

The two cultures: Do schools have to choose between the EBacc and the arts?

Introduction and background

New Schools Network (NSN) is a UK registered charity founded in 2009 to support groups wishing to set up free schools within the English education system. Directors of the charity have been keen, for some time, to increase the number of free schools set up with an arts focus. However, on approaching arts organisations, they realised that concerns about the EBacc measure were creating a significant barrier. Potential applicants were wary of setting up secondary schools with an arts focus if their students would be under pressure to perform well in the EBacc suite of subjects (English, Maths, the Sciences, the Humanities and Foreign Languages). Many arts organisations and members of the arts community take the view that the introduction of the EBacc has had a detrimental impact on arts education. Their concerns have found a voice in recent campaigns such as *'Bacc for the Future'*, which criticises an over narrow focus on a range of academic subjects and argues for the inclusion of arts GCSEs in the EBacc. Within this context, the NSN was keen to explore the extent to which the concerns expressed were supported by the evidence available. Ed Fellows, a member of the NSN campaign team, was asked to produce a report assessing the state of the arts in schools and exploring whether the EBacc has, in fact, led to a decline in the popularity of arts subjects. The report also looks briefly at the impact of the new Progress 8 measure.

Data on GCSE entries between 2011-12 and 2015-16 were drawn from the DfE Key Stage 4 qualification and subject data. The results for non-mainstream schools and independent schools were filtered out in order to produce an overview of annual GCSE entries for state-funded mainstream schools.

Key points

The value of an arts education

- Numerous studies have shown that children benefit in a wide range of ways from an arts education. This is recognised in the National Curriculum which was introduced in 2014. Art and design and music were retained as foundation subjects; they are compulsory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and maintained schools must provide all pupils with the opportunity of doing at least 1 arts subject at Key Stage 4.
- Several studies have provided evidence that studying the arts has a beneficial impact on progress in other subjects. For example, a study by Kendall et al (2008) found that Key Stage 4 students with regular structured access to the arts progressed faster in English and the Sciences.
- Research also points to the behavioural and cognitive benefits of studying the arts. Regular access to creative subjects has been shown to increase scores in cognitive tests by up to 19 per cent and to boost test scores in transferable skills (e.g. communication and social competency) by up to 17 per cent.
- Socially, engagement with the arts is linked to considerable benefits for deprived children. Disadvantaged students who engage with the arts at school are twice as likely to volunteer in later life and 20 per cent more likely to vote.
- Since 1997, the growth of the creative industries has outstripped that of many other UK industries. Employees in the arts and cultural industries earn on average 5 per cent

more than the median UK wage. A 2012 paper by Creative and Cultural Skills estimated that graduate employment in the cultural and creative industries is likely to rise by 67 per cent between now and 2020.

Uptake of the arts

- In measuring the changes to uptake of the arts, the report takes 2011-12 as the baseline year, because this is the year in which the introduction of the EBacc would have started to impact on subject entries. Since numbers of pupils in each cohort fluctuate, the report has looked both at total GCSE entries and per pupil entries.
- The data show that in 2011-12 there were 314,418 entries to arts subjects. Despite the introduction of the EBacc, entries in arts subjects rose in the period between 2011-12 and 2015-16 by 6,318 or 2 per cent. In the same time period there was a drop in the size of the pupil cohort (3.7%). This means that the number of arts entries per pupil rose from 0.56 in 2011-12 to 0.59 in 2015-16.
- The data show that 48 per cent of England's GCSE students took at least one arts subject in 2015-16. This represents a 7.4 per cent rise on the 2011-12 figure.
- The increase in arts take-up was also evident in areas of deprivation. The report looks at the situation in schools rated in the bottom third of the country according to IMD rankings (a system which ranks areas' deprivation on a

range of factors such as illiteracy, crime or income). It was found that entries to GCSE arts subjects in these schools also increased from 70,755 in 2011-12 to 80,128 in 2015-16. This represents an increase of 13.3 per cent. While arts entries per pupil rose by 5.9 per cent nationally between 2011 and 2012, in areas of high deprivation they rose by 16.1 per cent.

- Between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the percentage of arts subjects as a proportion of all GCSEs taken has fallen. This is, however, due to an absolute increase in the number of GCSEs taken, rather than to a fall in the average number of arts GCSEs taken by each pupil.
- Some organisations have produced apparently contradictory statistics which appear to point to a decline in the number of GCSE arts entries since the introduction of the EBacc. This is due to their inclusion of independent schools in the dataset; there has, in fact, been a sharp decline in entries in the independent sector. This report excludes independent school data for two reasons. Firstly, the new accountability measures do not apply to independent schools so it does not make sense to talk about an 'EBacc effect'. Secondly, there has been a general decline of 30 per cent in GCSE and IGCSE arts entries from independent schools over the same time period (2011-12 to 2015-16).

GCSE arts resourcing

- In spite of an increase in GCSE arts entries within the reference time period, the number of teachers and taught hours dedicated to the arts fell. Between November 2011 and November 2015, the number of arts teachers at Key Stage 4 in England's state-funded schools decreased from 25,300 to 21,900, a fall of 13.4 per cent. By contrast, the number of Geography and History teachers at Key Stage 4 rose by 8.5 per cent.
- Within the reference period, the level of taught hours dedicated to arts subjects at Key Stage 4 fell by 16.4 per cent, whereas for History and Geography there was an increase of 22.9 per cent.

Attainment in the arts

- In 2015-16, attainment in arts subjects consistently outstripped attainment in other subjects with a pass rate of 71.7 per cent (A*-C) compared to a rate of 68 per cent across all other subjects, i.e. a gap of 3.7 per cent. The gap was similar in deprived areas with an A*-C pass rate of 65.55 per cent in the arts subjects and 61.98 per cent across other subjects.
- High attainment in the EBacc correlates with above average entry rates to arts GCSEs. Schools with higher levels of entries to the arts also did well in the EBacc. This indicates that some of the most successful secondary schools are those in which there are both high academic expectations and a focus on the arts.
- In schools where an above average number of pupils (i.e. above 24.7 per cent) achieved the EBacc, GCSE arts results were also above average (73.2% compared to a national average of 71.7%).
- In schools which entered an above average (i.e. more than 39.7%) of pupils for the EBacc, arts results were particularly strong with an average of 86.4 per cent of pupils achieving A*-C. The effect is pronounced at the top performing schools. Those schools entering more than 90 per cent of the cohort for the EBacc in 2015-16 achieved

an average A*-C pass rate of 97.5 per cent in the arts subjects.

- The above pattern is also evident against the new Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures. Where schools had a higher rate of per pupil entries to the arts, Attainment and Progress 8 scores tended to be higher. In those schools with an average Attainment 8 score above the national average of 49.9, A*-C arts results were also higher than the national average (79.1% compared to a national average of 71.7%). In schools with Progress 8 scores of zero or above, 76.1 per cent of arts entrants achieved A*-C grades.
- In summary, schools which recorded high attainment in the EBacc Attainment 8 and Progress 8 also saw high attainment in the arts.

Conclusions and recommendations

- The preliminary findings in this report suggest that there is no conflict between the new performance measures and the study of the arts. Since the introduction of the EBacc there has been no fall off in GCSE arts entries and attainment in the EBacc seems to go hand in hand with attainment in the arts.
- Schools have reduced funding for the arts. This does not appear to have had an impact on GCSE take up or attainment but it may well do so in the future.
- There appears to have been a misunderstanding on the part of many schools which think that in order to boost their EBacc scores as well as their Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores, they need to focus their resources on the EBacc subjects. This report has shown, however, that schools which perform well on the key measures also have a strong focus on the arts.
- The Government must recognise that it is, in part, responsible for this misunderstanding. It now needs to highlight the importance of the arts and continue to fund initiatives such as the Music Hubs and the Cultural Citizens Programme.
- More data should be published about the uptake of arts subjects. Although the DfE publishes a national statistic about the proportion of students taking at least 1 arts GCSE, it could also publish this information at school level.
- Arts organisations and prominent figures in the arts could do more to promote the arts in schools. Many studies have found that partnerships between arts organisations and schools have been effective in boosting attainment in the arts. One way in which this can be achieved is by arts organisations becoming directly involved in the setting up of free schools.
- There are already some examples of free schools which have a focus on the arts. One such school is Cobham free school in Surrey which works in close partnership with the Yehudi Menuhin School. As a result of this partnership, pupils at Cobham enjoy access to free music lessons from the age of 5. Ninety per cent of what will be the first GCSE cohort have chosen to take at least 1 arts subject.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<http://www.newschoolsnetwork.org/file/nsn-arts-report-the-two-culturespdf-0>