



BRIEFING: English Baccalaureate March 2016

The government wants to impose the English Baccalaureate on 90% of state schools:

The Department for Education says that 'at least 90% of pupils in mainstream secondary schools should be entered for the EBacc' by 2020. They also want to make it the overarching measure for judging secondary school success. The English Baccalaureate requires passing a minimum of seven, and up to eight, GCSEs.

None of these are arts or design subjects

The Cultural Learning Alliance, which exists to ensure that all children and young people have meaningful access to culture – including art, design, music, drama and dance – argues that making nearly all pupils take the EBacc will further reduce the uptake and availability of arts subjects in schools, with damaging long term effects.

Five reasons why the EBacc is a bad idea

1. Imposition of the EBacc will increase bureaucracy and limit choice:

Schools' participation in the EBacc will be judged by five different statistical measures and made a higher priority in inspections by Ofsted. Schools that score badly will be judged to be failing. As a result schools will have to teach the EBacc, their autonomy will be reduced, and the choice of subjects will be narrowed for parents, students and teachers.

2. Teaching and learning about the arts in schools will further decline:

There has already been a 14% reduction in the number of arts subjects taken at GCSE since the EBacc was introduced in 2010. Between 2010 and 2014 the number of hours the arts were being taught in secondary schools fell by 10% and the number of arts teachers by 11%. The exclusion of arts subjects from the EBacc and the lack of time in the curriculum mean that fewer students will study the arts and there will be fewer qualified teachers to teach them.

3. Exclusion of the arts will not help the disadvantaged:

Studying the arts improves social mobility. The proposed reforms are unambitious and will widen the disadvantage gap: the EBacc narrows educational horizons, when we know that students from low-income families who take part in arts activities are three times more likely to get a degree, are more employable and tend to stay in jobs longer. It is noticeable that private schools place great emphasis on arts subjects and activities because they increase their students' social and cultural capital. Exclusion of the arts from the core of state sector education reduces them to an optional extra for those who can afford to pay.

4. Evidence for the benefits of the EBacc is insecure:

There is no real evidence that concentrating on EBacc subjects will help young people get jobs or progress to university. Employers, including the Confederation of British Industry, say they want creative young people with a range of both science and arts skills. Other countries with comparable education systems make the arts compulsory. The UK is already ranked eleventh in the PISA international league table for Creative Problem Solving: discouraging creativity will not help our scores.

5. The UK needs investment in arts education to succeed economically, internationally and socially:

The creative economy accounts for 8.24% of the UK economy and as a whole is growing twice as fast as the rest of the economy. Failure to invest in arts education will lead to skills shortages and the UK's reputation as a creative nation will be challenged. The arts teach ingenuity, empathy and imagination, as well as technical skills. Without the arts and our cultural heritage as part of every student's education, the UK will be, in all senses, a poorer place.

We believe that the changes should not be implemented and we call on the government to scrap these proposals. The answer is not to add the arts to the EBacc – we don't want to create more restrictions on schools and teachers in an already desperately crowded accountability system – it's time to rethink and to simplify.

Yes, we need Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) as part of the curriculum. We need literacy and numeracy. But we also need the Arts to fire our creativity and enlarge our imagination. We need to move from STEM to STEAM.

CULTURAL LEARNING ALLIANCE, 2016

www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk

info@culturallearningalliance.org.uk