
The English Baccalaureate and GCSE choices

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Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE), through the Centre for the Analysis of Youth Transitions (CAYT), commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to undertake a survey to assess the effects of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) on secondary schools in England. The survey was undertaken in June and July 2011.

This research brief presents the findings of the survey.

Key Findings

- Around half of the schools taking part in the survey (52%) said that the EBacc had influenced their curriculum offer, and most schools (88%) had provided information or advice on EBacc to parents/carers and to pupils.
- The survey found that a higher proportion of pupils are choosing to take EBacc subjects. Among Year 10 pupils, on average, 33% had selected GCSE subjects that, if passed at 'C' or above, would lead to them achieving the EBacc. For Year 9 pupils, this stands at 47%.
- Looking at the specific subject choices made by Year 9 pupils, double science is far more popular than triple science. On average, 29% of Year 9 pupils were taking triple science, while 54% were taking double science. This reflected the curriculum policies of schools. Only a minority of schools (27%) offered triple science to all pupils, most (65%) offered it to some and 8% of schools did not offer triple science at all. Double science was more widely offered, being offered to all pupils in 54% of schools.
- History, geography and a language GCSE were far more likely to be on offer to all pupils (83%, 85% and 83% respectively). On average, 39% of Year 9 pupils had chosen to take a history GCSE, 33% had opted to take geography and 52% were taking a language GCSE. Again, this reflected school curriculum policy. Few schools make history and geography compulsory (12% and 13% respectively, although schools were not asked if pupils had to choose one or the other), while in 39% of schools a language was compulsory for either all or some pupils.
- Just under half of the schools in the survey (45%) said that a course or subject had been withdrawn from the curriculum or had failed to recruit enough students for the 2011/12 academic year.
- Most schools (81%) said that some of their current Year 9 and Year 10 pupils would take some GCSEs before the end of Year 11, and most of these schools (90%) had no plans to change their policy on this.

Background

The EBacc was introduced as a performance measure in the 2010 performance tables. The measure recognises where pupils have secured a 'C' grade or better in GCSEs or accredited international GCSEs (iGCSEs) across a core of subjects – English, mathematics, two sciences, history or geography and a language (including Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) or ancient languages).

By introducing this performance measure, the Government hopes that more pupils will be offered the chance to take a broad core of more traditional academic options.

Research Methods

The survey was administered to a representative sample of 1500 maintained secondary schools (stratified by region, establishment type and the % of pupils who received free school meals). A letter was sent to the headteacher of all the sampled schools explaining about the survey and giving them the option to complete the survey online, or to wait for a phone call from a NatCen interviewer. Fieldwork took place from 23rd June to 21st July 2011.

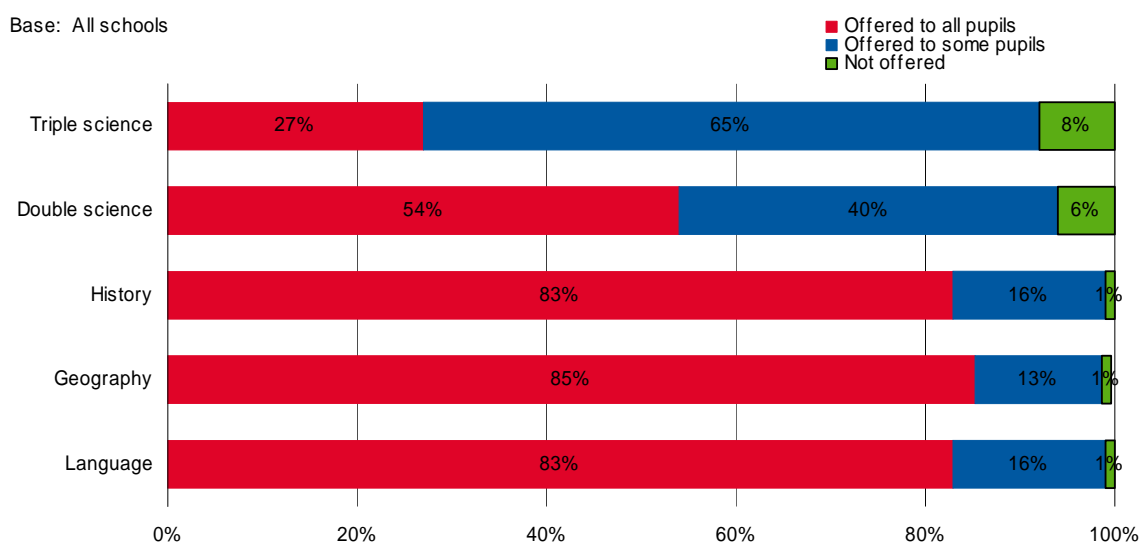
In total, 692 schools took part (578 by phone and 114 online) - a response rate of 46%. The schools responding were representative of all secondary schools in England.

Findings

GCSE subjects offered by schools

- Schools were asked if they offered GCSE subjects that are integral to the EBacc to their pupils, including triple science, double science, history, geography and a language. Figure 1 shows that nearly all schools (99%) offered history, geography and a language GCSE to their pupils. A slightly smaller percentage offered triple science (92%) and double science (94%), but 99% offered at least one of these science options to their pupils. Apart from triple science, which in most schools was only offered to some pupils, these subjects were commonly offered to all pupils.

Figure 1: Percentage of schools offering subjects to all or some of their pupils

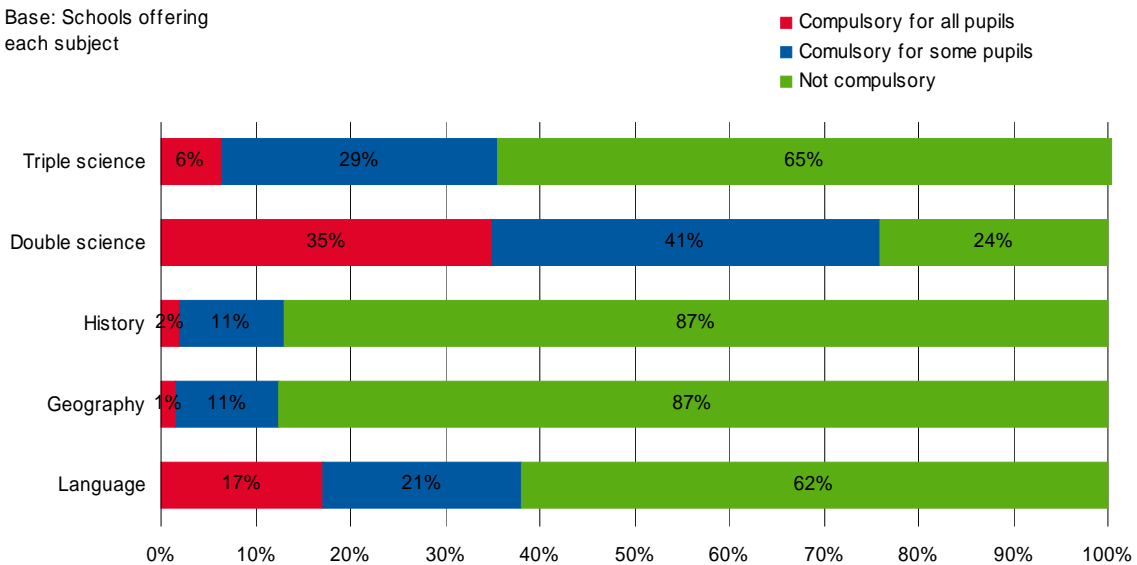


Note: In some cases percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding

- Figure 2 shows that in most schools, double science was compulsory for some or all pupils (35% of those offering double science made it compulsory for all pupils, and 41% made it compulsory for some). Triple science was rarely compulsory for all pupils (only 6% of schools), but was compulsory for some pupils in 29% of schools.
- A significant minority of schools made a language compulsory for pupils – 17% of those offering a language made it compulsory for all pupils and a further 21% made a language compulsory for some pupils.
- History and Geography were least likely to be compulsory subjects, with 87% of schools saying that neither were compulsory subjects.

Figure 2: Whether each subject is compulsory for all or some pupils

Base: Schools offering each subject



Note: In some cases percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding

Pupils choosing EBacc options

- Schools were asked how many of their current Year 9 and Year 10 pupils had chosen GCSE subjects that could lead to them achieving the EBacc. Using data from the Annual School Census on the number of pupils each school has in Years 9 and 10, NatCen calculated the proportion of Year 9 and Year 10 pupils in each school who were taking EBacc subjects (these data provide an idea of the proportion of pupils who will take the relevant subjects, but do not provide any information as to how many of these will actually achieve the EBacc).
- There has been an increase in the proportion of pupils who are taking EBacc GCSE subjects in the last year, so that a greater proportion of Year 9 pupils are taking the relevant subjects than is the case for Year 10 pupils. Table 1 shows that on average, 33% of Year 10 pupils have selected GCSE subjects that, if passed, would lead to them achieving the EBacc. For Year 9 pupils, who (in most cases) will have very recently made their GCSE selection, this stands at 47%.

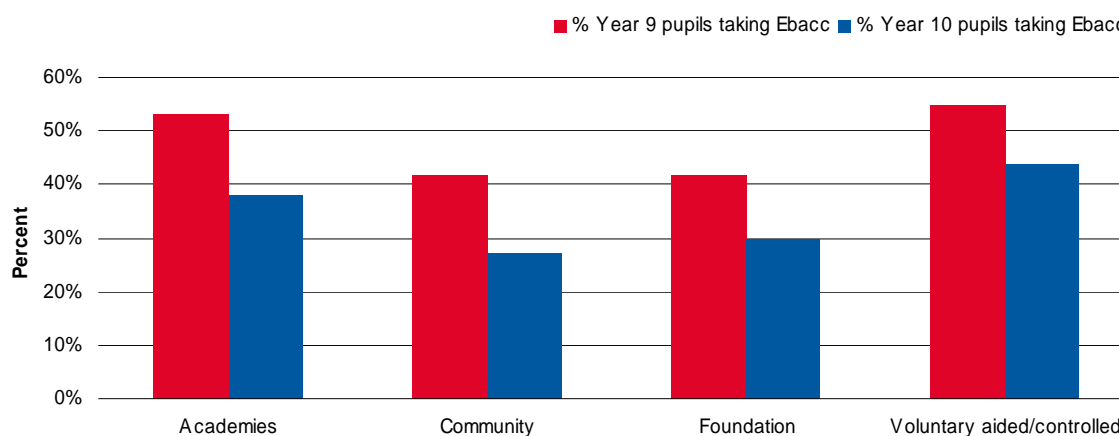
Table 1: Proportions of pupils taking EBacc subjects

% of pupils taking EBacc subjects	Year 9 pupils	Year 10 pupils
	%	%
10% of pupils or less taking EBacc subjects	7	20
>10%, up to 25% taking EBacc subjects	15	30
>25%, up to 50% taking EBacc subjects	35	26
>50%, up to 75% taking EBacc subjects	28	14
More than 75% taking EBacc subjects	15	10
Mean % taking EBacc subjects	47%	33%
<i>Bases</i>	629 ¹	637 ²

Base: Schools with valid data³

- Around half of schools (52%) said that the EBacc has influenced their curriculum offer for September 2011. Most schools (88%) have provided information on EBacc to parents/carers and the same percentage (88%) have provided information or advice on EBacc to their pupils. This appears to be leading to a higher proportion of pupils choosing to take EBacc subjects.
- Academies and voluntary aided/controlled schools seem to have a higher proportion of their pupils (at both Year 9 and Year 10) taking EBacc subjects than community or foundation schools. Over half (53%) of Year 9 pupils attending Academies are taking EBacc subjects as are 55% of those in voluntary aided/controlled schools compared with 42% of Year 9 pupils in both foundation and community schools. For Year 10 pupils, 38% of those in Academies and 44% of those in voluntary aided/controlled schools are taking EBacc subjects compared with 27% in community schools and 30% in foundation schools⁴ (figure 3).

Figure 3: Average % of pupils taking EBacc subjects by type of school



Bases: Academies Yr 9 – 133, Yr 10 – 135; Community Yr 9 – 246, Yr 10 – 253; Foundation Yr 9 – 136, Yr 10 – 134; Voluntary aided/controlled Yr 9 – 114, Yr 10 – 115.

- Schools with a religious character also have a higher proportion of their pupils in Years 9

¹ 21 schools provided a number for Year 9 pupils taking EBacc subjects that was higher than the number we had for total Year 9 pupils. We have coded these as 100% for the purposes of this report.

² 8 schools provided a number for Year 10 pupils taking EBacc subjects that was higher than the number we had for total Year 10 pupils. We have coded these as 100% for the purposes of this report.

³ Schools are included in this table if they answered the question about how many pupils were taking EBacc subjects, and also had valid data for the number of pupils in the relevant year.

⁴ Differences between academies/voluntary controlled or aided schools and foundation/community schools were found to be significant at the 95% level.

and 10 taking EBacc subjects. On average, 55% of Year 9 pupils at religious schools are taking EBacc subjects compared with 45% of Year 9 pupils in non-religious schools. At Year 10, 41% of pupils (on average) in religious schools are taking EBacc subjects compared with 31% in schools that do not have a religious character⁵.

GCSE choices for Year 9 pupils

- Schools were asked how many of their Year 9 pupils had chosen to take EBacc subject areas (including triple science, double science, history, geography and a language). Table 2 shows the distribution of schools with varying proportions of their pupils taking each of the subjects. Languages and double science were popular choices, and around a quarter of schools (23%) had over three-quarters of their Year 9 pupils enrolled in these subjects. On average, over half of all Year 9 pupils had selected double science and over half had selected a language at GCSE.

Table 2: Proportions of Year 9 pupils taking subjects

% of pupils taking subject	Triple Science (%)	Double science (%)	History (%)	Geog. (%)	Language (%)
10% or less	14	9	3	6	5
>10%, up to 25%	37	8	18	27	14
>25%, up to 50%	37	25	54	52	33
>50%, up to 75%	6	36	23	13	25
More than 75% ⁶	7	23	2	2	23
Mean % taking subject	29%	54%	39%	33%	52%
<i>Bases</i>	634	634	638	639	639

Base: Schools answering question and with valid number of Yr 9 pupils⁷

- Schools were asked if any subjects or courses had been withdrawn from the curriculum or failed to recruit enough students for the 2011/12 academic year. Just under half of schools (45%) said that a course had been withdrawn. Schools were asked which subjects had been withdrawn. A top-level analysis of the answers shows that most of the courses that have been withdrawn are BTEC courses. However, courses like music, performing arts and textiles were also mentioned, as were some languages.

Early entry to GCSEs

- Most schools (81%) said that some of their current Year 9 and Year 10 pupils would complete some GCSEs before the end of Year 11.
- Nearly all of these schools said that pupils who took GCSEs early and got a grade 'C' would be allowed to retake: 59% said that such pupils would always get a chance to retake, 35% said that such pupils would sometimes get a chance to retake, and 6% of schools did not allow pupils who got a 'C' grade at early entry the chance to retake.
- One in ten schools that allowed some of their pupils to take GCSEs early said that they were changing their policy on early entries in light of the EBacc, but most (90%) were not changing their early entry policy at this time.

⁵ This is significant at the 95% level.

⁶ Some schools provided a number for Year 9 pupils taking a subject that was greater than the number of Year 9 pupils. In these cases, we have coded the % of pupils as 100.

⁷ If the subject was not offered to pupils, we have assumed that zero pupils in that school would take this at GCSE for this table.

Additional Information

Further information about this research can be obtained from John Sreeton, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.