



## **Save Our Subjects response for the Curriculum and Assessment Review**

Submitted by the Independent Society of Musicians, One Dance UK and the National Society for Education in Art and Design, representing the Save Our Subjects campaign.

### **Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways**

#### **10. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways are working well to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?**

Arts subjects (including art & design, dance, design & technology, drama and music) provide vital pathways into our world-leading creative industries, which in 2022 contributed £126 billion to the UK economy. An arts education is also key to creating the audiences of the future.

A wide array of research shows that studying arts subjects provides significant benefits:

- Arts subjects help learners develop skills such as oracy, critical thinking, collaboration and problem-solving. They help students 'look at things from different perspectives, understand the limits of their and others' views, and help transform their ideas into innovative solutions.' (OECD, Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking, 2019)
- Arts subjects enhance learning in STEM subjects. 'Schools that integrate arts into their curriculum show improved student performance in Maths, English, critical thinking and verbal skills.' (RSC, Tate and Nottingham University, Time to Listen, 2018) Case studies showed '[t]he value that bringing arts and creative approaches into STEM subjects gives to student learning by increasing engagement, developing observation skills and increasing resilience.' (A New Direction, Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future, 2023)
- Employers need workers with creative skills. In 2019 business leaders stated that we need 'a curriculum that instead of narrowing horizons, broadens them, and fosters skills such as creativity, resilience, communication, and problem-solving.' (Confederation of British Industry, Getting young people work ready, 2019)
- Those with access to arts education do better in terms of social mobility. The Durham Commission's research reveals the importance of creativity and creative thinking to individual and collective mobility, both in terms of social mobility and national economic growth. (Durham Commission on Creativity and Education, 2020)
- The arts support health and wellbeing. 'Engaging in creativity and culture is linked to positive wellbeing, feeling connected, and motivation in people across a range of ages and locations.' (Arts Council England, Arts, Culture & the Brain, 2022) Physical self-worth scores for girls who took part in dance activity as an intervention improved



significantly when compared to other PE activities. (Arts & Health, The effects of recreational dance interventions on the health and well-being of children and young people, 2012)

- The arts also support mental wellbeing. A major study this year found that people who took part in arts and crafts activities reported higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, as well as a stronger sense that life is worthwhile. (Frontiers in Public Health, Study into engagement with Creating Arts and Crafting, 2024)
- The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how making music helps people to create meaning in their lives and foster social connections (Oxford University News, 2020)

Parents support creative education for their children. A 2022 survey by Parentkind on behalf of Save Our Subjects found that:

- 95% of parents agreed – 81% strongly – that it is important for schools to teach pupils skills as well as knowledge/facts.
- 80% of parents felt it is very important for their child's school to provide access to a full arts and technology curriculum up to and including GCSE level.
- 56% of parents said they had noticed arts subjects being treated differently from other subjects at their child's school.

Additionally, a YouGov poll commissioned by the ISM in 2011 revealed that 97% of adults believe music should be taught in schools.

Despite this, arts subjects are in serious decline across the English state school system. This is due to education policies that have prioritised the small group of subjects contained in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) since 2010.

To retain the UK's place as a world leader in creative industries and provide young people with the skills they need for the future, we must put arts subjects back at the heart of the curriculum so they are accessible to learners of all types and from all backgrounds.

We were greatly encouraged to hear the Prime Minister say in the House of Commons on 6 November: '...music, the creative subjects and art are really important not only for the pleasure and knowledge that they give to children and young people but for the experience of working in groups and leadership. That is why we are determined to ensure that they are counted as subjects again in the curriculum, which will encourage many more schools to provide them in the curriculum and enrich the futures of children and young people across the country.' (Prime Minister's Questions, 6 November 2024)



The Save Our Subjects campaign is calling for reform of the EBacc and Progress 8 accountability measures as a vital first step towards restoring the arts in the curriculum. In July 2023 our open letter to the then Education Secretary Gillian Keegan attracted over 1,200 signatures from arts organisations and individuals. See more information at [www.saveoursubjects.org](http://www.saveoursubjects.org).

### **11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?**

The secondary school accountability system should be targeted for urgent reform because it has caused such widespread damage to arts subjects in English state schools.

Arts subjects are excluded from the EBacc and the Progress 8 buckets are heavily skewed towards EBacc subjects. This has created a subject hierarchy, where EBacc subjects are prioritised over non-EBacc subjects in the curriculum.

Since the introduction of the EBacc in 2010 there has been an alarming erosion in arts subjects in state secondary schools. Data from the Cultural Learning Alliance's [Report Card 2024](#) shows:

- Since 2010 there has been a fall of 42% in GCSE entries in arts subjects.
- 84% of schools no longer enter any pupils for dance GCSE; 41% of schools no longer enter any pupils for drama GCSE; and 42% enter no pupils for music GCSE (a change of 14% since 2016/17)
- There has been an overall 21% decrease in arts entries at A level since 2010, with the decline most pronounced in dance (56%), music (43%) and design & technology (42%).

The EBacc is based on a backward-looking belief that all students should be encouraged to take an academic pathway, with an emphasis on a knowledge-rich curriculum. This narrow approach does not prepare students adequately for the digital age and the rapid advance in Artificial Intelligence:

- The EBacc subjects are almost identical to those of the [1904 Secondary Regulations](#).
- The EBacc subjects are based on the Russell Group's list of facilitating subjects, which does not include any arts subject and was abandoned in May 2019 due to its negative impact on arts education. In a statement, the [Russell Group said](#) that facilitating subjects had become incorrectly viewed as 'the only subjects pupils should consider to get into a Russell Group university, or that you must take them for any degree.'
- The McKinsey Institute found that the demand for skills such as creativity and critical thinking will increase rapidly, predicting that the demand for creativity will rise by 30% in



Western Europe by 2030. (OECD, Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking, 2019)

### **Section 3: Social justice and inclusion**

#### **12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?**

Arts education must be accessible and inclusive for all children and young people. Yet the EBacc has pushed arts subjects to the margins of the curriculum. This makes them far less accessible to those from under-privileged backgrounds who cannot afford to study these subjects privately. We can see the impact in the wide accessibility gap between rich and poor:

- Young people in the wealthiest decile are three times more likely to sing in a choir or play in a band or orchestra weekly; just over 50% play a musical instrument, compared with under a third of those in the most deprived decile. (Onward, Beyond School: The Case for School Enrichment, 2022)
- 'Disadvantaged pupils are 39 per cent less likely than non-disadvantaged pupils to take music at GCSE and, when they do, they score 1.4 grades below their non-disadvantaged peers.' (Education Policy Institute, Covid-19 and Disadvantage gaps in England, 2022)
- Overall 37% of young people do not take part in any extra-curricular activities, indicating that over a third of all English students do not currently engage in the kind of activities needed to cultivate creative competencies. This rises to 54% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not have such opportunities. (Sutton Trust, Extra-Curricular Inequality research brief, 2014). Parentkind reports that nearly 1 in 4 children do not attend activities after school. (Parentkind, National Parent Survey, 2024)
- The Child Poverty Action Group reports that 65% of children in low-income families miss out on extra-curricular activities, and underlines the detrimental impact of this. One single parent said: 'The place where [my daughter] was happy and thrived was in dance classes and I now can't pay for them and that was the thing she looked forward to every week, she made friends there; she doesn't have friends at school as such but at dance she had friends.' (CPAG, Effects of Poverty)

Reducing arts subjects in the curriculum creates barriers for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and ultimately narrows the creative talent pipeline. A recent report



found that 'younger adults from working-class backgrounds are 4 times less likely to work in the creative industries compared to their middle-class peers.' (Sutton Trust, [A Class Act](#), 2024)

Without reform that puts arts subjects at the heart of the curriculum, the creative industries will become the preserve of the privileged few.

**13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity)?**

Black, Asian and ethnically diverse pupils are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to curriculum arts education, as they are already affected by a lack of representation in the curriculum and among educators. (Runnymede Trust, [Visualise: Race and Inclusion in Secondary School Art Education](#), 2023)

This directly impacts the creative industry talent pipeline:

- The arts, culture and heritage workforce is 90% white. (Creative PEC, [Arts, Culture and Heritage: Audiences and Workforce report](#), 2024)
- White music industry professionals are more likely to have a music-related qualification compared to black professionals and earned more for their work in the industry pre-Covid. (Black Lives in Music, [Being black in the UK music industry](#), 2021)
- 'Children from an ethnic minority background had a 48% lower odds of visiting an archive, a museum or heritage site, compared to those from a white majority background.' (University College London, [Comparisons of in-school and out-of-school participation in the Taking Part Survey](#), 2021)

There are also gender barriers:

- There is a gender imbalance in GCSE take up of art and design (just over double the number of female candidates compared to male candidates). However, today's design workforce is disproportionately male (77%) and from more privileged backgrounds; designers who are female, from an ethnic minority (excluding white minorities) or have a disability are also under-represented at senior and managerial levels. (Design Council, [Design Economy](#), 2021)
- Ofsted reports a gender imbalance in dance, which is often taught to girls but not boys or certain 'ability' sets. 'Many schools do not match the ambition of the national curriculum. In two thirds of the schools, dance is not taught to all pupils.' (Ofsted, [PE Subject Report 'Levelling the Playing Field'](#), 2023)



## **Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content**

### **22. Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects where:**

#### **a. there is too much content; not enough content, or content is missing;**

Since the introduction of the new GCSEs in 2014 by the then Education Secretary Michael Gove, many GCSE subjects have so much content that increasingly schools are starting courses a year early in Year 9. This reduces curriculum time for arts subjects in Key Stage 3.

- Chair of the Lords Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee Jo Johnson said the committee's inquiry found 'an overloaded curriculum, a disproportionate exam burden and declining opportunities to study creative and technical subjects.' (Lords Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee, Requires improvement: urgent change for 11–16 education, 2023)
- The exam board OCR recommends that the content of GCSEs be reduced as well as the length and number of assessments, and that the EBacc should be reviewed to encourage schools to offer a wider range of subjects. It cites the sciences, maths and history as subjects 'where the volume of content is most commonly described as excessive' and references a 2019 Schoolzone survey of history teachers in which only 20% of respondents regarded the amount of content as manageable. (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA, Striking the balance, 2024).
- Ofsted's 2019-20 report found: 'Curriculum narrowing, where a disproportionate or premature emphasis on teaching exam specifications was limiting pupils' exposure to a broad and balanced curriculum over the course of their secondary education.' (Ofsted, Annual Report, 2019-20)
- The new GCSEs shifted the curriculum towards knowledge-rich learning. This has led to a focus on rote-learning of facts rather than development of important skills such as oracy, problem-solving and creative thinking. 'On average 47% teachers felt that there were fewer opportunities to develop employability skills and competencies due to changes in GCSEs and A-Levels, citing a new focus on rote learning as a detriment to developing the skills and attitudes needed for work.' (Teachers' survey carried out by Education and Employers, quoted in CBI, Getting young people 'work ready', 2019)

**26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?**



The emphasis on EBacc subjects in the current secondary curriculum does not allow pupils to fully develop the skills they need for future study, life and work.

Arts subjects are renowned for their ability to develop a wide range of skills, including oracy, problem-solving, critical thinking, resilience and creativity. Each arts subject develops a different set of these important skills, and learners should have the opportunity to study a combination of arts subjects.

- A recent report described the arts as ‘full spectrum’ subjects, supporting the development of critical thinking, oracy, self-expression, self-belief, independence, initiative, focus, flexibility, collaboration, compassion, responsibility, resilience, achievement and creative freedom. (A New Direction, Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future, 2023)
- Susan Hallam and Evangelos Himonides’ book collates the vast amount of research showing the significant benefits of music education from the fields of neuroscience, psychology, education and music. They show how music can help develop skills such as oracy, maths, literacy and spatial skills as well as supporting wellbeing and mental health. (Hallam and Himonides, The Power of Music: An Exploration of the Evidence, 2022)
- ‘Overwhelmingly, students who are studying arts subjects talk about: how they developed their knowledge and critical thinking skills, enjoyment and wellbeing; and the way the arts relate to who they are, how they want to be and the things they might do “in future”.’ (Royal Shakespeare Company, Tate and Nottingham University, Time to Listen, 2018)
- Research has found a wide range of positive outcomes for children studying art and design. ‘These include disciplinary learning through encouraging diverse ways of knowing, interpreting, evaluating and feeling; supporting the development of a sense of individual and collective identity; increased social awareness and engagement, and enhanced opportunities for vocational learning and access into subject-related careers. As well as documenting learning and enhancing understanding in subjects such as science and the natural sciences, drawing is seen as a route to visualising thoughts and ideas in order to imagine new possibilities for the world and for the self.’ (Nottingham University, Rapid Evidence Review: The benefits of Art, Craft and Design Education, 2021)
- A recent report describes oracy education and arts education as ‘mutually supportive: teaching pupils to talk and listen makes an arts education accessible; and an arts education provides a distinctive vehicle for the provision of opportunities for pupils to



engage in experiences that foster the development of their oracy skills.’ It also states: ‘Arts education offers unique conditions and contexts for pupils to engage in dialogue, express themselves and develop their oracy skills through creative processes. Opportunities to speak, listen and engage in creativity and experimentation, which can be developed through arts education, play a crucial role in children’s development.’ (Oracy Education Commission, [We need to talk](#), 2024)

Reform of the accountability system to restore the place of arts subjects in the curriculum is essential to allow all pupils the opportunity to develop these skills, including the option to take more than one arts subject at GCSE.

## **Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum**

### **29. To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?**

Far from supporting a broad and balanced curriculum, the secondary accountability measures (EBacc and Progress 8) have caused a narrowing of the curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and 4 by focusing on EBacc subjects at the expense of arts subjects. See answer to question 31 for more detail.

### **31. To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?**

Ensuring creative subjects are accessible and inclusive for all learners is only possible by making them a core part of the curriculum. Extra-curricular opportunities such as drama and dance clubs or orchestras and choirs are not open to all and are not a replacement for curriculum time.

Creative education has become increasingly inaccessible in state schools since 2010 due to the secondary accountability measures that exclude all arts subjects from the EBacc and give far greater weight to EBacc subjects in the Progress 8 buckets. This has led to schools spending more curriculum time and resources on EBacc subjects at the expense of arts subjects:

- 3 in 5 teaching hours in secondary schools are for EBacc subjects – an increase of 10% between 2012 and 2023. (DfE, [School workforce in England data](#), 2023)
- Between 2011/12 and 2022/23, the fall in teaching hours for arts subjects (excluding dance, for which data was unavailable) was 21%. (CLA, [Report Card](#), 2024)





- There was a 27% drop in arts teachers in English secondary state schools between 2011 and 2024. (Campaign for the Arts, [The state of the arts](#), 2024)
- 82% of teachers believe the accountability system is too concerned with academic achievement. (Times Education Commission, [Bringing Out the Best](#), 2022)
- 93% of music teachers said that the EBacc and/or Progress 8 had caused harm to music education provision. (ISM, [Music: A subject in peril](#), 2022)
- Analysis by the ISM of the schools with the top 20 Progress 8 scores in 2023 revealed that less than half (nine) offered music GCSE, seven offered drama, five offered design & technology and just two offered dance GCSE.
- More able students are often encouraged to follow an EBacc pathway, usually at the expense of creative subjects. 'For those young people who wanted to study a music qualification but were not able to, a number of them said that they felt under pressure to choose other subjects instead or that music was not available as a GCSE or A-level option at their school.' (DfE, [Report on the Call for Evidence for the refreshed National Plan for Music Education](#), 2021)
- Ofsted reported that the curriculum has been narrowed due to 'a disproportionate or premature emphasis on teaching exam specifications' and that 'around half of schools had moved to a two-year KS3 model, which had resulted in the marginalisation of practical and creative subjects.' (Ofsted, [Annual Report](#), 2019/20)

We urgently need reform of the secondary accountability measures to allow schools to put arts subjects back at the heart of the curriculum.

### **32. Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?**

The steep decline in arts subjects shown in the analysis has largely been caused by the EBacc and Progress 8 accountability measures. Together these measures have created a subject hierarchy by assessing schools primarily on the progress students make in EBacc subjects. This has devalued arts subjects in the curriculum.

This decline is a serious cause for concern and should not be dismissed by the suggestion that it is accounted for by a move to vocational qualifications. As the analysis shows, arts subject GCSE entries have fallen significantly since 2010. As a percentage of the cohort, dance has fallen by 50%, drama by 46% and music by 43%.

In addition, although art & design GCSE entries appear more stable, NSEAD has pointed out that 'this stability is propped up by students moving across from D&T'. There has been a sharp fall in entries for entries in design & technology GCSE, which has fallen by over 50%, from 40% to just 19% of the cohort since 2010. The Textiles Skills Centre's research shows that 32% of



schools that offer a textiles GCSE had recently switched from design & technology to art & design. (Design Council, [A Blueprint for renewal: Design and Technology Education](#), 2024)

There has only been comparable data for vocational arts qualifications since 2019, but figures from the DfE's Key Stage 4 performance tables show that art & design and dance vocational entries fell 5% between 2019/20 and 2022/23. While vocational music entries increased by 7% year on year between 2019/20 and 2021/22, entries fell in all three subjects from 2021/22 to 2022/23 as follows:

- Art and design: 11% decrease
- Dance: 15% decrease
- Music: 11% decrease

We cannot use vocational qualifications to explain away the dramatic fall in GCSE arts entries. Accountability measures that strongly favour EBacc subjects are harming curriculum provision in arts subjects regardless of whether students are taking the GCSE or a vocational alternative.

## **Section 7: Assessment and accountability**

### **42. Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?**

Arts subjects at Key Stage 3 are increasingly squeezed in the curriculum by schools prioritising EBacc subjects and extending Key Stage 4 by a year.

- In 2018 Ofsted reported that around half of schools had moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 model, which had marginalised practical and creative subjects. (Ofsted, [An investigation into how to assess the quality of education through curriculum intent, implementation and impact](#), 2018)
- In music, Ofsted found at secondary level a 'less ambitious and limited' curriculum in schools where Key Stage 3 was reduced to two years or where music was taught in blocks on a carousel. (Ofsted, [Music Subject Report: Striking the Right Note](#), 2023)

We must reform accountability measures to create a level playing field for subjects at Key Stage 3, so that all pupils are able to progress in arts as well as STEM subjects.

### **44. To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?**

Secondary accountability measures have an enormous influence over curriculum and assessment decisions in schools. Progress 8 scores are used to compile school league tables, and because the Progress 8 buckets are heavily weighted towards EBacc subjects, schools are more likely to prioritise EBacc subjects in the curriculum.



Ofsted reinforces the impact of the EBacc. While a school's EBacc entry figures do not directly contribute to its final rating, the Ofsted inspection handbook states that a school must aim 'to have the EBacc at the heart of its curriculum, in line with the DfE's ambition' and will be expected to make 'good progress towards this ambition.'

A wealth of evidence shows the impact of accountability measures in schools:

- 3 in 5 teaching hours in secondary schools are now spent on EBacc subjects – an increase of 10% between 2012 and 2023. (DfE, [School workforce in England data, 2023](#))
- 'Accountability measures have had a considerable impact on the way curriculum time is allocated to different subjects in secondary schools, as well as on GCSE entries. The downward trend in time dedicated to non-EBacc subjects seems set to continue.' (National Foundation for Educational Research, [Changing the Subject? How EBacc is changing school timetables](#), 2017)
- : 'This decline [of entries in non-EBacc subjects] indicates that schools/colleges are continuing to focus more on EBacc subjects than those subjects which do not count towards the EBacc. Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures are also likely to be influencing these patterns.' (Ofqual, [Entries for GCSE, AS and A Level](#), 2019)
- Various studies have raised concerns about how the EBacc has changed the behaviour of teachers and school leaders. 'A study by Ipsos Mori commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) found that many schools had changed their curriculum offer to accommodate more EBacc subjects and sometimes redeployed staff to deliver this, but this often resulted in schools withdrawing or restricting other subjects (particularly creative arts courses).' (EDSK, [A Step Backward](#), 2019)
- The way in which schools present KS4 option choices, as a result of the EBacc and Progress 8, affects the uptake of arts subjects. Schools often steer pupils towards the EBacc combination of subjects at GCSE because they are inextricably linked to the Progress 8 buckets. 'There is a lot of pressure on the brighter (and often those who can afford instrumental lessons) to take EBacc subjects over arts.' (Secondary academy teacher, ISM, [Music: A subject in peril?](#), 2022)
- Despite the Russell Group removing its list of facilitating subjects in 2019, students are still being advised that the EBacc is the best subject combination for top university entry: '...by taking the subjects outlined in the English Baccalaureate, you will be giving yourself the best options and opportunities for further education, by ensuring you have the broad base of core academic subjects that universities and colleges prefer.' (<https://www.applytouni.com/courses/languages/english-baccalaureate/>)



- The focus on EBacc subjects and Progress 8 buckets filters down to Key Stage 3. Some schools teach arts subjects on a carousel to allow more time for EBacc subjects; others shorten their Key Stage 3 to two years, which means many students drop all arts subjects by the end of Year 8. Ofsted found that by 2018 around half of schools had moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 model, which had marginalised practical and creative subjects. (Ofsted, An investigation into how to assess the quality of education through curriculum intent, implementation and impact, 2018)

The influence of accountability measures is so strong that the school curriculum, assessment and qualifications system will not change substantially without reform of the accountability system.

#### **45. How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?**

The EBacc and Progress 8 accountability measures fail learners in multiple ways:

- A learner's Attainment 8 score tells you nothing about the progress they have made in arts subjects, as the benchmark is KS2 SATS, which are limited to English and maths.
- Progress 8's emphasis on EBacc subjects limits pathways for students who wish to study more than one arts subject at GCSE. 'Progress 8 has meant students have had to choose between some arts subjects...it does not recognise students who have strength in the arts.' (Maintained secondary teacher, ISM, Music: A subject in peril?, 2022) 'The EBacc accountability measure has meant the options are limited for students. Students have 1 option and have to make difficult decisions. Due to low uptake, SLT (Senior Leadership Team) then cut the course.' (Secondary dance teacher, One Dance UK, Everything We Loved About Dance Was Taken, 2021)
- Attainment 8 scores fail those SEND pupils and others (who are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds) who do not take as many as eight GCSEs.
- The accountability system has not closed the disadvantage gap. 'There has been no progress in closing the persistent disadvantage gap over the last decade across key stages – persistently disadvantaged pupils are over one year behind their non-disadvantaged peers by the end of primary school and almost two years behind by the end of secondary school.' (Education Policy Institute, Annual Report 2023, Disadvantage)
- The EBacc is actively detrimental to some disadvantaged students. 'The government's EBacc targets (75% of pupils studying EBacc subjects by 2022; 90% of pupils by 2025) may also have resulted in some schools entering large numbers of pupils for EBacc



subjects even when they were not likely to pass the examinations and may not have been interested in the subjects to begin with. Far from improving social mobility, this could have the opposite effect if it reduces poorer pupils' GCSE performance.' (EDSK, [A Step Backward](#), 2019)

- By pushing arts subjects out of schools, the EBacc and Progress 8 make these subjects far less accessible to those from under-privileged backgrounds. 'Disadvantaged pupils are 39 per cent less likely than non-disadvantaged pupils to take music at GCSE and, when they do, they score 1.4 grades below their non-disadvantaged peers.' (Education Policy Institute, [Covid-19 and Disadvantage gaps in England](#), 2022)

Many influential bodies and individuals are calling for reform of the accountability system:

- The Lords' 11-16 Education Committee calls for reform of Progress 8 that would 'give schools greater flexibility to offer the subjects and qualifications that would best serve their pupils, based on a balanced curriculum that includes scope for creative, technical and vocational subjects.' (Lords' 11-16 Education Committee, [Requires improvement: urgent change for 11–16 education](#), 2023)
- The Lords' Communications and Digital Committee: 'Employers are increasingly calling for a blend of creative and digital skills. This interdisciplinary approach needs to be encouraged at school. Yet there are too few incentives for students to study a combination of creative and STEM subjects.' (Lords' Communications and Digital Committee, [At risk: our creative future](#), 2023)
- The Times Education Commission: '...the introduction of performance measures including the EBacc and Progress 8 have accelerated pressures on schools to help students to secure top grades in the traditionally academic subjects. The price? The breadth of the curriculum has been squeezed, pushing out creative subjects, practical work, sports, trips and extracurricular activities and hampering social justice.' (Times Education Commission, [Bringing Out the Best](#), 2022)
- Pearson Qualifications says government should: 'Adapt the Ebacc and Progress 8 measures to allow schools to provide a more tailored, high-quality curriculum.' (Pearson, [Future of Qualifications and Assessment in England](#), 2022)
- The Lords' Youth Unemployment Committee recommends reforming Progress 8: 'We were overwhelmingly told that the EBacc and Progress 8... are limiting schools' and colleges' abilities to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that includes subjects beyond their scope. This is creating a gulf between what is taught in schools and colleges, the subjects many young people want to study, and the skills the economy



demands.’ (Lords’ Youth Unemployment Committee, Skills for every young person, 2021)

- The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, the ISM and the University of Sussex’s Music Education: State of the Nation 2019 report recommends that ‘the English Baccalaureate and Progress 8 accountability measures should be reviewed and reformed to provide a better education for our children.’
- The CBI has called for the government to broaden the EBacc to include a creative subject should the measure be maintained. (CBI, Getting young people ‘work ready’, 2019, [https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2960/cbi\\_work-readiness.pdf](https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2960/cbi_work-readiness.pdf))
- EDSK recommends immediate withdrawal of the EBacc as it ‘no longer serves any useful purpose’ and that ‘consideration should be given to reforming the “Progress 8” performance measure if policymakers want to put a greater emphasis on “additional” subjects including arts provision.’ (EDSK, A Step Backward, 2019)
- The Fabian Society has welcomed the Labour Party’s pledge to reform Progress 8 to add a creative or vocational subject and says, ‘The EBacc and Progress 8 accountability metrics... have led to music and the arts being squeezed out of the curriculum.’ (Fabian Society, Arts for us all, 2024)
- Former education secretary Kenneth Baker blamed the EBacc for ‘squeezing out’ creative subjects from secondary schools in a letter published in The Telegraph in August 2019. The letter, which was also signed by former education secretaries David Blunkett and Estelle Morris, and former Ofsted chief inspectors Sir Michael Wilshaw and Sir Mike Tomlinson, called the EBacc a ‘costly and damaging experiment’ which has ‘failed and is virtually indefensible’.
- More recently Lord Baker has called for the EBacc and Progress 8 to be abandoned. He told the Lords 11-16 Education Committee in 2023: ‘It is undoubtedly the collective view of all that Progress 8 and EBacc should go because, in all the evidence we have received so far, no one has defended Progress 8 or EBacc.’ (Lords 11-16 Education Committee oral evidence session, 11 May 2023)
- The ISM’s Bacc for the Future campaign warned of the damage that the EBacc would do to arts subjects in schools and called for an arts pillar to be added to the EBacc. This campaign was supported by over 200 creative businesses, education bodies and organisations as well as more than 100,000 individuals and generated numerous parliamentary debates.



**46. Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?**

Young people with SEND and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly poorly served by the current accountability system.

- The EBacc and Progress 8 advocate the academic EBacc pathway as the best option for all learners. Yet this pathway does not suit all learners, particularly those with SEND. Of the 754 special schools in England which have pupils at Key Stage 4, only one has a positive P8 score. Nationally in 2018, pupils with an EHCP scored -1.09 on the Progress 8 measure, and those on SEN support scored -0.43. (MIME analysis, reported in Schools Week, [Progress 8 fails pupils with special needs](#), 2019)
- The EBacc is actively detrimental to some disadvantaged students. 'The government's EBacc targets (75% of pupils studying EBacc subjects by 2022; 90% of pupils by 2025) may also have resulted in some schools entering large numbers of pupils for EBacc subjects even when they were not likely to pass the examinations and may not have been interested in the subjects to begin with. Far from improving social mobility, this could have the opposite effect if it reduces poorer pupils' GCSE performance.' (EDSK, [A Step Baccward](#), 2019)
- The accountability system makes the arts less accessible to those learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, who are unlikely to be able to access extra-curricular opportunities such as drama and dance clubs or orchestras and choirs. The Child Poverty Action Group reports that 65% of children in low-income families miss out on extra-curricular activities (CPAG, [Effects of Poverty](#)). For these children, the only opportunity to study arts subjects is within the curriculum.

It is vital to reform the accountability system to allow arts subjects more space in the curriculum and learners more freedom of choice at Key Stage 4. This will allow young people with SEND and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds to choose the pathway that suits them best, and it will make it easier for them to study arts subjects and pursue a career in the creative industries.

**Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19**

**49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?**



Arts subjects give students a huge range of skills that will benefit them at university and in employment, including oracy, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking and creative thinking. However, the myth persists that universities prefer the facilitating subjects contained in the EBacc:

- Although the Russell Group of universities has abandoned its list of facilitating subjects in order to foster a broader range of subjects, facilitating subjects are still mentioned on many websites as the best option for those wishing to go to university: 'There are eight "facilitating" subjects listed by Russell Group universities to help you keep your degree options open until you decide which course to take.' ([Complete University Guide](#))
- Students are still being advised that the EBacc is the best subject combination for top university entry: '...by taking the subjects outlined in the English Baccalaureate, you will be giving yourself the best options and opportunities for further education, by ensuring you have the broad base of core academic subjects that universities and colleges prefer.' ([Apply to Uni](#))

To support the creative talent pipeline into university and employment, we must move away from an accountability system that presents the EBacc group of subjects as the gold standard.

**51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?**

Employers value the set of skills that are developed by studying arts subjects, including oracy, collaboration, resilience, problem-solving, critical thinking and creative thinking. The pathways available at 16-19 need to include a greater breadth of subjects to enable this.

- 'Most employers (45%) ranked aptitude and readiness for work as the most important factor they consider when recruiting school and college leavers.' Additionally, '60% of employers said they rate broader skills such as resilience, communication, and problem-solving among their top 3 priorities when recruiting.' (CBI, Annual education and skills survey, quoted in [Getting young people 'work ready'](#), 2019)
- 'Employers are increasingly calling for a blend of creative and digital skills. This interdisciplinary approach needs to be encouraged at school. Yet there are too few incentives for students to study a combination of creative and STEM subjects.' (Lords' Communications and Digital Committee, [At risk: our creative future](#), 2023)
- A major survey of businesses showed that the ability to communicate, analyse, adapt, problem-solve and think creatively are the key skills leading businesses want from their





employees but also the skills that students value the most. (Kingston University, Future Skills, 2022)

- Parents overwhelmingly agree that the curriculum should focus on skills as well as knowledge, with 97% saying that it is important to teach life skills such as self-confidence and resilience, and skills that are useful outside of schools such as critical thinking and teamwork. (Parentkind, National Parent Survey, 2024)

However, post-16 students are studying a narrower range of subjects than 20 years ago, which 'could limit their future education and career options', according to an NFER report commissioned by the British Academy. This has particularly affected arts subjects: 'Arts subjects take-up has declined considerably over the last two decades, compared to STEM and Social Science subjects. Controlling for students' characteristics, the likelihood of a student studying [an] Arts subject is around 15 percentage points lower in 2021/22 compared to 2003/04.' (NFER, Subject choice trends in post-16 education in England, 2024)

There is a clear connection between the narrowing of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and 4 and the narrowing of subject choices at Key Stage 5. Again, reforming accountability measures to broaden the curriculum is vital to reverse these damaging trends for arts subjects.

**54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?**

The Save Our Subjects campaign is a coalition of over 40 arts and education organisations led by the ISM, NSEAD and One Dance UK and supported by over 1,200 organisations and individuals. The campaign website includes a wealth of research evidencing the damage these measures have done to arts subjects in English secondary state schools. For more information see [www.saveoursubjects.org](http://www.saveoursubjects.org).