towards English and maths at the expense of everything else".[92] Aalok Kanwar, Regional Director of Science at Outwood Grange Academies Trust, agreed, commenting that although numeracy and literacy are the "bedrock for the educational system in terms of accessibility to the curriculum and future employment", English and maths have become "overemphasised" at key stage 3 and 4, with "drastic consequences for the breadth of curriculum studied".[93]

55. English and maths are disciplines in their own right and, particularly at GCSE, their subject content goes significantly beyond core literacy and numeracy. Professor Jessie Ricketts and Dr Laura Shapiro told us that "the primary English curriculum focuses on literacy knowledge and skills, whereas the emphasis shifts to English as a discipline in the secondary curriculum".[94] Mr Middlehurst argued:

> "We must be very cautious about using the disciplinary nature of English literature or English language and of mathematics as proxies for being literate and numerate. We need to dissociate those".[95]

56. Catherine Sezen, Director of Education Policy at the Association of Colleges, noted that English language GCSE is quite "literature focused",[96] despite it being the only qualification available for most pupils to demonstrate their basic literacy skills. Moreover, when the current maths GCSE was introduced in 2013, the Government said that it would "demand deeper and broader

88 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)
89 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)
90 Written evidence from Fair Education Alliance (EDU0024)
91 Details of the relevant measures can be found in paras 274–75 and para 292.
92 Written evidence from Impington Village and International College (EDU0014)
93 Written evidence from Aalok Kanwar (EDU0069)
94 Written evidence from Professor Jessie Ricketts and Dr Laura Shapiro (EDU0055)
95 Q 62 (Tom Middlehurst)
96 Q 173 (Catherine Sezen)

mathematical understanding."[97] Dr Bousted noted that the content of the reformed maths GCSE has significantly increased compared to the previous version.[98]

The pass boundary

57. Achieving a grade 4 in English and maths at GCSE is seen as the threshold at which a young person demonstrates that they have reached required standards in literacy and numeracy.[99] The Government refers to this as a 'standard pass'. NAHT, a school leaders union, asserted that the Government's language "undermines the value of grades 1–3, effectively labelling them a fail, and, as a result, devaluing the achievements of a wide range of students".[100] Mr Gibb told us that "all grades from 1 represent a pass grade".[101] Mr Middlehurst, however, argued that the earlier references to a standard pass have "cemented" the idea of a pass/fail boundary into the system in such a way that it can no longer be removed.[102]

Box 1: GCSE grading system

Following the announcement of the current nine-point scale grading system for GCSEs, the DfE announced in 2015 that the new grade 5 would be the 'good pass' level to match the equivalent rate most pupils are working at in "top-performing countries such as Finland, Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland".[103] In 2017, Justine Greening (then Secretary of State for Education) told the Commons Education Committee that there would be two GCSE pass rates in school performance tables—grade 4, a "standard pass", and grade 5, a "strong pass"—with both published as accountability measures. However, only the latter is regarded as a headline performance measure for schools.[104]

The "forgotten third"

58. Around a third of all pupils in state-funded schools do not secure a grade 4 or above in both English and maths GCSE each year. In 2023 this figure was 35.2%.[105] We heard from many witnesses that not reaching the 'standard pass' threshold at 16 can leave pupils feeling they have been "labelled as failures",[106] with some suggesting this can have a long-term impact:

97 HC Deb, 1 November 2013, col 63WS
98 Q 66 (Dr Mary Bousted)
99 A grade 4 is roughly equivalent to a C grade in the previous GCSE grading system.
100 Written evidence from NAHT (EDU0020)
101 Letter from Nick Gibb MP to Lord Johnson of Marylebone Chair of the Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee (8 August 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41497/documents/204425/default/
102 Q 64 (Tom Middlehurst)
103 Department for Education, 'New reforms to raise standards and improve behaviour' (16 June 2015): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-reforms-to-raise-standards-and-improve-behaviour [accessed 10 August 2023]
104 Letter from Rt. Hon. Justine Greening MP Secretary of State for Education to Neil Carmichael MP Chair of the Education Committee (28 March 2017): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/603594/ESC_letter.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]
105 Data available at Department for Education, 'Explore education statistics': https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/538ced25-5dea-4b11-b799-08dbd08e1875 [accessed 19 October 2023].
106 Written evidence from Parentkind (EDU0030)

> "This is a 'cliff edge' for many and research suggests young people find perceived failure at this stage in their academic career to be difficult to recover from academically and more holistically."[107]

59. The group of pupils who receive grades less than 4 in English and maths is often referred to as the "forgotten third". Mr Middlehurst clarified that:

> "When we say forgotten we mean that they are forgotten in policy terms. There is no policy design for those young people. Essentially, you are saying to those young people after over a decade of academic study and time in school: 'You have now failed'."[108]

60. These pupils have more limited options in the 16–19 phase. A grade 4 in English and maths is generally required for a pupil to progress to a level 3 qualification, such as an A-level, T-level or apprenticeship.[109] Ms Sezen noted that "to go on to a level 3 course, most colleges would require students to have five GCSEs at grade 4 and above, including English and maths".[110] Moreover, pupils who 'fail' either of these GCSEs are required to resit the qualification up to the age of 18, or until they achieve a grade 4.[111] Several witnesses highlighted the demoralising effect that this can have. Ms Sezen noted that engaging young people who are preparing for resits is a "tall order". She suggested that the main role of the teacher in this context becomes helping pupils with "building confidence and dealing with failure."[112]

61. Others drew attention to the low proportion of pupils who go on to achieve a grade 4 in their resits.[113] In June 2023, around 118,000 17 to 18 year-olds resat their maths GCSE, with 13.7% securing a grade 4 or above. Of the roughly 90,500 17 to 18 year-olds who retook their English exams, 23.5% achieved a grade 4 or above.[114] The National Education Union suggested that, for many, having to retake exams equates to "an insistence on a repetition of the experience of failure."[115] Several witnesses therefore argued that consideration should be given to offering alternative literacy and numeracy qualifications at key stage 4. They argued that this would address this "continued barrier" and support young people who struggle to secure a grade 4 in their English and maths GCSEs to progress to post-16 education and training.[116]

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107 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)
108 Q 64 (Tom Middlehurst)
109 Government guidance for pupils notes that most A-level and T-level courses "require at least five GCSEs at grades 9 to 4, including English and maths." Entry requirements for other courses "vary depending on the college and course". Those for apprenticeships "vary depending on the employer, training provider and level of the apprenticeship", but "many require English and maths GCSEs." Department for Education, 'GCSE results day: What to do if you didn't get the grades you were expecting' (24 August 2023): https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/08/24/gcse-results-day-what-to-do-if-you-didnt-get-the-grades-you-were-expecting/ [accessed 29 November 2023]
110 Q 169 (Catherine Sezen)
111 Some pupils are able to take alternative qualifications depending on their grade and the institution they attend.
112 Q 176 (Catherine Sezen)
113 Written evidence from National Foundation for Educational Research (EDU0050)
114 Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, *GCSE (full course): outcomes for post-16 for England* (August 2023): https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/GCSE-Full-Course-English-and-Maths-Results-England-Post-16.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]
115 Written evidence from National Education Union (EDU0071)
116 Written evidence from National Foundation for Educational Research (EDU0050)

Functional skills qualifications

62. One option is the already available 'functional skills' qualifications in English and maths. These are available at both level 1 (equivalent to GCSE grades 1–3) and level 2 (equivalent to GCSE grades 4–9), but they are usually taken from the age of 16 onwards, rather than in key stage 4. NCFE, an awarding body for technical qualifications, describe functional skills qualifications as a "vocational pathway into English and maths".[117] Passing the level 2 English and maths is the equivalent of receiving a grade 4 in the respective GCSEs, but the content and exams are designed to be more applicable to real-world scenarios, including employment. As a result, functional skills qualifications are often viewed as theoretically more achievable and relevant to students who have difficulty reaching the grade 4 threshold in their GCSEs.

63. Currently, some students can take functional skills qualifications as an alternative to resitting English or maths GCSEs post 16, but only if they received a grade 2 or below and if their school or college offers them.[118] These qualifications are also taken as alternatives to GCSEs at key stage 4 by some pupils, although in practice this is only in special schools and in very small numbers. Of the 8,641 pupils who took NCFE's level 2 maths functional skills qualification in 2022–23, just 0.8% were under 16.[119]

64. NCFE highlighted that mainstream schools are strongly disincentivised from offering functional skills qualifications in English and maths due to the weighting of GCSE English and maths in the current accountability measures—schools would receive significantly lower scores in their headline performance scores if their pupils did not study English and maths GCSEs. NCFE argued that the measures should record attainment in functional skills qualifications to "make it fair for learners who are not suited to academic learning styles".[120] NAHT argued that, when assessing which qualifications will best enable a pupil to develop and demonstrate core skills,

> "schools should be able to decide which qualification is most appropriate and in the best interests of the student, without this having a detrimental impact on any related performance measures."[121]

Proposals for new qualifications

65. While increasing take-up of the existing functional skills qualifications is a potential option in the short term, we also heard that they have some limitations. Paul Warner, Director of Strategy and Business Development at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, was broadly supportive of the wider use of functional skills qualifications at key stage 4. However, he criticised the current versions of the English and maths functional skills courses, which were introduced in 2019.[122] He argued that

117 NCFE, 'Functional Skills': https://www.ncfe.org.uk/sector-specialisms/english-and-maths/functional-skills/ [accessed 27 October 2023]
118 Letter from Nick Gibb MP to Lord Johnson of Marylebone Chair of the Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee (8 August 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41497/documents/204425/default/
119 This data was provided to us by NCFE.
120 Written evidence from NCFE (EDU0104)
121 Written evidence from NAHT (EDU0020)
122 Ofqual, 'Reform of Functional Skills qualifications in English and maths' (12 April 2019): https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2019/04/12/reform-of-functional-skills-qualifications-in-english-and-maths/ [accessed 29 November 2023]

stakeholders are increasingly "hard-pushed to find the difference" between the GCSE and the functional skills course:

> "if you put a GCSE exam paper and a functional skills paper side by side and took the titles off, I would defy anybody to make an informed guess about which one was actually the GCSE and which one was the functional skills … We say that one of them is going to be applied. It is actually not."[123]

66. Dr Jo Saxton, Chief Regulator at Ofqual, noted that they have heard stakeholder concerns regarding the recently reformed functional skills qualifications. She told us that Ofqual undertook research into them and concluded that "in the pure assessment sense the questions are not harder than in the unreformed version". However, Dr Saxton highlighted that:

> "this all comes back to what the curriculum that it is built on is asking. The reformed functional skills assessments absolutely assess the curriculum as set out by the Department for Education."[124]

Mr Warner told us that the DfE guidelines for functional skills say that they "do not have to be assessed in an occupational or real-life context", which means they are increasingly not contextualised in this way.[125]

67. Other witnesses suggested that new qualifications should be introduced to either replace GCSE English language and maths, or as alternative foundation level qualifications that could be taken alongside them. ASCL proposed a new "passport" qualification focused on proficiency in literacy and numeracy. This would be "certificated by a body with international standing, with employer approval and branding".[126] Mathematics in Education and Industry suggested creating a new GCSE in 'essential maths'. This would be at foundation tier only (grades 1–5) and enable pupils to "demonstrate that they have mastered the mathematics knowledge, skills and understanding needed to be able to use mathematics successfully in later life."[127] Both proposals suggested that these qualifications could be taken by pupils at any point from year 10 onwards, which could reduce the likelihood of large numbers of pupils 'failing' due to having to take core English and maths qualifications at a fixed point in year 11.

68. The Welsh Government plans to introduce a level 1 "number, measure and data" qualification in 2027. This is designed to be taught alongside GCSE maths and taken by most learners aged 14–16. It will be assessed via a single on-screen test, taken whenever a pupil is ready. According to the Welsh Government, the qualification "has been developed alongside employers and post-16 learning providers to make sure it focuses on the mathematical skills most needed by young people". It is intended to "evidence learners' ability to function numerically for the workplace and everyday life."[128]

123 Q 163 (Paul Warner)
124 Q 140 (Dr Jo Saxton)
125 Q 174 (Paul Warner)
126 Association of School and College Leaders, *The forgotten third* (September 2019), p 7: https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Our%20view/Campaigns/The-Forgotten-Third_full-report.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]
127 Written evidence from Mathematics in Education and Industry (EDU0072)
128 Qualifications Wales, *Level 1 number, measure and data design proposal*, pp 1–2: https://ehq-production-europe.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/2c79f668292180bf7a590cf4b8b95cb6bd8fe4e7/original/1664793291/2f68bb82db47976b1f400fa87053cfac_Level_1_Number__Measure_and_Data_Design_Proposal.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

69. **Supporting pupils to achieve a basic standard of literacy and numeracy should remain a core purpose of the 11–16 system. These skills are essential for young people to progress in their education and to succeed in life and work. The stubbornly high proportion of pupils who do not achieve a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths each year must be addressed.**

70. ***The Government should determine why around a third of pupils do not secure a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths each year, and publish its findings.***

71. ***We recommend that high-quality level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications should be available for pupils to take during key stage 4, and that attainment in these should be recognised in school performance measures. Such qualifications should be genuinely distinct from the discipline-based English and maths GCSEs and should focus on the application of essential skills. We invite the Government to launch a consultation to assess whether the existing English and maths functional skills qualifications could fulfil this purpose, or whether the development of new qualifications is required.***

Oracy

72. Voice 21, an education charity, defines oracy as "the ability to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through spoken language." They, along with others, argued that "oracy skills are essential for young people to successfully transition from school into further study and the workforce".[129] However, they also commented that while the 11–16 curriculum includes a statutory spoken language programme, "evidence suggests that this is not being realised in schools; only 23% of secondary school teachers are confident in their understanding of the statutory spoken language requirements outlined in the national curriculum."[130]

73. At present, oracy plays only a very minor role during key stage 4 assessment, which may contribute to the limited emphasis it is given in the 11–16 phase. GCSE English language previously contained a speaking and listening component worth 20% of the overall grade.[131] However, with the reformed GCSEs introduced in 2015, this was replaced with a spoken language task that requires pupils to give an oral presentation and respond to questions and feedback. This task no longer contributes to a pupil's overall grade, with pupils receiving only an endorsement from their teacher.[132] The Working Group on GCSE English Reform commented that while teachers are "obliged to undertake oracy assessment" at GCSE, this has "no value in the eyes of students".[133]

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129 Written evidence from Voice 21 (EDU0073)

130 *Ibid.*

131 Ofqual, 'Changes to GCSE English and English language': available at https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20141031170020/http://ofqual.gov.uk/news/changes-to-gcse-english-and-english-language/ [accessed 29 November 2023]

132 Department for Education, *English language: GCSE subject content and assessment objectives* (November 2013), p 3: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7bfd7640f0b63f7572aa8b/GCSE_English_language.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

133 Written evidence from Working Group on GCSE English Reform (EDU0059)

74. However, we also heard positive examples of schools that have successfully woven the development of communication skills into their curricula at key stages 3 and 4 through, for example, interdisciplinary learning and extended project work. For example, Jamie Portman, XP Trust, told us that the interdisciplinary 'expeditions' pupils complete in their school conclude with presentations, where pupils "have to present their learning in front of a live audience".[134]

75. **Oracy is an essential skill for pupils to develop in preparation for their future life and work, but it may not be being consistently prioritised by schools in the 11–16 phase.**

76. ***As part of a wider review of the key stage 3 and GCSE curricula, the Government should embed opportunities for oracy and communication skills development.***

Digital skills

Digital skills in the 11–16 curriculum

77. Many witnesses drew attention to existing digital skills gaps and noted that the demand for digital skills is growing every year, across almost all sectors of the economy. Dr Claire Thorne, Co-CEO of Tech She Can, suggested that "£60 billion is the projected lost annual income to the UK economy from the digital skills gap."[135] To tackle this gap, BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, argued that the secondary computing curriculum must address the needs of three different groups:

- pupils who will go on to become "specialist computing professionals", who will "create new digital products and services";
- pupils who will work as professionals in other fields, who will need to understand "how to use digital technology in their sectors"; and
- pupils who do not require more specialist skills, but who need to be "digitally literate citizens", equipped with "the knowledge and skills to use digital tools and expect and drive the creation and innovation of high quality, ethical and effective digital products, and services."[136]

78. The DfE told us that the current computing curriculum "provides young people with the essential knowledge and skills to succeed as active participants in a digital world, and to help meet the needs of the future digital economy in shortage areas such as programming."[137] Mr Gibb also highlighted the establishment of the National Centre for Computing Education and "30 computing teaching hubs around the country, which are training teachers how to teach computer science".[138] BCS told us that there is "a lot to be proud of", and that the computing national curriculum "sets out an entitlement for every learner to access a high-quality computing education. It can equip pupils to use computational thinking and creativity to understand and change the world."[139]

134 Q 1 (Jamie Portman)
135 Q 58 (Dr Claire Thorne)
136 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)
137 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)
138 Q 149 (Nick Gibb MP)
139 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)

79. However, BCS also argued that the key stage 3 computing curriculum is often impacted by the specialist computer science GCSE, with teaching skewed towards this and away from the full breadth of computing.[140] They also suggested that, despite computing being a foundation subject in the national curriculum at key stage 4, and therefore a mandatory subject in maintained schools,[141] it is inconsistently delivered in schools, with few consequences from Ofsted.[142] This means that in some schools pupils finish formal study of computing at 14.

80. We heard that an alternative approach to digital skills development in the curriculum has been taken in Wales. The Welsh Government has positioned "digital competence" as one of three "mandatory cross-curricular skills", alongside literacy and numeracy, in the new Curriculum for Wales.[143] It noted that "it will be the responsibility of all practitioners, across all curriculum areas, to develop and ensure progression in these skills". Methods of implementation will be "decided at a local level and will fit with individual schools' approaches."[144] Some have called for a similar approach to be taken in England. A primary recommendation in a recent Microsoft report on addressing the digital skills gap was to: "Embed computing and digital literacy skills across key stages 1–3 to boost uptake of key stage 4 computer science GCSE".[145]

81. A multi-academy trust commented that its main concern in relation to the development of pupils' digital skills was that "many pupils are expected to complete the majority of their classwork by hand, writing for long periods". They identified funding constraints and lack of access to specialist teachers as barriers in the transition towards delivering a greater proportion of classwork digitally.[146] Other witnesses highlighted the need for improved digital infrastructure and access to devices in delivering high-quality digital learning.[147]

82. An education technology survey conducted by the Government in 2020–21 found that "the majority of headteachers (88%) and teachers (84%) indicated that technology had or would contribute to improved pupil attainment". However, it also identified that:

> "1:1 access to mobile devices for pupils was extremely low. Just 1% of primary schools and 2% of secondary schools provided access to at least one mobile device (tablet or laptop) for every pupil."

Financial barriers were seen by teachers and school leaders as the biggest obstacle to increased uptake of educational technology, with connectivity,

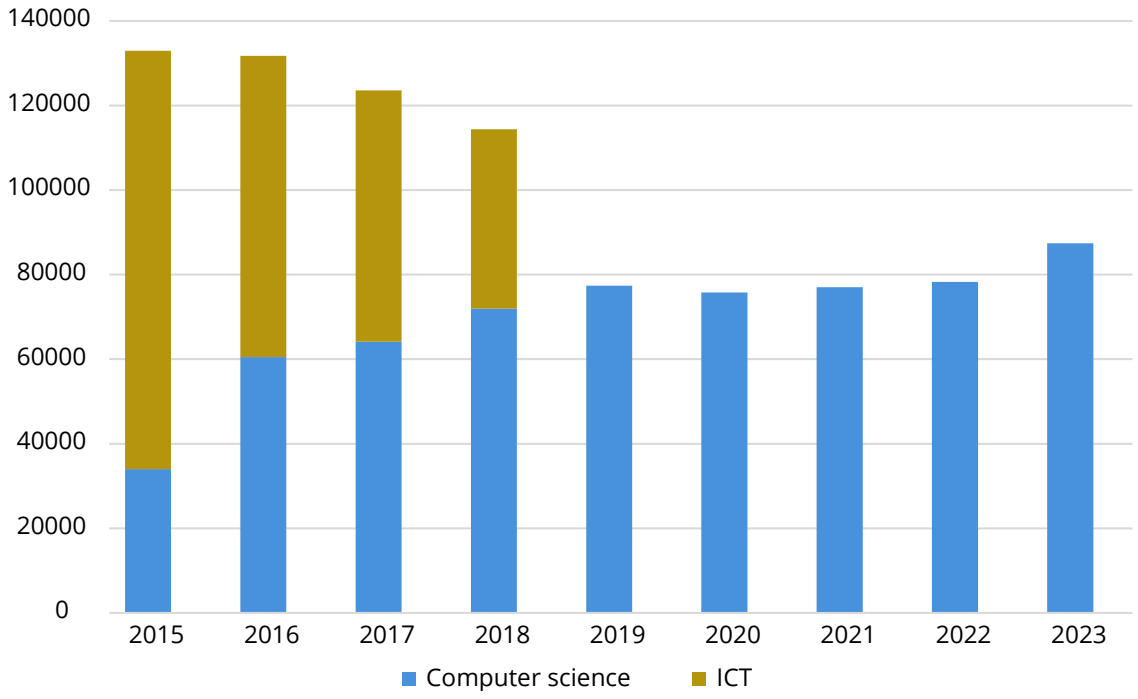
140 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)
141 See paragraph 29.
142 BCS, *Non examined subjects at key stage 4—especially computing* (March 2019), pp 3–4: https://www.bcs.org/media/2936/scac-ofsted-response-0419.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]
143 Welsh Government, 'Cross-curricular skills frameworks': https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/cross-curricular-skills-frameworks/ [accessed 10 October 2023]
144 *Ibid.*
145 Microsoft, *Rebooting tech skills: A blueprint to transform the digital skills landscape* (2023), p 3: https://query.prod.cms.rt.microsoft.com/cms/api/am/binary/RW14lBD [accessed 29 November 2023]
146 Written evidence from Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust (EDU0041)
147 Written evidence from Stuart McLaughlin (EDU0011), Association of School and College Leaders (EDU0029), National Association for Special Educational Needs (EDU0038), Sutton Trust (EDU0057) and Pearson (EDU0093)

pupils' access to technology at home, and teachers' digital skills and confidence also mentioned.[148]

Take-up of digital qualifications at key stage 4

83. The number of pupils taking a digital qualification at GCSE level has declined significantly in recent years. This relates primarily to the termination of GCSE information and communication technology (ICT) in 2019, following the introduction of GCSE computer science in 2012. While the number of pupils taking GCSE computer science has grown in recent years, from 34,019 in 2015 to 87,405 in 2023, this has not compensated for the 98,908 pupils who were taking ICT GCSE in 2015.[149] Overall, there has been a 34% decline in entries across the two subjects. Moreover, although 14% of pupils took computer science GCSE in 2023, only 21% of these pupils were girls.[150] BCS noted that "nine in 10 girls leave school without IT skills or a computing qualification".[151]

Figure 1: GCSE entries in ICT and computer science (England only)



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ *[accessed 10 October 2023]*

84. Some pupils take technical or vocational qualifications, or Technical Awards, that relate to digital skills. However, as Professor Simon Peyton Jones and Professor Dame Muffy Calder highlighted, Technical Awards "do not enjoy parity of esteem with GCSE", meaning pupils are less likely to be encouraged

148 Department for Education, *Education technology (EdTech) survey 2020–21* (May 2021), pp 14–20: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/621ce8ec8fa8f54915f43838/Education_Technology_EdTech_Survey.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

149 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 29 November 2023].

150 *Ibid.*

151 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)

to take them by teachers and parents.[152] In 2023, 23,974 pupils took an ICT Technical Award; this corresponds to 3.7% of the cohort.[153]

85. The DfE do not permit computing-related Technical Awards to include much of the content from the key stage 3 computing curriculum or the computer science GCSE subject specification.[154] Prof Peyton Jones and Prof Dame Muffy Calder argue that they are therefore "not really technical at all", and that this limits topic coverage:

> "An awarding organisation could not offer an exciting Technical Award in robotics, say, with substantial programming content, because it would overlap with the GCSE."[155]

Kate Ambrosi, Director of Innovation and Learning, Baker Dearing Educational Trust, argued that providers are:

> "stuck with the [digital] qualifications they are given, and some of them are not innovative or creative. They are driving down the number of young people overall in the country who are doing digital skills."[156]

GCSE in applied computing

86. BCS argued that GCSE computer science addresses the needs of only the first of the three groups described above—future specialist computing professionals.[157] Prof Peyton Jones and Prof Dame Muffy Calder suggested that the qualification is by design "academic and challenging" and does not cover "the more applied parts of the curriculum".[158] They called for a new applied computing GCSE, which could "contain a substantial element of programming" and focus on the application of digital skills in contexts such as graphics, business data processing and web design.

87. BCS similarly proposed the introduction of a new qualification that would recognise "higher-level technical knowledge and skills at the GCSE level", valued equally to the computer science GCSE.[159] Julia Adamson, Managing Director of Education and Public Benefit at BCS, highlighted that these skills are essential for jobs in many sectors—"from pharmaceuticals to farming to food production to transport".[160] BCS suggested that this approach would be welcomed by parents, citing a recent survey in which 74% of respondents supported the introduction of a broader IT skills GCSE .[161]

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152 Written evidence from Professor Simon Peyton Jones and Professor Dame Muffy Calder (EDU0094)

153 These figures refer to Technical Awards categorised as ICT qualifications by the DfE. Other categories of Technical Award, such as 'multimedia', may also include opportunities for the development of digital skills. The "cohort" is the number of pupils taking a GCSE in any subject in 2022–23. Data available at Department for Education, 'Explore education statistics': https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/d4f2cd25-f29e-4e18-b79a-08dbd08e1875 [accessed 19 October 2023].

154 BCS, Chartered Institute for IT, 'England: Vocational and Technical Qualifications in Computing at the end of Key Stage 4 and 5': https://www.bcs.org/policy-and-influence/education/bcs-landscape-review-computing-qualifications-in-the-uk/england-vocational-and-technical-qualifications-in-computing-at-the-end-of-key-stage-4-and-5/ [accessed 10 October 2023]

155 Written evidence from Professor Simon Peyton Jones and Professor Dame Muffy Calder (EDU0094)

156 Q 11 (Kate Ambrosi)

157 See para 77.

158 Written evidence from Professor Simon Peyton Jones and Professor Dame Muffy Calder (EDU0094)

159 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)

160 Q 28 (Julia Adamson)

161 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)

88. Witnesses noted that as part of its wider education reforms, Wales has introduced "a compulsory digital route in their Science and Technology area of learning", with two "complementary pathways" available at GCSE, in computer science and digital technology.[162] This has been supported by a new digital technology GCSE, which was introduced by WJEC, the Welsh exam board, in 2021. The qualification is "designed for learners who wish to begin their journey towards a career that utilises digital technologies or to progress onto advanced level programmes of learning involving digital technologies."[163] It covers topics such as website design, animation and game design, storing and using data, marketing and social media, cyber security, artificial intelligence, and the history and ethics of digital technology.[164]

89. **We heard persuasive evidence that an applied computing GCSE should be introduced, to provide an alternative to the more academically focused computer science GCSE. This could help to address the declining uptake of digital qualifications at key stage 4 and support us to meet the growing demand for a wide range of digital skills across the economy.**

90. ***Working closely with stakeholders, the Government should take steps to develop and introduce a new GCSE in applied computing as soon as possible.***

Digital literacy qualification

91. We have also heard that a basic digital skills qualification should be made available at key stage 4. This would allow pupils to develop and demonstrate an expected standard of digital literacy, in a similar way to the core literacy and numeracy qualifications called for above. Prof Peyton Jones and Prof Dame Muffy Calder argued that this should be "unashamedly focused on employability skills, and what young people need to flourish as well-informed users in a digital world". They also suggested it could be taken whenever pupils are ready.[165] BCS called for a "digitally enabled portfolio-based assessment of young people's digital literacy for every learner". They suggested this would address the needs of the "approximately three-quarters of mainstream state-funded pupils [who] leave school, aged 16, without a qualification in IT skills or computing".[166]

92. The Government has recently introduced a digital functional skills qualification to replace the legacy ICT qualification. This is intended to provide learners with "the skills they need to succeed in work, education and life".[167] However, this has been introduced at 'entry level' only, which is equivalent to slightly below a grade 1 at GCSE. It supports learners who may have "little or no prior experience of using digital devices or the internet" to develop the basic digital skills needed to complete everyday tasks.[168] Although

162 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)
163 WJEC, *WJEC GCSE in digital technology* (June 2020), p 4: https://www.wjec.co.uk/media/y14f1jvq/wjec-gcse-digital-technology-specification-e-20-08-2020.pdf [accessed 10 October 2023]
164 *Ibid.*, pp 7–31
165 Written evidence from Professor Simon Peyton Jones and Professor Dame Muffy Calder (EDU0094)
166 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)
167 NCFE, 'Digital Functional Skills': https://www.ncfe.org.uk/digital-functional-skills/ [accessed 10 October 2023]
168 Department for Education, *Digital functional skills qualifications: subject content* (October 2021), p 4: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/617bc9cce90e07197d8fb8f9/Digital_Functional_Skills_qualifications_-_subject_content.pdf [accessed 10 October 2023]

the qualification is theoretically available to be taken by pupils from the age of 14, functional skills qualifications are primarily designed to support post-16 students. It is far from clear that this would be a suitable basis for a digital literacy qualification that could be made available to all key stage 4 pupils.

93. **All pupils should have the option of taking a digital literacy qualification in the 14–16 phase. This would support the development of core digital skills, particularly for those who do not choose to take a computing qualification at key stage 4.**

94. ***The Government should explore introducing a basic digital literacy qualification that can be taken at key stage 4, to ensure that all pupils have an opportunity to develop the basic digital skills needed to participate effectively in post-16 education and training, employment and wider life.***

Climate and sustainability education

95. In April 2022, the DfE published a policy paper entitled *Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems*. It sets out how the department, and education and children's services providers in England, will contribute to increased sustainability and particularly the drive towards net zero. The paper describes a vision for the UK to be "the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030" and identifies climate education as one of five key 'action areas'.[169] It specifies that the actions set out within it aim to respond to the recommendations for education from the Climate Change Committee, the Dasgupta review[170] and the Green Jobs Taskforce report.[171] In presenting the case for change, the paper recognises that young people are concerned about climate change and eager to learn more about it, and that the education system provides important opportunities to engage with them on this topic. It also recognises the relevance of sustainability and climate change to the future employment

169 Department for Education, *Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems* (April 2022): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems [accessed 22 August 2023]

170 The Dasgupta review was commissioned in 2019 by HM Treasury. It called for changes to how economic success is measured, presenting a new economic framework that takes account of nature and biodiversity. On education, it argued that "every child in every country is owed the teaching of natural history, to be introduced to the awe and wonder of the natural world, and to appreciate how it contributes to our lives. Establishing the natural world within educational policy would contribute to countering the shifting baseline, whereby we progressively redefine ourselves as inhabitants of an emptying world and believe that what we see is how it is and how it will continue to be." HM Treasury, *The economics of biodiversity: the Dasgupta review* (February 2021), p 498: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602e92b2e90e07660f807b47/The_Economics_of_Biodiversity_The_Dasgupta_Review_Full_Report.pdf [accessed 17 November 2023]

171 The Green Jobs Taskforce was convened by the then Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Education to examine the skills needed for the UK's transition to net zero. Its report concluded that "if the UK is to grasp the opportunities afforded by a green industrial revolution, we must develop a comprehensive and holistic view of the green jobs and skills challenge". Its recommendations included proposals on ways to "build pathways into green careers for people from all backgrounds". Green Jobs Taskforce, *Report to government: industry and the skills sector* (July 2021), p 6: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1185360/green-jobs-taskforce-report-2021.pdf [accessed 17 November 2023]

opportunities young people will have access to, stating that these will "touch every career".[172] These conclusions were echoed by several witnesses.[173]

96. The DfE's paper sets out that children and young people have opportunities to develop their knowledge of the natural world and sustainability and environmental topics through the science, geography and citizenship programmes within the national curriculum. Witnesses similarly identified these subjects as the primary means through which young people learn about these topics in the 11–16 phase. However, they suggested that even in these subjects such topics do not necessarily receive adequate coverage. The Royal Society of Chemistry, for example, highlighted that in research it had conducted "70% of 11 to 14 educators and 65% of 14 to 16 educators … raised concerns that there is 'too little content in the chemistry curriculum that directly relates to sustainability and climate change'".[174]

97. The British Science Association argued that climate education at key stage 4 is "constrained by exam requirements", with pupils studying GCSEs in both science and geography feeling that "they are taught 'just enough to pass the exam'".[175] It also noted that confining climate education to "subject silos" is likely to result in inequality in climate literacy. It highlighted that those who do not take GCSEs in geography or triple science[176] (which has a larger climate education component than the double science option, but which may not be available to all pupils) will have fewer opportunities to study climate and sustainability topics. The British Science Association also drew attention to the ways climate education is handled within these subjects, highlighting a tendency to "focus narrowly on impacts and rarely on solutions".[177]

98. UCL's Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education (CCCSE) suggested that at key stage 3, the breadth of the curriculum "could be viewed as providing adequate opportunity for teachers to generate their own content, including content related to climate change and sustainability".[178] However, it also highlighted research suggesting that in many schools pupils receive very little or no climate change and sustainability education in this phase. CCCSE therefore called for "a more 'climate change and sustainability aware' approach across all subjects".[179] This recommendation was supported by organisations including Chester Zoo, the Zoological Society of London and the British Science Association, all of whom argued that climate education should be embedded across the school curriculum.[180] A similar conclusion was reached by the House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee in its recent report on behaviour change towards environmental goals. The committee stressed the "need for young people to be educated

172 Department for Education, *Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems* (April 2022): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems [accessed 22 August 2023]

173 Written evidence from Royal Society of Chemistry (EDU0022), Teach the Future (EDU0027) and UCL Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education (EDU0065)

174 Written evidence from Royal Society of Chemistry (EDU0022)

175 Written evidence from British Science Association (EDU0089)

176 There are two routes through the sciences at GCSE. Pupils taking the 'triple science' option take separate GCSEs in physics, chemistry and biology. Pupils taking 'double science' take a double GCSE that combines all three sciences but contains less content than the separate GCSEs.

177 Written evidence from British Science Association (EDU0089)

178 Written evidence from UCL Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education (EDU0065)

179 *Ibid.*

180 Written evidence from Chester Zoo and Chester Youth Board (EDU0049), Zoological Society of London (EDU0056) and British Science Association (EDU0089)

about the science of climate change and actions they can take to support meeting climate and environmental goals, which must be embedded across the curriculum".[181] The youth-led campaign Teach the Future's Curriculum for a Changing Climate project provides a fully developed framework for how this could be achieved at key stages 3 and 4.[182]

99. Many witnesses who addressed the topic of climate education made reference to the new GCSE in natural history. Arising from a campaign led by naturalist Mary Colwell, the proposal for the new qualification was taken forward by the exam board OCR and received backing from the DfE in April 2022.[183] The department suggests that the GCSE could be available to pupils by 2025 and that its content will enable them to "explore the world by learning about organisms and environments, environmental and sustainability issues, … gain a deeper knowledge of the natural world around them" and "develop the skills to help them carve a future career in the natural world if they wish to".[184]

100. Witnesses generally welcomed the new qualification.[185] However, Mary Colwell, Professor Alastair Fitter and Professor Russell Wynn argued that the GCSE "needs to be embedded in a wider remit", which they describe as a "defined nature pathway" from primary through to tertiary education. They also concluded that schools may need support to deliver the new GCSE, due to limited confidence in their ability to teach the subject or lack of resources.[186] The Royal Society of Biology similarly identified that the "proposed element of fieldwork" will have "financial and resource implications for schools".[187] They stated:

> "It is not expected that many students would take this qualification in addition to those that are already on offer, which would limit access to this knowledge to a small group of students … Independent schools are likely to be best placed to offer these fieldwork experiences to their students, which could further narrow the demographic."[188]

101. Witnesses consistently suggested that the likely benefits of a greater focus on climate and sustainability education across the whole curriculum would include:

- increased pupil motivation and engagement, since climate and sustainability-related topics are of interest to learners, and relating subject content to such issues would help it to feel meaningful and relevant;

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181 Environment and Climate Change Committee, *In our hands: behaviour change for climate and environmental goals* (1st Report, Session 2022–23, HL Paper 64)

182 Written evidence from Teach the Future (EDU0027) and Teach the Future, 'Curriculum for a Changing Climate': https://www.teachthefuture.uk/tracked-changes-project [accessed 22 August 2023]

183 OCR, 'Green light for 'game-changer' GCSE in Natural History': https://www.ocr.org.uk/news/green-light-for-game-changer-gcse-in-natural-history/?hsCtaTracking=5b298bfe-14e1-434f-88cb-c33ea24952be%7Ce657795e-97c3-4b91-87cd-1291ae2de295 [accessed 22 August 2023]

184 Department for Education, 'The new Natural History GCSE and how we're leading the way in climate and sustainability education—your questions answered' (25 April 2022): https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/04/25/the-new-natural-history-gcse-and-how-were-leading-the-way-in-climate-and-sustainability-education-your-questions-answered/ [accessed 22 August 2023]

185 Written evidence from Royal Society of Biology (EDU0023), Field Studies Council (EDU0044) and Chester Zoo and Chester Zoo Youth Board (EDU0049)

186 Written evidence from Mary Colwell, Professor Alastair Fitter and Professor Russell Wynn (EDU0032)

187 Written evidence from Royal Society of Biology (EDU0023)

188 *Ibid.*

- improvements in pupils' wellbeing, particularly if subject content were orientated more around the solutions to, rather than the impacts of, climate change, as this would help to address the eco-anxiety experienced by many young people;
- additional opportunities for cross-curricular learning and projects, which are seen as a good vehicle for the development of skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving; and
- young people being equipped with the skills and knowledge they will need to live in a climate changed world, and to take up the employment opportunities that will be available in the future economy.[189]

102. Benefits for teachers were also identified.[190] However, witnesses highlighted that at present many teachers feel insufficiently prepared to incorporate climate change and sustainability into their teaching. CCCSE reported survey data which suggests that while science and geography teachers feel "relatively confident" in their ability to do this, a "sizeable and troubling gap" is seen in other subject areas. As such, it called for the provision of "comprehensive, up-to-date and trustworthy support" for teachers. It also recommended the inclusion of climate change and sustainability within the core content framework of the initial teacher education programme.[191]

103. **Secondary education must support young people to develop the knowledge, skills and agency they will need to live in a world affected by the impacts of climate change. We welcome the actions relating to climate education set out in the *Sustainability and climate change strategy* published by the DfE, particularly the recognition that providing effective support, training and resources for teachers will be critical to the delivery of high-quality climate and sustainability education to all pupils. It is essential that the Government meets the commitments detailed in this strategy.**

104. **We also welcome the new natural history GCSE and the opportunities it will afford for pupils to learn about the natural world as part of their key stage 4 studies. However, without reform to embed nature, climate and sustainability education more widely across the 11–16 curriculum, particularly at key stage 3, the qualification risks becoming a 'subject silo'. It could also see low take-up, as pupils may be less likely to select a GCSE in a subject to which they have previously had limited exposure, and not all schools will have the necessary resources to deliver it.**

105. ***The Government must ensure that a core purpose of future reviews of the key stage 3 and 4 curricula, and GCSE content specifications, is to identify and incorporate opportunities to educate pupils about climate change and sustainability across a wider range of subjects. This is necessary to avoid the persistence of 'subject silos' and to ensure that teaching on such topics is available to all.***

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189 Written evidence from Royal Society of Chemistry (EDU0022), Royal Society of Biology (EDU0023), Teach the Future (EDU0027), Chester Zoo and Chester Zoo Youth Board (EDU0049), UCL Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education (EDU0065) and British Science Association (EDU0089)

190 Written evidence from Teach the Future (EDU0027)

191 Written evidence from UCL Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education (EDU0065)

Languages

106. The DfE told us that "languages are hugely important in broadening pupils' horizons and improving their employment opportunities."[192] In 2022, it published updated subject content for GCSEs in French, German and Spanish that "is intended to encourage more students to take up these important subjects … The changes will make modern foreign language GCSEs more well-rounded for both teachers and pupils".[193] In March 2023, it launched a language hubs programme, which aims to encourage schools to work together to "improve standards of language teaching across the country" and "increase the number of pupils studying languages to GCSE level and beyond". The programme is also intended to increase access to "home, heritage and community languages".[194]

107. Ofsted has similarly described languages as an "integral part of the curriculum" and argued that they "equip pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life."[195] Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted, said that "there is clearly an intrinsic but also cultural and economic value to children in learning a language. Having a range of language speakers is immensely important."[196]

108. The number of pupils studying languages at GCSE has declined significantly since "studying a language after the age of 14 was made non-statutory" in 2004.[197] In 2003, there were just under 515,000 GCSE entries in modern foreign languages (MFL)[198] in England, but this had fallen to around 286,000 by 2011.[199] Following the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) accountability measure in 2010,[200] the number of entries in MFL rose, reaching around 334,000 in 2014. Since then, the number of entries has declined slightly, to 292,000 entries in 2019, and 317,000 in 2023.[201] Stuart Miller, Director of Curriculum and General Qualifications at the DfE, told us that "you could argue that the EBacc is a driver of that recovery in language uptake", but that "it is not yet back to where it was".[202]

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192 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)
193 *Ibid.*
194 *Ibid.*
195 Ofsted, 'Research review series: languages' (June 2021): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-research-review-series-languages/curriculum-research-review-series-languages [accessed 29 November 2023]
196 Q 110 (Amanda Spielman)
197 Ofsted, 'Research review series: languages' (June 2021): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-research-review-series-languages/curriculum-research-review-series-languages [accessed 29 November 2023]
198 Modern foreign languages include frequently taught languages such as French, German and Spanish, but many exam boards offer GCSEs in a much broader range of languages. For example, Pearson offers GCSEs in Arabic, Japanese and Urdu, among others. Pearson, 'Modern Languages': https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/modern-languages-2016.html [accessed 29 November 2023]
199 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 29 November 2023]. The decline in language entries is primarily associated with a decline in take-up of GCSE French and German. Entries in other modern foreign languages GCSEs, including Spanish, have nearly doubled since 2003.
200 See paras 248–49 and figure 6.
201 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 29 November 2023].
202 Q 147 (Stuart Miller)

109. Ms Spielman commented that:

> "a long-standing challenge for all English-speaking countries, at an individual level, has been having children recognise the clear value of learning a particular language in their own lives. We have struggled with that for decades, as do Australia and America … I recognise the pragmatic choices that are made about this in schools."[203]

She also suggested that "there is nowhere near the cadre of teachers needed to make language teaching universal".[204] ASCL noted that the EBacc measure "fails to recognise the difficulty of finding sufficient teachers to teach the EBacc subjects, particularly modern foreign languages."[205]

110. Evidence suggested that GCSEs and A-levels in modern foreign languages, along with the sciences and computer science, are graded more harshly than other subjects, and that this affects pupils' subject choices.[206] Dr Jo Saxton, Chief Regulator, Ofqual, told us that the regulator "takes action where evidence in the round, including the statistics, demonstrates that that is the right thing to do", and confirmed that it had recently "required the adjustment of the standards in French and German to better align with Spanish."[207] However, 2023 analysis by FFT Education Datalab concluded that pupils who take GCSEs in French, German, Spanish or computer science "tend to achieve half a grade lower" in these subjects than in English and maths, and that "despite efforts to bring French and German in line with Spanish, they still seem more severely graded".[208] Dave Thomson, Chief Statistician at FFT Education Datalab, argued that the current key stage 4 school performance measures, many of which are based on pupils' GCSE results, may "dissuade schools from entering pupils for qualifications that score less well; I am thinking mainly about modern languages."[209]

111. Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud, Director of Operations at AlphaPlus, suggested that alternative qualification models for languages were being considered in Wales, as part of a broader review of GCSEs:

> "They are looking at innovating the design and what they reward so that, for example, you can choose to try to achieve a conversational level in three different languages because you are interested in their communications value rather than trying to become expert in a single language … They are going back to effectively a unitised and credit-based approach that values the love of learning and the value of languages."[210]

112. **Proficiency in modern languages is an important asset, both in individual relationships and for career pathways. The low take-up of GCSEs in modern foreign languages, despite the inclusion of languages within the EBacc subject combination, is therefore**

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203 Q 110 (Amanda Spielman)
204 *Ibid.*
205 Written evidence from Association of School and College Leaders (EDU0029)
206 Written evidence from Royal Society of Biology (EDU0023) and Science Education Policy Alliance (EDU0099)
207 Q 134 (Dr Jo Saxton)
208 FFT Education Datalab, 'Revisiting subject difficulty at Key Stage 4': https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2023/06/revisiting-subject-difficulty-at-key-stage-4/ [accessed 9 November 2023]
209 Q 69 (Dave Thomson)
210 Q 21 (Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud)

concerning. We heard that a number of different factors contribute to this.

113. ***The Government should explore innovative ways to encourage schools to promote language learning, whether or not as a GCSE subject, and to address practical barriers, including the limited supply of suitably qualified teachers.***

Creative and artistic subjects

114. Evidence suggests that creativity[211] is increasingly valued by employers across all sectors of the economy.[212] Olly Newton, Executive Director, Edge Foundation, suggested that creativity "comes out time and again at the top of the league table of skills that employers are looking for, not just in the UK but internationally".[213]

115. The value of the creative sectors to the UK economy is well documented.[214] Evidence highlighted Nesta research that suggests that the creative industries are growing twice as fast as other industry sectors and will create 900,000 new jobs in the next 10 years.[215] Sage Gateshead told us that in the last pre-pandemic year, "the creative industries contributed £116 billion to the UK economy gross value added and grew faster than the economy as a whole".[216]

116. As well as being valuable to employers and the UK economy, we heard that access to creative subjects and the arts can have profound benefits for individual pupils. A 2021 report by the Independent Society of Musicians cited evidence that music can "enhance language skills and literacy, support creativity, academic progress and attainment, enhance fine motor skills, motivate disaffected students and contribute to health and wellbeing."[217]

Access to creative subjects

117. There has, however, been an ongoing decline in take-up of arts subjects in the 11–16 phase, as well as a decrease in wider opportunities to develop creativity. As noted earlier in this chapter, witnesses expressed concern that some academies are using the flexibility they have over their curricula to drop national curriculum arts subjects, such as art and design and music, in key stage 3.[218] On drama, which is not compulsory for any school, we heard

211 The Durham Commission on Creativity and Education defined creativity as "The capacity to imagine, conceive, express, or make something that was not there before" and creative thinking as "A process through which knowledge, intuition and skills are applied to imagine, express or make something novel or individual in its contexts." Arts Council England, *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education* (November 2019), p 2: available at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/durham-commission-creativity-and-education [accessed 29 November 2023]

212 Written evidence from NOCN Group (EDU0018)

213 Q 46 (Olly Newton)

214 See, for example, Communications and Digital Committee, *At risk: our creative future* (2nd Report, Session 2022–23, HL Paper 125).

215 Nesta, 'Creative industries are driving economic growth across the UK, on track to create one million new creative industries jobs between 2013 and 2030' (February 2018): https://www.nesta.org.uk/press-release/creative-industries-are-driving-economic-growth-across-the-uk-on-track-to-create-one-million-new-creative-industries-jobs-between-2013-and-2030/ [accessed 29 November 2023]

216 Written evidence from Sage Gateshead (EDU0081)

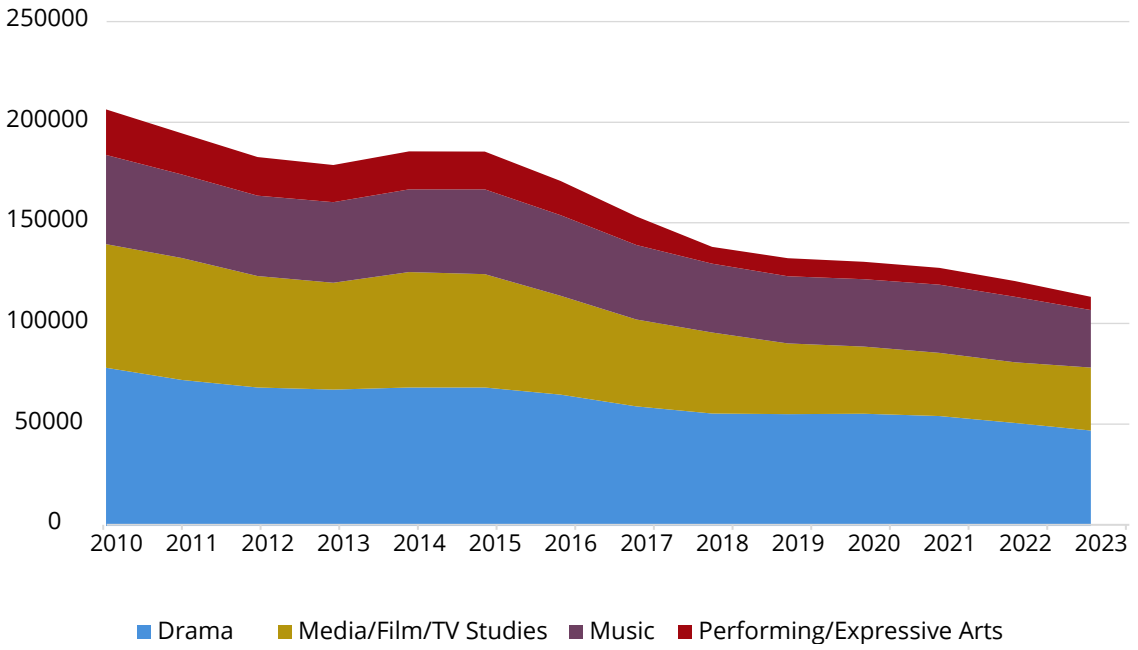
217 Independent Society of Musicians, *Music: a subject in peril?* (March 2022), p 2: https://www.ism.org/images/images/ISM_Music-a-subject-of-peril_A4_March-2022_Online2.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

218 See para 35.

that "from 2010 to 2020, the number of drama teachers reduced by 18% and the number of hours taught reduced by 12% across the nation".[219]

118. GCSE entries in many creative subjects have declined in recent years. The number of pupils taking music, drama and performing/expressive arts GCSEs in 2023 was 29,732 (5% of all pupils), 49,247 (8%) and 6,780 (1%) respectively.[220] Take-up of all three subjects has declined since 2010, with music falling by 35%, drama by 40% and performing/expressive arts by 69%.[221] Likewise, take-up of media/film/TV studies fell by 49% to 32,429.[222] Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, suggested that there has not been a drop-off in take-up of arts subjects but instead a shift from GCSEs to technical and vocational qualifications in these subjects.[223] The decline for music is indeed smaller when entries for Technical Awards in music are included—the overall decline in music entries per pupil between 2016 and 2023 then falls to 8%. However, the decline in drama remains significant, with a reduction in the number of overall drama entries per pupil of 16% in the same period.[224]

Figure 2: GCSE entries in creative subjects (England only)



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ *[accessed 10 October 2023]*

219 Q 42 (Dr Geoffrey Readman)

220 Declining take-up is also seen in design and technology. This is discussed in paras 134–41. Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 10 October 2023] and Ofqual, 'Infographics for GCSE results, 2023' (August 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infographic-gcse-results-2023/infographics-for-gcse-results-2023-accessible [accessed 29 November 2023].

221 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 10 October 2023].

222 *Ibid.*

223 Q 108 (Amanda Spielman)

224 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 29 November 2023] and Department for Education, 'Key stage 4 performance': https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance-revised#explore-data-and-files [accessed 29 November 2023].

119. Several witnesses argued that the decline in opportunities to study creative and arts subjects across the 11–16 phase is largely a result of school accountability measures that prioritise traditionally academic study over more creative learning.[225] The Independent Society of Musicians also highlighted the impacts of reduced funding for arts subjects. They argued that real-terms education spending per pupil fell 9% between 2009 and 2019. They also noted the wide variations in music department budgets in different schools and spoke of "a widening gulf between arts provision in state and independent schools."[226]

120. This was echoed by the National Education Union:

> "Independent schools tend to ascribe value to arts and cultural education. State school teachers increasingly report that basic resources for the teaching of arts subjects are not available. This divergence between public and private leads to increased inequalities in terms of access to a broad educational experience."[227]

121. Sage Gateshead argued that:

> "This leads to a reduction in diversity of creative talent and closes off careers in the creative sector with the very real risk, aside from the damage to individuals and communities, of reduced international competitiveness of such an economically important sector."[228]

122. Witnesses also described a more general decline in opportunities to develop creativity across secondary education. Some attributed this to the Government's focus on knowledge acquisition within a content-rich curriculum, which was seen to have squeezed out the opportunity to develop broader skills such as creativity across all subjects.[229] Recent reports from the Durham Commission on Creativity and Education and the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee emphasised that all subjects can be taught in a way that fosters creativity. They also stressed the value of opportunities for interdisciplinary learning in secondary school, in view of the growing demand in the workforce for individuals with both creative and technical skills.[230]

Government activity

123. In June 2022, the Government published new non-statutory guidance on the teaching of music in its national plan for music education.[231] This is supported by the model music curriculum, published in 2021, which provides guidance

225 This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.
226 Written evidence from Independent Society of Musicians (EDU0083)
227 Written evidence from National Education Union (EDU0071)
228 Written evidence from Sage Gateshead (EDU0081)
229 Written evidence from Design and Technology Association (EDU0026) and Andrew Martin Speight, Will Jay Hamilton and Sarah Madeline Smith (EDU0040)
230 Arts Council England, *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education* (October 2019), p 6: available at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/durham-commission-creativity-and-education [accessed 22 November 2023] and Communications and Digital Committee, *At risk: our creative future* (2nd Report, Session 2022–23, HL Paper 125), p 40
231 HM Government, *The power of music to change lives* (June 2022): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1086619/The_Power_of_Music_to_Change_Lives.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

on how the statutory music curriculum can be delivered in key stages 1, 2 and 3.[232] The new national plan detailed that:

- pupils should receive at least one hour of "high-quality curriculum music" per week in key stage 3;
- "high-quality music education" should include curriculum music, instrumental and vocal lessons, and musical events and opportunities such as staging concerts;
- funding for music education hubs—groups of organisations, including schools, working together to support music provision for young people—would be extended; and
- £25 million would be made available to provide instruments to pupils for free.

124. Music organisations generally welcomed the plan but argued that additional funding would be needed to deliver fully on its ambitions.[233] The Independent Society of Musicians (ISM) noted that the number of music hubs will be reduced, with each one expected to cover a wider geographical area,[234] and suggested that, in real terms, funding has been cut since 2015.[235] ISM also highlighted the challenges of delivering the commitments set out in the plan in the current context of limited teacher supply. It noted that the plan "states that all schools should deliver one hour of curriculum music per week, but with the current shortfall in teachers, it is hard to see how this ambition can be realised."[236]

125. The Government has also recently appointed an expert advisory panel to support the development of a similar plan for cultural education. It states that the plan will aim to:

> "articulate and highlight the importance of high-quality cultural education in schools. It will also promote the value of cultural and creative education, outline and support career progression pathways, address skills gaps and tackle disparities in opportunity and outcome by ensuring that all young people, regardless of their background, can access high-quality cultural education."[237]

126. Baroness Bull, chair of the expert advisory panel, noted that its terms of reference clarify the remit of this work and that "the national curriculum and exams, Ofsted's inspection framework and performance measures such

232 Department for Education, *Model music curriculum: Key stages 1 to 3* (March 2021): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6061f833d3bf7f5ce1060a90/Model_Music_Curriculum_Full.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]
233 House of Lords Library, 'National plan for music education' (September 2022): https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/national-plan-for-music-education/ [accessed 29 November 2023]
234 Independent Society of Musicians, 'The Music Hub Investment Programme': https://www.ism.org/news/the-music-hub-investment-programme/ [accessed 1 November 2023]
235 Independent Society of Musicians, *Letter from Deborah Annetts, chief executive of ISM, to Rt. Hon. Nick Gibb MP* (September 2023): https://www.ism.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Music-Hubs-letter.pdf [accessed 1 November 2023]
236 Written evidence from Independent Society of Musicians (EDU0083)
237 HM Government, 'Government appoints new panel to promote cultural education' (3 July 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-appoints-new-panel-to-promote-cultural-education [accessed 29 November 2023]

as the EBacc and Progress 8 are all out of scope."[238] The Government states that this is because it has:

> "already implemented significant reforms to raise expectations in what all children are taught and how schools are held accountable. This is to ensure that every school has a well sequenced, knowledge-rich curriculum so children build knowledge in a broad range of subjects before going on to specialise after the age of 16."[239]

The Government's intention is to publish the cultural education plan by the end of 2023.[240]

127. **Pupils must have genuine, substantive opportunities to study creative and artistic subjects at key stages 3 and 4. This is vital to enable them to develop creative skills and to support a diverse talent pipeline for our creative industries, which are a key sector of the UK economy, and the many other businesses that are crying out for creative skills. We have heard that the delivery of these opportunities is increasingly difficult in the current context due to funding constraints and the deprioritisation of creative subjects due to accountability measures.**

128. ***A principal aim of future adjustments to key stage 4 school accountability measures, including those called for in this report, should be to reverse the impact of the current measures on the take-up of creative subjects at GCSE.***

Technical and vocational education

The value of technical and vocational learning opportunities

129. Technical education is defined by the DfE as "any training … that focuses on progression into skilled employment" and that "requires the acquisition of both a substantial body of technical knowledge and a set of practical skills valued by industry."[241] The DfE states that it "draws its purpose from the workplace rather than an academic discipline."[242] Design and technology is generally seen as the subject most closely related to technical education, although practical skills and vocational learning can be incorporated into many subjects. At key stage 4, some schools also offer Technical Awards,[243] which are more explicitly focused on technical and vocational learning, as well as GCSEs in subjects such as engineering.

238 Letter from Baroness Bull to Lord Johnson of Marylebone Chair of the Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee (17 July 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41035/documents/199848/default/

239 HM Government, *Cultural education plan expert advisory panel terms of reference* (July 2023): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1167139/Cultural_Education_Plan_Expert_Advisory_Panel_Terms_of_Reference.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

240 HM Government, 'Cultural education plan expert advisory panel': https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/cultural-education-plan-expert-advisory-panel [accessed 29 November 2023]

241 Department for Education, *Review of higher technical education: glossary of terms* (2019), p 8: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907145/Review_of_higher_technical_education_-_glossary_of_terms.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

242 *Ibid.*

243 The DfE says that Technical Awards "are distinct from GCSEs. They complement and supplement the academic curriculum. They must, however, provide a comparable level of rigour and challenge to GCSEs if they are to be recognised as valuable, distinctive and respected qualifications." Department for Education, *Technical qualifications for 14 to 16 year olds* (September 2020), p 9: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/917672/KS4_technical_guidance_2024_approval_process.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

130. Numerous witnesses highlighted the value of offering technical education opportunities during the 11–16 phase. David Gallagher, Chief Executive, NCFE, told us that "for many young people, access to technical and vocational opportunities is what suddenly lights a fire and sparks people into life. It can be engaging and inspiring."[244] He also highlighted that these opportunities can allow pupils to "try different things to figure out their strengths and preferences in order to inform their choices" for post-16 education.[245]

131. The Government has taken a number of steps in recent years aimed at boosting technical education for those aged 16 and above. These include launching T-levels in 2020,[246] establishing a network of Institutes of Technology[247] and taking forward commitments made in the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper.[248] The desire to "ensure technical and academic education are placed on an equal footing" at key stage 5 has been reiterated in announcements on the proposed Advanced British Standard, which would bring A-level and T-level programmes together into a single new qualification.[249]

132. However, commenting on the 14–16 phase, Energy and Utility Skills suggested that:

> "Whereas GCSEs are directly designed to support progression to higher levels of study, the vocational offer does not enjoy the same integrated approach. Alongside the five core GCSEs, there are no clear vocational options that support progression to, for example, apprenticeships, T-levels or employment."

They argued that a "credible, consistent vocational offer" would:

> "integrate with progression opportunities, support young people who have, to one degree or another, rejected or failed to engage with academic study and do not adequately attend school, and support the national skills needs that employers are concerned about."[250]

133. Energy and Utility Skills highlighted particularly the increasing importance of technical and practical skills to the UK economy as it transitions towards a low-carbon future. Existing and growing skills demands in the energy, construction and manufacturing sectors were also noted by NOCN Group and EngineeringUK.[251] WorldSkills UK argued that "empowering young people to pursue technical and vocational options is vital to meeting demand for digital and green skills across all sectors of the economy."[252]

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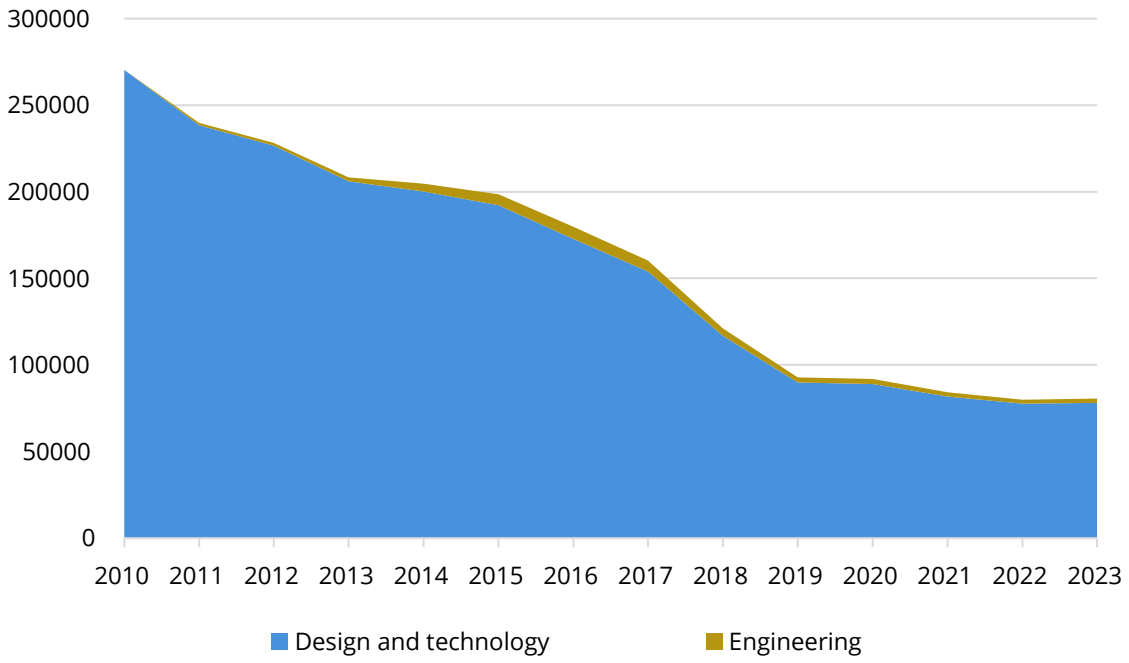
244 Q 46 (David Gallagher)
245 *Ibid.*
246 Department for Education, 'Introduction of T Levels' (updated 9 March 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introduction-of-t-levels/introduction-of-t-levels [accessed 29 November 2023]
247 Department for Education, 'Institutes of Technology' (updated 4 September 2023) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/institutes-of-technology--2/institutes-of-technology [accessed 29 November 2023]
248 Department for Education, *Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth* (January 2021): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/601980f2e90e07128a353aa3/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth__web_version_.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]
249 Department for Education, 'The Advanced British Standard: Everything you need to know' (5 October 2023): https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/10/05/the-advanced-british-standard-everything-you-need-to-know/ [accessed 29 November 2023]
250 Written evidence from Energy and Utility Skills (EDU0051)
251 Written evidence from NOCN Group (EDU0018) and EngineeringUK (EDU0092)
252 Written evidence from WorldSkills UK (EDU0035)

Declining take-up of technical qualifications

134. In recent years, there has been a significant decline in the number of pupils taking technical-related qualifications at key stage 4. Entries for GCSE design and technology have fallen by more than 70% since 2010. In 2023, the subject was taken by just 12% of all pupils. Likewise, the number of pupils taking GCSE engineering has fallen by 65% since 2016 to just 1% of pupils.[253] Between 2016 and 2023, there was a drop of nearly 100,000 entries across the two subjects.[254]

Figure 3: GCSE entries in technical subjects (England only)



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ *[accessed 10 October 2023]*

135. In this period, the number of Technical Award entries grew by only 45,000, an increase which is reduced to just 32,000 once entries for more 'creative' Technical Awards in music, drama, dance and art are excluded.[255] NOCN Group noted that the Technical Awards offered to 14–16 year-olds in schools are "often confined to those easy to deliver", such as fashion and textiles, food technology and business, and that the 415,000 Technical Awards certified in 2020–21 is small by comparison to the 5.3 million GCSEs awarded.[256]

136. Stakeholders have also expressed concerns about a more general decline in the development of practical skills in the 11–16 system, across a wider range of subjects. HMC, an association for headteachers of independent schools, found that only 2% of the teachers and school leaders it surveyed were

253 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 10 October 2023] and Ofqual, 'Infographics for GCSE results, 2023' (August 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infographic-gcse-results-2023/infographics-for-gcse-results-2023-accessible [accessed 29 November 2023].

254 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 10 October 2023].

255 Data available at Department for Education, 'Key stage 4 performance': https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance-revised#explore-data-and-files [accessed 29 November 2023].

256 Written evidence from NOCN Group (EDU0018)

"very satisfied with the way our curriculum is developing practical skills." It concluded that:

> "While our research does not explicitly explore the balance between academic and technical and vocational qualifications at GCSE, those students with a preference for practical skills appear to be particularly badly served."[257]

137. The Times Education Commission argued that "education has become increasingly theoretical". It noted, for example, that "only 37% of students took part in science practicals in 2019 (down from 44% three years previously)".[258] EngineeringUK saw the decline in practical work in science lessons since 2016 as "coinciding with the removal of its teacher assessment as part of GCSEs."[259] This emphasis on exam-based assessment affects other subjects too—even in design and technology, 50% of a pupil's grade is now determined by a written exam.[260]

138. The evidence we received suggested that the 11–16 curriculum is overly focused on academic learning, with technical and vocational education insufficiently valued. EngineeringUK argued that this may affect pupils' progression to post-16 technical pathways:

> "A greater focus on traditionally 'academic' subjects and less practical experience within them could be one of the drivers of the decline in uptake of engineering apprenticeships—students are given little understanding of what more hands-on, contextualised learning looks like."[261]

In a recent report, they suggested that those who do apply for apprenticeships do so "without having gained enough practical experience … at school", in part due to the "lack of importance" given to subjects such as design and technology.[262]

139. Many witnesses suggested that this focus on academic learning has been caused, in part, by the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) accountability measure.[263] However, Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted, argued that design and technology has been in a longer-term decline, with significant falls in entries taking place prior to the introduction of the EBacc. She suggested that this may be due to the subject

257 HMC, *The state of education—time to talk* (November 2022), p 19: https://www.dropbox.com/s/098owmvryjs45id/HMC%20report%20-%20FINAL.pdf?dl=0 [accessed 29 November 2023]

258 Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 28: https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times_Education_Commission_final_report.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

259 Written evidence from EngineeringUK (EDU0092). Following the reforms to GCSEs in 2015, practical coursework has been removed from the assessment of science subjects. These are now assessed by exam only.

260 Q 42 (Tony Ryan)

261 Written evidence from EngineeringUK (EDU0092)

262 EngineeringUK, *Fit for the future: A 5-point plan to grow and sustain engineering and technology apprenticeships for young people* (October 2023), p 37: https://www.engineeringuk.com/media/lkmlu2vn/full-report_a4-apprenticeship-inquiry-04.pdf [accessed 3 November 2023]

263 See paras 250–57.

no longer being compulsory[264] and argued for more limited scope to drop subjects at the end of key stage 3:

> "If we want more children taking technology subjects throughout the system, removing some of the flexibility and freedom of choice at that age is the only sensible way of achieving that."[265]

140. Mr Gallagher suggested that there were other challenges associated with the teaching of design and technology and other technical subjects. He highlighted that "technical and vocational education is more costly to deliver because of the infrastructure that is required".[266] EngineeringUK agreed, commenting that declining take-up of these subjects "may result from the need for physical resources—a technology studio requires a lot of space and a lot of expensive equipment."[267] On funding, Mr Gallagher noted that "we are one of the few OECD countries that spends less on our technical and vocational education than we do on our general education".[268]

141. Mr Gallagher also drew attention to the impact of the recent reforms to post-16 education. He argued that it is unclear "whom a T-level is for", how these fit with apprenticeships and what they lead to.[269] He suggested this could make post-16 technical and vocational education a less attractive option to learners in the 11–16 phase: "The incoherence in the system is a huge barrier to young people and their parents and carers".[270]

Potential solutions

142. We heard several potential solutions to encourage greater prioritisation and take-up of technical subjects at secondary school. Rt. Hon. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, proposed the introduction of a Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc), which would focus on technical careers and sit alongside the academically orientated EBacc.[271] Like the EBacc, the MBacc would not be a qualification or certificate in itself, but a collection of subjects for pupils to study at key stage 4. The subjects included would be "designed to steer young people on the technical route" towards jobs in key sectors of the Greater Manchester economy, including manufacturing, construction and health.[272] Mr Burnham suggested that a similar baccalaureate could be created in every region of England and be tailored to the subjects that would best support pupils into jobs in the local economy.[273]

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264 Design and technology GCSE was compulsory prior to 2000. 'Why has the number of teenagers taking design and technology GCSE dropped?', *The Conversation* (24 August 2015): https://theconversation.com/why-has-the-number-of-teenagers-taking-design-and-technology-gcse-dropped-46361 [accessed 29 November 2023]

265 Q 109 (Amanda Spielman)

266 Q 47 (David Gallagher)

267 Written evidence from EngineeringUK (EDU0092)

268 Q 47 (David Gallagher)

269 *Ibid.*

270 *Ibid.*

271 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 'Mayor unveils new plan for equal pathways to technical education and university for school leavers': https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/mayor-of-greater-manchester-unveils-plans-to-create-two-equal-pathways-for-young-people-pursuing-technical-careers-and-those-applying-for-university/ [accessed 29 November 2023]

272 *Ibid.*

273 Q 91 (Andy Burnham)

He argued that the MBacc is "the start of the journey of creating a clear and equal pathway for technical education."[274]

143. Another proposal was to extend the approach taken by university technical colleges (UTCs) into mainstream schools. There are 44 UTCs across England, which educate around 19,000 students, and a further two are scheduled to open in 2026.[275] They are government-funded free schools, "established by companies and universities in areas of high demand for talent to provide sought-after technical qualifications". They focus on providing "industry standard equipment and specialist staff" and usually enable their pupils to study subjects that are not available elsewhere.[276] UTCs are not expected to promote the EBacc list of subjects like other schools.[277] Kate Ambrosi, Director of Innovation and Learning, Baker Dearing Educational Trust, highlighted that pupils from UTCs are significantly more likely to continue in technical and vocational pathways from age 16 onwards.[278] It was noted that some engineering-focused UTCs see 60–80% of pupils going on to apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships.[279]

144. Most UTCs begin at key stage 4 (year 10) or towards the end of key stage 3 (year 9), requiring pupils to change institution partway through secondary school. NOCN Group suggested that this can be a drawback of the model, as it is "a big commitment without a sound understanding of the alternative subjects on offer." They also commented that there is little incentive for schools to advertise a UTC as an option to their students, due to government funding following the pupil.[280]

145. To broaden access to technical education, the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, which oversees and supports UTCs, proposed a model to "insert a technical stream" into mainstream 11–18 secondary schools—a "UTC sleeve". This is aimed at schools that wish to provide a specialist technical stream alongside their main curriculum and would focus on preparing pupils to take T-levels at key stage 5. The UTC sleeve would have "separate principals, teachers, classrooms … and a separate governing body, led by representatives of local employers and a local university."[281] The Baker Dearing Educational Trust suggested that this would be a relatively low-cost way of significantly enhancing technical education opportunities and noted that at least one pilot is already underway.[282] NOCN Group suggested that significant funding would still be needed to purchase specialist equipment.[283] However, this resource would need to be committed by any schools that wish to offer T-levels, regardless of whether they adopted a UTC sleeve.

274 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 'Mayor unveils new plan for equal pathways to technical education and university for school leavers': https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/mayor-of-greater-manchester-unveils-plans-to-create-two-equal-pathways-for-young-people-pursuing-technical-careers-and-those-applying-for-university/ [accessed 29 November 2023]
275 Written evidence from Baker Dearing Educational Trust (EDU0015)
276 UTC, 'Welcome': https://www.utcolleges.org/ [accessed 29 November 2023]
277 Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook' (updated 6 October 2023), para 280: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023 [accessed 29 November 2023]
278 Q 9 (Kate Ambrosi)
279 *Ibid.*
280 Written evidence from NOCN Group (EDU0018)
281 Written evidence from Baker Dearing Educational Trust (EDU0015)
282 *Ibid.*
283 Written evidence from NOCN Group (EDU0018)

146. **There has been a significant decline in recent years in the number of pupils taking up technical subjects during key stage 4. This is coupled with a wider decline in the opportunities available throughout 11–16 education for pupils to develop practical skills. The current system is overly focused on academic pathways and changes are needed to ensure that there are clear and coherent routes from key stage 4 into post-16 technical education.**

147. **The collapse in take-up of design and technology requires the urgent attention of the Government. The expansion of technology and engineering learning at key stage 4 is essential to opening up opportunities for young people and nurturing core talent for the future economy.**

148. **We support the ambition of the MBacc and UTC sleeve proposals in seeking to promote the status and availability of technical education in the 11–16 phase of education. We recognise, however, that careful consideration is needed to ensure that any changes of this nature can be effectively and equitably delivered within the current system.**

149. ***The Government should set out how technical and vocational education opportunities can be promoted to a greater number of pupils during the 11–16 phase, with the aim of enabling all pupils to study at least one technical or vocational subject should they wish. The Government should engage closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's proposal to offer, as an alternative to the EBacc, a key stage 4 subject combination focused on technical careers, and the Baker Dearing Educational Trust's proposal for a "UTC sleeve", and publish its response to these suggestions.***

Careers education and employer engagement

150. The House of Commons Education Committee recently undertook an inquiry on careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), publishing its report in June 2023.[284] The Committee noted that, following changes in recent years, the system of CEIAG now takes broadly the right approach. However, it identified "a lack of a clear overarching strategy" and noted that progress towards meeting the Gatsby benchmarks[285] has been slow. The Committee recommended that the Government should publish an updated careers strategy by the end of 2024. The DfE have since confirmed that they plan to do this.[286]

151. In light of the Commons Education Committee's work, we did not make this topic a principal area of focus in this inquiry. Nonetheless, many witnesses addressed this subject in their evidence. A strong theme was that careers education should be embedded across the secondary curriculum, from year 7 onwards.

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284 Education Committee, *Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance*, (Fourth Report, Session 2022–23, HC54)

285 The eight Gatsby benchmarks "define what world class careers provision in education looks like and provide a clear framework for organising the careers provision" at a school or college. The Careers and Enterprise Company, 'Gatsby Benchmarks': https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/gatsby-benchmarks/ [accessed 29 November 2023]

286 Education Committee, *Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report*, (Fifth Special Report, Session 2022–23, HC1848)

152. Oli de Botton, CEO, Careers and Enterprise Company, told us that there is an opportunity to make "the existing curriculum come to life" by linking learning to employment. He highlighted the example of a manufacturing company in the West Midlands that has worked with local academy trusts to incorporate industry-specific learning into their key stage 3 curricula.[287] The Edge Foundation noted how Cowes Enterprise College has adapted its key stage 3 curriculum in partnership with local maritime employers, to focus on "applying the knowledge and skills learned to real-world problems such as the mechanics of a boat." They suggested this had led to "increased engagement and attainment particularly amongst its most disadvantaged students."[288] Ms Ambrosi suggested that the extensive employer engagement that takes place in UTCs supports pupils to develop skills and behaviours such as independence and teamwork, and to make more informed choices about post-16 education and training.[289]

153. To support teachers to embed careers-related content, Dr Claire Thorne, Co-CEO of Tech She Can, told us that teachers must have access to "tech-focused, industry-relevant" continuing professional development (CPD) resources, aimed at helping them understand "what the workplace of today and tomorrow might look like." She argued that: "We cannot expect teachers to understand what it looks like to work in Deutsche Bank or Google".[290] Aspirations Academies Trust proposed that "teacher training needs to change so teachers have a better understanding of the world outside the classroom and the skills required to succeed in it."[291]

154. Evidence also emphasised the importance of pupils having access to work experience.[292] However, Carolyn Roberts, Headteacher at Thomas Tallis School, noted that it can be difficult for mainstream schools to offer this. She argued that it is expensive and often inequitable, suggesting that while "young people who have reach within their own households can get interesting work experience", this is not available to all.[293] Organisations which provide work experience opportunities commented that the approach across schools is inconsistent:

> "With work experience not being compulsory for key stage 4 students, there is a very different level of engagement in careers education and work experience at different schools—it's a bit of a postcode lottery. Some local schools still hold space for work experience for all year 10 students, and take up places with us, whereas others don't."[294]

155. Some called for the reintroduction of mandatory work experience in the 14–16 phase.[295] Dr Thorne suggested that "the notion of traditional work, or a quota on the number of hours of work experience, is less important", and that the emphasis should instead be on "immersive experiences with employers".[296] Nick Brook, CEO of Speakers for Schools, argued that schools need to help

287 Q 54 (Oli de Botton)
288 Written evidence from Edge Foundation (EDU0021)
289 Q 1 (Kate Ambrosi)
290 Q 57 (Dr Claire Thorne)
291 Written evidence from Aspirations Academies Trust (EDU0006)
292 Written evidence from Speakers for Schools (EDU0046) and Sutton Trust (EDU0057)
293 Q 1 (Carolyn Roberts)
294 Written evidence from Zoological Society of London (EDU0056)
295 Written evidence from South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (EDU0047), Sutton Trust (EDU0057) and Doceo Development (EDU0084)
296 Q 51 (Dr Claire Thorne)

pupils to "draw the value from the experience they have had, to identify the learning from it and to capitalise on it".[297] Mr de Botton similarly told us that there should be "objectives set in advance, assessment throughout, and reflection after".[298]

156. The Commons Education Committee found that, despite the introduction of the new 'provider access legislation',[299] schools are still incentivised primarily to promote academic routes. We heard similar arguments and received wide-ranging evidence in favour of raising the prominence of technical and vocational education in the 11–16 phase.[300] Witnesses highlighted the importance of ensuring teachers are well informed. The Careers and Enterprise Company noted the need to focus on "skills pathways like apprenticeships where awareness may be lower", citing a Teacher Tapp survey that found that only 26% of teachers felt confident advising students about how to find an apprenticeship.[301] Catherine Sezen, Director of Policy, Association of Colleges, told us that:

> "It is about educating the educators as well. By definition, people who work in schools are people like me, who went to school and university and then went back into teaching … It should be very much a whole-school process. Everybody should engage and find out much more about vocational technical options and what they offer."[302]

157. **We are encouraged by the House of Commons Education Committee's conclusion that reasonable progress towards improving careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in secondary schools has been made over the past decade. We heard that an even greater emphasis on CEIAG is needed in the 11–16 phase, and that this can be enhanced through meaningful engagement between schools and employers.**

158. ***Careers education, information, advice and guidance in the 11–16 phase must give equal status to the full range of post-16 pathways, including technical and vocational qualifications, such as BTECs, and apprenticeships. We support the House of Commons Education Committee's call for the Government to develop potential solutions to the problem of schools being overly incentivised to encourage pupils to follow academic routes.***

297 Q 52 (Nick Brook)
298 Q 53 (Oli de Botton)
299 The updated provider access legislation requires schools to "provide at least six encounters with approved providers of apprenticeships and technical education for all their students." The Careers and Enterprise Company, 'Provider Access Legislation': https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/ [accessed 29 November 2023]
300 See, for example, Q 47 (David Gallagher), Q 83 (Andy Burnham) and written evidence from NOCN Group (EDU0018), NAHT (EDU0020) and Speakers for Schools (EDU0046).
301 Written evidence from Careers and Enterprise Company (EDU0045)
302 Q 171 (Catherine Sezen)

CHAPTER 3: ASSESSMENT

Introduction

159. Assessment in England during the 11–16 phase focuses on GCSEs, which are studied across key stage 4 and assessed primarily in year 11. Pupils are also able to take qualifications with a more technical or vocational focus known as Technical Awards, but GCSEs are overwhelmingly the dominant set of qualifications taken at this age.

160. We heard from numerous witnesses that the current key stage 4 assessment system places intense pressure on both pupils and teachers. This is partly the result of several recent changes to the nature of GCSE exams. First, as discussed earlier, there has been a significant increase in the GCSE curriculum content that pupils are expected to learn.[303] Pupils who attended our roundtable session felt that the extensive content required them to 'cram' vast amounts of knowledge in the run-up to their exams. They argued that this reduces the opportunity to develop necessary skills and retain subject knowledge for future study or work, as teachers are forced to rush through content.[304] Dr Mary Bousted, then Joint General Secretary, National Education Union, noted that this approach results in narrow learning techniques: "Teachers are under so much pressure … if you have to deliver such a big body of content knowledge, of course you resort to rote learning."[305]

161. Secondly, there has been a move away from a modular approach towards terminal assessment at the end of year 11. This has resulted in pupils sitting many hours of exams over a short period. Evidence suggested that most pupils will "undergo more than 30 hours of assessment" during GCSE exam season.[306] Dr Bousted cited a school leader who described this as "a test of endurance and resilience rather than learning".[307] Some also argued this leads to an undue emphasis on exam preparation throughout key stage 4: "the class time lost to teaching exam rubrics, exam technique, taking practice questions, sitting mock exams, taking exam leave and sitting the exams, can remove over a sixth of the total potential learning time in years 10 and 11."[308]

162. The pressure of exam season has been intensified by the Government's removal of non-exam assessment in many GCSE subjects. This means that pupils' grades in core subjects are often based solely on their performance in two or three exams taken within a few weeks of each other. This was raised as a primary concern by several pupils who attended our roundtable sessions. They noted the increased impact of a pupil having an 'off day' during exam season, without being able to rely on marks gained from non-exam assessment earlier in the year, and highlighted the additional stress this causes.[309]

163. This intensive period of exams could be having a negative impact on pupils' wellbeing. In the Youth Voice Census 2022, co-sponsored by the Edge

303 See paras 46–50.
304 Roundtable discussion with pupils (20 September 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42297/documents/210208/default/
305 Q 65 (Dr Mary Bousted)
306 Written evidence from Association of School and College Leaders (EDU0023)
307 Q 62 (Dr Mary Bousted)
308 Written evidence from Rethinking Assessment (EDU0100)
309 Roundtable discussion with pupils (20 September 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42297/documents/210208/default/

Foundation, "49.1% of respondents stated that assessments have a negative impact on their mental health".[310] This was supported by evidence from Parentkind, a charity representing parents and carers in education, and the membership body for parent-teacher associations. They cited polling they had conducted which found that "almost half (48%) of parents were concerned about their child's exam stress … which was the third biggest indicator of mental health concerns".[311] Alistair McConville, Deputy Head of King Alfred School and Co-founder of Rethinking Assessment, described the GCSE exam period as "an incredibly stressful experience" which pupils must undergo "at a time of their maximally sensitive development as adolescents."[312]

The high-stakes nature of key stage 4 assessment

164. The pressure of assessment at key stage 4 is intensified by aspects of the wider education system. We heard that pupils often need to receive specific grades at GCSE to allow them to progress to the 16–19 institution and/or course of their choice.[313] A pupil's performance in GCSE English language and maths is of particular significance, as receiving a grade 4 (a 'standard pass') in these subjects is generally a prerequisite for progression to level 3 qualifications and apprenticeships. Moreover, as noted earlier, pupils who receive a grade 3 or below in these subjects are generally required to resit their GCSE or take an equivalent qualification.[314] GCSEs can also be used in university admissions processes. Following the Government's recent reforms, A-levels (taken at the end of key stage 5) no longer include externally validated assessment at the end of year 12. GCSE results are therefore often the only definitive qualification data available for pupils who apply to university at the beginning of year 13.[315]

165. Teachers are similarly under considerable pressure to ensure that their students perform well in key stage 4 qualifications, as GCSE grades underpin the main accountability measures used to judge overall school performance in this phase.[316] Matthew Glanville, Director of Assessment, International Baccalaureate, told us that "there is certainly a real tension … in the role of teachers. Is it to maximise the student's performance, to maximise the school's performance, or to be the guardian of a high-quality education?"[317] Professor Graham Donaldson, Honorary Professor at the University of Glasgow, told us that this approach risks the primary purpose of assessment becoming school accountability. He suggested that in some cases "young people are there to serve the school's reputation rather than the assessment serving the needs of the young person."[318]

166. Some witnesses argued that the English system of high-stakes assessment at 16 is an outlier internationally. Professor Gordon Stobart, Emeritus Professor of Education, University College London, suggested that other

310 Written evidence from Edge Foundation (EDU0021)
311 Written evidence from Parentkind (EDU0030)
312 Q 121 (Alistair McConville)
313 Q 169 (Catherine Sezen)
314 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)
315 Institute for Government, *The exam question: changing the model of assessment reform* (August 2022), p 6: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/exam-question.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]
316 See paras 238–43.
317 Q 123 (Matthew Glanville)
318 Q 103 (Prof Graham Donaldson)

countries focus on exams at 18, and that "we are out of kilter with the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and France."[319] In contrast, Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge University Press and Assessment, argued that many of the best-performing systems in the world have high-stakes assessment at 16. He conceded, however, that in some of these jurisdictions pupils take exams in fewer subjects or are tested through other forms of assessment.[320] In its report, *The exam question: changing the model of assessment reform*, the Institute for Government made a similar point, arguing that:

> "Elsewhere, many assessments at 15 or 16 contain coursework or continuous assessment as well as or instead of written tests. England is unusual in the extent to which it relies on linear written exams and also in the number of papers young people sit".[321]

167. The Institute for Government explained that the emphasis on extensive, exam-based assessment, and other characteristics of the current system, derive from the fact that secondary exams in England are used for several purposes: to assess pupils' knowledge of the content they have studied; to provide a consistent measure of pupils' performance that enables post-16 institutions and universities to select students; and to feed into the performance measures through which schools are held to account.[322] Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud, Director of Operations, AlphaPlus, commented that "one of the immense pressures that is placed upon GCSEs is that they carry many purposes".[323]

168. Dr Michelle Meadows, Associate Professor of Educational Assessment at the University of Oxford, suggested that GCSEs fulfil "the specific purposes that the Government laid down" for them. She argued that these, particularly the focus on obtaining a reliable measurement of student attainment, have led to "a particular design" for the system. She also asked: "Could we imagine a different set of purposes and a different emphasis? Yes, and that would lead to a different kind of design."[324]

Proposals for reform

169. We heard several proposals for how the current system of high-stakes assessment at 16 could be modified in the long term. First, it was proposed that there could be reform to the accountability system, with a decoupling of performance measures from assessment results, or at least a reduced emphasis on them.[325] This appears to be the approach being adopted in Wales as part of its wider education reform programme. Gareth Evans, Director of Education Policy at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, told us that the Welsh system is looking to move towards data sampling. This is linked to "a disaggregation of assessment of the learner for the learner's benefit

319 Q 96 (Prof Gordon Stobart)
320 Q 15 (Tim Oates)
321 Institute for Government, *The exam question: changing the model of assessment reform* (August 2022), p 7: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/exam-question.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]
322 *Ibid.*, p 4
323 Q 15 (Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud)
324 Q 15 (Dr Michelle Meadows)
325 Q 103 (Prof Graham Donaldson)

and assessment of the learner for the system's benefit. There is no longer by standard a publication of attainment outcomes."[326]

170. Several witnesses addressed recent calls for the introduction of 'learner profiles'[327], describing these as "a digital record of achievement"[328] or "a kind of learning LinkedIn".[329] Mr McConville suggested that they would "capture a broader range of evidence and remove the accountability pressures that tie everyone to eight, nine or 10 GCSEs."[330] Describing an example learner profile produced by Rethinking Assessment, Olly Newton, Chief Executive, Edge Foundation, said that "employers love how it shows not just young people's academic achievements but their skills, creativity, communication and broader development."[331] Parentkind cited polling which suggested that 74% of parents "would support the introduction of a learner profile which records their child's skills, qualifications and achievements throughout their education."[332]

171. Others have recommended moving away from GCSEs completely. We heard about several independent schools which have significantly reduced their use of GCSEs in recent years and introduced their own qualifications and assessment systems. For example, Bedales School in Hampshire now plans to offer GCSEs in only English language and maths, with pupils primarily studying their own Bedales Assessed Courses at key stage 4.[333] These schools argued that GCSEs no longer need to be a definitive final measure of a young person's achievements at 16 in the way they once did, given that all pupils must now remain in education or training until 18: "GCSEs were created at a time when many young people left school at 16 and needed to be able to demonstrate what they could do at this point of transition. With the majority of pupils now going on to study until 18, that idea is horribly out of date."[334]

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326 Q 93 (Gareth Evans)

327 The Times Education Commission called for the introduction of "a personal online portfolio for every student. It would include academic qualifications alongside a record of other achievements: video footage of a pupil playing a musical instrument, photographs of projects they have worked on or details of expeditions, volunteering and work experience." Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 40: https://nuk-tnl-editorialprod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times%20Education%20Commission%20final%20report.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]. A similar recommendation from the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland, which reported in June 2023, was that "all learners should have a digital profile to allow them to record achievements". In evidence to the review "the idea of a technology-based profile … was perceived to be the natural solution for future learners to present their achievements." Scottish Government, *It's our future: report of the independent review of qualifications and assessment*, (June 2023), pp 37 and 67: https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2023/06/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/documents/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/govscot%3Adocument/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

328 Written evidence from Globalbridge (EDU0019)

329 Written evidence from Rethinking Assessment (EDU0100)

330 Q 127 (Alistair McConville)

331 Q 49 (Olly Newton)

332 Written evidence from Parentkind (EDU0030)

333 'Private school to move further away from 'outdated' GCSEs, headteacher says', *The Independent* (11 September 2023): https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/gcses-english-private-school-daniel-daylewis-geoff-barton-b2408894.html [accessed 29 November 2023]

334 Written evidence from Rethinking Assessment (EDU0100)

172. Latymer Upper School has also announced plans to reduce dramatically the number of subjects in which they use external assessment.[335] From 2027, they will offer GCSEs in only English language and maths, with performance in all other subjects being judged through a range of internal assessment methods including vivas, presentations and extended projects. Pupils will have the chance to study a combination of long and short courses, covering topics such as robotics, world poetry and printmaking, which the school suggests will enable greater breadth and depth of learning and allow cross-curricular and project-based work.[336] Latymer argued that the new approach will better prepare pupils for "university, work and life".[337]

173. Latymer said they were inspired by proposals put forward by the Times Education Commission, which argued that GCSEs should be replaced by a slimmed-down set of exams in five core subjects: "This would allow children to progress to the next level and provide accountability for schools, but lower the stakes and reduce the amount of time spent on preparing for and taking exams".[338] This proposal sits alongside suggested reforms to post-16 education. The Commission called for A-levels and other qualifications to be replaced by a "British Baccalaureate" in which most pupils would study a much broader range of subjects. The Commission's proposals for key stage 4 and 5 draw on the structure of the International Baccalaureate (IB), which is widely respected by employers and universities and is used around the world, including in some UK schools.[339]

174. The Institute for Government, however, cautioned against recent calls for wholesale reform:

> "While GCSEs and A-levels are certainly imperfect, the proposals for overhauling the system typically exaggerate the benefits while failing to acknowledge the costs. Education systems are interconnected and changing one major component dramatically can cause upheaval elsewhere."[340]

They highlight, for example, that removing externally validated assessment at 16 would mean shifting to a post-qualification university admissions system, based on actual A-level results rather than predicted grades and GCSEs. Several witnesses also underlined the need to retain some form of

335 'Latymer Upper School ditches GCSEs for its own qualification', *The Times* (12 September 2023): https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/latymer-upper-school-ditches-gcses-for-its-own-qualification-zwdqn3z08 [accessed 29 November 2023]

336 Written evidence from Latymer Upper School (EDU0105)

337 *Ibid.*

338 Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 39: https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times Education Commission final report.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

339 The International Baccalaureate (IB) offers four educational programmes: the IB Diploma Programme for students aged 16 to 19; the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students aged 11 to 16; the IB Primary Years Programme for children aged 3 to 12; and the Career-related Programme, also for students aged 16 to 19. An IB programme is offered in 137 schools across the UK, including 58 state schools. However, only 30 schools offer the Middle Years Programme (MYP), 18 of which are state schools. Written evidence from International Baccalaureate Organization (EDU0079). Data available at International Baccalaureate Organization, 'Find an IB World School': https://ibo.org/programmes/find-an-ib-school/ [accessed 30 November 2023]

340 Institute for Government, *The exam question: changing the model of assessment reform* (August 2022), p 1: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/exam-question.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

national assessment at 16, since more than 50% of pupils move to a different institution at the end of key stage 4. [341]

175. In October 2023, the Government announced plans to reform post-16 education over the next decade through the introduction of a new qualification, the Advanced British Standard.[342] This would bring A-levels and T-levels together into a single qualification, with "every student also studying some form of maths and English to age 18." The intention is for pupils to study at least five subjects as part of the "Baccalaureate-style" qualification;[343] currently most study three A-levels or one T-level.

176. The Government said that it will review GCSEs in light of this proposal.[344] It stated that maintaining externally assessed GCSEs is the "best and fairest way to ensure children learn and retain knowledge". It also noted that "GCSEs can be onerous for students and teachers" and announced its intention to "look at where they can be streamlined, while still retaining their inherent rigour." This will include exploring whether "the number and/or length of papers that children sit" could be reduced, and whether digital solutions could allow performance to be assessed "in more innovative and less onerous ways."[345]

177. **We have heard that the high-stakes nature of key stage 4 assessment in England necessitates an emphasis on terminal, exam-based testing. Witnesses have suggested that the current focus on exam-based assessment places considerable pressure on pupils and can have a detrimental impact on their learning experiences in the 11–16 phase. While there remains a need for some kind of formal assessment at 16, given the number of pupils who change institutions at this age, the current exam burden is disproportionate, since pupils must now remain in education or training up to 18.**

178. **We recognise that radical reform of GCSEs would constitute a major shift in the current secondary assessment system. This transition would need to be made as part of a long-term programme, alongside changes to the post-16 phase, and extensive consultation would be critical. This clearly goes beyond the Committee's remit for this inquiry and so we have not made detailed recommendations in this area. We do, however, support recent proposals to move towards a slimmed-down form of assessment at 16, with externally validated assessment used across a smaller set of subjects.**

179. ***We urge the Government to consider proposals to reduce more dramatically the amount of external assessment undertaken at age 16, as it reviews options for a less onerous GCSE assessment model.***

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341 Q 15 (Sharon Hague, Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud), Q 137 (Dr Jo Saxton), Q 141 (Sir Ian Bauckham) and written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)

342 Department for Education, 'The Advanced British Standard: Everything you need to know' (5 October 2023): https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/10/05/the-advanced-british-standard-everything-you-need-to-know/ [accessed 6 November 2023]

343 Department for Education, *A world-class education system: the Advanced British Standard*, CP 945 (October 2023), p 7: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651d36656a6955001278b293/A_world-class_education_system_-_The_Advanced_British_Standard__accessible_.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

344 *Ibid.*, p 38

345 *Ibid.*, p 39

The Government should set out further details of its proposed review of GCSEs in its response to this report.

Non-exam assessment

Coursework and controlled assessment

180. When GCSEs were introduced in 1986, subjects were assessed by both coursework and exams, with the proportion of each varying from subject to subject. In 2006, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the regulator at that time, announced that controlled assessments would begin to replace coursework in many GCSE subjects. These assessments took place in the classroom and reduced the opportunity for outside help compared with coursework assessments. This change followed several years of criticism relating to the reliability of coursework and suggestions that it was often being amended, or even written, by teachers or parents.[346]

181. In 2011, the Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), which had replaced the QCA as regulator, commissioned a survey of teachers' experiences of controlled assessment, followed by a more comprehensive review in 2013. It found that, in general, controlled assessment was "well received" and that respondents felt it guarded against malpractice, provided a fair assessment of performance and assessed a broad range of skills. However, there were concerns about the impact on teaching and learning time, and the inconsistency with which rules were being followed, with many feeling there was too much room for schools to "interpret the guidance differently", or 'game' the system.[347]

182. Many of these concerns were reiterated to us by Dr Jo Saxton, Chief Regulator at Ofqual. She commented that "history has shown us that high degrees of non-examined assessment end up being very scaffolded by staff and not necessarily the best reflection of what students understand and know and can do." She added that this is particularly the case "when the qualifications are high stakes".[348] Sir Ian Bauckham, Chair of Ofqual, also noted that some students were previously doing up to 100 hours of controlled assessment. As this was done in class, it consumed large amounts of time in school that might otherwise have been used for teaching.[349]

183. In light of these concerns, from 2015 almost all GCSE subjects became assessed purely by examinations taken at the end of the course. Other types of assessment are now used "only where they are needed to test essential skills".[350] GCSEs in English literature, maths, biology, chemistry, physics, history and geography are all now assessed purely through examinations. English language GCSE does contain an element of non-exam assessment in the form of an oral presentation, but this component no longer counts towards a pupil's final grade. The only English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects that still contain non-exam assessment that contributes towards the final grade

346 EDSK, *Examining exams* (April 2023), p 16: https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/EDSK-Examining-exams.pdf [accessed 7 November 2023]

347 Ofqual, *Review of controlled assessment in GCSEs* (June 2013), p 11: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8092ff40f0b62305b8bf22/2013–06-11-review-of-controlled-assessment-in-GCSEs.pdf [accessed 6 November 2023]

348 Q 131 (Dr Jo Saxton)

349 Q 131 (Sir Ian Bauckham)

350 Ofqual, 'Get the facts: GCSE reform' (updated 26 January 2018): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-gcse-reform [accessed 29 November 2023]

are the modern foreign language qualifications.[351] Some non-EBacc GCSE subjects contain a significant proportion of non-exam assessment. For example, design and technology has 50%, music has 60% and art has 100% non-exam assessment.

Calls for more varied assessment methods

184. Much of the evidence we have received has called for a broader range of assessment methods to be used across a greater number of GCSEs. Dr Bousted told us that exams do some things well but are not "a valid way of assessing attainment" in key aspects of many subjects. For example, she highlighted the importance of project-based programming in computer science, extended research in history and fieldwork in geography, suggesting that all of these assess "essential fields of knowledge" in each subject which an exam cannot.[352] The Historical Association told us that the terminal exam in GCSE history is "more a test of how much the student can remember and does not allow them the room to show what they know".[353] They also argued that this assessment method is detached from real-life tasks: "In no other circumstances in the working world would someone be expected to produce a coherent, detailed and analytical extended response or report in 20–25 minutes of writing time."[354]

185. The Association of Colleges argued that the use of a narrow set of assessment methods is not adequately preparing pupils for post-16 study, particularly for technical and vocational options, or future employment. They told us that a more diverse range of assessment methods "would help to familiarise these forms of assessment, including practical, oral and work-based assignments and projects."[355] Young Enterprise told us that the shift to purely exam-based assessment in many subjects is "an example of where more practical applications of learning have been removed from education over time".[356] It stressed that coursework had helped to "build the confidence and motivation of those young people that found examinations challenging", as these pupils could demonstrate their understanding of the subject "in a more practical way".[357]

186. Rethinking Assessment highlighted a range of other assessment options that could be used instead of, or alongside, written exams. These include performance-based assessment, such as a viva or a practical assessment in music or sport, and extended investigations or projects.[358] Mark Marande, Principal of The Petersfield School, described the GCSE assessment system as "very one-dimensional" and proposed "project qualifications, interdisciplinary learning or micro-credentials" as alternative forms of testing that merit consideration.[359]

187. Pearson told us that in recent polling of pupils, parents, teachers, school and college leaders, and employers, "respondents articulated a strong preference

351 These contain a speaking assessment that makes up 25% of the overall grade.
352 Q 62 (Dr Mary Bousted)
353 Written evidence from Historical Association (EDU0075)
354 *Ibid.*
355 Written evidence from Association of Colleges (EDU0053)
356 Written evidence from Young Enterprise (EDU0054)
357 *Ibid.*
358 Rethinking Assessment, *A blueprint for change* (2023), pp 11–13: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NoyUc3P-wFi_LCJS0SlzzUrQxkLC2WsG/view [accessed 6 November 2023]
359 QQ 5, 13 (Mark Marande)

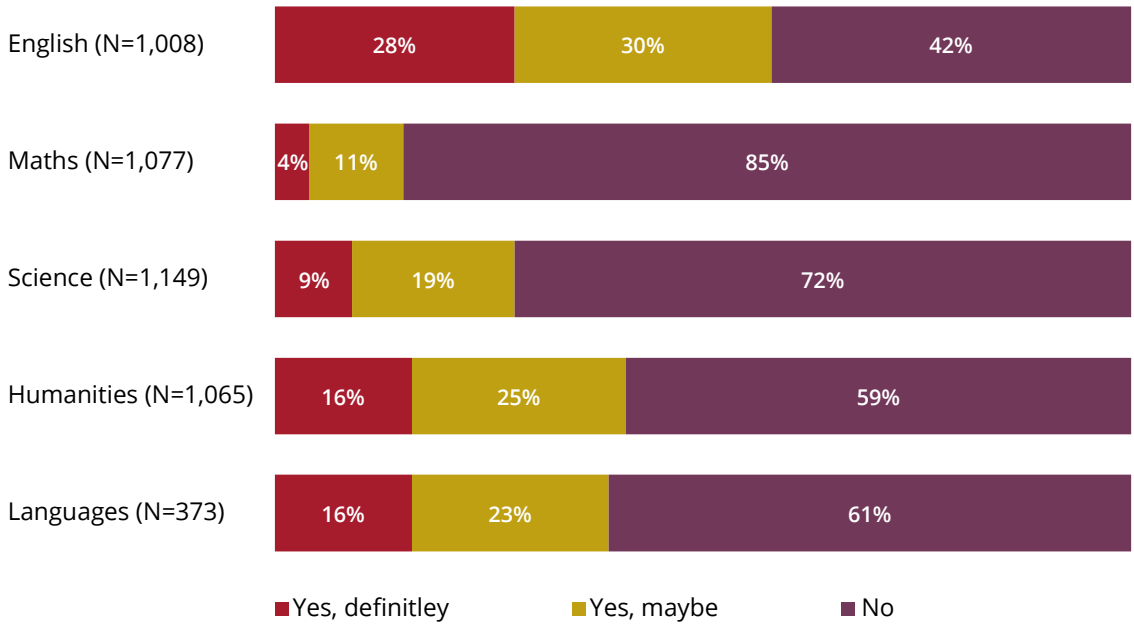
for regular assessments throughout the year—with more coursework, fieldwork, observations and internal assessment".[360] Parentkind noted that in their 2022 Parent Voice survey 76% of parents supported including some coursework in every GCSE subject, rather than examinations only.[361]

188. At our roundtable events, pupils told us that coursework helped them develop skills such as project and time management, and encouraged engagement throughout the year, compared to terminal exams. They argued that increasing the proportion of coursework in GCSE courses would reduce the pressure of exams and more fairly capture the abilities of all pupils.[362] Several teachers called for an end to "100% terminal exams" at GCSE.[363] A history teacher commented that coursework enabled pupils to "really explore what history is like". Arguing that coursework is used successfully in A-level history, they suggested that any problems in implementation at GCSE are "fixable".[364]

189. However, data from the survey app Teacher Tapp suggests that, in most EBacc subjects, the majority of teachers are against a return to coursework assessment at GCSE. Only among English teachers was there a majority in favour of a coursework component.[365] Pearson concluded that while "there is definitely scope to evolve the methods of assessment incorporated into existing GCSE qualifications", implementation would need to be carefully considered, "being mindful of teachers' time and the volume of teaching hours required to implement different assessment methods."[366]

360 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)
361 Written evidence from Parentkind (EDU0030)
362 Roundtable discussion with pupils (20 September 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42297/documents/210208/default/
363 Roundtable discussion with teachers (14 September 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42296/documents/210207/default/
364 *Ibid.*
365 Teacher Tapp, 'Ofsted, your colleagues and a return of GCSE coursework': https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/ofsted-your-colleagues-and-a-return-of-gcse-coursework/ [accessed 6 November 2023]. This survey question was answered by 5,137 teachers, with results weighted to reflect national school and teacher demographics.
366 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)

Figure 4: Teacher survey: "Would you like there to be an assessed coursework component at GCSE?"



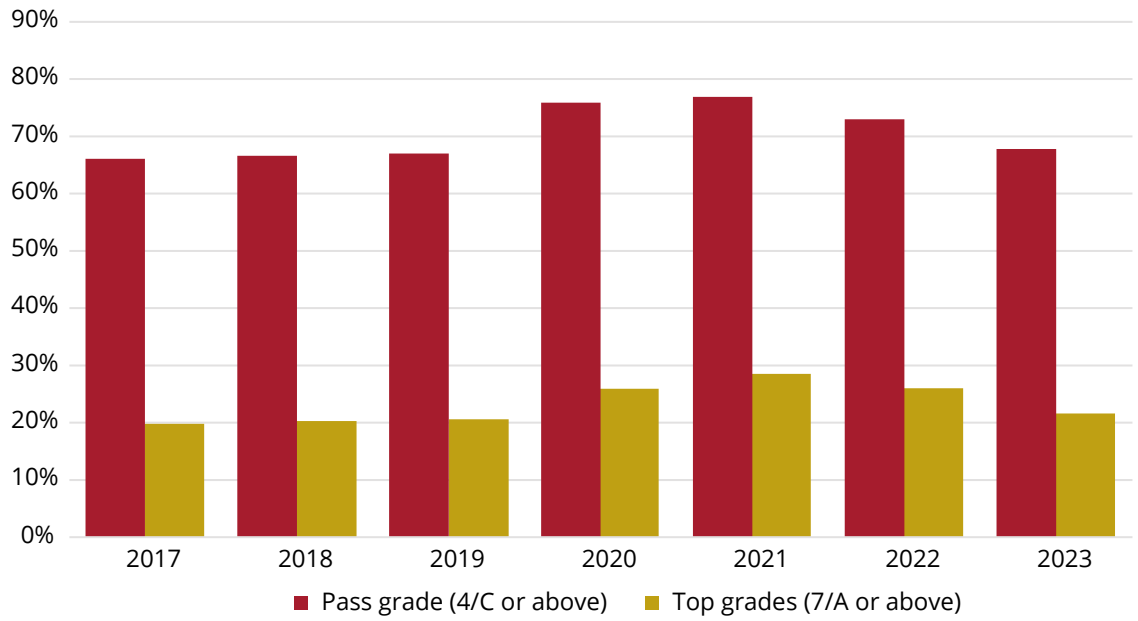
Source: Teacher Tapp, ' Ofsted, your colleagues and a return of GCSE coursework': https://teachertapp.co.uk/articles/ofsted-your-colleagues-and-a-return-of-gcse-coursework/ *[accessed 7 November 2023]*

Non-exam assessment and reliability

190. During the COVID-19 pandemic, examinations at key stage 4 were cancelled and grades were based solely on non-exam assessment, graded by teachers. This led some to raise concerns about grade reliability.[367] There was a significant increase in the number of top grades awarded at GCSE in both 2020 and 2021, followed by comparable falls in 2022 and 2023 when exams were reinstated.[368] A survey by Ofqual in 2021 found that less than 40% of the public had confidence in the A-level and GCSE grades awarded during the pandemic.[369] Dr Saxton noted that pupils she had engaged with supported a return to exam-based assessment, stating that: "I was overwhelmed by the extent to which students wanted their exams reinstated … They felt trust in the examined system, where there are expert markers."[370]

367 Evidence relating to the reliability of grading in exam-based assessment is discussed in paras 226–34.
368 Data available at Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ [accessed 10 October 2023].
369 EDSK, *Examining exams* (April 2023), p 4: https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/EDSK-Examining-exams.pdf [accessed 7 November 2023]
370 Q 132 (Dr Jo Saxton)

Figure 5: Percentage of GCSE grades awarded in all subjects (England only)



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications CIC, 'Examination results': https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/ *[accessed 10 October 2023]*

191. Mr McConville cautioned against placing too much emphasis on the experience of teacher assessment during the pandemic, due to the specific circumstances: "Teachers were not prepared for that experience … that was not a totally fair set of evidence to use to compare."[371] Likewise, Mr Glanville argued that teacher assessment can be implemented reliably through a robust moderation process, such as that used as part of the IB's Middle Years Programme:

> "We can ensure that teacher marks are consistent across schools through the moderation process … It is about selecting a random element from the teacher's marking and making sure that our examiners agree with the marks that the teacher has given and the reasons why. That can be done."[372]

192. However, the thinktank EDSK noted in a recent report that even with moderation in place, "students often appear to perform better in assessments such as coursework and controlled assessments that are graded by their teacher rather than external examiners".[373] Moreover, moderation is not able to mitigate against different pupils receiving different levels of teacher support during the non-exam assessment, or any other attempts by schools to 'game' the system. Mr Oates highlighted the example of Sweden where, with increased use of teacher assessment, there had been a significant increase in pupils' grade outcomes but "an almost mirror decline" in attainment, based on international surveys: "They found that they had relied on teacher assessment without a whole series of other safeguards in place. Sweden is now looking at introducing more testing, not removing it."[374]

371 Q 123 (Alistair McConville)
372 Q 123 (Matthew Glanville)
373 EDSK, *Examining exams* (April 2023), p 3: https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/EDSK-Examining-exams.pdf [accessed 7 November 2023]
374 Q 16 (Tim Oates)

193. EDSK also highlighted that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT present further challenges to ensuring reliability in non-exam assessment. They note that the ability of such tools to produce essays and projects with minimal input has significantly increased the risk of plagiarism. This issue was also raised by several witnesses, including Sarah Fletcher, High Mistress of St Paul's Girls' School. However, she argued that St Paul's is at least partially mitigating this risk by ensuring that extended essays are written in controlled conditions.[375] Mr Glanville commented that the increased prevalence of tools like ChatGPT could mean that teacher judgement will have an even greater role when non-exam assessment is used: "The people who are best placed to understand whether it is the student's own work are, of course, the teachers." However, he also noted that this can work only "if we have a system whereby the pressure on the teacher is not to maximise the student's grade but to represent the result accurately".[376]

The Higher Project Qualification

194. Witnesses have suggested that increasing take-up of the Higher Project Qualification (HPQ) could enable more pupils to benefit from the opportunities of non-exam assessment in key stage 4. The HPQ requires students to carry out research on a topic of their choice that is not covered by their other qualifications. They use this research to produce a written report and, in the case of practical projects, an artefact.[377] AQA, an exam board that offers the qualification, highlights that "a student can take inspiration from something studied in class or something completely unrelated to their studies".[378] Mr Newton told us that the HPQ "encourages the sorts of skills that excellent schools encourage—team working and problem-solving" and would be "an impressive thing to show an employer".[379]

195. The HPQ is overseen by project supervisors, who guide pupils through the process, and is expected to take 60 guided learning hours.[380] Schools and teachers are not assessed on their pupils' performance in the qualification since the HPQ is not recognised in the headline school accountability measures.[381] In 2023, the HPQ was taken by 5,347 pupils,[382] just 0.8% of all 16 year-olds taking GCSEs.[383] Jenny Clements, writing for the British Educational Research Association, highlighted that the take-up of the HPQ declined dramatically in the early 2010s. Over 20,000 pupils entered for the

375 Q 126 (Sarah Fletcher)
376 Q 123 (Matthew Glanville)
377 AQA, *Level 2 Higher Project Qualification*, p 7: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-W-7992-SP-19.PDF [accessed 8 November 2023]
378 AQA, 'Introduction': https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/projects/project-qualifications/PQ2-7992/introduction [accessed 8 November 2023]
379 Q 47 (Olly Newton)
380 AQA, *Level 2 Higher Project Qualification*, p 2: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-W-7992-SP-19.PDF [accessed 8 November 2023]
381 Department for Education, 'Key stage 4 qualifications, discount codes and point scores' (updated 28 September 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-4-qualifications-discount-codes-and-point-scores [accessed 8 November 2023]
382 Data available at AQA, 'Results statistics': https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/results-days/results-statistics [accessed 8 November 2023] and Pearson, 'Grade statistics': https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-statistics.html?Qualification-Family=Project-Qualification [accessed 8 November 2023].
383 Ofqual, 'Infographics for GCSE results, 2023 (accessible)' (24 August 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infographic-gcse-results-2023/infographics-for-gcse-results-2023-accessible [accessed 8 November 2023]

qualification in 2011, but this decreased to just 4,829 in 2016. One exam board, OCR, dropped the qualification completely in 2019.[384]

196. **There is some evidence to suggest that non-exam assessment produces less reliable grades than traditional exams. However, we heard that non-exam assessment supports the development of knowledge and skills that are more difficult to assess in an exam context. Witnesses suggested that, used alongside exams, it can lessen the pressure of assessment for pupils, by reducing the significance of terminal exams to their overall grade, and help to capture the full range of their achievements. We are persuaded that an increase in the use of non-exam assessment at GCSE would bring benefits for pupils.**

197. **Concerns about reliability, plagiarism and the impact on teacher workload mean that an increase in the use of non-exam assessment should be approached cautiously. Careful consultation with teachers and schools will be vital to ensure that any increase in the use of non-exam assessment at GCSE is manageable to deliver. Increasing take-up of the Higher Project Qualification would enable more pupils to experience the benefits of non-exam assessment at key stage 4, without requiring any significant changes to the current suite of GCSEs.**

198. ***As part of a longer-term review of qualifications at 16, the Government should introduce a greater proportion of non-exam assessment at key stage 4. In the short term, the Government should set out how greater take-up of the Higher Project Qualification at key stage 4 could be encouraged, to enable more pupils to undertake an extended project qualification alongside their GCSEs.***

On-screen assessment

199. The vast majority of GCSE exams in England are still conducted using pen and paper.[385] Even in GCSE computer science, most pupils do not use a computer to complete their exams. Sharon Hague, Senior Vice President of Pearson School Qualifications, highlighted to us that "Pearson is the only awarding organisation to provide an on-screen assessment in computer science where children are coding in the examination and being assessed on the quality of their coding. We are not the most popular."[386]

200. There have been strong calls in recent years for a move towards greater use of technology in school assessments. The Times Education Commission recommended online testing as part of its overall proposal for a slimmed-down assessment system at 16. It suggested that this could bring significant

384 BERA, 'The Higher Project Qualification: It doesn't matter what you've learned. At the end of the day, it's the grade': https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-higher-project-qualification-it-doesnt-matter-what-youve-learned-at-the-end-of-the-day-its-the-grade [accessed 8 November 2023]

385 We understand that only three GCSE examinations currently involve an on-screen component: the GCSE computer science exams offered by the Pearson and WJEC Eduqas exam boards, in which candidates are required to use the Python 3 programming language during the exam; and the WJEC Eduqas GCSE geology exam, in which candidates complete multiple choice questions, and short, structured and extended written answers on-screen. AQA, England's largest exam provider, announced in October 2023 that it would introduce digital assessment for some components of its GCSE Italian and Polish exams by 2026, and incorporate digital assessment into "at least one of the large entry subjects", for example GCSE English, by 2030. AQA, 'Click to the future: exams to go digital to better prepare the workforce of tomorrow': https://www.aqa.org.uk/news/click-to-the-future-exams-to-go-digital-to-better-prepare-the-workforce-of-tomorrow [accessed 8 November 2023]

386 Q 19 (Sharon Hague)

savings to the education budget and noted that AQA, an exam board "which has to print, deliver, collect and mark about 12 million scripts a year",[387] is already trialling on-screen assessment. The Institute for Government was also positive about the potential for online assessment, listing a move towards this as one of a series of "smaller improvements" to the current system that could have "important benefits".[388]

Benefits and barriers

201. A number of witnesses emphasised the potential benefits of on-screen assessment. Pearson told us that it can "facilitate a far more modern, flexible, and inclusive examination model for young people" and that "70% of teachers feel on-screen assessment will provide faster, better insights about students' performance, helping to improve teaching and learning".[389] The question of inclusivity was also addressed by the National Association of Special Educational Needs (NASEN.) They suggested that the dominance of paper-based exams presents teachers and special educational needs coordinators with "a difficult decision for students who benefit from assistive technology in the classroom, but who … would not be granted access to the same adaptive methods in exams". They argued that these pupils may be being "set up to fail".[390]

202. The International Baccalaureate Organization, which has offered digital assessments at the end of year 11 since 2016, highlighted that on-screen exams do not have to be simply "digitised conventional examination papers", but can "take advantage of the digital environment to utilise a range of innovative features".[391] The IB Middle Years Programme assessments, for example, may require students to engage with video content or plot graphs, as well as offering features that can support learning "such as hover-text to explain or define words that may be difficult for students".[392] Analysis conducted by AQA in 2022 identified "a general expectation" among the teachers and school leaders surveyed that with digitisation "the examination experience would evolve to become a richer one with, for example, real archive documents in history, digital mapping in geography and the use of relevant applications."[393] AQA's analysis also raised the important point that completing tasks on-screen will feel more familiar and relevant for many young people than completing them on paper:

> "Digital technology is what they have grown up with and how they prefer to work. Editing of answers is a clear advantage. Many prefer to type rather than write and few were concerned about typing in an exam situation given enough time to prepare. Typing is seen as an essential skill."[394]

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387 Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 40: https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times Education Commission final report.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

388 Institute for Government, *The exam question: changing the model of assessment reform* (August 2022), p 11: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/exam-question.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

389 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)

390 Written evidence from National Association of Special Educational Needs (EDU0038)

391 Written evidence from International Baccalaureate Organization (EDU0079)

392 *Ibid.*

393 AQA, *On-screen exams: what school leaders, teachers and students think* (July 2022), p 7: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/content/news/G02404-ON-SCREEN-EXAMS-REPORT-2022.PDF [accessed 25 September 2023]

394 *Ibid.*, p 20

203. AQA's polling found that 81% of headteachers and 64% of teachers surveyed felt that "digitisation of examinations is inevitable". Respondents were persuaded that this was necessary given the growing importance of digital skills in higher education and employment, and the centrality of digital experiences to young people's lives. AQA noted that "many teaching leaders felt examinations could not remain static amidst such fundamental change and to do so would have a negative effect on the ability of students to demonstrate their abilities in summative assessment."[395]

204. Dr Saxton described a move towards greater use of on-screen assessment as a question of "when, not if".[396] She noted that Ofqual is conducting "an ongoing feasibility study to look at … what would be needed for high-stakes qualifications such as GCSEs to be delivered on-screen."[397] In a recent speech, she argued that England should move towards having "a mixed approach" that combines on-screen assessment with more traditional, paper-based exams.[398] Dr Saxton also noted that there are "obstacles and pitfalls" and highlighted the importance of ensuring that any transition towards alternative forms of assessment "is safe for students".[399]

205. Ofqual published a review of on-screen assessment at the end of 2020 which found "no evidence in the literature of regulation as a barrier to greater adoption of online and on-screen assessment in its own right".[400] However, it did identify other barriers including:

- limited consistency in IT provision across schools and colleges;
- insufficient or unreliable internet and network capabilities in many settings;
- a lack of physical spaces in which on-screen assessments could be completed by a large cohort of pupils concurrently;
- a lack of specialist staff and appropriate training; and
- a lack of experience and infrastructure in schools to manage security risks consistently.[401]

206. Similar concerns were raised by NASEN and ASCL; the latter told us that "many schools are not sufficiently resourced to deliver large-scale assessments electronically".[402] Pearson noted that "only 2% of schools in England offer a 1:1 device to student ratio", a far lower percentage than in the United States, and stressed that sufficient funding would be needed to address practical

395 AQA, *On-screen exams: what school leaders, teachers and students think* (July 2022), pp 7–8: https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/content/news/G02404-ON-SCREEN-EXAMS-REPORT-2022.PDF [accessed 25 September 2023]
396 Q 136 (Dr Jo Saxton)
397 Q 129 (Dr Jo Saxton)
398 Ofqual, 'Dr Jo Saxton's speech at the Wellington Festival of Education' (7 July 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/dr-jo-saxtons-speech-at-the-wellington-festival-of-education [accessed 8 November 2023]
399 Q 136 (Dr Jo Saxton)
400 Ofqual, *Online and on-screen assessment in high stakes, sessional qualifications* (December 2020), p 25: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fd361b7e90e0766326f7f6e/Barriers_to_online_111220.pdf [accessed 8 November 2023]
401 *Ibid.*, p 4
402 Written evidence from National Association of Special Educational Needs (EDU0038) and Association of School and College Leaders (EDU0029)

barriers such as access to equipment.[403] Pearson also warned that many pupils in the UK may not have the required digital skills to complete on-screen assessments, citing polling among teachers: "When surveyed, 59% of secondary teachers feel the current curriculum does not provide learners with the necessary digital skills to take on-screen exams". They argued that "we need to ensure there is a level playing field for children from different backgrounds with different degrees of digital literacy".[404] ASCL similarly highlighted that "many young people still don't have everyday access to devices or unlimited access to internet data at home".[405]

207. We heard that pupils and parents have expressed reservations about on-screen assessment. A recent survey by Ofqual found that just one in five students and parents thought that all GCSE exams should be taken on a computer, with 48% of students and 54% of parents preferring a mixture of on-screen and handwritten assessments.[406] In contrast, Pearson drew attention to positive feedback received from candidates following on-screen assessment trials they conducted in Bahrain, UAE, Qatar and Spain in 2022. They noted that 77% of the 600 students who completed their final English language GCSE assessments on-screen said afterwards that they preferred the on-screen format to more typical pen and paper exams.[407]

208. Reflecting on transitions to on-screen assessment in other countries, witnesses suggested that the obstacles outlined above are not insurmountable. Ms Hague shared examples of how the issues of access to devices and data had been addressed in Egypt and the United States.[408] Dr Meadows highlighted the importance of "massive communication efforts … not just with schools but with parents and stakeholders beyond the education system". She also stressed the need for "political will" to drive change.[409] These factors, along with others such as thorough piloting and "a high degree of student input during transition", were similarly highlighted by Ofqual as being evident in jurisdictions that had "successfully implemented" a move to on-screen assessment.[410]

209. In this context, the Committee was interested to hear evidence on the introduction of on-screen assessments to measure literacy and numeracy skills across all maintained schools in Wales. Mr Busuttil-Reynaud, who has been closely involved in the rollout of these 'personalised assessments', emphasised the role of the Welsh Government in addressing the practical barriers faced by schools:

> "Taking lessons from Wales, the single most important thing is that the state has to do things that have to happen at a systemic level. The Welsh Government organised for the high-speed digital connection of all of their schools, funded that and made sure it happened. They also

403 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)
404 *Ibid.*
405 Written evidence from Association of School and College Leaders (EDU0029)
406 Ofqual, 'Dr Jo Saxton's speech at the Wellington Festival of Education' (7 July 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/dr-jo-saxtons-speech-at-the-wellington-festival-of-education [accessed 8 November 2023]
407 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)
408 Q 23 (Sharon Hague)
409 Q 25 (Dr Michelle Meadows)
410 Ofqual, *Online and on-screen assessment in high stakes, sessional qualifications* (December 2020), pp 5–6: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fd361b7e90e0766326f7f6e/Barriers_to_online_111220.pdf [accessed 8 November 2023]

> provided funding through the local authorities for devices and it was basically mandated that there would be on-screen assessment."

He concluded that "that has to happen as an enabler. The reason why we all use computing devices in business is because it is mission critical. It has to be made mission critical and mandated for schools".[411]

Adaptive testing

210. The on-screen numeracy and literacy assessments in Wales are a positive example of the use of 'adaptive' testing. In an adaptive test,

> "an algorithm controls the difficulty level of the questions. Each student faces different questions according to how well they are doing during the assessment. If the student is doing well and answering questions correctly, the difficulty of the questions increases. However, if the student struggles to answer questions correctly, the algorithm presents slightly easier questions."[412]

211. According to the e-Assessment Association and the Cambridge Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring, adaptive testing has a number of advantages. These include:

- being able to provide a more accurate measure of a candidate's performance, often in a shorter time than would be possible with more traditional forms of testing;
- making testing more personalised to a candidate's ability, thereby potentially increasing their motivation; and
- increased test security, since no candidate will answer exactly the same set of questions.[413]

Limitations to adaptive tests are that they can only realistically be delivered digitally and can therefore include only computer markable questions with a clear right/wrong answer.[414] The Times Education Commission saw adaptive testing as 'blowing apart' the secondary assessment system, arguing that it "would remove the need for all teenagers to sit the same paper at the same time across the country."[415]

411 Q 24 (Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud)
412 Cambridge University Press and Assessment, '5 reasons to use adaptive tests': https://www.cem.org/blog/5-reasons-to-use-adaptive-tests [accessed 8 November 2023]
413 e-Assessment Association, 'Adaptive Testing': https://www.e-assessment.com/news/adaptive-testing/ [accessed 8 November 2023] and Cambridge University Press and Assessment, '5 reasons to use adaptive tests': https://www.cem.org/blog/5-reasons-to-use-adaptive-tests [accessed 8 November 2023]
414 e-Assessment Association, 'Adaptive Testing': https://www.e-assessment.com/news/adaptive-testing/ [accessed 8 November 2023]
415 Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 40: https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times_Education_Commission_final_report.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

Box 2: The introduction of 'personalised assessments' in Wales

Pupils in maintained schools in Wales are required to take national 'personalised assessments' in years 2 to 7 (ages 6 to 13 at the start of the year) in procedural numeracy (number, measuring and data skills), numerical reasoning (solving problems) and reading. The assessments can be taken at any point during the academic year, at a time decided by the school. They must be taken at least once, and schools have the option to use them once more during the academic year.[416]

These assessments were previously taken on paper but since 2018 have moved to an online, adaptive format. As the assessment is personalised for each learner, there is no need for a whole class to take the test at the same time, and schools can choose to test classes, smaller groups or individual pupils as preferred, and according to their facilities. Following an assessment, feedback is provided in class by the teacher, in reports to parents and via Hwb, the Welsh Government's digital learning platform.[417]

The introduction of personalised assessments is part of a move in Wales towards the greater use of assessment for learning (or formative assessment) rather than assessment for school accountability purposes.[418] Prior to their introduction, the Welsh Government reiterated that the results of these assessments are not used to make judgements on school performance.[419]

212. Mr Busuttil-Reynaud emphasised the benefits of adaptive testing for formative assessment, noting that by testing pupils "on exactly the same scale" every year, the personalised assessments in Wales enable schools to see "their learning trajectory and overall performance" in literacy and numeracy.[420] He suggested this could help to improve pupil performance in GCSE English and maths, particularly for those who do not achieve a grade 4 or above at 16, by identifying those who need additional support sooner. He stressed that: "The seeds of that are planted long before GCSE."[421]

213. Another potential use of adaptive testing was highlighted by Dr Saxton. Currently some GCSE subjects, maths in particular, include the option to take the exam at either a higher or lower tier depending on the presumed ability level of the pupil. A lower (or foundation) tier paper features easier questions to give lower-ability pupils greater opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge.[422] These lower-tier papers are capped at grade 5, but theoretically increase the chances of lower-ability pupils achieving a grade 4 or 5 than if they sat the higher-tier exam. However, Mathematics in Education and Industry argued that there are weaknesses in this model:

> "The current two-tier GCSE mathematics has low grade boundaries for the lower grades at each tier so students can achieve those grades by

416 Welsh Government, 'Personalised assessments: information for parents and carers': https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/reading-and-numeracy-assessments/personalised-assessments-information-for-parents-and-carers/ [accessed 8 November 2023]
417 *Ibid.*
418 Welsh Parliament, 'Personalised Assessments: Assessment for learning not accountability?' (updated 27 May 2021): https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/personalised-assessments-assessment-for-learning-not-accountability/ [accessed 8 November 2023]
419 Welsh Parliament, Kirsty Williams AM, para 220: https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/4293#C16488 [accessed 8 November 2023]
420 Q 15 (Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud)
421 *Ibid.*
422 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)

picking up odd marks throughout the paper without demonstrating a thorough understanding of anything in particular."[423]

214. Requiring every pupil to complete the same adaptive test would remove the "tricky" decision for teachers, highlighted by Dr Saxton,[424] of deciding which tier paper a pupil should be entered for. Mr Busuttil-Reynaud suggested that if adaptive tests were adopted as the method of measuring literacy and numeracy skills at 16, they could provide "a straightforward assessment of [a pupil's] capability and whether they meet that grade 4/5 threshold boundary and remove the backwash pressure from GCSEs."[425]

215. Witnesses raised other important considerations regarding adaptive testing. Mr Glanville told us that as it can mark reliably only "a narrow right/wrong answer", we must avoid "a race to the bottom" in assessment: "We must not allow it to go to narrow multiple choice or drag and drop."[426] Dr Saxton also stressed that, due to the need for an extensive question bank to ensure adaptive tests are not predictable and therefore open to malpractice, "they are incredibly resource-intensive to develop." However, Sir Ian Bauckham identified the possibility of using AI to generate test questions in future.[427]

216. **Paper-based exams that require pupils to write for extended periods are increasingly out of alignment with the experiences and tasks young people will encounter in their education, life and work. On-screen testing represents a more modern approach and offers huge potential to enhance the assessment experience for learners. We welcome Ofqual's initial investigatory work in this area and support its future vision of a mixed model combining on-screen and paper-based assessment.**

217. **We recognise that there are numerous barriers to delivering a greater proportion of on-screen assessment within national exams at the end of key stage 4, including the need to develop school infrastructure and ensure pupils are equipped with the necessary digital skills. It is imperative that the transition towards on-screen assessment at GCSE is managed in a way that ensures fair treatment of all learners.**

218. ***The Government should lead on ensuring that the transition towards on-screen assessment at GCSE is implemented successfully. In its response to this report, the Government should summarise the steps it is taking to support progress towards a greater proportion of GCSE assessments being undertaken on-screen in future.***

Grading and marking

GCSE grade boundaries

219. Some have suggested that the fact that around a third of pupils do not achieve a grade 4 or 'standard pass' in their English and maths GCSEs each year is unavoidable due to the way GCSE grade boundaries are set. It has been suggested that grades are awarded according to a normal distribution, with fixed percentages of pupils receiving each grade each year, to ensure

423 Written evidence from Mathematics in Education and Industry (EDU0072)
424 Q 136 (Dr Jo Saxton)
425 Q 15 (Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud)
426 Q 126 (Matthew Glanville)
427 Q 140 (Dr Jo Saxton, Sir Ian Bauckham)

comparable outcomes between cohorts.[428] However, Dr Saxton confirmed that "there is absolutely no quota" for particular grades and that GCSE results "are a direct consequence of the marks that students achieve".[429] She noted that:

> "It is true that before the pandemic, grade distributions were very stable from one year to the next. It does not follow, however, that this is because there is a quota of available grades. Students are not fitted to a bell curve or normal distribution. Rather, the stability in grading reflects the stability in attainment from year to year."[430]

220. Sir Ian Bauckham also clarified that ensuring comparable outcomes from one year to the next does not rely on a fixed number of pupils achieving each grade:

> "It is about holding the relationship between the grade and the underlying performance standard year on year. You get debasement or inflation when that relationship is not held and a grade indicates progressively lower levels of performance. Provided that a particular grade—let us say a grade B at A-level—relates to the same standard of performance year on year, not the same number of students, you hold the value of grades."[431]

221. Grade boundaries are determined each year by the exam boards under the supervision and close monitoring of Ofqual. For GCSE English and maths, three factors feed into this process. First, each year 11 cohort's performance in national maths and English exams taken at the end of key stage 2 (SATs) is compared against that of a previous cohort. The performance of the previous cohort at GCSE is then used to predict what proportion of the current cohort will achieve each grade.[432] If one cohort's English SATs results were slightly higher than those achieved by the previous cohort, for example, then the GCSE English grade boundaries for that new cohort might be adjusted accordingly.

222. Ofqual then looks at two additional factors to assess how the actual performance of pupils in the cohort compares to what would have been expected based on SATs results. The primary method is consultation with senior examiners from each of the exam boards to see whether there is evidence of an improvement or decline in performance based on exam scripts received.[433] For GCSE English language and maths, Ofqual can also

428 The Times Education Commission, for example, described this as "an inevitable consequence of grade boundaries, set to ensure that a certain proportion of pupils get each mark every year." Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 23: https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times_Education_Commission_final_report.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

429 Q 132 (Dr Jo Saxton)

430 Letter from Dr Jo Saxton to Lord Johnson of Marylebone Chair of the Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee (24 July 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41096/documents/200101/default/

431 Q 132 (Sir Ian Bauckham)

432 Ofqual, 'Levelling the playing field' (24 March 2017): https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2017/03/24/levelling-the-playing-field/ [accessed 20 October 2023]. This article discusses predicting A-level grades, but Ofqual confirmed to us that the process is the same for GCSEs, using key stage 2 results.

433 Ofqual, 'Prediction matrices explained' (21 April 2017): https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2017/04/21/prediction-matrices-explained/ [accessed 20 October 2023]

refer to how pupils from the cohort performed in the National Reference Test (NRT).[434]

223. The NRT was introduced in 2017 and aims to provide an objective, longitudinal measure of how year 11 pupils in England are performing in English language and maths. The test is effectively identical each year and is taken by a representative sample of year 11 students.[435] Dr Saxton suggested that it "helps us to determine whether the underlying performance standard of 16 year-olds in this country in English and maths is changing".[436] She highlighted that the 2020 NRT recorded "a statistically significant improvement in performance in maths compared with 2017" and emphasised that this "would have been reflected in results that summer" had GCSE exams not been cancelled during the pandemic.[437]

224. For most GCSE subjects there is no NRT equivalent, which means evidence of improved performance can be more difficult to demonstrate.[438] Grade boundaries may therefore be less likely to be adjusted. Dr Saxton suggested that being able to refer to NRT data in other subjects "would be absolutely wonderful", but that funding for this "would not necessarily" be available from the DfE.[439]

225. **It has been suggested that the system for determining GCSE grade boundaries requires a fixed proportion of pupils to 'fail' their English and maths GCSEs each year. However, we are persuaded that it does not set quotas for the number of pupils who can be awarded each grade.**

Grade reliability

226. Dr Meadows, then Ofqual's Executive Director for Strategy, Risk and Research, told the House of Commons Education Committee in 2020 that 96% of GCSE grades in each subject are accurate "plus or minus one grade".[440] The then Chief Regulator of Ofqual, Dame Glenys Stacey, told the Committee in the same session that "they are reliable to one grade either way".[441] This analysis was based on a research paper Ofqual published in 2018. Ofqual outlined that whereas the probability of being awarded the

434 Ofqual, 'How do we achieve fairness in exams?' (26 April 2019): https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2019/04/26/how-do-we-achieve-fairness-in-exams/ [accessed 20 October 2023]

435 Ofqual, *National Reference Test information* (updated August 2023), p 3: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1179254/NRT_2019_General_Report_background_-_updated2023__1_.pdf [accessed 29 September 2023]

436 Q 132 (Dr Jo Saxton)

437 Letter from Dr Jo Saxton to Lord Johnson of Marylebone Chair of the Education for 11–16 Year Olds Committee (24 July 2023): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41096/documents/200101/default/

438 Ofqual, 'How do we achieve fairness in exams?' (26 April 2019): https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2019/04/26/how-do-we-achieve-fairness-in-exams/ [accessed 20 October 2023]

439 Q 139 (Dr Jo Saxton)

440 Oral evidence taken before the House of Commons Education Committee, inquiry on The Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Children's Services, 2 September 2020 (Session 2019–21), Q 997 (Dr Michelle Meadows)

441 Oral evidence taken before the House of Commons Education Committee, inquiry on The Impact of COVID -19 on Education and Children's Services, 2 September 2020 (Session 2019–21), Q 1059 (Dame Glenys Stacey)

"definitive" grade in maths at GCSE or A-level is 96%, this falls to 52% for qualifications in English language and literature.[442]

227. This led one witness to argue that, on average, one GCSE grade in four is wrong.[443] However, this notion was challenged by Pearson:

> "The probability of receiving a definitive grade varies depending on which mark you have (and how close you are to another grade boundary) and between subjects. We know that for subjects with essay questions, history and English, for example, it is reasonable for two experts to award two different marks to the same essay (25 or 26 out of 40)."[444]

They drew attention to comments made by Dr Saxton "in which she confirms that this does not mean that one in four grades are wrong, but that the method of assessing these subjects means that there is some expert judgement required."[445] Sir Jon Coles, Chief Executive of United Learning, challenged the 2018 Ofqual analysis itself, arguing that "it exaggerates the extent to which there is marker inaccuracy overall".[446]

228. Witnesses stressed that grade reliability can be a significant issue at the level of the individual pupil, given the weight that is placed on GCSE results.[447] Receiving a grade that is lower than expected in a particular subject could affect the post-16 routes available to them, or commit them to resitting their English and maths exams. Dr Meadows, now Associate Professor of Educational Assessment at the University of Oxford, commented that:

> "unfortunately … a lot of weight is placed on particular GCSEs for progression, maths and English being the obvious ones. In maths that is less problematic because the assessment in maths is generally highly reliable. In English that is problematic."[448]

229. Dr Meadows also argued that reaching a completely reliable measure of attainment at GCSE "in a complex area such as English literature" would be "pretty much impossible without the most extraordinarily long assessments and perhaps multiple assessments". She implied that this would not be desirable: "It is how we use the grades that needs to change rather than creating a system of lengthy assessments."[449] Pearson highlighted that an alternative way to improve reliability is to base assessments on multiple choice or short answer questions only. They noted, however, that for subjects such as English, this "would be of detriment to the learner experience of the subject and would not allow [pupils] to express their analysis or conclusions in long form."[450]

230. Dr Saxton told us that quality assurance of grading in England is "as good as it can be" and "up there with the best standards around the world".

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442 The term 'definitive' is "based on terminology ordinarily used in exam boards for the mark given by the senior examiner". Ofqual, *Marking consistency metrics* (November 2018), p 4 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759207/Marking_consistency_metrics_-_an_update_-_FINAL64492.pdf [accessed 29 September 2023]
443 Written evidence from Dennis Sherwood (EDU0007)
444 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)
445 *Ibid.*
446 Q 80 (Sir Jon Coles)
447 Q 20 (Dr Michelle Meadows), Q 80 (Sir Jon Coles)
448 Q 20 (Dr Michelle Meadows)
449 *Ibid.*
450 Written evidence from Pearson (EDU0093)

She highlighted that Ofqual has taken steps to improve transparency. For example, pupils are allowed to see their marks in a subject as well as their overall grade, and schools can now request to review a pupil's GCSE exam script if they are considering appealing a grading decision.[451] She also noted that technology has enabled advancements in marking, with scripts now being "divided up into questions and marked on-screen". She argued that this process "protects the student from the particular approach of one marker versus another".[452] Ms Hague raised similar points.[453]

231. Ms Hague also suggested that AI could play a role in the marking of GCSEs in the future, explaining that in the United States "automated marking is used extensively." She noted that the technology can assist with identifying anomalies in marks awarded: "You might have it marked twice by AI and then identify differences and use human scorers to check."[454] Dr Saxton suggested in a recent speech that AI "has a place" and could support "quality assurance of human marking and spotting errors".[455] Ms Fletcher was also positive about this potential use of AI, but stressed the need for regulation of the technology. This would be necessary to ensure that "the algorithms at its root and the way it is developed are genuinely equitable" and that it can effectively assess the skills and knowledge being measured. In particular, she noted that while existing AI tools can successfully mark shorter answers, they are less effective in assessing long-form or creative work.[456]

232. **Where external assessment is used, it is vital that GCSE grades are, and are perceived to be, accurate reflections of a pupil's performance. This is particularly important given that, at present, a pupil's GCSE results can have a direct impact on the post-16 options they are able to pursue. Robust processes must be in place to assure the reliability of grading. These should be kept under review, including in light of the potential enhancements that emerging technologies such as AI may bring to marking.**

233. **We heard that taking steps to increase the reliability of GCSE assessment would be likely to entail more extensive testing of pupils, or moving to a more limited set of question types. Such changes could have a detrimental impact on learners and would run counter to efforts to transition to a more varied and less onerous assessment system at key stage 4.**

234. ***The Government should instead prioritise lowering the stakes of assessment at 16, to ease the pressure for testing at this age to meet such high reliability standards, and reduce the present emphasis on exam-based assessment at the end of key stage 4.***

451 Q 135 (Dr Jo Saxton)
452 *Ibid.*
453 Q 20 (Sharon Hague)
454 *Ibid.*
455 Ofqual, 'Dr Jo Saxton's speech at the Wellington Festival of Education' (7 July 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/dr-jo-saxtons-speech-at-the-wellington-festival-of-education [accessed 29 September 2023]
456 Q 126 (Sarah Fletcher)

CHAPTER 4: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Introduction

235. There are several key performance measures within the current school accountability system in England which relate specifically to the 11–16 phase of education. These measures are published by the DfE and form the basis of school performance tables. They also inform the inspection regime operated by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), which inspects all state-funded schools in England.

236. Several witnesses made reference to the approach taken by Ofsted, characterising it as, for example, "results-oriented and reductive",[457] and "adversarial".[458] Some suggested that the current inspection system fails to support sustained school improvement, but instead distorts priorities in schools and intensifies pressure and workload for teachers and school leaders.[459] Similar criticisms were levelled by both the Times Education Commission and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, which called for Ofsted to take a more collaborative approach in its work with schools. The Times Education Commission described Ofsted as "a toxic brand".[460]

237. We recognise the need for a detailed examination of the effectiveness and impact of the current school inspection system, and we welcome the House of Commons Education Committee's decision to launch an inquiry into this subject earlier this year. In light of the scrutiny work being undertaken by that committee, Ofsted is not a key area of focus of this report. Nevertheless, we make reference to Ofsted's role as it relates to the accountability system affecting education for 11 to 16 year-olds, and we took evidence from Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, as part of our information gathering.

Key stage 3 and 4 performance measures

238. There are currently six headline school performance measures (also known as accountability measures) which relate to key stages 3 and 4:

- EBacc entry, which reports the percentage of pupils in a school entered for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subject combination;
- EBacc average point score, which measures student performance in EBacc subjects;
- Progress 8, which records the progress pupils make between the end of primary school and the end of year 11;
- Attainment 8, which records pupils' attainment in their key stage 4 qualifications and informs the Progress 8 calculation;
- the English and maths attainment measure, which shows the proportion of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in their English and maths GCSEs; and

457 Written evidence from Fair Education Alliance (EDU0024)
458 Written evidence from Edge Foundation (EDU0021)
459 Q 6 (Carolyn Roberts), Q 8 (Jamie Portman) and written evidence from NAHT (EDU0020)
460 Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best* (June 2022), p 44: https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times_Education_Commission_final_report.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

- the pupil destinations measure, which reports the percentage of pupils continuing in education, employment or training in the year following year 11.[461]

239. These measures apply to all state-funded schools in England, including those such as studio schools[462] or UTCs that offer an alternative or specialist curriculum. A school's scores in these metrics are published in DfE performance tables and as part of the school's entry on the GOV.UK school and college performance data website. Figures are compared against local authority and England averages. Scores against each of the accountability measures above are also now published for multi-academy trusts.[463]

Box 3: Types of accountability measure

The six headline accountability measures for key stages 3 and 4 represent a mix of attainment, threshold and value-added measures. Attainment measures such as Attainment 8 and the EBacc average point score record the outcomes (grades) achieved by pupils at GCSE. The English and maths attainment measure shows the proportion of pupils reaching the specified threshold of a grade 5 result in their English and maths GCSEs.

The Progress 8 metric is an example of a value-added accountability measure. In measuring the progress that pupils make between when they finish primary school and the end of year 11, Progress 8 gives an indication of the degree of improvement that a secondary school has 'added' to its pupils' performance in that time. Value-added measures are widely viewed as a fairer way of assessing and comparing school performance than threshold measures since they take account of pupils' baseline attainment. Improvement at all levels is therefore recognised, giving a better picture of a school's overall effectiveness.

Source: Department for Education, 'How to understand school performance–everything you need to know': https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/10/19/how-to-understand-school-performance-everything-you-need-to-know/ *[accessed 24 August 2023]*

240. Scoring poorly against these measures can have significant repercussions for a school; a lower league table ranking may mean it becomes a less attractive option for prospective pupils, and these figures are used by Ofsted as part of its inspection process and determination of gradings. Receiving an 'inadequate' grade from Ofsted means that a maintained school is required by law to become an academy. If a school is already an academy, it can be forced by the DfE to join a different multi-academy trust. These changes can also be enforced by the Secretary of State for Education if a school receives two or more consecutive ratings below the 'good' grade.[464]

461 The DfE announced in October 2023 changes to the headline performance that will be published from autumn 2024 and 2025 (see para 254).

462 The Government defines studio schools as "small schools (usually with around 300 pupils) teaching mainstream qualifications through project-based learning. This means working in realistic situations as well as learning academic subjects." HM Government, 'Types of school: Free schools': https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/free-schools [accessed 29 November 2023]

463 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 31: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

464 Department for Education, 'What are academy schools and what is 'forced academisation'?' (2 May 2023): https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/05/02/what-are-academy-schools-and-what-is-forced-academisation/ [accessed 10 August 2023]

241. Ms Spielman and Chris Russell, National Director for Education at Ofsted, both emphasised to the Committee that performance data is only ever interpreted alongside the first-hand evidence gathered during an inspection, and that there has been a shift in focus away from results data since the introduction in 2019 of the current inspection framework.[465] Nonetheless, Professor George Leckie, Professor of Social Statistics at the University of Bristol, told us that: "The stakes are so high at the moment that a lot of schools feel they have to strongly follow the specific performance measures" and that despite such statements from Ofsted "a lot of schools would still say that they feel that if their stats do not look good enough they are really under the cosh."[466]

242. There was an overwhelming consensus among the witnesses who addressed this issue that the high-stakes nature of the current accountability arrangements is having a detrimental impact on pupils, teachers and schools. The majority of the headline accountability measures for the 11–16 phase rely heavily on pupils' key stage 4 assessment outcomes, leading to a system that sees the pressures of external accountability "passed down the line of influence—from senior leadership to teachers to students".[467] We heard that the system leaves school leaders feeling "captured"[468] and unable to "bring themselves to do anything that is any kind of risk";[469] teachers feeling demotivated and confined to 'teaching to the test';[470] and pupils being encouraged to take courses which align well with accountability frameworks, "instead of what they would naturally flourish in".[471]

243. Witnesses also highlighted how the publication of performance data in league tables has effectively put schools in competition with one another, reducing their willingness to work together and limiting the benefits that could be drawn from such collaboration.[472] Research published by the DfE similarly concluded that "competition between schools, such as for school places or driven by accountability frameworks" was a key barrier to school-to-school collaboration.[473]

244. This raises broader questions about the appropriateness of publishing comparative school performance data. NAHT told us that:

> "The 'all schools and colleges comparison tables' on the performance data website have damaging consequences, encouraging the public to compare institutions in 'league tables'. When considering what information parents and carers need when choosing a school or college, there is no benefit to them in comparing all schools and colleges across the country.
>
> "The sheer quantity of data and performance measures published on the performance data website has become excessive and complex. This

465 Q 106 (Amanda Spielman, Chris Russell)
466 Q 78 (Prof George Leckie)
467 Written evidence from National Association of Special Educational Needs (EDU0038)
468 Q 76 (Sir Jon Coles)
469 Q 4 (Carolyn Roberts)
470 Written evidence from Edge Foundation (EDU0021) and National Education Union (EDU0071)
471 Q 6 (Jamie Portman)
472 Written evidence from NAHT (EDU0020)
473 Department for Education, *Exploring school collaboration and workload reduction* (January 2023), p 6: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1130804/Exploring_school_collaboration_and_workload_reduction.docx.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]

must be reviewed and reduced to provide information which is useful and meaningful for its intended users."[474]

245. In this context, we note the sensible temporary changes that the DfE made to the schools and colleges performance data website in 2022. These aimed to ensure that data from the 2021–22 academic year, which was affected by changes to key stage 4 assessment, marking and grading during the COVID-19 pandemic, was used appropriately.[475]

246. **The interplay between Ofsted's inspection regime and the collection and publication of school performance data relating to the 11–16 phase results in an accountability system that places intense pressure on schools. Its overreliance on key stage 4 attainment figures disproportionately raises the stakes of assessment in this phase and also pressurises teachers and pupils.**

247. ***The Government must ensure that the type and volume of school and college performance data it publishes balances the needs of users against the risk of undesirable outcomes, such as disproportionate pressure on schools and pupils. Taking forward the recommended reforms to specific key stage 4 accountability measures set out in this report presents an opportunity for the Government to conduct a wider review of the data it publishes for this phase, to ensure that an appropriate balance is being struck.***

The English Baccalaureate

248. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) comprises a specific set of GCSE subjects, defined by the DfE. It was introduced in 2010 and, according to the DfE, "keeps young people's options open for further study and future careers."[476] The EBacc does not contain any other qualifications available at key stage 4 such as Technical Awards. It is worth emphasising at the outset that the EBacc is a performance measure for schools, not a qualification for pupils.

249. The EBacc underpins two of the headline school accountability measures: EBacc entry and EBacc average point score (APS). It is also a key component of the Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures.[477] The EBacc entry measure reports the percentage of pupils in a school entered for the EBacc subject combination. For a pupil to have entered the EBacc, they must take up to eight GCSEs across five subject 'pillars':

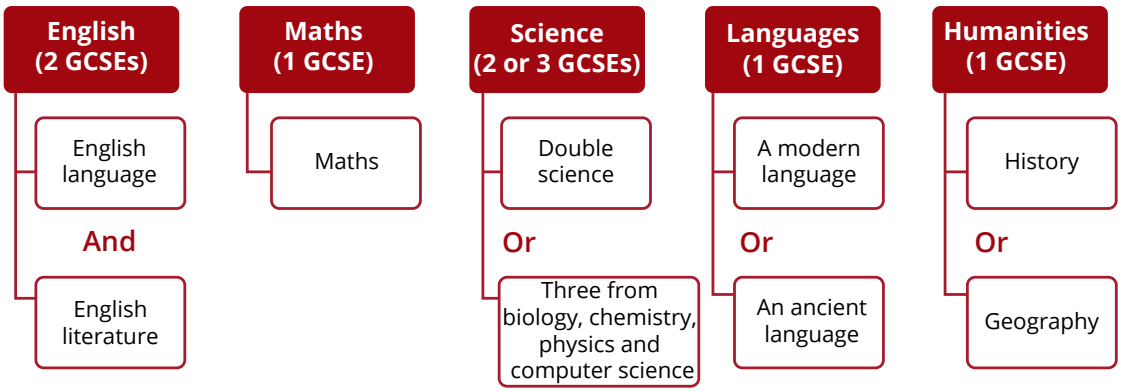
474 Written evidence from NAHT (EDU0020)

475 These included: removing the 'all schools and colleges in England' and local authority comparison tables; removing the reference to comparing schools and colleges from the website's name by changing it to 'Find School and College Performance Data'; and removing coloured 'bandings' from the presentation of progress measures to "discourage simplistic conclusions being drawn about a school or college's overall performance". ASCL, 'Changes to the Compare School and College Performance (CSCP) website': https://www.ascl.org.uk/Help-and-Advice/Accountability-and-inspection/Performance-measures/Changes-to-the-Compare-School-and-College-Performa [accessed 29 November 2023]

476 Department for Education, 'English Baccalaureate (EBacc)' (updated 20 August 2019): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc [accessed 29 November 2023]

477 *Ibid.*

Figure 6: The EBacc subject combination



Source: Department for Education, Consultation on implementing the English Baccalaureate (November 2015), p 13: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8066a940f0b623026934ab/Consultation_on_implementing_the_English_Baccalaureate.pdf *[accessed 7 November 2023]*

250. The EBacc average point score (APS) measures pupils' point scores across the five EBacc pillars. The EBacc APS for each pupil is calculated by summing a pupil's GCSE grades, which range from 1 to 9, in their EBacc subjects. The total is then divided by six.[478] The average score across all year 11 pupils determines a school's APS. If a pupil has not taken a subject in one of the five pillars, the APS will be calculated as if they had received a grade of zero in that subject, which will lower the school's overall APS.[479]

The national ambition for EBacc entry

251. To promote uptake of the EBacc subject combination, the Government has set a national ambition for 90% of year 10 pupils to be studying the EBacc subject combination at GCSE by 2025 (for examination in 2027)[480] and previously sought to have 75% of pupils studying the combination by 2022.[481] Ofsted's school inspection handbook refers to the national ambition for EBacc entry under the heading "Evaluating the quality of education". The handbook states that this is not a target for any individual school and that inspectors "will not make a judgement about the quality of education based solely or primarily on the school's progress towards the EBacc ambition".[482] It also notes that the EBacc ambition does not apply to special schools, studio

478 For example, if a pupil received a grade 6 in maths, a grade 5 in English, and a grade 4 in their other EBacc subjects, their EBacc APS would be 4.5. Only one English grade is included (the highest of either English language or English literature, but the pupil must have sat both), and the pupil's two highest grades in science subjects. A maximum of six EBacc subjects can be included in the calculation. Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 41–43: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

479 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 41: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

480 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)

481 Department for Education, 'English Baccalaureate (EBacc)', (updated 20 August 2019): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc [accessed 29 November 2023]

482 Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook' (updated 6 October 2023), para 220: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023 [accessed 29 November 2023]

schools or UTCs.[483] This position was reiterated by Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, who told us:

> "We do not translate [the EBacc ambition] into an expectation for schools, because it is not a value-added measure. There is no basis on which we could link a national ambition of 90% to an appropriate aspiration for an individual school. To the extent that it comes up, it is in the context of a school offering a broad and balanced curriculum to all pupils to age 16, not as a thing in itself."[484]

252. The inspection handbook, however, states in its guidance that EBacc entry is "an important factor in understanding a school's level of ambition for its pupils".[485] It also sets out that to achieve a 'good' or 'outstanding' grade in an inspection, a school must aim to "have the EBacc at the heart of its curriculum" and demonstrate "good progress" towards the ambition set by the DfE, where this applies.[486] We noted that Ms Spielman's statement above was later challenged in an article which drew attention to several recent Ofsted reports which explicitly referred to the level of take-up of EBacc subjects in the school being inspected.[487] Sir Jon Coles, Chief Executive, United Learning, commented that the ambition for EBacc entry "has nothing to do with inspection and should not be in the framework."[488]

253. Government data shows that the proportion of pupils entering for the full complement of EBacc subjects has fallen some way short of the national ambition in recent years. In 2022–23, only 39.3% of pupils entered the EBacc. This is in line with the recent average entry level;[489] while the entry level increased significantly from 21.8% in 2010 (when the EBacc was introduced) to 38.7% in 2014, it has since plateaued at just under 40%.[490] The DfE highlighted to us, however, that "entry in four of the EBacc's five subject 'pillars' (English, mathematics, science and humanities) has increased to exceed the ambition of 75% uptake by 2022 (for 2024 examination)."[491] Moreover, an increasing number of all GCSEs taken nationally are in EBacc

483 Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook' (updated 6 October 2023), para 270 and 280: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023 [accessed 29 November 2023]

484 Q 107 (Amanda Spielman)

485 Ofsted, 'School inspection handbook' (updated 6 October 2023), para 220: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023 [accessed 29 November 2023]

486 *Ibid.*, paras 442–443

487 'Spielman's EBacc inspection claims don't seem to stand up', *Schools Week* (23 June 2023): https://schoolsweek.co.uk/spielmans-ebacc-inspection-claims-dont-seem-to-stand-up/ [accessed 29 November 2023]

488 Q 79 (Sir Jon Coles)

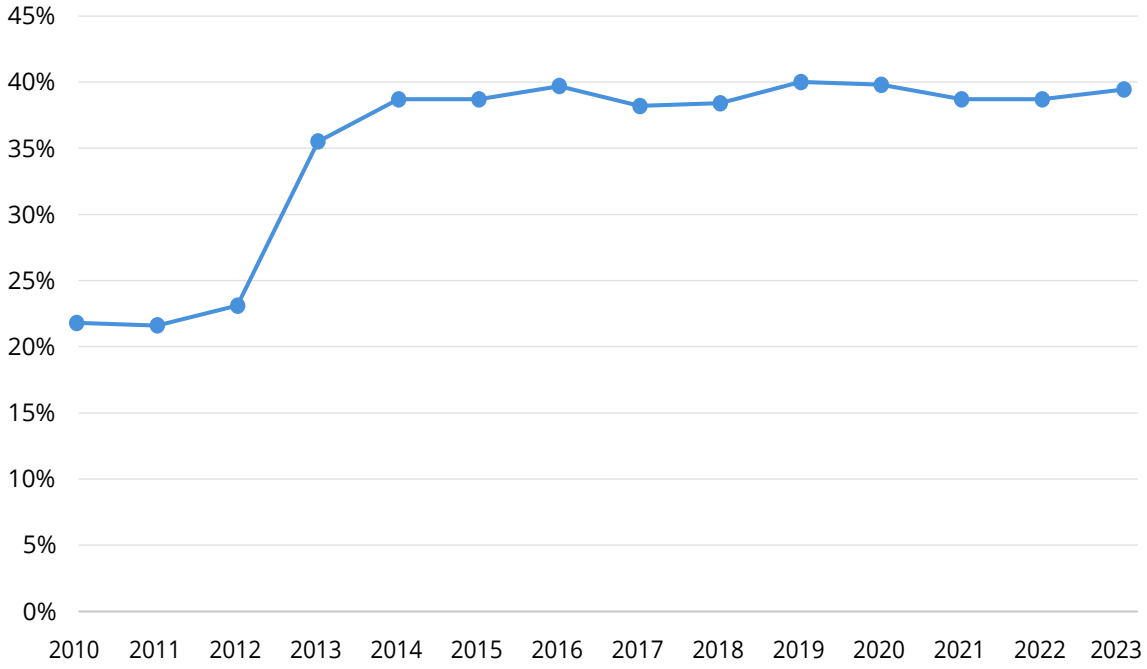
489 Department for Education, 'Academic year 2022/23 Key stage 4 performance' (updated 19 October 2023): https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance-revised#releaseHeadlines-tables [accessed 29 November 2023]

490 Department for Education, 'Key stage 4 performance, 2019 (revised)': https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/863815/2019_KS4_revised_text.pdf. [accessed 29 November 2023]

491 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)

subjects (rising from 78.9% in 2018[492] to 82.2% in 2023).[493] Therefore, although the EBacc entry level has remained relatively low since it was introduced, as most pupils do not take the full suite of subjects needed to fulfil the EBacc requirement, EBacc subjects make up a growing proportion of pupils' GCSE choices.

Figure 7: Percentage of pupils entering for the EBacc in state-funded schools



Source: Department for Education, 'Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2022/23': https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/f3bfbbf1-0dbf-4027-7db8-08dbdf454469 *[accessed 7 November 2023]*

254. The DfE clarified that the primary reason why the 2022 ambition was not achieved was due to low take-up of modern foreign languages at GCSE, meaning that many pupils do not take a subject that qualifies under the languages pillar of the EBacc.[494] The DfE announced in October 2023 its intention to "move to a headline EBacc attainment measure that incentivises full EBacc entry", suggesting this would be achieved through adaptations to the EBacc APS.[495] It said that it will "engage with the sector" prior to the change being introduced in 2024–25.[496] It has already confirmed that two additional headline performance measures will be published from autumn 2024: entries into triple science (the percentage of pupils entered for all three

492 Ofqual, 'Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2022 exam series' (26 May 2022): https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2022-exam-series/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2022-exam-series [accessed 29 November 2023]

493 Ofqual, 'Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2023 exam series' (1 June 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2023-exam-series/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2023-exam-series [accessed 29 November 2023]

494 Q 147 (Stuart Miller)

495 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 10: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

496 *Ibid.*

single science GCSEs) and entries into languages (the percentage of pupils entered for an EBacc language GCSE).[497]

Impact on subject take-up

255. In its report *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England*, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change sets out detailed analysis of how schools have pivoted over the last decade to dedicate more classroom time and teaching resource towards the EBacc subjects. It argues that this has increasingly "crowded out" other subjects, highlighting particularly the impact on creative subjects, including art and design, design and technology, drama and music.[498] Many witnesses similarly commented on the underlying tension between a focus on a fixed set of core subjects and participation in "those subjects that provide breadth and balance in the curriculum".[499] Indeed, there was near unanimous agreement across the evidence we received that the introduction of the EBacc has created "a hierarchy of subjects which devalues those not included".[500]

256. The Design and Technology Association for example described how the introduction of the EBacc has resulted in:

> "an increasingly narrow curriculum offer being offered to young people in many schools across England. This is hitting the creative subjects harder than it is others as these are increasingly viewed by school leaders as 'nice to have' rather than being an essential part of a broad and rich curriculum offer."[501]

National Drama argued that the EBacc has "had a devastating impact on drama and theatre education in terms of funding and subject status",[502] while Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive, Independent Society of Musicians, stated that "schools have heard the call from the DfE as to what matters and they are rejigging their timetables to deliver on the EBacc subjects".[503]

257. Tom Middlehurst, Curriculum, Assessment and Inspection Specialist, ASCL, suggested that the orientation of resources towards the subjects promoted by accountability measures is almost unavoidable when budgets are stretched. He also stressed that the deprioritisation of subjects at GCSE has implications beyond key stage 4: "it means that key stage 3 is inevitably reduced as well. You cannot run key stage 3 subjects if you cannot fund them through key stage 4."[504] NAHT argued:

> "The performance measures related to the EBacc must be ended … The rigid and prescriptive set of GCSEs which form the EBacc is limiting and unrealistic; not only does the EBacc have the effect of narrowing

497 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 10: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

498 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England* (August 2022), pp 25–32: https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/1nrrxVUPtZzMdI5U3ER4Ep/2f86cc94b653ab7992a35917560814b9/Ending-the-Big-Squeeze-on-Skills-How-to-Futureproof-Education-in-England.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

499 Written evidence from National Education Union (EDU0071)

500 Written evidence from Association of Colleges (EDU0053)

501 Written evidence from Design and Technology Association (EDU0026)

502 Written evidence from National Drama (EDU0067)

503 Q 42 (Deborah Annetts)

504 Q 61 (Tom Middlehurst)

> the curriculum at key stage 4, but the effects can be seen at key stage 5 too."[505]

258. Rt. Hon. Nick Gibb MP, then Minister of State for Schools, maintained that the EBacc provides sufficient flexibility and choice for individual pupils: "If they are a musician and want to study music, there is scope for that. There is scope for vocational and technical subjects."[506] Juliet Chua, Director-General for Schools, Department for Education, noted that results achieved in non-EBacc subjects and technical qualifications would be recognised in the Progress 8 metric.[507] Sir Jon Coles, Group Chief Executive, United Learning, said that:

> "I believe, and I think our schools demonstrate very clearly, that you can teach a rich academic curriculum … alongside opportunities for children to study technical subjects and vocational subjects in key stage 4, and that that is not in contradiction with teaching the arts, music, drama, and art itself".[508]

The EBacc and social mobility

259. The Government has argued that "lower participation in core academic subjects can negatively affect social mobility"[509] and that "studying subjects included in the EBacc provides students with greater opportunities in further education and increases the likelihood that a pupil will stay on in full-time education."[510] Mr Gibb reiterated this:

> "The EBacc is not just about that choice of subjects. It is a social mobility/social justice issue. Why, if you come from a disadvantaged background, should you be studying a different curriculum from those who come from more advantaged backgrounds?"

He noted that in 2010 "only 8.6% of disadvantaged pupils who were eligible for free school meals were entered for that [subject] combination, whereas it was a quarter for advantaged pupils" and that "as a consequence of the EBacc policy, that 8% has gone up to 27%. For advantaged pupils, it has gone from 25% to 43%."[511]

260. The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change argued that this justification for the EBacc is "unconvincing", proposing that the improved education and employment outcomes achieved by more advantaged pupils depend on factors beyond studying a core of traditional academic subjects.[512] Indeed, research into the impact of the EBacc on social mobility offers limited evidence to support the Government's position. For example, a 2018 Sutton Trust report

505 Written evidence from NAHT (EDU0020)
506 Q 144 (Nick Gibb MP)
507 Q 150 (Juliet Chua)
508 Q 73 (Sir Jon Coles)
509 Department for Education, 'Education Secretary sets vision for boosting social mobility' (31 July 2018): https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-sets-vision-for-boosting-social-mobility [accessed 29 November 2023]
510 Department for Education, 'English Baccalaureate (EBacc)' (updated 20 August 2019): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc [accessed 29 November 2023]
511 Q 145 (Nick Gibb MP)
512 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England* (August 2022), pp 33: https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/1nrrxVUPtZzMdI5U3ER4Ep/2f86cc94b653ab7992a35917560814b9/Ending-the-Big-Squeeze-on-Skills-How-to-Futureproof-Education-in-England.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

that compared pupil attainment and proportion of pupils entered for the EBacc across 58 multi-academy trusts suggested that "there seems little to support the idea that those [multi-academy trusts] with high EBacc entry rates are necessarily improving disadvantaged pupils' performance in English and maths". The authors found that "most of those [academy] chains with a high level of EBacc entry among their disadvantaged pupils showed little or no increase in the percentage achieving both English and maths".[513]

261. Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge University Press and Assessment, noted that:

> "A particular school that I am closely connected with has a relatively low EBacc entry … It is an effective school in the outcomes that are achieved for young people."[514]

He continued: "Some [kids] have their needs met by having a combination of qualifications that are not within the EBacc specification. This is important."[515] Carolyn Roberts, Headteacher of Thomas Tallis School in Greenwich, which has become a 'magnet school' for pupils with special educational needs, told us that she is "a great believer that any child of any ability has the entitlement to study [the EBacc] subjects". However, she commented that:

> "For a child who is a slow acquirer of learning, it is a deadly experience if that is all you do in school. That means that they are frustrated, behave badly, drop out and stop coming to school. It makes teachers' lives really hard."[516]

262. ASCL argued that:

> "In 2022, the gap between disadvantaged students and their wealthier peers was the largest in a decade, as was regional disparity.
>
> The focus on academic subjects in the EBacc may contribute to this, with pupils being compelled to take subjects they do not enjoy or feel motivated by. While Attainment 8 and Progress 8 encourage this take-up in a more nuanced way, the EBacc itself is restrictive and not the right range of subjects for all young people."[517]

The "university route"

263. The DfE states that the EBacc enables pupils to "keep their options open to follow any path post 16".[518] While Sir Jon Coles agreed that the EBacc subject combination gives "the best access to the best range of post-16 options",[519] other witnesses challenged this view. Olly Newton, Chief Executive, Edge Foundation, argued that if pupils have limited opportunities to study creative and technical subjects at key stage 4, "we ask a great deal of them to get to

513 Sutton Trust, *Chain Effects 2018: The impact of academy chains on low-income pupils* (December 2018), p 29: https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Chain-Effects-2018.pdf [accessed 21 September 2023]
514 Q 20 (Tim Oates)
515 *Ibid.*
516 Q 7 (Carolyn Roberts)
517 Written evidence from Association of School and College Leaders (EDU0029)
518 Written evidence from Department for Education (EDU0085)
519 Q 82 (Sir Jon Coles)

16 and be ready to go into an interview to be an apprentice, say, and to know what that is about."[520]

264. In setting out the principles behind his proposed Greater Manchester Baccalaureate, or MBacc, Rt. Hon. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, explicitly characterised the EBacc as "the university route".[521] While emphasising that he was "in no way … denigrating"[522] this pathway, Mr Burnham argued that the current accountability measures are sending a strong signal to young people who do not aspire to follow it, by creating "a sense that the system is disinvesting from them and they are somehow a second-class student because they are not in the system that the school prioritises".[523]

265. He suggested that the MBacc, which would recognise subjects such as engineering, business studies and art and design, would support the provision of a clear and equally valued route for the 64% of students in Greater Manchester who do not go to university and who may wish to pursue technical qualifications or apprenticeships at key stage 5. He argued that this could in turn help to address the currently elevated rates of school absences, suspensions and exclusions by tackling "the feeling of many young people at 14 and 15 that they cannot see where school is taking them".[524]

266. The EBacc's composition is "based on what used to be called the facilitating subjects",[525] meaning it is geared towards the requirements of university entrance. Around three in five 18 year-olds in the UK do not go to university; the figure was 62.5% in 2022.[526] In 2022, just 18% of the school leaving cohort started a degree at a Russell Group institution.[527]

Box 4: Facilitating subjects

The term 'facilitating subjects' arose from a booklet entitled 'Informed Choices', published in 2011 by the Russell Group, a representative body with a self-selecting membership composed of 24 large, research-intensive universities. It referred to A-level subjects that were "required more often than others" for entry to these universities: mathematics and further maths, English, physics, biology, chemistry, geography, history, and classical and modern languages.[528] The Russell Group "scrapped" the list in 2019, saying that it had been "misinterpreted" by students who mistakenly thought these were the only subjects that top universities would consider.[529] However, Mr Gibb suggested that though the Russell Group stopped using this designation "the truth remains that those are the subjects that are most likely to secure you a place at a high-tariff university."[530]

520 Q 46 (Olly Newton)
521 Q 83 (Andy Burnham)
522 Q 84 (Andy Burnham)
523 Q 85 (Andy Burnham)
524 *Ibid.*
525 Q 145 (Nick Gibb MP)
526 House of Commons Library, Higher education student numbers, Research Briefing, CBP-7857, February 2023
527 The school leaving cohort refers to the number of 18 year olds who did a level 3 qualification and was 360,368 in 2022. Data available at Department for Education, 'Download data': https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/download-data [accessed 29 November 2023].
528 EDSK, *A step baccward* (July 2019), p 8: https://www.edsk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A-step-Baccward.pdf [accessed 29 November 2023]
529 'Russell Group scraps preferred A-levels list after arts subjects hit', *The Guardian* (23 May 2019): Russell Group scraps preferred A-levels list after arts subjects hit | A-levels | The Guardian
530 Q 145 (Nick Gibb MP)

267. Sir Jon Coles, while expressing some support for the EBacc as a guiding principle for the curriculum, argued that: "The 90% target for EBacc is a mistake and should be dropped. It is not the right option for 90% of children to do that precise range of subjects".[531]

268. **The Government's ambition that 90% of pupils in state-funded schools should enter for the EBacc sends a strong message as to which subjects should be prioritised, which is echoed by the references to the EBacc in Ofsted's handbook and recent school inspection reports. Faced with the pressures of a high-stakes accountability system and stretched resources, schools have understandably organised their curricula in line with the EBacc's requirements, often deprioritising creative, artistic and technical subjects as a result.**

269. **Core subjects such as English, maths and science should form a central part of the key stage 4 curriculum, and all pupils should have the opportunity to pursue traditionally academic subjects at key stage 4 should they wish. Nonetheless, the EBacc subject combination is overly restrictive and demotes to second-tier status subjects that bring breadth and balance and enable the development of essential skills.**

270. **There is a continued connection between the EBacc's composition and the facilitating subjects list previously used to designate the A-level subjects most often required for entry to high-tariff universities. This gives undue prominence to the university route and is no longer justifiable given the Russell Group's withdrawal of this classification.**

271. ***The Government must immediately abandon the national ambition for 90% of pupils in state-funded mainstream schools to be taking the EBacc subject combination. The EBacc subject categorisation, and the EBacc entry and EBacc average point score accountability measures, should also be withdrawn in their entirety, and all references to the EBacc in the Ofsted school inspection handbook removed.***

Progress 8

272. Ms Spielman said that of the headline accountability measures published by the DfE: "Progress 8 is the measure that clearly carries the most weight … It is the headline measure that the Government use. It is the most widely considered in schools".[532] Progress 8 is a value-added performance measure that aims to capture the progress that pupils make from when they finish key stage 2 (at the end of primary school) to when they finish key stage 4 (usually at age 16). A pupil's Progress 8 score is "based on whether their actual GCSE scores are higher or lower than those achieved by pupils who had similar attainment at the end of primary school."[533] The Progress 8 score for a school is determined by calculating the average of the Progress 8 scores for all its year 11 pupils. Government guidance makes clear that "Progress 8 is calculated for individual pupils solely in order to calculate average Progress

531 Q 82 (Sir Jon Coles)
532 Q 106 (Amanda Spielman)
533 Education Policy Institute, *The introduction of Progress 8* (March 2017), p 1: https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The_Introduction_of_P8.pdf [accessed 4 August 2023]

8 scores … Schools should not share individual pupil progress scores with pupils or parents."[534]

273. Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 and replaced the previous headline measure for secondary schools, which was a threshold measure reporting the percentage of pupils receiving five A* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and maths. A recent review by the British Educational Research Association identifies that the move to a value-added measure had been "long called for by academic research" and that Progress 8 is "widely viewed as a fairer measure for comparing schools for accountability and choice purposes".[535] While some value-added measures had been published by the DfE in the past, the introduction of Progress 8 was the first time that such measures were positioned at "the sharp end of the accountability system as part of the minimum floor standards."[536]

Progress 8 and Attainment 8

274. Progress 8 is closely linked to the Attainment 8 accountability measure, which references a pupil's results at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 4. A pupil's performance at key stage 2 is determined by assessments in English reading and maths, commonly known as SATs. These SATs scores are used to create an estimated Attainment 8 score for that pupil, based on the average performance at key stage 4 of all pupils with the same SATs score. When the pupil finishes key stage 4, their actual Attainment 8 score is calculated. This is based on the pupil's best results in eight subjects, two of which are required to be GCSEs in maths and English. Of the remaining six results, three must be for GCSEs that count towards the EBacc (sciences, humanities and ancient or modern foreign languages). The other three can be for any key stage 4 qualification from a list compiled by the DfE, which includes GCSEs in other subjects and some Technical Awards.[537] The three components of Attainment 8 and Progress 8 are often referred to as 'buckets'.

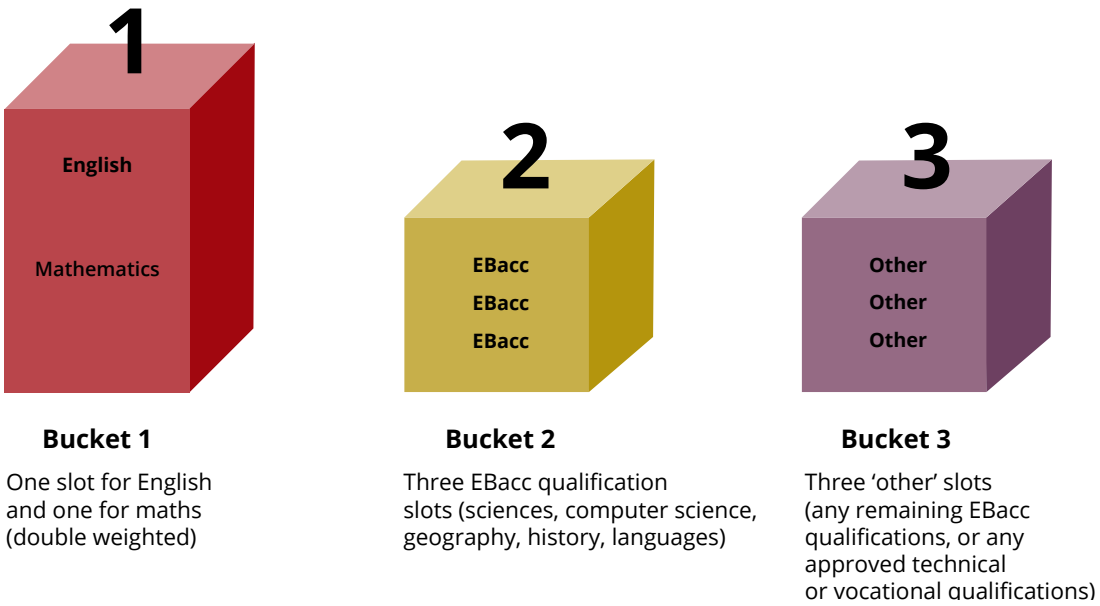
534 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools*, p 13

535 Lucy Prior, John Jerrim, Dave Thomson, George Leckie, 'A review and evaluation of secondary school accountability in England: Statistical strengths, weaknesses and challenges for 'Progress 8' raised by COVID-19', Review of Education, vol. 9, (2021), pp 2–3: https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/rev3.3299 [accessed 7 August 2023]

536 Education Policy Institute, *The introduction of Progress 8* (March 2017), p 1: https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The_Introduction_of_P8.pdf [accessed 4 August 2023]

537 Department for Education, 'Key stage 4 qualifications, discount codes and point scores' (updated 28 September 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-4-qualifications-discount-codes-and-point-scores [accessed 29 November 2023]

Figure 8: Attainment 8 and Progress 8 subject 'buckets'



Source: Department for Education, Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools (October 2023), p 15: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf *[accessed 7 November 2023]*

275. A pupil's Attainment 8 score is calculated by summing the best grades they received in subjects that fit the above criteria. The pupil's grade in maths is double weighted, as is their best English grade.[538] A fully worked example of how Attainment 8 is calculated is set out on the DfE website.[539] Subtracting a pupil's estimated Attainment 8 from their actual Attainment 8 score demonstrates the progress they have made during their secondary school education, compared to peers with a similar level of prior attainment. To generate Progress 8 scores, this figure is divided by 10. Individual scores are then incorporated into an average Progress 8 score for all pupils on the year 11 roll at a school.[540]

Strengths and weaknesses

276. Witnesses told us that the introduction of Progress 8 has had a series of negative effects on pupils and schools. NCFE argued that "schools are under pressure to deliver against the Progress 8 metric" and that as a result "attitudes have moved away from 'what's best for the learner' towards 'what's going to achieve the best Progress 8'". They argued that Progress 8 "overemphasises academic learning", leading to a narrowing of the curriculum at key stage 4.[541]

538 This occurs only if a pupil takes GCSEs in both English language and English literature, which most do.

539 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 33: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

540 *Ibid.*, p 36

541 Written evidence from NCFE (EDU0104)

277. Pupils must take a minimum of five EBacc subjects to fulfil the requirements of the first two Progress 8 buckets.[542] However, Professor George Leckie, Professor of Social Statistics, University of Bristol, felt that Progress 8 is in fact "more EBacc-focused than first comes across".[543] He argued that this is because of the requirement for both English language and English literature GCSEs to be taken in order for a pupil's English result to be double weighted in the calculation, thereby boosting their overall score. The English subject that is not counted under the double-weighted English bucket usually makes up one of a pupil's three 'other' subjects.[544] Prof Leckie highlighted that this "really means that you only have two slots to play with, not three."[545]

278. Tony Ryan, Chief Executive, Design and Technology Association, noted that having only one bucket for non-EBacc subjects means that design and technology is effectively directly competing against other creative subjects such as art and design, with pupils being unlikely to be able to take more than one of these subjects.[546] He concluded that "Progress 8 is harming individual students" and that it "has to be rethought".[547] Similarly, BCS argued that timetabling constraints linked to the EBacc and Progress 8 affect take-up of computer science at GCSE, despite computer science being an EBacc subject:

> "While computer science is listed as an EBacc subject, it is grouped with the natural sciences. As these are compulsory national curriculum requirements, computer science tends to be offered in the more general subject choice 'buckets' alongside subjects such as art, PE, DT and so on, where, because of its perceived difficulty, it struggles to attract students." [548]

Mr Newton drew attention to a similar effect on take-up of Technical Awards, stating that Progress 8 and the EBacc must change if we are ever to "make a shift" in the number of pupils taking these qualifications at key stage 4.[549]

279. A school's Progress 8 score includes only the results of pupils enrolled in the January of year 11; any pupil who leaves before then is not included in the measure. Dave Thomson, Chief Statistician at FFT Education Datalab, suggested that this could encourage schools to engage in 'off-rolling',[550] as "there is an incentive to move pupils who might not achieve very well off the roll before then".[551]

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542 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), pp 12–15: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

543 Q 72 (Prof George Leckie)

544 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 19: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

545 Q 72 (Prof George Leckie)

546 Q 42 (Tony Ryan)

547 Q 44 (Tony Ryan)

548 Written evidence from BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (EDU0090)

549 Q 47 (Olly Newton)

550 Ofsted defines this as "the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the best interests of the pupil." Ofsted, 'What is off-rolling, and how does Ofsted look at it on inspection?' (10 May 2019): https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2019/05/10/what-is-off-rolling-and-how-does-ofsted-look-at-it-on-inspection/ [accessed 18 September 2023]

551 Q 69 (Dave Thomson)

280. Prof Leckie highlighted that, due to the cancellation of key stage 2 assessments in 2020 and 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will not be possible to calculate Progress 8 scores for the pupil cohorts who complete key stage 4 in 2025 or 2026. He suggested that the next few years represent "a natural opportunity" to consider modifications to the Progress 8 measure.[552]

281. However, Prof Leckie welcomed the "focus on progress" that came with the introduction of the new metric in 2016:

> "The contextualisation in terms of starting achievements … is all-important. We are now trying to move closer to measuring the actual learning that happens on average in each school. That, for me, is the biggest strength."[553]

282. While also identifying the benefits of moving to a contextual value-added measure,[554] Mr Thomson agreed, acknowledging that Progress 8 "rewards every grade. It encourages schools to teach well and help students achieve the best grade possible."[555] This is supported by prior analysis conducted by Mr Thomson and Simon Burgess, University of Bristol, which concluded that "the introduction of Progress 8 had the intended effect of shifting schools' focus away from students who were marginal to the previous accountability threshold … In that sense, the policy 'worked'."[556]

283. Mr Middlehurst argued that the measure is "quite nuanced" and allows schools to "adapt their curriculum", while setting an appropriate requirement that pupils take at least three academic subjects, as well as English and maths.[557] Likewise, Sir Jon Coles described Progress 8 as a "pretty reasonable measure of school performance", noting that it "reflects the curriculum that most children study pretty well".[558] He also suggested that while one "could make the argument" that it is difficult to take several creative subjects while also fulfilling the requirements of the EBacc, meeting the requirements of Progress 8 would not prevent a pupil studying those subjects.[559] The level of flexibility offered by Progress 8 would of course be enhanced by removing the link between it and the EBacc, which would be an inevitable outcome of the withdrawal of the EBacc subject categorisation called for earlier in this chapter.

284. The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change concluded that:

> "The concept that underpins Progress 8 is sound: it is a value-added measure of performance in context and therefore rewards schools for

552 Q 69 (Prof George Leckie)
553 *Ibid.*
554 A contextual value-added measure would take account of factors beyond prior attainment which can influence pupils' performance, such as socioeconomic background. FFT Education Datalab argued that "differences in attainment between the majority of schools are actually tiny once context and prior attainment [are] taken into account". FFT Education Datalab, 'Value added measures in performance tables: A recap of the main issues for secondary schools': https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2018/05/value-added-measures-in-performance-tables-a-recap-of-the-main-issues-for-secondary-schools/ [accessed 22 September 2023]
555 Q 69 (Dave Thomson)
556 Dave Thomson, Simon Burgess, *Beyond the threshold: the implications for pupil achievement of reforming school performance metrics*, (August 2022), p 19: https://www.bristol.ac.uk/efm/media/workingpapers/working_papers/pdffiles/dp22770.pdf [accessed 7 August 2023]
557 Q 61 (Tom Middlehurst)
558 Q 69 (Sir Jon Coles)
559 Q 77 (Sir Jon Coles)

developing all pupils (including those who started secondary school with low attainment) and not just those on the borderline of a success measure as often used to be the case. However, in its current configuration, it still leans too strongly towards more traditional EBacc subjects. It should be refined so that schools can still achieve good Progress 8 scores when including more non-EBacc GCSEs."[560]

Adjustments or alternatives

285. One solution suggested to this Committee was to move to a 'Progress 9' or 'Progress 10' metric, which would incorporate four or five open choice subjects and support "an increased emphasis on enabling a pupil to have a broad and balanced curriculum".[561] The 2021 *Skills for every young person* report by the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee proposed a 'Progress 5' measure as a possible alternative performance indicator. This would record pupil attainment in compulsory qualifications in English, maths, science and digital, along with one open choice subject, which would be chosen from a broad list including the humanities as well as technical and creative qualifications.[562]

286. We heard some support for a metric that would record attainment across a smaller set of subjects. Mark Marande, Principal, The Petersfield School, suggested that this could "allow space in the timetable for other things to happen". However, he argued that this would "have to be married with intelligent accountability".[563] Carolyn Roberts, Headteacher, Thomas Tallis School, raised similar points, and asked: "Is there a risk that some schools might shrink their curriculum even more, to five subjects with no arts or humanities?".[564]

287. **Progress 8 is an improvement on the previous headline accountability measure and was introduced with the valuable aim of capturing the average level of progress pupils in a school make during key stages 3 and 4 across a range of subjects. We welcome the emphasis it places on supporting pupils of all abilities to increase their attainment.**

288. **The dominance of EBacc subjects within the Progress 8 measure limits flexibility around subject choice and incentivises schools to focus their resources on a narrow set of academic subjects. This constricts in particular the take-up of creative and technical qualifications, and compounds the impacts of the EBacc described earlier. Withdrawing the EBacc subject classification would change the composition of Progress 8 by removing the requirement for pupils to take three additional EBacc subjects, alongside English and maths. This presents an opportunity for further refinement of the measure.**

289. **In the short term, we favour adjustments to Progress 8 that would enhance the flexibility and choice it offers, while reducing the**

560 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England* (August 2022), p 46: https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/1nrrxVUPtZzMdI5U3ER4Ep/2f86cc94b653ab7992a35917560814b9/Ending-the-Big-Squeeze-on-Skills-How-to-Futureproof-Education-in-England.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

561 Written evidence from Aalok Kanwar (EDU0069)

562 Youth Unemployment Committee, *Skills for every young person* (1st Report, Session 2021–22, HL Paper 98)

563 Q 10 (Mark Marande)

564 Q 10 (Carolyn Roberts)

disruption and risk of unintended consequences that changing the number of subject slots which comprise it might cause. A reformed Progress 8 could be structured around the core subjects of English, maths and science, complemented by up to four open slots. It should give schools greater flexibility to offer the subjects and qualifications that would best serve their pupils, based on a balanced curriculum that includes scope for creative, technical and vocational subjects.

290. **A revised Progress 8 should also record results gained in English and maths functional skills qualifications, to ensure that even if pupils do not take English and maths GCSEs, their attainment in literacy and numeracy is recognised.**

291. ***We call on the Government to review the current set of headline accountability measures, particularly Progress 8, in light of evidence that the existing measures are failing to support schools to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. The review should examine how, following the withdrawal of the EBacc, Progress 8 can be further refined to ensure that schools maintain an appropriate level of focus on the core subjects of maths, English and science, while enabling them to promote a broader range of subjects to pupils at key stage 4. Consideration should also be given to how results achieved in functional skills qualifications in English and maths would be incorporated into the measure.***

Other key stage 4 accountability measures

292. The DfE publishes data on two further headline accountability measures: the percentage of pupils achieving grade 5 or above in their English and maths GCSEs, and the percentage of pupils staying in education or entering employment. Evidence to this inquiry did not address these measures in any detail. Proposals relating to the reporting of pupil attainment in English and maths—and alternative literacy and numeracy qualifications—are discussed elsewhere in this report.[565]

Pupil destinations measure

293. This metric reports the proportion of pupils continuing to a sustained education, employment or training destination in the year after finishing year 11. The most recent national figure, published in 2023, is for pupils who finished year 11 in 2021 and was 93.6%.[566] The figure has remained almost exactly the same year on year since 2015.[567] Pupils are counted as being in a sustained destination if they "have a recorded activity throughout the first two terms of the 2021–22 academic year (or any consecutive six months in the year for apprenticeships)".[568] As with the other headline accountability measures, the percentage for an individual school is published as part of its

565 See paras 64, 71 and 290.

566 Department for Education, 'Academic year 2021/22 Key stage 4 destination measures' (19 October 2023): https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-destination-measures#dataBlock-155dc990-4ec7-4051-bbc5-62231be39021-tables [accessed 29 November 2023]

567 *Ibid.*

568 Department for Education, *Secondary accountability measures: guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools* (October 2023), p 15: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/652fad41d0666200131b7c47/Secondary_accountability_measures_-_2023_guidance_for_maintained_secondary_schools__academies_and_free_schools.pdf [accessed 1 December 2023]

entry on the GOV.UK school and college performance data website, where it is compared against local authority and England averages.

294. The Baker Dearing Educational Trust told us that while exam outcomes are important, pupil destinations are of "the highest priority" in its technical colleges.[569] Ms Ambrosi, the organisation's Director of Innovation and Learning, suggested that these could play a greater role in school accountability arrangements:

> "We would like to be judged, yes, on maths, English, science and our technical [qualifications], which are incredibly important, but also on our destinations. What happens next? Do [pupils] go off into sustained employment in the long run? Do they go through the most appropriate route for their particular endeavours, in terms of their careers?"[570]

295. When asked about raising the significance of destination data within the suite of key stage 4 accountability measures, Prof Leckie noted that altering the balance between the headline metrics would require "a very strong steer" from the Government.[571] He suggested that other aspects of school activity, such as support for pupil wellbeing or adherence to the Gatsby benchmarks,[572] might warrant consideration if a more fundamental reassessment of existing performance measures was undertaken.[573]

296. Key stage 5 (years 12 and 13) school performance measures include two destinations measures. The headline measure records "the percentage of students staying in education, employment or training for at least two terms in the year after their last allocation to a school or college at 16 to 18." The 'progression to higher education or training' measure reports the percentage of pupils from each school or college who continue to degrees, higher technical courses and higher apprenticeships. Data for entry to higher education institutions is broken down to show the number of pupils progressing to Oxford or Cambridge, a Russell Group university or a "top-third" university.[574] Asked whether the Russell Group measure is driving schools to disincentivise pupils from taking technical or vocational options, Paul Warner, Director of Strategy and Business Development, Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said:

> "Absolutely, yes. This was at the heart of why we were so active in backing provider access legislation … we could give so many stories of where colleges and independent apprenticeship providers have been to schools' careers days, when they can get in at all, and are given a stand at the back or even in a corridor, or the pupils are actively told, 'You need to talk to the universities over here. That is the route you need to go down. For the rest of you, there is an apprenticeship provider over there. You can talk to them'. … The DfE, advertently or inadvertently, reinforces that."[575]

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569 Written evidence from Baker Dearing Educational Trust (EDU0015)
570 Q 6 (Kate Ambrosi)
571 Q 78 (Prof George Leckie)
572 See definition in footnote 285, para 150.
573 Q 74 (Prof George Leckie)
574 The "top-third" ranking is "determined by the average UCAS points of successful applicants". Department for Education, *16 to 18 accountability measures: technical guidance* (April 2023): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1150839/16_to_18_accountability_measures.pdf [accessed 7 November 2023]
575 Q 171 (Paul Warner)

Catherine Sezen, Director of Education Policy, Association of Colleges, said: "I have personally had that experience, admittedly a little while ago, so hopefully things have moved on."[576]

297. **Although we are sympathetic to the idea of increasing the prominence of destination data in the key stage 4 accountability system, further investigation is necessary to determine the benefits of doing so and the best approach by which to achieve this. As with any adjustment to performance measures, changes should be approached cautiously to avoid increasing pressure on schools and inappropriately driving behaviour. A consistent approach to school performance measurement across key stages 3, 4 and 5 is essential to ensuring that efforts made to promote technical qualifications and apprenticeships in the 11–16 phase are not undermined by the impact of performance metrics used at key stage 5.**

298. ***The remaining headline accountability measures, including the percentage of pupils staying in education or entering employment, should be re-evaluated as part of a wider review of the key stage 4 school performance measures published by the Government. The Government should also review the key stage 5 destinations measures, including the entry to Russell Group universities metric, and adjust or withdraw these as required to ensure that performance incentives for schools and colleges are coherent across the 11–16 and 16–19 phases.***

576 Q 171 (Catherine Sezen)

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee

Lord Aberdare
Lord Baker of Dorking CH
Baroness Blower
Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
Baroness Garden of Frognal
Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Chair)
Lord Knight of Weymouth
Lord Lexden OBE
Lord Mair CBE
Baroness Massey of Darwen
Lord Storey CBE
Lord Watson of Invergowrie

Declarations of interests

Lord Aberdare
Chair, Berlioz 150

Lord Baker of Dorking CH
Chair, Baker Dearing Educational Trust
Advisory Group Member, Rethinking Assessment

Baroness Blower
Life Member, National Education Union
Previous President, National Union of Teachers, 1996–1999
Previous Deputy General Secretary/General Secretary, National Union of Teachers, 2005–2016

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
Adviser, Charter Schools Capital

Baroness Garden of Frognal
No relevant interests to declare

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Chair)
Non-executive Director and Chairman of the Board, Access Creative College
Non-executive Director, Dyson Technical Training Limited
Chairman of the Board, FutureLearn
Visiting Professor, King's College London
Advisory Board Member, Halp

Lord Knight of Weymouth
Chair of the Board of Trustees, E-Act Multi-Academy Trust
Director, Suklaa Limited
Non-executive Director, Century-Tech Limited
Non-executive Director, Macat International Limited
Non-executive Director, Education Ventures Research Limited
Visiting Professor at the Institute of Education, University College London
Pro bono chair of inquiry into apprenticeship take-up, Engineering UK
Pro bono chair of inquiry into school inspection, National Education Union
Chair, Board of Directors, Council of British International Schools (from May 2023)
Adviser, Charter Schools Capital

Member, Qualifications and Standards Committee, Pearson Education Limited

Lord Lexden OBE

President, Independent Schools Association

President, Council for Independent Education

Vice-President, Council of British International Schools

Lord Mair CBE

Emeritus Professor of Engineering, University of Cambridge

Fellow, Royal Academy of Engineering

Fellow, Royal Society

Partner, Geotechnical Consulting Group

Co-Chair, All Party Parliamentary Engineering Group

Baroness Massey of Darwen

No relevant interests to declare

Lord Storey CBE

Trustee, Summer Camps

Patron, Careers Connect

Trustee, Liverpool College

Lord Watson of Invergowrie

Founder Member and Vice-Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Schools, Learning and Assessment

A full list of members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests: https://members.parliament.uk/members/lords/interests/register-of-lords-interests

Specialist adviser

Tom Richmond

Founder and Director, EDSK

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WITNESSES

Evidence is published online at:https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/647/education-for-1116-year-olds-committee/publications/ and available for inspection at the Parliamentary Archives (020 7219 3074).

Evidence received by the Committee is listed below in chronological order of oral evidence session and in alphabetical order. Those marked with ** gave both oral and written evidence. Those marked with * gave oral evidence and did not submit any written evidence. All other witnesses submitted written evidence only.

Oral evidence in chronological order

**	Kate Ambrosi, Director of Innovation and Learning, Baker Dearing Educational Trust	QQ 1–13
**	Mark Marande, Principal, The Petersfield School, Bohunt Education Trust	QQ 1–13
*	Jamie Portman, Trust Instructional Lead, XP Trust	QQ 1–13
*	Carolyn Roberts, Head, Thomas Tallis School	QQ 1–13
*	Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud, Director of Operations, AlphaPlus	QQ 14–26
**	Sharon Hague, Senior Vice-President, Pearson School Qualifications	QQ 14–26
*	Dr Michelle Meadows, Associate Professor of Educational Assessment, University of Oxford	QQ 14–26
*	Tim Oates CBE, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge University Press and Assessment	QQ 14–26
**	Julia Adamson, Managing Director, Education and Public Benefit, BCS, Chartered Institute for IT	QQ 27–40
**	Dr Hilary Leevers, CEO, EngineeringUK	QQ 27–40
**	Charles Tracy OBE, Senior Adviser for Learning and Skills, Institute of Physics	QQ 27–40
**	Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive, Independent Society of Musicians	QQ 41–45
**	Dr Geoffrey Readman, Chair, National Drama	QQ 41–45
**	Tony Ryan MIET FRSA, Chief Executive, Design and Technology Association	QQ 41–45
**	David Gallagher, Chief Executive, NCFE	QQ 46–49
**	Olly Newton, Executive Director, Edge Foundation	QQ 46–49
**	Nick Brook, CEO, Speakers for Schools	QQ 50–60
*	Nick Chambers, CEO, Education and Employers	QQ 50–60
**	Oli de Botton, CEO, Careers and Enterprise Company	QQ 50–60
*	Dr Claire Thorne, Co-CEO, Tech She Can	QQ 50–60

**	Dr Mary Bousted, Joint General Secretary, National Education Union	QQ 61–67
**	Tom Middlehurst, Curriculum, Assessment and Inspection Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders	QQ 61–67
*	Sir Jon Coles, Group Chief Executive, United Learning	QQ 68–82
*	Professor George Leckie, Co-Director of the Centre for Multilevel Modelling, University of Bristol	QQ 68–82
*	Dave Thomson, Chief Statistician, FFT Education Datalab	QQ 68–82
*	Rt. Hon. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester	QQ 83–91
*	Professor Graham Donaldson, Honorary Professor, University of Glasgow	QQ 92–104
*	Gareth Evans, Director, Education Policy, University of Wales Trinity Saint David	QQ 92–104
*	Professor Gordon Stobart, Honorary Research Fellow, Oxford University	QQ 92–104
*	Chris Russell, National Director for Education, Ofsted	QQ 105–118
*	Amanda Spielman, Chief Inspector, Ofsted	QQ 105–118
*	Sarah Fletcher, High Mistress, St Paul's Girls' School	QQ 119–127
**	Matthew Glanville, Director of Assessment, The International Baccalaureate	QQ 119–127
**	Alistair McConville, Deputy Head of King Alfred School and Co-Founder, Rethinking Assessment	QQ 119–127
*	Sir Ian Bauckham CBE, Chair, Ofqual	QQ 128–141
*	Dr Jo Saxton, Chief Regulator, Ofqual	QQ 128–141
*	Rt. Hon. Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools	QQ 142–161
**	Juliet Chua CB, Director General for Schools, Department for Education	QQ 142–161
**	Stuart Miller, Director of Curriculum and General Qualifications, Department for Education	QQ 142–161
**	Catherine Sezen, Director of Education Policy, Association of Colleges	QQ162–177
*	Paul Warner, Director of Strategy and Business Development, Association of Employment and Learning Providers	QQ162–177

Alphabetical list of witnesses

**	Julia Adamson, Managing Director, Education and Public Benefit, BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (QQ 27–40)	EDU0090

	Adoption UK	EDU0060
	Ambition Institute	EDU0039
	Ambitious About Autism	EDU0091
**	Kate Ambrosi, Director of Innovation and Learning, Baker Dearing Educational Trust (QQ 1–13)	EDU0015 EDU0097
**	Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive, Independent Society of Musicians (QQ 41–45)	EDU0083
	Aspirations Academies Trust	EDU0006
	Association for Citizenship Teaching	EDU0063
	Association for Physical Education	EDU0048
	Association for Science Education	EDU0076
*	Sir Ian Bauckham CBE, Chair, Ofqual (QQ 128–141)	
	Bell Foundation	EDU0016
	Biophilic Education Alliance	EDU0064
	Bond and Coyne	EDU0037
**	Oli de Botton, CEO, Careers and Enterprise Company (QQ 50–60)	EDU0045
**	Dr Mary Bousted, Joint General Secretary, National Education Union (QQ 61–67)	EDU0071
	Professor Robert Bowie	EDU0034
	Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust	EDU0041
	British Science Association	EDU0089
**	Nick Brook, CEO, Speakers for Schools (QQ 50–60)	EDU0046
*	Rt. Hon. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester (QQ 83–91)	
*	Gavin Busuttil-Reynaud, Director of Operations, AlphaPlus (QQ 14–26)	
	Professor Dame Muffy Calder	EDU0094
	Lucy Carman	EDU0010
	Centre for Real-World Learning, University of Winchester	EDU0078
*	Nick Chambers, CEO, Education and Employers (QQ 50–60)	
	Helen Chatwin-Wray	EDU0012
	Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership	EDU0052
	Chester Zoo and Chester Zoo Youth Board	EDU0049
	Deborah Chowney	EDU0005
**	Juliet Chua CB, Director General for Schools, Department for Education (QQ 142–161)	EDU0085

	Professor Alison Clark-Wilson	EDU0058
*	Sir Jon Coles, Group Chief Executive, United Learning (QQ 68–82)	
	Christopher Collins	EDU0003
	Mary Colwell	EDU0032
	Creativity, Culture and Education	EDU0077
	Ian Davies	EDU0058
	Mark Dawes	EDU0058
	Doceo Development	EDU0084
*	Professor Graham Donaldson, Honorary Professor, University of Glasgow (QQ 92–104)	
	Duke of Edinburgh's Award	EDU0031
	Energy and Utility Skills	EDU0051
	Engineering and Machinery Alliance	EDU0086
*	Gareth Evans, Director, Education Policy, University of Wales Trinity Saint David (QQ 92–104)	
	Fair Education Alliance	EDU0024
	Family Education Trust	EDU0017
	Field Studies Council	EDU0044
	Professor Alastair Fitter	EDU0032
*	Sarah Fletcher, High Mistress, St Paul's Girls' School (QQ 119–127)	
**	David Gallagher, Chief Executive, NCFE (QQ 46–49)	EDU0104
*	Rt. Hon. Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools (QQ 142–161)	
**	Matthew Glanville, Director of Assessment, International Baccalaureate (QQ 119–127)	EDU0079
	Globalbridge Ltd	EDU0019
	Dr Jennie Golding	EDU0058
	Dr David Gutmann	EDU0002
	Will Jay Hamilton	EDU0040
**	Sharon Hague, Senior Vice-President, Pearson School Qualifications (QQ 14–26)	EDU0093
	Historical Association	EDU0075
	I Have a Voice	EDU0074
	Impington Village and International College	EDU0014
	Dr Jenni Ingram	EDU0058
	Clare Jones	EDU0088

	Aalok Kanwar	EDU0069
	Latymer Upper School	EDU0106
*	Professor George Leckie, Co-Director of the Centre for Multilevel Modelling, University of Bristol (QQ 68–82)	
**	Dr Hilary Leevers, CEO, EngineeringUK (QQ 27–40)	EDU0092
**	Alistair McConville, Deputy Head of King Alfred School and Co-Founder, Rethinking Assessment (QQ 119–127)	EDU0078 EDU0100
	Stuart McLaughlin	EDU0011
	Mathematics in Education and Industry	EDU0072
**	Mark Marande, Principal, The Petersfield School, Bohunt Education Trust (QQ 1–13)	EDU0009
*	Dr Michelle Meadows, Associate Professor of Educational Assessment, University of Oxford (QQ 14–26)	
**	Tom Middlehurst, Curriculum, Assessment and Inspection Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders (QQ 61–67)	EDU0029
	Hayden Miller	EDU0001
**	Stuart Miller, Director of Curriculum and General Qualifications, Department for Education (QQ 142–161)	EDU0085
	Liesa Moon	EDU0098
	NAHT	EDU0020
	National Association of Teachers of RE	EDU0082
	National Association for Special Educational Needs	EDU0038
	National Foundation for Educational Research	EDU0050
	Vicky Neale	EDU0028
**	Olly Newton, Executive Director, Edge Foundation (QQ 46–49)	EDU0021
	NOCN Group	EDU0018
	Nuffield Foundation	EDU0095
*	Tim Oates CBE, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge University Press and Assessment (QQ 14–26)	
	Ros Page	EDU0008
	Parentkind	EDU0030
	Professor Simon Peyton Jones	EDU0094
	Phoenix Education Trust	EDU0061

*	Jamie Portman, Trust Instructional Lead, XP Trust (QQ 1–13)	
**	Dr Geoffrey Readman, Chair, National Drama (QQ 41–45)	EDU0067
	Professor Jessie Ricketts	EDU0055
*	Carolyn Roberts, Head, Thomas Tallis School (QQ 1–13)	
	Tom Roper	EDU0058
*	Chris Russell, National Director for Education, Ofsted (QQ 105–118)	
	Royal Society of Biology	EDU0023
	Royal Society of Chemistry	EDU0022
**	Tony Ryan MIET FRSA, Chief Executive, Design and Technology Association (QQ 41–45)	EDU0026
	St Stephen's International School Khao Yai Thailand	EDU0068
	SAGE Gateshead	EDU0081
*	Dr Jo Saxton, Chief Regulator, Ofqual (QQ 128–141)	
	Science Education Policy Alliance	EDU0099
	Scottish Government	EDU0103
	Sense	EDU0043
**	Catherine Sezen, Director of Education Policy, Association of Colleges (QQ162–177)	EDU0053
	Dr Laura Shapiro	EDU0055
	Dennis Sherwood	EDU0007
	Skills Builder Partnership	EDU0033
	Martin James Slattery	EDU0070
	Dr Cathy Smith	EDU0058
	Sarah Madeline Smith	EDU0040
	Society for Natural Sciences	EDU0066
	South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership	EDU0047
	Speech and Language UK	EDU0036
	Andrew Martin Speight	EDU0040
*	Amanda Spielman, Chief Inspector, Ofsted (QQ 105–118)	
	Deborah Spratling	EDU0062
	STEM Learning	EDU0096
*	Prof Gordon Stobart, Honorary Research Fellow, Oxford University (QQ 92–104)	
	Sutton Trust	EDU0057

	Teach the Future	EDU0027
*	Dave Thomson, Chief Statistician, FFT Education Datalab (QQ 68–82)	
*	Dr Claire Thorne, Co-CEO, Tech She Can (QQ 50–60)	
**	Charles Tracy OBE, Senior Adviser for Learning and Skills, Institute of Physics (QQ 27–40)	EDU0042
	UCL Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education	EDU0065
	A Venn	EDU0025
	Voice 21	EDU0073
	Welsh Government	EDU0101
*	Paul Warner, Director of Strategy and Business Development, Association of Employment and Learning Providers (QQ162–177)	
	Dr Paul Wood	EDU0013
	Working Group on GCSE English Reform	EDU0059
	WorldSkills UK	EDU0035
	Professor Russell Wynn	EDU0032
	Young Enterprise	EDU0054
	Zoological Society of London	EDU0056

APPENDIX 3: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

The House of Lords Committee on Education for 11 to 16 Year Olds was appointed in January 2023. It is chaired by Lord Johnson of Marylebone and will report by 30 November 2023.

The Committee has been asked to focus on an important stage in a young person's education, from year 7, when they start secondary school, to year 11. During this period, most young people will work towards national qualifications, usually GCSEs, as well as making important decisions about their future education and training. Educational provision for this age range has seen significant reforms in recent years, particularly changes to GCSE subject content and assessment.

This inquiry will consider the challenges and opportunities faced by the secondary education system in England, building on the findings of several recent reports, including:

- HMC, *The state of education: time to talk*
- Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Education inequalities*
- Institute for Fiscal Studies, *School spending and costs: the coming crunch*
- Institute for Government, *The exam question: changing the model of assessment reform*
- Times Education Commission, *Bringing out the best*
- Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Ending the big squeeze on skills: how to futureproof education in England*

The inquiry will look critically at the effectiveness of the current curriculum and assessment model, exploring whether these are preparing young people for the job opportunities they will encounter in a future digital and green economy, and will consider proposals for significant reform.

This is a public call for written evidence to be submitted to the Committee. The deadline is 6pm on 30 April 2023.

The Committee encourages people from all backgrounds to contribute. The Committee's work is most effective when it is informed by as diverse a range of perspectives and experiences as possible. Please pass this on to others who may be interested in contributing.

Instructions on how to submit evidence are set out below. If you have any queries please email the staff of the Committee at hleducation11to16@parliament.uk. When preparing your response, please keep in mind that short, concise submissions are preferred, and that you do not need to address every topic.

Topics

The Committee is seeking written submissions addressing any or all of the following topics:

- The range and breadth of subjects covered in the 11-16 curriculum
- The effectiveness of the 11-16 curriculum in equipping young people with the skills they need to progress into post-16 education and employment in a future digital and green economy

- The availability and attractiveness of technical and vocational options in the 11-16 phase
- The impact of the 11-16 system on the motivation and confidence of pupils of all abilities
- The effectiveness of GCSEs as a means of assessing the achievements of all pupils at the end of the 11-16 phase
- Alternative methods of assessment for measuring progress that could be considered either alongside or instead of GCSEs
- How the school accountability system affects the 11-16 curriculum
- The role technology can play in education in this phase, including in assessment, the personalisation of learning and reducing teachers' workload
- How the 11-16 system could be adapted to improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession, and the recruitment, training and retention of teachers
- How spending for this phase of education should be prioritised, in the context of the current fiscal climate
- Lessons for improving education for the 11-16 phase from educational policy and practice from overseas, or from the devolved administrations