

## EBacc will open doors to the future claims DfE

The government's proposals for how to get at least 90% of pupils to take GCSEs in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects\* have been published.

The [consultation](#) sets out how the government will fulfil its manifesto commitment that the vast majority of pupils currently in year 7 should, in five years' time, be entered for the EBacc at GCSE. "This academic core shouldn't be the preserve of an academic elite," says the Secretary of State for Education, "it should be the basic right of every single child".

The DfE recognises the challenges involved in this ambition, including curriculum planning and teacher recruitment and training, but says it will "work with schools to explore the potential solutions".

This consultation makes 6 proposals:

1. The EBacc will become the default option for all pupils, but schools should be able to determine the small minority of pupils for whom taking the whole EBacc is not appropriate.

2. The proportion of pupils entering the EBacc will become a headline measure of secondary school performance.
3. EBacc entry and attainment will be given a more prominent role in the Ofsted inspection framework.
4. EBacc data for mainstream secondary schools will be published by the government to allow schools, parents, and Ofsted, to understand how similar schools compare to each other.
5. An additional measure will be published showing the EBacc Average Point Score.
6. Special schools will not be expected to meet the 90% ambition. Consultation is taking place on how the policy should apply to UTCs, studio schools and FE colleges.

The consultation closes on 29 January 2016. Contact [policy@ocr.org.uk](mailto:policy@ocr.org.uk) for further information on OCR's response.

\*English, mathematics, sciences, history or geography, and a language.

## ... and the EBacc doesn't rule out a cultural education claims schools minister

In a move to support cultural education, the schools minister has claimed that an EBacc curriculum and a cultural education can only complement each other.

In a recent [speech](#) at the launch of [Cultural Education Challenge](#) – an Arts Council England initiative to increase cultural engagement and education in schools – Nick Gibb said: "There is no reason why an academic core curriculum should in any way imperil a cultural education, or vice versa." He went on to claim that the suggestion that "the EBacc will drive pupils away from creative subjects at GCSE has been made vocally in the media, but proven to be unfounded."

The speech also reinforced the ability of cultural education to build positive character traits amongst pupils such as confidence, perseverance and team work, and ruled out the assumption that an arts education should be just for the wealthy.

Meanwhile, the 2015 annual survey results from the National Society for Education in Art and Design are set to show that performance measures, including the EBacc, have negatively impacted on subject choice and allocation of time given to art and design in schools. The Society will "continue to challenge the implications of the EBacc on a broad and balanced curriculum and a cultural entitlement for all pupils across all phases".

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## Change of plan from DfE: ICT GCSE and A Level will not be reformed

From deep within a further qualifications reform consultation, we have learnt that ministers have taken the decision not to approve the ICT GCSE and A Level for redevelopment for first teaching from September 2017. This is because, according to the DfE, the reformed computer science GCSE and A Level occupy a “similar qualification space”.\*

The consultation containing this announcement seeks views on the [reformed content](#) for the remaining subjects for first teaching in September 2017. These subjects are:

- Physical education GCSE short course
- Geology AS and A
- Politics AS and A.

Ofqual is consulting in parallel on the [assessment arrangements](#) for these qualifications.

The deadlines for responses to the consultations are 15 December 2015 and 4 January 2016 respectively.

\* The announcement from the DfE not to redevelop ICT GCSE and A level will be disappointing news for some. OCR would like to reassure teachers looking for alternatives that, alongside our [Computer Science qualifications](#), OCR will offer [Cambridge Nationals in ICT](#) and [Cambridge Technicals in IT](#) for teaching beyond 2018.

## Technical and professional routes to be developed

“UK Technical and Professional Education (TPE) is too complex and confusing and failing to deliver skilled employees” says Skills Minister Nick Boles. The Minister has announced [a review panel](#) to develop up to 20 specific new professional and technical routes which will lead to employment or degree-level study. Young people taking one of these routes will specialise over time, gain a work placement while at college, and then progress to an apprenticeship.

The government believes that “a new system with clearer routes to the world of work will ensure young people get the skills employers are looking for in our modern economy”.

The content of each route will be designed with direct input from employers, who will look at the skills required “at the highest levels” and trace these back to age 16. The development will be guided by an expert panel whose members include:

- Lord Sainsbury - Chair and former Minister of Science and Innovation
- Professor Alison Wolf - author of 2011 review of vocational education
- Bev Robinson - Principal and Chief Executive of Blackpool and the Fylde College
- Simon Blagden - Non-executive Chairman of Fujitsu UK.

The government also will be involving a university vice chancellor.

The announcement of this new panel and TPE routes intends to address the issues raised by the productivity plan in relation to providing clear routes to employment. The panel was inspired by the minister’s visits to the Netherlands and Norway over the summer. The government intends to take an evidence-based approach to using learning from these systems.

## AoC proposes new Technical Education Accreditation Council

The Association of Colleges has set out proposals for a “streamlined validating and awarding organisation”. The Technical Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) would operate within the FE and HE landscape and bring clarity to what it claims is the “overly complex current situation”.

*Breaking the Mould* describes how more needs to be done to rebalance the supply and demand for labour if the economy is to grow and the productivity gap is to be redressed. The proposed TEAC would aim to improve clarity for employers and students about technical qualifications. It would support the development of high status technical education and help in the reduction of skills shortages.

Principles underpinning the proposed TEAC are set out as:

- Strong leadership and the promotion of technical education.
- Prevention of academic drift

- Synergy with qualification reforms
- Maintenance of institutional autonomy
- Resistance to the introduction of new intermediaries
- Support for a reformed adult skills funding system that is both fair and simple.

Core responsibilities would include:

- Setting quality standards
- Confirming technical qualification priorities
- Managing the accreditation process
- Publishing the accredited provider register
- Publishing the Technical Education Qualifications Directory
- Publishing research
- Promoting success.

The proposals describe TEAC as an organisation but do not rule out that the functions of an accreditation council could also be undertaken by an organisation such as the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

## Re-balancing the system: take money from HE to support FE

A report from think-tank Policy Exchange calls on the government to redirect funds from universities to boost higher level professional and technical education.

The report *Higher, Further, Faster, More*, claims that there is a “systematic imbalance” between the 2 halves of our tertiary education system, and the forthcoming government spending review (scheduled for 25 November) must safeguard the FE sector as much as possible.

The report concludes:

1. Leaving the system as it is will not lead to an increase in the types of technical and professional skills that are increasingly important in the labour market.
2. Further action needs to be taken to avoid the risk of further deterioration of the FE sector.
3. A focus is needed on achieving a competitively neutral system of post-secondary education with a unified funding system.

Other recommendations in the report include:

- Freeing up Level 4 and 5 qualifications for wider use - the current restriction on the funding for different organisations to offer higher national certificates/diplomas or equivalents (such as Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals) should be lifted.
- Government commitment to move towards a single student loan system for all post-19 training whether in FE or HE, and extend maintenance support for some FE learners.
- Accelerating the development of National Colleges and Institutes of Technology as flagships for developing higher level technical and professional skills. This would include allowing them to award their own vocational qualifications.
- Government support for Industrial Partnerships - groups of employers in specific sectors - as the main route for employer engagement with qualifications.

## Education, skills and productivity: a cross-country comparison

Expanding the provision of pathways and developing greater options for skilled employment and further study after two years of higher education, could equip the UK with more intermediate skills vital for economic growth. These are the messages coming out of [joint research](#) published by the Select Committees for Education and for Business, Innovation and Skills, ahead of their joint work on the issue of education, skills and productivity.

The committees believe that closer alignment of the needs of business and the education system is vital to boosting productivity.

The report looks at the main factors by which education and skills affect economic performance. It compares skills and productivity rates in the UK with those in Germany, France and the US, covering the role played by education/training

institutions and vocational systems. The research covers a number of areas:

- Cross-country differences in workforce skills
- High-level skills issues
- STEM graduate supplies
- Graduate employability and underemployment issues
- Intermediate skills development
- Technician-level education and training
- Apprenticeship training and full-time vocational schooling
- Continuing training for adult employees
- Assessment and qualifications.

Further details of the future programme of the committee's joint work on education, skills and productivity is expected to be published later in November.

## Apprenticeships failing to meet needs says report

"Too many apprentices still do not receive sufficiently high-quality training." This is the clear message coming out of Ofsted's survey into the current frameworks of apprenticeships.

According to the critical [report](#), Ofsted inspectors found that in a third of the providers visited, apprenticeships did not provide sufficient high-quality training; long-term value to individual companies was not added; skills shortages were not tackled sufficiently; collaboration between providers and employers was lacking; English and maths skills were poorly developed; too few 16 to 18 year olds were starting apprenticeships (blamed on poor promotion in schools); and progression through the apprenticeship route was weak.

Some low-level, low-quality apprenticeships were "wasting public funds" with some learners unaware that they were even on an apprenticeship.

It was not all bad news. There was evidence of high-quality apprenticeships but these were typically found in industries that have a long-established reliance on employing apprentices to develop their future workforce such as motor vehicle, construction and engineering industries.

To tackle the long list of failings in the report, its recommendations focus on raising the quality and

profile of apprenticeships and not just on increasing the numbers:

- **The government** should build on the reforms underway, ensure skills and prospects for long term employment are enhanced, provide better promotion of the benefits, focus on the right industries, enable SMEs to be fully involved, develop routes to apprenticeships, improve information about local skills priorities, and hold providers to account for the value of their apprenticeships.
- **Schools, FE and skills providers** should provide impartial careers guidance about apprenticeships to all pupils and their parents, including to those pupils expected to achieve high grades at GCSE, and prepare students to develop employability skills.
- **Providers of apprenticeships** should ensure provision is of a high standard that leads towards higher skills needed by employers and long term employment, ensure expertise and resources to develop English and maths, promote apprenticeships to people with special needs, and meet regional and national skills needs.
- **Employers** should agree their contribution with providers, do more than assess existing skills, and give greater consideration to the benefits.
- **Ofsted** should ensure that inspections focus on evaluating the impact of apprenticeships on enhancing the nation's skills set.

## New Apprenticeships Adviser

[Nadhim Zahawi](#) MP has been appointed to the role of Prime Minister's apprenticeships adviser.

As reported in [August's OCR Policy Briefing](#), this role is key to the Apprenticeship Delivery Board, created to advise on the Government's ambitious plans to deliver 3 million new apprenticeship starts in this parliament.

## Teacher recruitment: crisis or not?

Do we have a chronic teacher shortage? This is the question to be asked at the Education Select Committee's [one-off evidence session](#) when it will consider whether there is a current crisis in teacher recruitment and retention in England, or whether it is merely a "challenge", as described by the DfE.

Written submissions are invited by 20 November 2015 on the following points:

- Is there a crisis in the recruitment and retention of teachers, including at senior levels of the profession, at a regional level, and by subject, and how might the situation develop during the 2015 Parliament?
- What are the root causes of the current situation with regard to the supply of teachers?
- What further action should be taken by the Government to tackle teacher shortages?

## National Teaching Service to get the "brightest and best" in struggling schools

The Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, has announced a 'National Teaching Service', which aims to get the best teachers and middle leaders into underperforming schools in areas where they are needed most.

The teachers will be employed by the schools for up to 3 years aiming to bring outstanding teaching into the classroom, and also to improve the quality of teaching and leadership throughout the school. The new service will give teachers that take part fast-track development opportunities including a clear path to promotion and

leadership roles

By 2020, the National Teaching Service will have deployed 1,500 outstanding teachers to underperforming schools.

A pilot has been launched in the North West of England to enlist up to 100 teachers and leaders to start work in primary and secondary schools in 2016.

## National College of Teaching seeks views to shape the professional body

The College of Teaching, the new independent professional body for the teaching profession, has launched a national awareness campaign – *The Big Staff Meeting* – to take place in schools on 6 January 2016.

The College is asking schools to set aside half an hour of discussion to discuss and debate future membership and membership benefits. Schools can [download supportive resources](#) to help plan and run the staff meeting successfully.

Following involvement in *The Big Staff Meeting*, teachers will be encouraged to submit their feedback via an [online survey](#). All feedback will be fed in to the national membership consultation, which will close at the end of February 2016.

## Failing, underperforming and coasting schools to become academies

A new [DfE consultation](#) seeks views on proposals for tackling maintained schools that are "causing concern".

The consultation makes a number of proposals regarding the new and strengthened powers of intervention in maintained schools being introduced by the Education and Adoption Bill – currently being considered in Parliament. The measures in this Bill are designed to speed up the process by which failing schools become sponsored academies.

The consultation sets out:

- The background and context, including an overview of the changes being introduced in the Education and Adoption Bill
- How Regional Schools Commissioners and local authorities should use their intervention powers in practice
- How the DfE proposes that schools will be identified as coasting.

The earliest date for the implementation of any intervention powers will be summer 2016.

## Reform ahead for Higher Education

Proposals for an increased focus on the learner are included in the Government's plans for the future of HE.

A new [green paper](#) from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills sets out proposals to change the higher education landscape. *Fulfilling our potential: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice* seeks views on proposals to:

- Introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) that "will deliver better value for money for students, employers and taxpayers" by measuring teacher quality. Universities who perform well on the TEF will be allowed to raise tuition fees (in line with inflation) above the current £9000 cap.
- Expand the HE sector by making it easier for new providers to enter the market, by providing quicker access to funding, a faster route to degree-awarding powers and removing the cap on student numbers for

alternative providers.

- Create a new single gateway for entry and create a common system for all providers.
- Establish a new Office for Students (OfS) to promote the student interest and ensure value for money, and to reduce the regulatory burden on the sector. This would mean a merger of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) to create a new single regulator for the sector.
- Increase access and success in HE participation for those from disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

The consultation also considers the implications of the proposals on the research landscape.

The deadline for responses is 15 January 2016.

### A\*-G grades to continue in Northern Ireland

The grading of all GCSEs in Northern Ireland will continue under the alphabetical grading system.

This will mean that, from Summer 2017, GCSEs in NI, regardless of Exam Board, will continue to be awarded using the A\*-G grades.

The Minister of Education in Northern Ireland, John O'Dowd, made this announcement following consultation. He made it clear that his decision did not in any way affect the operation of the 'open market' for GCSEs in NI and that Exam Boards, other than CCEA, play a valuable role in the NI education service. The Minister said: "I am not asking Awarding Organisations to change from the alphabetical grading they currently use and I am very happy for them to continue to operate here and to offer services to our schools provided they can meet our needs".

His announcement detailed how the grade 4 in England will be anchored to the grade C in NI, and the grade 7 in England will be anchored to grade A.

### "A curriculum for Wales - a curriculum for life"

Wales Education Minister, Huw Lewis, has announced that he wants Wales' radically [reformed curriculum](#) to be available to schools by 2018 with formal teaching beginning by 2021.

The Minister has accepted all 68 of the recommendations in [Successful Futures](#), Professor Graham Donaldson's independent report on curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales.

The new curriculum will include:

- 6 areas of learning and experience from 3 to 16
- 3 cross curriculum responsibilities: literacy, numeracy and digital competence
- Progression reference points at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16
- Achievement outcomes at each progression reference point.

The curriculum will be organised into 6 areas of learning and experience:

- Expressive arts
- Health and well-being
- Humanities (including RE which should remain compulsory to age 16)
- Languages, literacy and communication (including Welsh, which should remain compulsory to age 16, and modern foreign languages)
- Mathematics and numeracy
- Science and technology (including computer science).

### Future priorities for apprenticeships in Wales

The Welsh Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology has set out the Welsh Government's future plans for apprenticeships in Wales.

The plans include a focussed drive on increasing the number of 16 to 18 year olds starting apprenticeships, a keener emphasis on higher skilled apprenticeships, particularly in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) sector and better links between Further Education programmes and Apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships will continue to grow in priority sectors in Wales to meet emerging skill shortages in technical and highly skilled occupations, such as engineering and IT.

# The Last Word

*Paul Steer, Head of Policy, comments on some of the issues featured in this issue.*

The consultation on the implementation of a 'compulsory' EBacc was published this month with the aspiration that almost all current year 7s should take a full suite of EBacc subjects at 16. This is a predetermined government policy, indeed a manifesto commitment, so the consultation asks about how best to implement the policy, rather than whether it is a good idea in the first place. Many stakeholders are frustrated by this, feeling they would have preferred an opportunity to challenge the fundamentals of the policy itself. Indeed, as we know from a recent ASCL survey of members, many school leaders are so opposed to the policy that they claim they are prepared to ignore it, even if it impacts on their Ofsted performance rating. Only time will tell if this is mere bluster.

Those school leaders opposed to the compulsory EBacc have argued that it will lead to further curriculum time, and more money and effort being dedicated to the delivery of those core EBacc subjects. The risk is that this can only happen at the expense of wider curriculum subjects and broader educational priorities such as the development of personal skills, character and resilience and, of course, the creative arts. The Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, disputed this strongly in a recent speech in which he claimed the EBacc doesn't rule out a cultural education, but a 2015 National Society for Education in Art and Design annual survey is set to claim that performance measures, including the EBacc, have negatively impacted on subject choice and time given to art and design in schools. Again, only time will tell, but even if creativity manages to remain part of the core offer, there is certainly a possibility that some of those less popular GCSE and A Level subjects, especially those being redeveloped for first teaching in 2017, may see a decline.

One very popular subject that we will certainly be saying farewell to is ICT, with the government announcing that new versions of GCSEs and GCEs in this subject will not be developed. The rationale given is that the content of these qualifications overlaps too much with that of Computing. There are a range of views about the value of ICT as a subject and differing perceptions of its rigour, but it clearly *isn't* the same thing as Computing and we should be wary if the consequence of this decision is that many young people no longer get formal training on how to make the best use of IT in the digital age. Teachers should look very closely at our alternative Cambridge Nationals and Technicals in this subject.

Previous editions of *OCR Policy Briefing* have given much coverage to the area reviews of FE and 6<sup>th</sup> Form colleges. Recent announcements about plans for the development of 'up to 20' new technical and professional educational routes (TPE) are another indication of the intention to rebalance and refocus the entire post 16 vocational curriculum. It is encouraging that the panel set up to steer this work, headed by Lord Sainsbury, will include Professor Alison Wolf. Professor Wolf is extremely well-versed in the history and nature of vocational provision in England. She has spoken wisely on the value of long-standing and established brands, the importance of awarding organisations in brokering provision with employers, and the risks that come with heavy-handed interventions from the state in the design and funding of provision. Current concerns about the quality of apprenticeships might be a case in point.

Major curriculum changes are also afoot in Wales where a radically reformed curriculum is to be available to schools by 2018 with formal teaching beginning by 2021. With its emphasis on breadth, synthesis and skills development it represents a significant fork in the road leading away from the English approach and the compulsory EBacc. The recent decision in Northern Ireland to retain the existing grading system for GCSEs is a more incremental step but reminds us again of how the devolved nations are showing a strong inclination to leave England to walk its own educational path.