

Written Ministerial Statement Department for Education

School Curriculum

Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education (Nick Gibb):

In order to ensure our education system drives social mobility, it is imperative that the vast majority of pupils – whatever their background – have the opportunity to study the suite of academic subjects that make up the EBacc. These subjects - English, maths, science, history or geography, and a language – are the core of a rounded and well balanced education that should be the entitlement of the vast majority of pupils. According to the Russell Group, studying these subjects at A level opens more doors to more degrees.

A recent study found that pupils in a set of 300 schools that increased their EBacc entry, from 8% to 48%, were more likely to achieve good English and maths GCSEs, more likely to take an A level, or an equivalent level 3 qualification, and more likely to stay in post-16 education.

Since 2010, we have increased the opportunity for pupils to study this combination of GCSEs, with 40% of pupils now being entered for this combination of subjects at GCSE, up from 22% in 2010. However, there are still too few pupils studying these subjects, with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds disproportionately less likely to be studying these subjects.

Research suggests that lower participation from disadvantaged pupils in these core academic subjects can negatively affect social mobility. Yet overall, disadvantaged pupils remain half as likely to be entered for the EBacc subjects as their non-disadvantaged peers, and the gap in EBacc subject entry persists even among the most academically able disadvantaged pupils.

There is no doubt that studying the EBacc subjects up to the age of 16 is right for the vast majority of pupils. As a Government we are committed to unlocking the potential of all pupils regardless of their background and this is why, as set out in our manifesto, we would like to see 90% of year 10 pupils starting to study GCSEs in the EBacc combination of subjects by 2025.

Through our consultation on implementing the EBacc, we sought to understand the barriers schools face in increasing EBacc entry. Having carefully considered the consultation responses, it is my view that we need an approach that is both pragmatic, stretching, and one that takes into account the challenge involved in meeting this ambition.

While some schools are already responding to this challenge by significantly increasing the number of pupils studying the EBacc suite of GCSEs, some schools have more to do to reach our ambition. It will take time to build the right capacity across the whole school system and ensure that schools have access to high quality staff in EBacc subjects, so that all pupils have the best chance of success in their studies.

Taking this all into account it is our ambition that 75% of year 10 pupils in state-funded mainstream schools will start to study GCSEs in the EBacc combination of subjects by September 2022. This will mark an important milestone in driving towards the government's ambition that the vast majority of pupils – irrespective of background – have access to this core academic suite of GCSEs, which is central to a broad and balanced curriculum.

The government response being published today considers and responds to the issues raised in consultation responses, and outlines the steps we will take to support schools to deliver the EBacc subjects to the vast majority of pupils.

Copies of the government's response document will be placed in both House libraries.