

Ebacc consultation statement from A New Direction

January 2016

Summary of key points

- The government is keen that all pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum which includes high quality cultural education. The expansion of the Ebacc may create conditions which are harmful to this goal and the Government should show leadership in encouraging schools to maintain high standards of cultural education and illustrate innovative ways in which schools can combine high levels of EBacc entry with high quality arts and cultural engagement. The cultural sector and Bridge organisations (such as A New Direction) can help with this goal.
- It is vital that *all* students have the chance to study an arts subject at GCSE, the government should look at innovative ways that schools can meet this obligation.
- It is particularly important that students from lower income families, who may have more barriers to engagement with the arts outside of curriculum time, are supported to develop their interests and talents. The government should endorse schools having strategies for supporting these pupils in particular.
- Consideration needs to be given to the measures in place to assess which schools are able to offer a high quality cultural education.

Introduction

The government is currently consulting on the next phase of the Ebacc. This consultation ends on the 29 January 2016 and is not about the nature of the Ebacc per se but rather about how it can (and should) be expanded. The Government's goal is for around 90% of students to be entered for the Ebacc against the current 39%.

It is inevitable that expansion of the Ebacc will restrict the number of entries to other subjects as the Ebacc usually takes up at least 7 GCSE spaces and most students currently do 8 GCSEs. Higher achieving students tend to do more like 10 subjects.

This is therefore a problem for GCSE arts subjects – music, design and technology, art and design, dance, drama etc. The policy creates perverse incentives which permeate the system; fewer students progressing to 'A' level in these subjects and knock on effects at higher education level and entry to careers where these subjects are a strong requirement; fewer teachers training to teach arts subjects; marginalising of the status of arts subjects within school. It is also likely that the impact of Ebacc, in terms of narrowing the curriculum, will be felt at least at KS3 as schools start preparing students for GCSE subjects earlier.

The demographic bias of arts engagement is an additional challenge. We know that poorer pupils participate less in the arts than their better off peers and that school is particularly important for introducing these students to the arts and providing opportunities for high quality engagement. Restricting the chances for studying the arts within curriculum time is likely to increase the divide between higher income pupils, who are able to engage with a wide range of extra curricula activities outside of the core curriculum, and lower income pupils who may not have these opportunities. If this is the case – and we know that many

schools buck this trend and provide a wide set of enrichment opportunities that are taken up by all students regardless of family income - it will directly affect social mobility as the development of 'cultural capital' in young people is critical for progression to higher education and employment.

However, in general, the arguments for the negative impact of the Ebacc on the arts could be made for any area outside of the Ebacc such as sport, food technology, technical subjects, religious studies. Only one of history or geography counts towards the Ebacc so these subjects may also have challenges and it will be hard to learn more than one language.

A New Direction's view is that it is not particularly useful to continue to argue for inclusion of the arts in the Ebacc as these policies are unlikely to change fundamentally and the main goal of the policy, the expansion of pupil entries into the stated subjects, is not a bad thing in itself. With regard to the target for expansion of the Ebacc we believe that there are two critical factors to consider. Firstly schools and parents (as well as students themselves) are surely in the best position to navigate the appropriate pathways for individuals. We are cautious about a policy which suggests a single path is correct for such a large group of students. Secondly, it is critical that the cultural and education sectors work together to mitigate the negative impacts of the Ebacc on cultural and creative education, developing innovative ways to sustain high quality engagement for all.

The government is keen that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and are committed to the importance of the arts and culture in education therefore we should be able to work together to find ways of ensuring this takes place across the schools system alongside the Ebacc.

Therefore where to go next?

Sustaining opportunities for all students to have the chance to study an arts GCSE

We believe that it is important to re-state the value of providing specialist arts GCSEs, though this is only one route for engagement in the arts and not necessarily a route large numbers of students will take. Being able to study art, design, drama, dance, music etc. to GCSE level is important because it provides an in-depth and high quality pathway to build a student's interest. It means engaging specialist teachers with particular skills who can also be utilised across the school in extra-curricula activity and for developing external partnerships. It also provides a straight forward and meritocratic route to progression into further study or employment in the creative sector. Crucially it means *all* students can get the chance to focus in-depth on a creative subject and therefore it is not simply the preserve of students who can pay for out of school classes or other forms of engagement.

The Ebacc in itself does not stop students pursuing these other subjects. There is a concern, however, that the expansion of the Ebacc will mean schools restricting the subjects they offer in order to get more students focusing on Ebacc subjects. It is crucial we consider ways in which we can help schools sustain opportunities for all students to study an arts GCSE.

There will be particular challenges for the gifted students who want to pursue a 'talent' pathway in the arts as well as disadvantaged and/or underachieving pupils who may be deterred from taking an arts subject as it might be seen as a distraction from the core Ebacc.

There is unlikely to be a one size fits all answer to how to meet the needs of these two groups of students but certain things could help:

- **Schools partnering** – Can schools get together to offer subjects across different schools? Building on school networks such as Teaching School Alliances, could schools work together to offer a high quality offer across the partnership ensuring a range of key arts subjects are offered?
- **Arts organisations offering specialist GCSEs** – could cultural partners find ways (singly or in groups) to offer arts GCSEs?

Fundamentally we believe that **no** student should find themselves in the position of not being able to do at least one arts GCSE because their school does not offer this provision.

Providing a cultural and creative education

Arts subjects are only one part of the story of a rounded creative and cultural education. Whilst we believe it is incredibly important that arts subjects are recognised for their rigour and utility alongside the so called ‘academic’ subjects and the fact that they are not included in the Ebacc can mean that their status is devalued in a school context, they are not the only way to experience or engage with art and culture in formal education.

Our ambition would be for every school to look at the way in which they provide an education for their young people which encompasses opportunities for making, creating, painting, drawing, listening, playing, appreciating, performing etc. as well as thinking deeply about how they can help their students connect with their heritage and the heritage of their country and locality through exposure to a range of cultural activities and practices. The best schools are ones that recognise this and run these opportunities through the ‘academic’ curriculum thinking about creative and dynamic ways of teaching these subjects, as well as providing support to develop cultural interest through, for example;

- Project based learning and creative and artistic ways of addressing the core curriculum
- Opportunities for all students to take part in an ‘enrichment’ activity every week or regularly
- Bursaries and other incentives to support students creative endeavours
- Engagement and valuing of voluntary opportunities such as school plays, competitions etc.
- Arts award, and other qualification clubs
- Regular organised visits, residencies and partnerships with organisations.

We would not advocate these things as a substitute for in-curriculum arts subjects and the two should go hand-in hand, but the development of a creative ethos across the school, of which all pupils can be part, is arguably more important than a rigid focus on GCSE art subjects.

There are a number of ways in which schools can develop a more creative and strategic approach to cultural education and the Bridge organisations can assist them. Strategies include:

- **Strategies for whole school cultural engagement** – Artsmark is a great tool for encouraging a whole school approach to high quality cultural education and this should be promoted across schools. Can schools (singly or in groups) use their Pupil

Premium to support lower income pupils to engage in culture? Can groups of schools and groups of cultural partners work together to develop innovative ways of delivering these opportunities for more disadvantaged students? Can we increase the number of offers from the cultural sector to schools that explicitly support the goals of the pupil premium (ie academic progression)?

- **Innovation in curriculum planning** – Through Project based learning, extended school day, creativity within the teaching of non-arts subjects, strategic approaches to partnerships, building opportunities for valuing and developing arts engagement.
- **Engagement with a range of non GCSE qualifications** - Building provision of high quality arts qualifications such as Arts Awards, or LAMDA in drama or CAT in dance supported (and potentially paid-for) by the schools outside of lesson time.

Valuing cultural education

It is a truism that what gets measured is what gets done. One way of helping mitigate the potential adverse impacts of the Ebacc on the arts is through the collection of data that can be used to understand the extent to which schools are able to provide a strong cultural education. This could include;

- Ofsted being explicit that a school can only be deemed outstanding if it has a cultural education plan
- Expansion of Artsmark as a stretching target endorsed and promoted by DfE and academy chain leaders
- Collection of basic monitoring data on (for example) – is there an art room? Is there rehearsal space? Does the school employ specialist art teachers?
- Is arts and cultural education part of the School Improvement Plan?
- Is the school a member of a cultural education partnership?
- Boards of governors could be encouraged to have an advocate for culture who could ensure provision of arts and cultural education at the highest level.

Conclusion

The critical issue is whether or not pupils are supported to have positive and high quality engagement with arts and culture, and whether pupils are being offered opportunities to be creative, to stretch their imagination and to develop their talents. Strong and visible leadership and support for cultural education from the DfE and Ofsted, as well as practical support from the cultural sector, will be essential to making this happen.