

“There is no question .. that the Government’s motivation behind the EBac is right in several regards. Of course all children should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum – including traditional, academic subjects – and of course we should be working tirelessly to narrow the gap in attainment between the richest and poorest. But our inquiry uncovered significant concerns about the EBac’s composition, potentially negative as well as positive impact, and the way it was introduced.”

Graham Stuart, Committee Chair

This guide focuses on the conclusions and recommendations of the Select Committee. The length has been reduced but the original language has been retained.

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction of the EBac

1. We acknowledge the Secretary of State’s rationale for the retrospective introduction of the EBac. However, we also recognise the tension between the lack of consultation concerning the EBac’s introduction, and the Government’s aspiration to afford greater autonomy and respect to the education profession. Consultation ...might have avoided a number of the concerns which are now being raised, and may have secured support for the EBac rather than generating the mainly negative response (Paragraph 18)
2. We welcome the recently-launched review of the National Curriculum.We understand the Government’s wish to introduce reform with all speed, but regret the launch of the EBac before the curriculum review was completed. Any [performance measures] would be better introduced once the curriculum itself has been defined and finalised. (Paragraph 20)
3. We do not believe the EBac— the hybrid of a certificate and a performance measure, named after a qualification—is appropriately labelled: it is not a baccalaureate, and as it stands the name can therefore be misleading to parents, professionals and pupils..... (Paragraph 22)

The impact of the EBac on progression and social mobility

4. We support the Government’s desire to have greater equality of opportunity for all students, and to improve the attainment of those eligible for free school meals. The evidence is unclear as to whether entering more disadvantaged students for EBac subjects would necessarily make a significant contribution to this aim.However, other evidence suggests that the EBac might lead to a greater focus on those students on the borderline..., and therefore have a negative impact on the most vulnerable or disadvantaged young people.... and risks the very shoehorning of pupils into inappropriate courses about which one education minister has expressed concerns.... it is essential that the Government confirms how it will monitor the attainment of children on free school meals in the EBac. (Paragraph 37)
5. We agree with the Government that, if our education system is to improve, it must take account of best practice internationally. However, the evidence we received does not suggest a link, in other countries, between the prescribed study of certain academic subjects and improved attainment and prospects for poorer students. (Paragraph 38)
6. Universities, further education providers and sixth form colleges have already begun to communicate their position on the EBac, but confusion on its status remains (Paragraph 39)

Subjects and specialisation

7. ...the Department for Education “should consider whether a 40%/60% split between time spent on specifically vocational or technical study and on core academic curriculum would best suit 14 year olds who take up vocational options while at school.” However, we have not seen any evidence that the problems associated with the introduction and mission of the EBac could be avoided if a Technical Baccalaureate were introduced along similar lines, despite the support this won from some witnesses..... (Paragraph 48)
8. We acknowledge that certain academic subjects studied at A-level are more valued by Russell Group universities than others. The EBac is

founded on that university based curriculum. However..... we are not clear on the rationale.... a focus on a fairly narrow range of subjects, demanding considerable curriculum time, is likely to have negative consequences on the uptake of other subjects. ... More importantly, future performance measures must be well thought through. (Para 68).

9. We are glad that the Department for Education has recognised the potential impact of the EBac on teacher supply....However, academic subjects are not the only path to a successful future, and all young people....must continue to have opportunities to study the subjects in which they are likely to be most successful, and which pupils, parents and schools think will serve them best. (Paragraph 69)

The EBac as a measure of performance

10. The SoS is right to recognise the distortions created by ‘gaming’ of the system by schools..... we recommend that, in future, the Government gives schools sufficient warning of any change to the criteria on which their performance is to be judged by parents and the wider public. (Paragraph 74)
11. We are concerned that the EBac is not yet part of a balanced score-card which gives equal weight to the progress of every child.... We would encourage the Governmentto develop performance measures which assess the progress of all pupils, including those on free school meals.... (Paragraph 77)
12. The Government should consider the publication of unique learner numbers which would enable the analysis of entry for, and attainment in, particular subjects and combinations of subjects within a school.... (Paragraph 78)
13. The Government needs either to remove or revalue qualifications appropriately within the performance tables. we remain unconvinced that the EBac is an effective way to redress the perverse incentives generated by existing performance measuresthe EBac serves as a distraction rather than a solution in this context. (Paragraph 82)
14. We are concerned that an EBac certificate might give too much emphasis to one performance measure in a balanced score-card, and for this reason suggest that plans for certification should be shelved.... (Paragraph 84)

Concluding remarks

15. We think the Government is right to say that all children should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum up to the age of sixteen, including traditional, academic subjects, and that the attainment gap between rich and poor can, and should, be narrowed..... However, our inquiry has uncovered significant concerns about:
 - the exact composition of the EBac.
 - the impact the EBac will have on students, including the most disadvantaged, about which the evidence was unclear
 - the manner of the EBac’s introduction

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