

A Curriculum for All?

The effects of recent Key Stage 4 curriculum, assessment and accountability reforms on English secondary education

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Executive summary

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of research which has explored how English secondary schools are responding to the introduction of the recent Key Stage 4 curriculum, assessment and accountability reforms – in particular, the EBacc, the new GCSEs and Progress 8. The research has focused on the implications of these reforms for schools' curricular offerings and the allocation of resources to different subject areas, for pedagogy and classroom practice and for social justice. The research was commissioned by the National Union of Teachers and carried out between April and September 2016 by researchers in the School of Education, Communication and Society at King's College London.

The mixed methods research design consisted of a survey of 1800 secondary school members of the National Union of Teachers and case studies conducted in three secondary schools in London.

Key findings

GCSE curriculum offer

- The overwhelming majority of teachers participating in the research reported that the EBacc has led to a narrowing of the Key Stage 4 curriculum offer in their schools, with 75% of the survey respondents reporting that students had a reduced number of GCSE subjects to choose from in their schools.
- The EBacc, alongside other school accountability measures, in particular the double-weighting of English and mathematics in the Progress 8 measure, is having a profound effect on the hierarchy of subjects within schools, with creative, vocational and technology subject teachers reporting a decrease in examination entry rates, reduced resources and less time being allocated to their subjects. Teachers of these subjects also reported experiencing increased job insecurity as a result of the reforms.
- A major concern of teachers is that, with the narrowing of the curriculum, students are increasingly being forced to take subjects which they are not motivated to study and do not enjoy. Teachers reported that in some cases this was leading to a deterioration in students' behaviour.
- The way in which schools respond to the EBacc is primarily through their options process. Our case studies show that, depending on their context, schools are positioned very differently in terms of their room for manoeuvre in designing option blocks, with schools with a more stable and secure context better able to protect creative and vocational subjects.

The new GCSEs

- The new GCSEs were characterised by research participants as encompassing a "one size fits all" approach, which makes it harder for teachers to respond to the diversity of students' needs and disadvantages students who are less able to perform well in written examinations.
- 76% of teachers of English and mathematics (the subjects constituting the first 'wave' of the new GCSEs) strongly agreed that their classroom practice has become more

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focused on examination and test preparation as result of the GCSE reforms.

- The more traditional knowledge-focused approach to both the content and assessment of the new GCSEs was criticised by some teachers for being uninspiring and anachronistic (e.g. neglecting the skills that are required for a technological age), and for placing insufficient emphasis on the practical components of creative subjects.
- Some teachers welcomed aspects of the new specifications and the change in focus for their subjects, whilst expressing concerns about the pace and scope of change and lack of information and resources to help teachers grade students' work and plan lessons adequately. These factors were felt to compromise the quality of their teaching.

Progress 8

- While teachers' assessments of the impact of the EBacc and the new GCSEs were overwhelmingly negative, in their responses to Progress 8 an appreciation of the positive potential of aspects of the reform was mixed with strong concerns about the reliability of the Progress 8 measure, and its use in the evaluation of teachers' performance and the determination of pay progression awards.
- Those expressing support for Progress 8 welcomed it as a framework which gives equal value to the progress of all children and which removes the artificial preoccupation with the C/D borderline produced by the previous accountability focus on the proportion of students attaining 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE.
- However, respondents also reported strong concerns and considerable distress about the reliability of the Key Stage 2 tests, their suitability for use as a baseline measure and consequently the reliability of the Progress 8 measure itself. 93% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "Key Stage 2 SATS results do not provide an adequate basis for tracking student progress across a whole range of secondary subjects".

Workload and wellbeing

- Many survey respondents commented that their workload has intensified with the introduction of Progress 8, with a significant majority reporting increased workload related to 1:1 booster classes (78%), data tracking and data collection (91%) and data analysis (90%).
- 72% of respondents agreed with the statement that Progress 8 takes time away from teaching, and comments about the increased workload associated with Progress 8 were often accompanied by scepticism about the value of this work.
- The reforms have introduced a great deal of uncertainty and confusion for schools attempting to implement them, which teachers told us has made it difficult to communicate the changes to students and parents and has undermined their confidence.
- Teachers' responses suggest that the combined effects of the reforms have been to exacerbate the pressures already present in a high-stakes accountability context fuelled by data-driven policies. Schools with 'Inadequate' or 'Requires improvement' Ofsted ratings are especially vulnerable to these pressures.
- Teachers reported that exam pressures and a preoccupation with performance data have had a negative impact on the mental health of both teachers and students.

- 85% of respondents agreed with the statement that teacher appraisal was becoming increasingly data-focused in response to Progress 8. Many of the written survey comments referred to teachers leaving or planning to leave the profession because they felt unable to cope with the pressures emanating from the greater focus on data and accountability measures, workload intensification and a sense of reduced classroom autonomy.
- In some schools, time for pastoral activities is being squeezed by the increased focus on 'core' subjects.

Social justice

- A major concern for teachers was that the steering of students towards EBacc subjects will increase disengagement and disaffection, and this was felt to be particularly the case amongst lower-attaining students, and students who are more creatively or practically inclined.
- Most teachers argued that the new GCSE curricula are less engaging for lower-attaining students and provide less opportunity to personalise teaching practices in response to students' interests and needs.
- The move away from coursework towards assessment by terminal examinations was seen as demoralising for students who struggle with exams, particularly lower-attaining, SEND and EAL students. Phrases such as "setting students up to fail" were frequently used by teachers in this context.
- These students are also more likely to attend schools that are more vulnerable to financial and accountability pressures and that therefore are less well-placed to protect the diversity and breadth of their curriculum offer. Some teachers spoke of students from low-income backgrounds who also attend resource-poor schools as being 'doubly disadvantaged' by the reforms. However, teachers also saw the potential for Progress 8 to direct more resources to the teaching of these students.

Section 1

Introduction

1 Introduction

A number of reforms to GCSEs and the Key Stage 4 curriculum have recently been introduced in England in tandem with reforms to school accountability measures. The stated aims of these reforms have been to raise the performance of English secondary schools in international league tables and reduce the number of students leaving school with no qualifications or with qualifications the Conservative Government has judged to be inferior, thereby improving the life chances of disadvantaged students (Morgan, 2015).

1.1 GCSE reforms

Changes in the content and requirements of GCSE examinations first introduced in 2015 are intended to “restore rigour, and bring standards up to match the best around the world” (DfE, 2015a: 8). The key areas of priority are English and mathematics (see section 1.2.3 below) with schools starting to teach reformed GCSE curricula in English Language, English Literature and Mathematics for the first time in 2015-16. The first cohort of students taking these new GCSE courses will be examined in 2017. A second wave of new GCSEs in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science, Languages, Religious Education, Geography, Music and History are being taught from September 2016 and will be examined in 2018, with a third wave, including Psychology, Ancient History, Business, Information and Communications Technology and Media Studies, commencing in 2017. The new qualifications are designed to be “more rigorous”, reduce what the DfE has referred to as “the constant treadmill of assessment”, and allow “more time for teaching” (DfE 2016a: 92). The content of the new GCSEs will be “more academically demanding” (DfE 2016a: 92) and terminal examinations will be taken at the end of two years of study rather than modules and coursework being used as the default method of assessment. Tiering is to be used only sparingly, and a new grading system is being introduced with a scale from 1 to 9 to enable more fine grained distinctions “and greater stretch” (DfE 2016a: 98) at the top end of the scale (with A/A* being replaced by three grades: 7, 8 and 9).

1.2 New school accountability measures

Alongside these changes in assessment, the accountability measures by which secondary schools are evaluated have been transformed fundamentally. In 2010 the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was introduced as a new school performance measure of the percentage of students attaining GCSEs (or accredited versions of established iGCSEs) at grade C and above in English, Mathematics, the sciences, History or Geography and a foreign language. From 2016 the key (or ‘headline’) accountability measures for secondary schools to be published in the performance tables will be the percentage of students attaining and entered for the EBacc, progress across eight qualifications (Progress 8), attainment across these subjects (Attainment 8), and the percentage of students achieving a ‘good pass’ in English and Mathematics (which will be grade 5 in the new grading system – i.e. a higher level than a C at GCSE). The percentage of students achieving 5 A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Mathematics will no longer be used as a performance measure.

1.2.1 EBacc

The introduction of the EBacc in 2010 arose from a number of concerns on the part of the then Conservative Coalition Government about the quality of the curriculum in secondary schools. The EBacc was designed to encourage a more traditional and academic curriculum in schools, deliver a broader and more balanced curriculum with more disadvantaged children taking subjects deemed to be ‘core’ (i.e. more traditional academic subjects) (DfE, 2015c), improve

SECTION 1: Introduction

the standing of English schools compared to their counterparts in higher performing jurisdictions and enable students to compete more effectively for jobs in the global marketplace (DfE, 2015a). The EBacc was also a response to concerns about the low take-up of modern foreign languages in many schools since their removal as a compulsory subject in 2004 (Taylor, 2011, DfE, 2012). In 2015, 39% of English school students were entered for the EBacc.

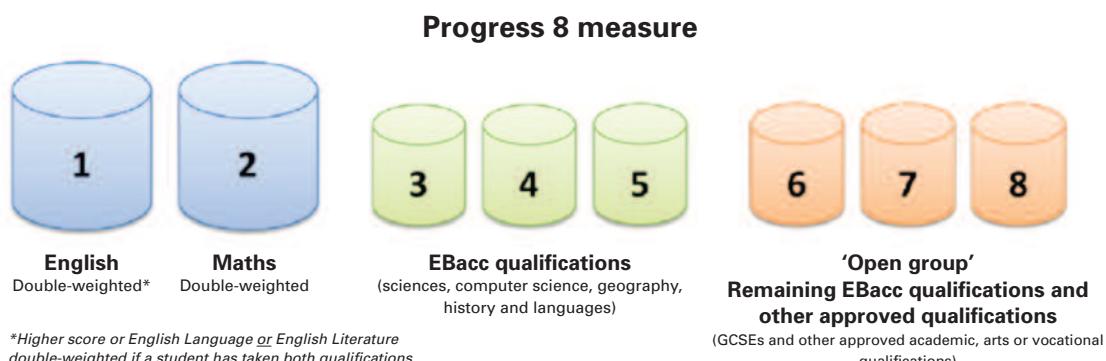
The DfE (2015a) recently consulted on proposals to make the EBacc the default option for students in mainstream schools, with the expectation that 90% of students would be entered for this award. The proportion of students entered for the EBacc in each school will be a 'headline' performance measure for schools in 2016 along with EBacc attainment. EBacc entry and attainment will also be given more emphasis in the Ofsted framework. These changes echo the stance of the Wolf Review of 14–19 vocational education (Wolf, 2011) which concluded that existing accountability measures had led to schools encouraging their "lower-attaining" students to take subjects "with little or no value" so that many young people were leaving school with "inferior qualifications" (Wolf, 2011:4).

1.2.2 Progress 8

From 2016, Progress 8 is set to be the "headline indicator of school performance determining the floor standard" (DfE, 2016b:7). Where schools do not show adequate Progress 8 scores, an Ofsted inspection may be triggered (DfE, 2016b), and conversely schools that perform well in Progress 8 will normally be given an inspection reprieve during the following year. Progress 8 is therefore arguably the highest stakes of the new performance measures being introduced.

The aim of Progress 8 is to record the progress students make from year 6, at the end of primary school, to the end of their time in secondary school. In effect Progress 8 is a value-added measure, which, according to the DfE (2016b:5), "means that pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with the same prior attainment".

Progress 8 is based on the Attainment 8 measure, which is a calculation of an individual student's average attainment in their best eight subjects. These subjects must fall into one of three subject 'baskets'. 'Basket 1': English and Mathematics; 'basket 2': three other EBacc subjects from Sciences, Computer Sciences, Geography, History and Modern Foreign Languages; and 'basket 3': three further qualifications which can be remaining EBacc qualifications or any other subjects from a prescribed list (DfE, 2015c). If a qualification does not fall into one of these baskets, it is not counted in the Attainment 8 or Progress 8 measure (see diagram below – DfE, 2014:3).



For their Progress 8 measure, each student's Attainment 8 score is divided by 10 (one point for each subject, with English and Mathematics being double weighted) and then related to their Key Stage 2 reading and mathematics scores to show progression from Key Stage 2 (year 6).

Although the accountability measures may result in schools emphasising the importance of EBacc subjects, students are not currently required to take the full EBacc (DfE, 2015a).

1.2.3 The special status of English and Mathematics

English and Mathematics have been referred to as “the golden core” (Schools Week/OCR 2016: 14) of the new school accountability regime, which has reinforced the special status these subjects have occupied since 2006 when the 5 A*-C GCSE measure of school performance was revised to include A*-Cs in English and Mathematics. Not only is one of the new headline measures devoted entirely to students’ attainment in these subjects (i.e. the proportion achieving English and Mathematics GCSEs at grade 5, which, as noted in section 1.2, above, is a higher level than the current grade C) but English and Mathematics are also integral to the other measures. As ‘basket 1’ EBacc subjects they will count towards schools’ percentage of pupils achieving the EBacc; and these subjects are double-weighted within the Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures.

1.3 The potential impact of the new measures

A number of commentators have expressed concerns about the impact of the accountability reforms on the Key Stage 4 curriculum, and, in turn, on students themselves. Among these are claims that the EBacc will result in the marginalisation and devaluing of creative and vocational subjects and that it will disadvantage lower-attaining and low-income students.

1.3.1 Creative and vocational subjects

A major area of concern centres on the exclusion of creative and expressive arts subjects such as Design and Technology, Music and Drama from the EBacc set of subjects (Welch, 2012; Adams, 2013; Taylor, 2013; Pring, 2013). Those calling for a greater representation of the arts in the curriculum suggest that a lack of the arts “does our younger generations a disservice” (Welch, 2015:5), with one commentator arguing that the reforms are an indicator of a “new philistinism that has overtaken the English education system” (Adams, 2013:2). An online group, Bacc for the Future, representing campaigners from a variety of sectors, including creative industries, are arguing for the inclusion of creative subjects in the EBacc to ensure the equal valuing of these subjects in schools to support a thriving creative economy for the future (baccforthefuture.com). In response, the DfE has argued that the EBacc has not in fact “squeezed out wider study”, citing the statistic that the “proportion of pupils in state-funded schools entering at least one GCSE in an arts subject has increased from 47% in 2010 to 50% in 2015” (DfE 2016a:93). However, it is not clear which subjects have been included in this statistic, which contrasts starkly with those produced by the Cultural Learning Alliance showing a 21% overall decline in arts GCSE entries (Art and Design, Dance, Design and Technology, Drama, Media/Film/TV Studies, Music and Performing/expressive arts) between 2010 and 2016.¹

¹ An earlier CLA analysis of similar claims made by the DfE found that the DfE figures excluded Design and Technology and Dance and included AS levels (CLA 2016b). The CLA have also analysed DfE teacher workforce statistics published in July 2015, concluding that “between 2010 and 2014 the number of hours the arts were taught in secondary schools fell by 10% and the number of arts teachers fell by 11%”. The most marked decline was in Design and Technology which saw a 15% decline in both hours of teaching and teachers, followed closely by Drama which saw an 8% decline in hours and a 14% decline in teachers, and Art and Design, with a 9% and 6% decline in hours taught and teachers respectively. The rate of decline in teaching hours and numbers was also found to be accelerating, “with over a third of the decline since 2010 taking place between 2013 and 2014” (CLA 2015).

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The EBacc has also been criticised for devaluing vocational education so that higher attaining students will be less likely to opt for vocational qualifications thereby “altering the mix of the type of people who opt for vocational qualifications” and further devaluing the status of vocational qualifications (Cook 2013: 13). This point was taken up by John Cridland, the then Chief Executive of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), in a speech at the Education Festival in 2015 when he argued that there should no longer be the “false choice” between “academic achievement or vocational skill” but a system which gives “everyone the chance to succeed” (Cridland, 2015).

1.3.2 Low-income and lower-attaining students

Critics have pointed out that students from low-income households, low-attaining students and those with special educational needs have been entered for fewer qualifications since the introduction of the EBacc, thus restricting their subject choices rather than ensuring a broader curriculum offer (Parameshwaran and Thomson, 2015; Taylor, 2011). Hodgson and Spours’ 2015 study suggests that middle-attaining students are also likely to be overlooked by the new measures because of the reduced provision of vocationally oriented courses and the greater emphasis on more traditional academic subjects. In November 2015 the Government proposed ensuring that at least 90% of students are entered for the EBacc, an ambition reiterated more recently in the 2016 White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE 2016a). This attempt to increase the numbers of students being entered potentially resolves the problem highlighted in these earlier studies of low-income and lower-attaining students being excluded. But it also creates the possibility that some lower-attaining students will be expected to study subjects “which will place too great a level of demand on them, reducing their likelihood of success” (NUT, 2016: 2). Furthermore, some of these students may be steered into further education colleges “as a means to improve league table standings or to focus fewer resources on the lowest ability pupils” in schools (Cook 2013: 13).

1.3.3 Classroom practice

However, aspects of the proposals have received support from some educators working within progressive educational traditions. For Smith (2015), for example, the new measures provide an opportunity for schools to move away from the educationally harmful and iniquitous practices generated by the previous accountability regime. These practices, which have been widely documented (e.g. see Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Stobart, 2008; Mansell, 2007; Mortimore, 2013), include: a prevalence of formulaic approaches to teaching; the targeting of resources on students on the C/D borderline and the consequent neglect of lower-attaining students; the unrealistic and pedagogically damaging expectation that students should make – and teachers should be able to evidence – progress in every lesson; and the relentless and persistent focus on continually assessing and tracking students and “teaching to the test” – conditions which Smith suggests are inimical to teaching that supports the acquisition of deep knowledge and higher order cognitive skills (Smith, 2015).

The raft of new reforms in secondary schools, including the new headline measures of EBacc entry and attainment, Attainment 8, and Progress 8, means that schools will have to adjust their teaching and learning practices to comply with the new rules and regulations (Parameshwaran and Thomson, 2015). Smith (2015), writing specifically about the English curriculum, suggests that the new regime has the potential to lead to a richer and more effective pedagogic approach characterised by open-ended exploration and dialogue (rather than the whole class teacher-directed methods that currently dominate) that is focused on

deepening understanding and developing higher order response and analysis skills in ways that can benefit students of all abilities including lower-attaining students. Smith argues that, done well and within mixed-attainment settings, this more dialogic approach can work well with students with special and complex needs. However, the success of such an approach, whether in English or other subjects, is dependent on the wider context of governance, management and accountability permitting the development of a different approach and on teachers having the opportunity to develop the skills required to teach in this way.

In the light of serious concerns about the potential effects of the recent Key Stage 4 reforms, the NUT commissioned a team of researchers from King's College London to investigate their early effects in English secondary schools with a particular focus on the perceptions and experiences of teachers currently charged with enacting the reforms. This document reports on the findings of this investigation.

1.4 Research design

The research relies on a mixed methods approach comprising a survey of secondary school NUT members and case studies of three secondary schools. Three pilot interviews with head teachers from schools with contrasting intakes guided the research team in developing the survey questionnaire and the interview schedules for the case studies. Our survey provides a national picture of the effects of the reforms. The case studies enabled the research team to explore some of the themes emerging from the survey in greater depth.

1.4.1 Survey

The survey, distributed to NUT English secondary school members between 23 April and 18 May 2016 via the NUT email database, was completed by 1800 teachers. Questions focused on GCSE curricular offerings, pedagogic approaches, data management, systems of grouping students, the allocation of resources for the teaching of different groups of students and teachers' perceptions of students' experiences of schooling in the context of the new reforms. There were six open-ended questions to which respondents were invited to provide free text responses. These comments are identified in the report as 'W' (written).

The survey questions were piloted with a range of secondary school teachers in different roles and levels of seniority. The Bristol Online Survey service www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk administered the survey and the results were processed and analysed using the SPSS Statistics package.

There was a 0.4 percentage point difference between the gender composition of the sample and the NUT English secondary school membership as a whole. In terms of school types, the maximum difference between the sample and the total population of NUT English secondary school members was 0.7 of a percentage point. This suggests that the sample is broadly representative of the NUT English secondary school membership in terms of gender and school type.

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Table 1. Gender and school type of sample population compared to overall NUT English secondary school membership

		Sample	NUT membership
Sample/population		1,800	68,833
Gender (female)		64.6%	65%
School type	Academy converter	60.7%	60%
	Academy sponsored		
	Community, foundation and voluntary aided	36.1%	36.7%
	Free schools	0.8%	1.1%

Although we did not aim for a representative sample of teachers from the English education system as a whole, it is worth noting that, with regard to Ofsted evaluations of secondary schools, the sample is slightly skewed towards schools rated as 'Good' and 'Requires improvement', and that schools rated as 'Outstanding' and 'Inadequate' are slightly under-represented in our sample.

Table 2. Ofsted rating for schools of sample population compared to general population of English Schools

Ofsted	Sample	England (2013/2014)
Outstanding	19.8%	21%
Good	53.8%	49%
Requires improvement	20.7%	23%
Inadequate	5.7%	6%

The majority of the respondents were in middle-managerial roles (43.1%) or classroom teachers (56.2%). Deputy heads and head teachers, who are underrepresented in the NUT membership, represented only 0.7% of the sample.

Respondents primarily taught the following subjects: science (13%), mathematics (10%), English language (10%) and modern foreign languages (9%) as their main subject at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, respondents primarily taught English (14%), mathematics (11%), modern foreign languages (9%) and the sciences (altogether 16%). In terms of Key Stage 4 subject 'baskets', 25% of the respondents primarily taught English or mathematics, 52% taught 'basket 2' subjects and 21% taught non-EBacc 'basket 3' subjects.

With regards to teaching experience, respondents have an average of 12.9 years of teaching experience, and the mode is 10 years. Overall, the teaching experience of the respondents ranges between one and 43 years.

1.4.2 Case study interviews

To complement the survey data, case studies of three contrasting non-selective, coeducational and non-denominational schools in London were carried out in order to generate more fine-grained qualitative data.

The case study schools, identified in this report by their pseudonyms, Ashfield, Maple Way and Oak Park, were selected to represent a diverse sample in terms of social class and ethnic makeup, size of intake, school type, and accountability pressures.

Table 3. Case study schools

	Ashfield School Academy – Converter Mainstream	Maple Way School Voluntary-Aided School	Oak Park School Community School
Size	1,880 pupils	687 pupils	974 pupils
Ofsted grade	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement
GCSE results 2015 Students achieving A*-C grades including English and Mathematics	71%	47%	56%
Pupils registered for FSM	10.8%	32%	33.6%
Pupils registered as SEND (2014-2015)	1.9%	5.7%	12.6%
% of pupils achieving EBacc qualification	30%	2%	37%

10-12 semi-structured interviews were conducted in each of the case study schools with a purposive sample consisting of members of the senior leadership team, classroom teachers, SENDCOs and union representatives. The interviews were designed to elicit participants' insights about how the reforms are being enacted in the schools and about their impact on school practices and student experiences. The case studies enabled an in-depth exploration of institutional strategies and practices in a way that is sensitive to the contextual aspects of institutional responses (such as position in the league tables and the nature of student intakes) and sensitive to the difficulties of separating out the effects of different policy initiatives that have to be simultaneously negotiated. While the survey responses allow us to gain a general understanding of how English secondary schools have been impacted by the reforms, the interview excerpts are necessarily limited in this respect.

The interviews were transcribed and coded both manually and using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Comments used in the report are identified as 'I' (interview data).

1.4.3 Research Ethics

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the British Education Research Association and King's College London. Participants were granted anonymity and pseudonyms have been used in the reporting of the findings to conceal the identity of schools and participants.

Section 2

The GCSE curriculum offer

2 The GCSE curriculum offer

In this section we report on teachers' perceptions of the impact of the EBacc on GCSE curricular offerings, with a particular focus on the availability and take up of creative and vocational subjects. We also explore teachers' perspectives on how changes in curricular offerings are affecting students' experiences of learning in different subject areas and students' sense of educational direction and motivation.

The overwhelming majority of the 1800 teachers responding to our survey reported that the EBacc has led to a narrowing of the Key Stage 4 curriculum offer in their schools. 75% of the survey respondents reported that students had a reduced number of GCSE subjects to choose from in their schools, with only 4% agreeing that the reforms will ensure a broader and more balanced curriculum than before.

Figure 1. Students have a reduced number of GCSE subjects to choose from

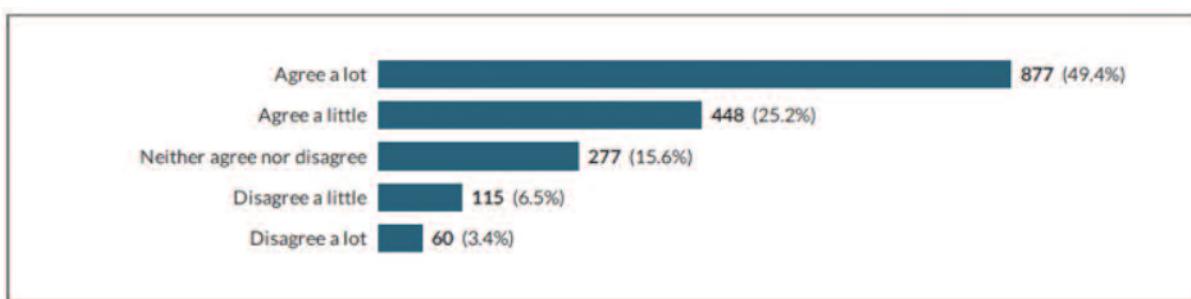
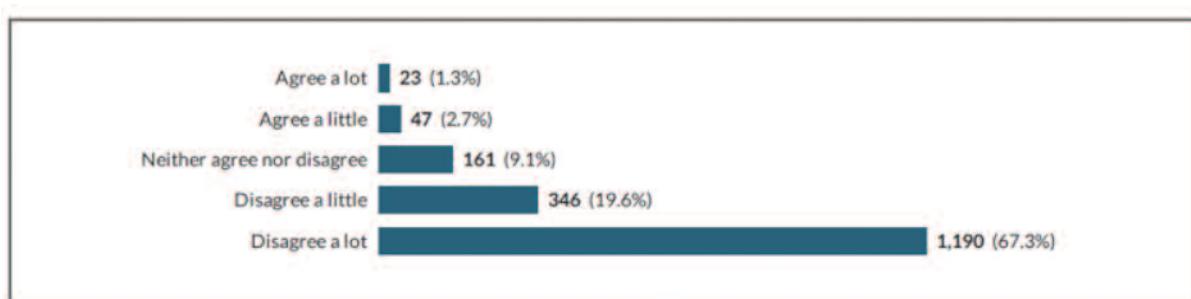


Figure 2. The reforms will ensure a broader and more balanced curriculum than before



In an open-ended survey question respondents were asked to report on which, if any, subjects had been removed and/or added to the curriculum offer. Creative subjects, in particular performing arts subjects (drama, music, dance and performing arts), DT and vocational subjects were those most likely to be reported as having been **removed** from the curriculum. Amongst BTECs, respondents specifically identified Applied Science, Child Development, Food Technology/Catering, Graphics, Health and Social Care, Resistant Materials, Construction, Engineering, Hair and Beauty, Travel and Tourism, and Leisure and Tourism as having been removed from the curriculum. Respondents indicated that religious education (RE) was often removed or relegated to being an option and thus taught in reduced time. A smaller number of respondents reported the removal of media, ICT, psychology and business from the curriculum offer in their schools.

Computer science and modern foreign languages (MFL) were the subjects most frequently reported as having been **added** to the curriculum offer in their schools, with some respondents

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reporting that a choice of MFL and/or a choice of humanities had become compulsory in their schools.

We found a significant correlation between the Ofsted rating of the schools and how their curriculum offer had changed, with teachers working in schools categorised as 'Inadequate' or 'Requires improvement' more likely to report that students had a reduced number of GCSEs to choose from.

Respondents were also asked to comment on changes to examination entry rates in their school between 2012 and 2015. Respondents teaching non-EBacc subjects were the most likely to report a decrease in the examination entry rates for their subjects. While 72% of English and mathematics teachers reported that the examination entry rates had not changed in their subjects, 61% of non-EBacc teachers reported decreases. The picture for science, computer science, geography, history and languages was more mixed with 31% reporting increases and 20% reporting decreases.

A decrease in examination entry rates in their schools was reported in creative subjects by 82% of the respondents, in vocational subjects by 84% of the respondents and in technology by 75% of the respondents. Exam entry rates had increased in both geography and history according to 69% of respondents and in modern foreign languages according to 59% of respondents.

The survey included an open-ended question inviting further comments on the impact of the EBacc on respondents' schools. The overwhelming majority of the 463 teachers responding to this question addressed the negative effects of the reform, with only three expressing hopes for positive impact. Typical comments included:

"Creative subjects are being sidelined and devalued." (W: Art and design teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"t is narrowing the curriculum and making vocational subjects seem less important." (W: Head of Year and design and technology teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"A lot of the art subjects were cut because they were time tabled against other art subjects so students could only choose one. More subjects are being dropped entirely this year, e.g. graphics and textiles." (W: Art and design teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"D&T does not matter any more." (W: Head of department of design and technology in a chain academy with a 'Requires Improvement' rating)

"It's stifling the education system. ... Do they not see how academic design is, how it creates balanced individuals who are organised, innovative individuals?" (W: Head of department of design and technology in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

Some of the survey respondents suggested that the creative subjects were losing some of their most talented students to more traditionally academic EBacc subjects:

"Excellent candidates for artistic subjects have been actively discouraged from taking Arts courses and told to do triple science and EBacc instead." (W: Head of Year and music teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Harder to get higher ability musicians to consider GCSE as an option." (W: Music teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

Comments about the narrowing of the curriculum were often linked to the claim that students were now being forced to take subjects which they may not be motivated to study:

"It's forced students who struggle with academic subjects to pick academic subjects that they don't enjoy. It causes them to lose confidence in their ability which causes their self esteem to plummet. It's horribly unfair as it's putting square pegs in round holes." (W: Head of humanities department and history teacher in a local authority school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"Students are pressured into the EBacc with the result that they are now taking subjects that they 'dislike least'. This has led to demotivated pupils and more behavioural issues for subjects like history and geography." (W: Head of department and history teacher in a standalone academy with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"Far more pressure on pupils [who] are pushed into choosing subjects for EBacc but cannot cope academically causing more problems with failure and behaviour/dysfunctionality." (W: Union rep and science teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Behaviour worsened amongst children who are forced into EBacc." (W: Head of key stage and history teacher in a multi-academy trust school with an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating)

"Students [are] forced to take EBacc subjects despite lack of desire and/or aptitude." (Union rep and history teacher in a free school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"We have ended up with students who were made to take a language as they were on a particular path regardless of their prior achievement and attitude towards the subject. Therefore, we have ended up with demotivated/disruptive students." (W: Head of key stage and MFL teacher in a local authority school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

These concerns were echoed in the case study interviews, in which a number of teachers suggested that the narrowing of the option choices coupled with the higher expectations associated with the new GCSE grading structure was likely to lead to disengagement amongst all students, with the lower achieving students disengaged from learning the most. For example, a drama teacher at Ashfield commented:

"I think maybe students that are at high risk of underachieving are getting disengaged with the school, if they are not able to take curriculum options that will engage them in school and really hone into their passions, I think they are going to find it increasingly difficult to stay with subjects and to achieve what the government feels is an acceptable grade." (I: Drama teacher, Ashfield School, standalone academy, 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

A senior teacher in the same school argued that the EBacc fails to recognise the value of creative careers as well as the progress made in creative subjects:

"So it's not that these students study art, drama and music and don't progress. They study art, music and drama and they progress the art, music and drama and things at degree-level or post-18 study. So it's still a perfectly useful route to them and we don't want the school measure affecting the interests of the child. The interests of the child have to come first." (I: Senior leader, Ashfield School, standalone academy, 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

SECTION 2: The GCSE curriculum offer

In summary, the majority of the teachers surveyed reported that, in response to the EBacc, their schools had narrowed the range of subject choices available for students, with 75% reporting that students had a reduced number of GCSE subjects to choose from in their schools. A major concern for teachers was that the steering of students towards EBacc subjects will increase disengagement and disaffection, particularly amongst lower-attaining students. A number of teachers also expressed the concern that creatively talented students were being steered away from creative subjects towards more traditionally academic subjects.

Section 3

Subject hierarchies and resource allocation

3 Subject hierarchies and resource allocation

EBacc, combined with the other new headline accountability measures, reinforces the special status of the more traditional academic subjects and especially English and mathematics (see section 1.2.3, above). As one interviewee put it:

“By definition if you say these subjects are in the EBacc then you are putting a ring fence around that as hallowed ground.” (I: Science teacher, Oak Park, local authority school, ‘Requires improvement’ Ofsted rating)

This is having a profound effect on the hierarchy of subjects within schools, reinforcing some existing hierarchies and extending and introducing new ways in which hierarchies are embedded. This is manifested in the reduction in the availability of creative and vocational subjects as GCSE option choices in many schools (as discussed in section 2.1, above). It is also manifested in a redistribution of resources to subjects deemed to be ‘core’ and reduced job security for teachers of ‘non-core’ subjects.

3.1 Resource redistribution

Survey respondents reported a significant redistribution in the allocation of resources to subjects, with more lesson time allocated to ‘core’ subjects and more students withdrawn from ‘non-core’ classes for additional 1:1 catch up provision and exam preparation in ‘core’ subjects.

Figure 3. More students are withdrawn from class for 1:1 catch-up provision

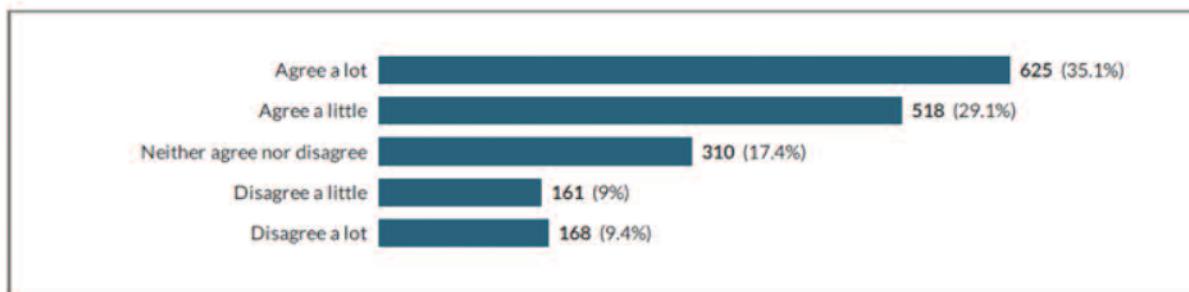
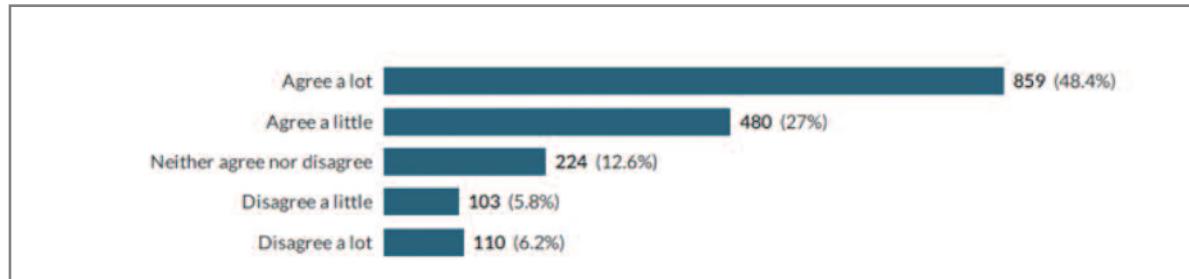


Figure 3. More students are withdrawn from class for exam preparation in ‘core’ subjects



Survey respondents reported that creative and vocational subjects were the most severely impacted by a withdrawal of resources, but that citizenship, PSHE, RE, some other humanities subjects and technology were negatively impacted as well. ‘Basket 1’ subjects (i.e. English and mathematics) were reported to be gaining resources as a result of the reforms, and this is also the case to a lesser extent for ‘basket 2’ subjects (geography, science, computer science, history and languages). For example, 67% of ‘basket 1’ teachers reported that their teaching

SECTION 3: Subject hierarchies and resource allocation

hours have increased, compared to 45% of 'basket 2' and 42% of non-EBacc 'basket 3' teachers. The shift in resources from arts to 'core' subjects was graphically illustrated by one survey respondent who reported that in their school:

"Dedicated classrooms for drama, media and music have been turned into science rooms ([with] sinks, gas taps, etc. added and sound engineer rooms removed)." (Head of mathematics department in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

There was a significant correlation between the Key Stage 4 subjects of the respondents and their responses to the statement that "more higher attaining students are being entered for GCSE exams in my subject". The majority (53%) of those teaching non-EBacc 'basket 3' subjects "disagreed a lot" with this statement whilst for teachers of 'basket 1' and 'basket 2' subjects the disagreement rate was around 20%.

Similarly, there was a significant correlation between the Key Stage 4 subjects of the respondents and whether they reported that their subject had "lost a significant number of students". 72% of non-EBacc teachers agreed with this statement. In contrast, not surprisingly, only 3% of English and mathematics teachers agreed with this statement.

Whilst our case study schools each responded to the new accountability measures in their own ways and according to their distinctive ethos and individual and situated contexts (see section 4, below), all of the **non-EBacc** teachers we interviewed reported experiencing some degree of marginalisation, whether reflected in loss of curriculum time, or reductions in uptake, resourcing and staffing of their subjects or increased pressure to 'sell' their subjects in the option choice process:

"The performing arts has been eroded ... [The time] has gone into the core subjects, which on the one hand you can understand because [of] the way the schools are judged, the way – certainly with Progress 8 – the school is accountable for making progress." (I: Arts and music teacher, Maple Way, voluntary-aided school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"We really do have to sometimes convince the parents that it's not a throwaway subject, that it's not regarded any less by universities or by college, and we show them the amount of science involved." (I: PE teacher, Maple Way)

"You can't offer a broad curriculum like you used to be able to because, for example, maths needs more time now ... so you're cutting hours from other subjects." (I: Senior leader, Maple Way)

"You know if you don't recruit and someone leaves they won't be replaced. If you don't recruit possibly you're going to be eased out the door." (I: Arts teacher, Oak Park, local authority school, 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

In contrast **English and mathematics** teachers reported that either the EBacc has not affected their subjects, or that it has strengthened their importance because of the special status of these subjects in the new headline accountability measures and the more demanding content of the new GCSEs:

"It hasn't really impacted that much. I think because maths is a core subject, students haven't had a choice with that, it's always been a measure." (I: Mathematics teacher, Ashfield, standalone academy, 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"So for a subject like English, which is compulsory, the EBacc hasn't really had any impact on us." (I: English teacher, Oak Park, local authority, 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"Key stage 4 in [maths] there's just a much bigger curriculum now that they have to follow, so they have more curriculum time. So that's a massive change ... I mean it's partly reflective of where maths is in our school, we do need to improve the progress of our students, but it is also reflective of the new GCSE and how much more content there is to cover." (I: Mathematics teacher, Oak Park)

"Our curriculum time has been increased because we've been seen as a priority over other subjects." (I: English teacher, Maple Way, voluntary aided, with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

Survey respondents' comments also revealed that increased curriculum time for English and mathematics has impacted negatively on 'basket 2' and non-EBacc 'basket 3' subjects:

"Over time, all arts subjects have been cut in curriculum time and teachers. Art was the last to fall this year, reducing from 3 hours a fortnight at KS3 to 2 hours and [from] 11 hours a fortnight to 10 at KS4." (W: Head of the arts department in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"The introduction of the EBacc has seen our SLT reduce curriculum time below the required rate for subjects such as PE and technology." (W: Citizenship teacher in a local authority school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"There has been an increase in additional revision-style off-timetable days in the core subjects which has reduced contact time for other subject staff." (W: PE and drama teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

A member of the senior leadership team at Maple Way reported that the 'core' subjects are also increasingly taking precedence even over pastoral activities that have, in the past, held a powerful place in the school curriculum and in its ethos:

"It used to be a lot of the time that the tutor could spend ... speaking with their tutees and getting to know them and build up a relationship. Now we have sessions where students will go out and might do some extra English, might do some extra maths, extra science, so rather than actually having a pastoral session you've got the pressure of the curriculum coming into the pastoral side and taking away from it." (I: SLT, Maple Way, voluntary aided, with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

A decrease in the time allocated to pastoral activities, and in some cases a loss of pastoral posts, was commented on by survey respondents as well:

"The pastoral, health and wellbeing of students has taken a back seat to teaching and learning." (W: Head of year and design and technology teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Faculty heads and assistant heads have been removed and replaced with lower-paid department heads. The pastoral team is being disbanded." (W: Art and design teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Restructuring tutor groups and the staffing with it, redundancies of non-teaching heads of year." (W: Biology teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

3.2 Job insecurity and redundancies

There was a strong correlation between the respondents' subject baskets and their views on their job security. 77% of non-EBacc 'basket 3' teachers 'disagreed a lot' with the statement that the reforms have increased their job security, whilst only 32% of 'basket 2' teachers and 21% of 'basket 1' teachers 'disagreed a lot' with this statement. Survey respondents used the opportunity provided by the free-text comment spaces to elaborate on the impact of the reforms on job security in their schools within a wider context of cuts to school budgets. Many reported that their schools had made, or were threatening, redundancies as a result of the financial pressures they were facing, particularly of non-EBacc 'basket 3' teachers and support staff, or that they were not replacing staff in these areas; and a number of comments referred to teachers of 'non-core' subjects increasingly being asked to teach subjects outside of their specialism:

"We are in the process of making seven staff redundant." (W: Design and technology teacher in a standalone academy with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"Change of focus for some staff combined with redundancies in staff, admin and teaching assistants." (W: Head of Year and PE teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Threats of redundancy if we cannot teach a second subject. The arts are being stripped away from options choices and many teachers are left with their full time timetables slashed in half. Many fear for their jobs at present." (W: Head of department and design and technology teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"It will ... result in job losses (currently under review). Teachers are being redeployed between subjects to meet needs – PE teachers teaching English and geography, for example, and technology teachers teaching art or Ethics, Philosophy and Religion." (W: English teacher in a local authority school with an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating)

"The arts are being slowly pushed out and staff are being asked to teach ... non-specialist subjects or support EBacc subjects on 1:1 teaching." (W: Head of department and dance teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"I am being made redundant because we will only be teaching EBacc subjects at KS 3 & 4 from now on." (W: Head of department, PSHE and citizenship studies teacher in a local authority school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"Redundancies have been made. Teachers in creative subjects have not been replaced." (W: Head of department, ICT and computer science in a local authority school, Ofsted rating not specified)

"Redundancies to teachers working in creative subjects, increased recruitment of core subject teachers." (W: Science teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"We have just had a round of redundancies due to financial shortages. The subjects that have lost teaching time are Art, Design and Technology, Music, Drama and RE. The art department has gone from 3 to 2 members of staff." (W: Art and design teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"A lot of staff have been made redundant due to more English and maths and science lessons per week." (W: Head of department and humanities and sociology teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted Rating)

In summary, the EBacc, alongside other school accountability measures, is reinforcing the marginalisation of creative, vocational and technology subjects, with teachers of these subjects reporting a decrease in examination entry rates, reduced resources and less time being allocated to their subjects. These teachers also reported experiencing increased job insecurity as a result of the reforms. In some schools the time allocated for pastoral activities is also being reduced by the increased focus on 'core' subjects.

Section 4

Options processes: context matters

Some of the survey respondents made positive comments about school leaders and their attempts to protect staff and students, as they saw it, from the full force of the reforms:

"As a school we've ignored the EBacc as a measure, it's not suitable for a good minority of our students." (W: Head of year and mathematics teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"As a school we've made a conscious decision to not let the reforms impact on how we teach. Options in year 9 have not changed so no subjects are at risk." (W: History teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"I have been pleased with my school's response to the EBacc – they have not changed their offering and in fact have made languages non-compulsory in response to students' needs and wants. They have not allowed themselves to be cowed by the government's demands that students are limited to certain subjects." (W: MFL teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

In the case study interviews we were able to explore in more detail how contextual factors such as school intakes and resources impacted on school leaders' freedom of manoeuvre to protect creative and vocational subjects in the new accountability landscape. The way in which the schools respond to the EBacc is primarily through their options process. Our case studies show that, depending on their context, schools are positioned very differently in terms of their room for manoeuvre in designing option blocks.

Ashfield School is an oversubscribed larger than average school which is rated by Ofsted as 'Outstanding' and performs well in the results league tables, with students entering the school with attainment significantly above the national average. The school is well-resourced and staffed with a secure and stable leadership team. All of this enables the leadership to implement changes gradually and apply a "wait and see" approach of 'adapting' to change (history and politics teacher, Ashfield) even in the current, rapidly changing policy environment. As a consequence, Ashfield has been able to maintain a flexible approach to its option block process and to ensure that every student has an opportunity to take an arts subject:

"We've always had a very open option process at Year 9 in that we never put subjects into blocks for students to choose between. They have complete free choice across all of our subjects that we offer." (I: Senior Leader, Ashfield)

Ashfield was the only one of our case study schools which had not increased curriculum time for English and mathematics because, as a mathematics teacher explained:

"If we increased our time [for English and maths] then we had to remove some of the options across other subjects and we felt that, as a school, we wanted to still offer more choice." (I: Mathematics teacher, Ashfield School)

However, the same teacher did acknowledge that this policy is results-dependent and could potentially change in the future:

"I think if our maths results drop significantly then there'll be a strong argument for increasing the number of lessons for maths and perhaps English." (I: Mathematics teacher, Ashfield)

Whilst Maple Way, rated as 'Good' in its last Ofsted inspection and 'Outstanding' in the behaviour and safety of its pupils, also aspires to provide a "flexible offer", options are constrained by the small size of the school:

SECTION 4: Options processes: context matters

“...what [the option blocks] do is they give students the opportunity to follow the EBacc if they wish ... so it’s a very flexible offer but we are ... a very, very small school so we can’t offer significant flexibility.” (I: Senior leader, Maple Way)

The senior leadership team (SLT) at Maple Way, which serves a predominantly socio-economically disadvantaged community, also wants to ensure its students should not be further disadvantaged by being discouraged from taking more EBacc subjects:

“I have asked the member of staff who leads [our] options [process] to go back to students and recommend the EBacc more strongly.” (I: Senior leader, Maple Way)

However, at the same time, the SLT is keen for students to be able to access a broad curriculum and, in order to protect creative subjects at risk of being dropped from the curriculum, it is considering a two-week timetable:

“If you go to a two week timetable then everybody can have an offer less frequently so you could keep textiles but they would only have it once every two weeks instead of once a week, so it offers a degree of flexibility.” (I: Senior leader, Maple Way)

Ultimately though the changes in the coming year will likely be determined by financial and infrastructural constraints beyond the school’s control.

“It will be determined by the fact that my budget is reduced and we might be moving to two sites and I might ... not be able to offer a broad range of DT for example.” (I: Senior leader, Maple Way)

Constraints imposed by budgetary pressures was also a strong theme in the open-ended survey responses, with teachers of subjects deemed to be ‘non-core’ identified as most at risk of redundancy or non-replacement in cases where reductions to school budgets were being addressed via staffing cuts (see section 3.2).

In Oak Park School, assessed by Ofsted as ‘Requires improvement’, experiencing high head teacher turnover, extreme financial pressures and redundancies due to falling roles, the SLT made a conscious decision to postpone dealing with the implementation of the new accountability measures until the following year. As one interviewee put it: “I think this year has been about other things”. Nevertheless, the effect of EBacc on subject hierarchies is felt implicitly:

“It has effects which may be not necessarily explicit, but, you know, again unconscious changes, and unconscious emphasis on particular subjects. Whether you like it or not, if it’s more important you are going to spend more time at parents evening talking about these subjects. So, where do we make the cuts? Who are we going to put the money into recruiting? ... The non-EBacc subject heads of department, what does it feel like for them? Do they get equal billing at options evenings? ... They’ll notice those things.” (I: Science teacher and NUT rep, Oak Park)

The general message we received in all the schools from the teachers we interviewed was that the schools are making determined attempts to protect their non-EBacc subjects and provide as broad a curriculum as possible, and none of the case study schools were requiring students to take the full EBacc – although, where it was felt appropriate, they were encouraging them to do so:

"I've been pleasantly surprised by the approach of the SLT ... At my last school most students were forced into EBacc ... Here, although there's been very much that encouragement, there's a vocational route, the timetable has been written so you can choose a vocational route and ... still do your English, Maths, Science, and a couple of other subjects. There hasn't been anyone forced into language, you know, very much an encouragement." (I: Senior Leader, Oak Park)

'We are trying to encourage more children who are able to take a language under Humanities, so we are not stating categorically that every child has to do the EBacc choice of subjects ... because we know that if students are corralled into something that they don't want to do, that actually everybody loses. We're trying not to put that sort of pressure on.' (I: Senior Leader, Ashfield)

Nevertheless, across all three school contexts, the non-EBacc teachers appeared to 'speak the same language' in terms of the impact that the EBacc is having or will have on their subjects in the future. Although it is still early days in terms of the new headline accountability measures kicking in, there was a sense of inevitability from the teachers interviewed that these would continue to impact on subject hierarchies in the ways described in Section 3, above. For example, an SLT member at Maple Way explained that the "reality is that the school is judged on its EBacc measure" so the school will eventually have to fall in line.

Section 5

The new GCSEs

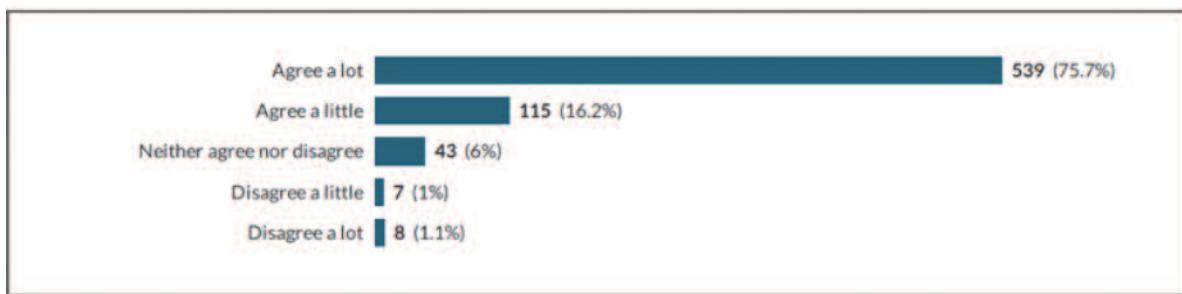
5 The new GCSEs

In this section we report on teachers' perspectives on the impact of the new GCSE curricula and assessment requirements on their classroom practice and their perspectives on how students have experienced or are likely to experience the new courses.

5.1 Impact on classroom practice

The survey was administered in the Spring of 2016 when English and mathematics teachers had been teaching the new GCSE content for almost a year. More than three-quarters (76%) of these teachers strongly agreed that their classroom practice has become more focused on examination and test preparation as a result of the new GCSE specifications.

Figure 5. Classroom practice has become more focused on exam and test preparation (English and mathematics teachers)



Numerous written replies further explicated these concerns:

"Teaching has changed at KS3. Everything is now targeted towards GCSE... No differentiation now allowed in exams so low-ability students achieving very poor results. Self esteem suffering. Everything geared towards tests." (W: English teacher in a multi-academy trust school rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted)

"The sheer level of fear about accountability and the difficulty of the new GCSEs and of terminal assessments have meant the ENTIRE curriculum (from Y7) has been reduced to replicated GCSE-style assessment. Kids are doing far more testing. The curriculum has narrowed. Forms of assessment have become narrowed. Teaching is becoming more a form of 'transmission'. It is depressing. Kids feel fatigued and stressed. I feel bored and demotivated." (W: English teacher in multi-academy trust school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"It has led me to consider leaving the profession. I did not come into teaching to teach students solely how to memorise facts for an exam." (W: Head of English department in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

The responses of teachers of other subjects revealed similar levels of concerns, with 87% of these teachers agreeing with the statement that classroom practice will become more focused on exam and test preparation in their subjects.

Only a small minority of English and mathematics teachers (12%) agreed that the new assessments had encouraged them to teach in more innovative and creative ways, with a slightly higher percentage of other teachers (15%) anticipating that this would be the case in their subjects:

SECTION 5: The new GCSEs

"The adjustments to the curriculum have resulted in much narrower, much less creative teaching. Moreover, 100% exam terrifies the pupils in all brackets as they have no safety net, particularly those pupils who cannot demonstrate their skills in exam conditions." (W: English teacher in a local authority school with 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"I became a teacher to encourage creativity, promote independent learning and develop problem-solving skills. To teach students to think for themselves in new and exciting ways NOT JUST EXAM FACTORY FODDER – strictly learning answers does not teach people to think!!" (W: Drama teacher in multi-academy trust with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"We are merely becoming an exam production unit and we are losing the breadth and depth of knowledge that we ought to be giving students. Also, we seem to be driven by the need to get rid of any in-depth, exciting and innovative teaching and now are solely focused on the PowerPoint-driven lesson with reliance on textbook materials which I feel is a real step backwards and is a result of the changes which have taken place recently." (W: Geography teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

Only 10% of English and mathematics teachers responding to the survey agreed with the statement that teaching had become more interactive and student-centred, with the same percentage of other teachers anticipating this would be the case in their subjects. In their written responses teachers explained that the increase in the volume of content that needed to be covered did not allow for more interactive and student-centred approaches:

"There is too much content to get through and I cannot teach for mastery with so little time." (W: Mathematics teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"We are fighting the temptation to teach in a dry rote fashion for the test but it is difficult because there is a lot to cover. The curriculum is also likely to be narrowed all the way through school with an overemphasis on grammar and accuracy instead of creativity." (W: English teacher in local authority school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"The content is much greater and it will be a race to cover it all in the time available. Content will need to be skimmed rather than investigated in depth as at present. This will undoubtedly lead to weaker understanding and students less able to cope at A Level." (W: Head of history department in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"So much content will force cursory coverage of issues in order to get through the course." (W: Religious Education teacher in multi-academy trust with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

Some teachers welcomed the move away from coursework and controlled assessment (with MFL teachers, in particular, arguing that controlled assessment had stifled the development of spontaneous communication skills). However, others saw coursework as an opportunity for creative and personalised learning, and argued that the combination of the new emphasis on terminal examinations and the rapid introduction of the new curricula are prompting a more formulaic approach to classroom practice:

"I have an ongoing concern ... that we're sometimes impacting the creative side of the curriculum because of the increasing focus on examination for them. We always comment when we get our new Year 7s ... how lively and creative they are. ... Unfortunately in English, the excitement and the kind of lively atmosphere is, that's the one that sometimes is being squashed because we have to get to this end product..." (I: English teacher, Ashfield, standalone academy, with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"Students with creative ability and the ability to sequentially develop designs and engineering concepts will have a reduced chance of gaining higher grades compared to their academic peers. It is often said 'work smart, not hard'. This presumes that hard working students shouldn't be rewarded for their endeavours. Many previously hard working pupils will now be at a disadvantage due to coursework assessed units now holding a lower percentage grade towards final marks. Some children are simply not exam sitting material, but are no less able or talented. In fact, they can often outperform their academic peers practically." (W: Head of design and technology department in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

5.2 Inequalities of access

77% of survey respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the new GCSE curriculum will be less suitable for low-attaining students. In both the written responses and interviews lower-attaining, SEND, EAL and low-income students were all identified as less well placed to access the new curriculum. Phrases such as "setting students up to fail" were frequently used in this context:

"Comes at a massive detriment to low attaining students. The teaching style will be more teacher-led and grammar based. Will also depend on their ability in English/home language in order to succeed. Overall pass mark across the department will definitely decrease due to lower ability students not being able to access the curriculum as easily. Only advantage is losing ... 'controlled assessment' Teaching will be more restrictive and less creative/innovative." (W: Newly qualified MFL teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"[Students from low-income families] are at a disadvantage, a significant disadvantage, with some of those exams which require you to understand, for example, what going on holiday to France actually means." (I: MFL teacher, Oak Park, local authority school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"The un-tiered system is isolating lower-attaining students. Differentiation is such an important factor within teaching. Why is it then seen as acceptable to change from inclusive teaching to assessment which sets some pupils up to fail who would in other circumstances succeed?" (W: newly qualified English teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"The SEND students and low attaining students are struggling severely with the new English GCSE. Staff feel as though they are setting them up to fail." (W: English teacher in a multi-academy trust school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"More students are having to study English Literature as well as English Language. This is stressful for students with literacy difficulties/SEN and EAL. We have students in Year 10 who are new to English and in tears because they are struggling with Shakespeare and other literature." (W: SENCO in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"The new English Language exams are an absolute disaster, especially for lower-attaining students. The tasks and texts are inaccessible ... Speaking and listening (arguably the most important skill in the 'real world' for the majority of students) has been relegated to a mere box-ticking exercise, which merely alienates students because of the way it has to be administered. There have been too many factors introduced to increase the difficulty level (set texts, loss of controlled assessment, longer exams, closed book conditions). ... I feel extremely angry that what should be an enjoyable subject at this level is becoming dry and exam-centric." (W: English teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"The students with better literacy skills will find [the mathematics exam] easier to access, because they'll be finding it easier to break problems down ... so they'll just understand the questions better, whereas I think that we might find that some of our students will get a bit lost in the paper, and it will be harder for them to understand what [they] need to do." (I: Mathematics teacher, Oak Park, local authority school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"I was told by a salesperson from AQA that if students don't have a reading age of 15, they are unable to read the inserts and questions in the new exam. We have very few students who are reading at this level.' (W: Head of key stage and English teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

Respondents referred in particular to the emphasis on exams and the detrimental impact they believed this would have on many students, particularly low attaining students. A number of respondents used the term 'exam factory' to describe the current situation of their schools:

"I now work in an exam factory in which my low ability students are being set up to fail." (W: English teacher in a multi-academy trust school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"No differentiation now allowed in exams so low ability students achieving very poor results. Self esteem suffering. Everything geared towards tests." (W: Head of English department, in a multi-academy trust school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"Children seem demotivated at times by knowing how hard these exams are.' (W: English teacher and union rep in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Higher academic demand on lower-attainers already shows them to be overwhelmed and demotivated." (W: Deputy head of science department and union rep in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"We are encouraged to welcome and work with children who have a vast range of special needs and this is great, but we are setting them up to fail when it comes to the new GCSE. ... We nurture and support our most vulnerable children, gradually gaining their trust and making them feel positive and enabled. At the end of this, we let them down by making them sit hours and hours of examinations that are way beyond their capabilities." (W: English teacher and union rep in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"We have stopped offering science GCSEs to [our] lowest attaining students as they would not be able to access [the] exams at all." (W: Science teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Tougher exams severely disadvantage inner city students no matter what the quality of provision they get." (W: Head of science department in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"It will create a big gap between low and high achievers. Low achievers will not benefit at all leading to a bigger gap in society between the rich and poor. Low-income students will be at more risk of not performing and getting good jobs." (W: Computing and business teacher at a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"There's been a real agenda around making BTECs more rigorous and BTECs moving to an exam-based system, and that's been to their detriment because the reason those students are put into technical qualifications is that they may have technical skills, they may have really good practical skills ... So it's very difficult to find a course for those students on which they're going to be successful." (I: Senior leader, Ashfield, standalone academy, 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

Another concern expressed by a number of respondents related to the impact of the new GCSEs on students from low-income backgrounds who also attend resource-poor schools, thus resulting in a 'double disadvantage'. For example, one teacher argued that the new Physical Education GCSE was tailored to the circumstances of private education institutions with more extensive resources to hand:

"We have no facilities in this school – there are no fields, no football pitches, no grass, we don't get to go offsite. So it really, really does impact." (I: PE teacher, Maple Way, voluntary-aided school, 'Good' Ofsted rating)

And a Design and Technology teacher commented:

"We are losing hundreds of thousands of pounds each year which impacts directly upon the school experience of all pupils but especially disadvantaged and special needs pupils". (W: Design and technology teacher in a multi-academy trust school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

5.3 Concerns about the content of the new GCSEs

The more traditional knowledge-focused approach to both the content and assessment of the new GCSEs was criticised by a number of teachers, not only for making the content more difficult for students to access, but also in some cases for being anachronistic and uninspiring:

"I absolutely hate teaching the new GCSEs. They are inappropriate for today's students. Boring, dull, lifeless. I am lecturing rather than teaching. Pupils are switched off literature and the life has been ripped out of the subject I used to love teaching." (W: English teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

SECTION 5: The new GCSEs

“Monocultural GCSE English curriculum for students living in a global and multi-cultural society doesn’t make sense.” (W: English teacher and union rep in a multi-academy trust school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“I am dismayed at the new GCSEs in MFL. My O level French in the seventies was more relevant and forward-looking.” (W: MFL teacher in a standalone academy with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“The new curriculum is focused almost entirely on knowledge. In the age of Google I cannot, for the life of me, understand why we would want to reduce the amount of evaluation that is required.” (W: Head of RE in a multi-academy trust school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“What is the purpose of pushing students to learn mathematics in a way that does not represent the 21st century technological age? There are many topics in the curriculum that are irrelevant to a modern mathematics curriculum Students should be allowed to take in textbooks etc. to the exam and be examined by using ... the tools they have, just as you would in a job situation. We are still assessing in the dark ages and the way our government leaders were taught. It is not going to generate a cohort of energised young people looking forward to the next stages of their lives.” (W: Assistant headteacher and head of mathematics department in a local authority school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“The 1950s Grammar School Curriculum may have had its place in the 1950s, but almost 70 years on, it does not meet the needs of students, nor the needs of the 21st century economy.” (W: Assistant head and science teacher in a standalone academy with an ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating)

“Just because a student cannot remember 20 physics equations, it does not mean they are stupid but this is the way students feel!!” (W: Science teacher in a local authority school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

For teachers of dance, drama and PE there was a particular concern about the increased weight given to written forms of assessment and the reduction in the practical component which is so central to these subjects:

“For creative subjects, the emphasis on theory is important but the fact that this it now weighed equally to practical ability is not appropriate. Dancers who are amazing DANCERS will not be as successful as average dancers with good subject knowledge. This is it the way that a creative subject should be assessed. It is discouraging for talented dancers!” (W: Dance teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“The practical aspect, the drama, in my subject is now worth less than written work. How is that a GCSE in Drama?” (W: Head of drama department in a local authority school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“In PE they have ... changed a practical vibrant subject into a dull classroom-based one, with an emphasis on exam skills rather than subject skills.” (W: Head of department, MFL and PE teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

5.4 Lack of information and pace of change

A significant concern and frustration for many teachers was the lack of information provided about the assessment of the new subject content. This was resulting in added stress and an increase in workload:

"We're still in the dark as to assessment requirements/standards – exam boards are still making it up as they go along and there are very few resources available. This is putting huge pressure on everyone." (W: English teacher in a school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"The Edexcel RE course has still not been approved and just this week extensive changes have been made to the course. The inability to provide teachers with the specification they are teaching next year means we will be woefully underprepared for the new course and greatly increases our workload as we will be planning on a week to week basis." (W: Assistant head and RE teacher in a local authority school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"The change of levelling is confusing for students and staff with barely any detailed information given by the DfE." (W: Mathematics teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

Whilst some teachers welcomed aspects of the new specifications and their potential to enhance the quality of their teaching, they were critical about the pace of change and the simultaneous introduction of multiple changes which was felt to compromise the quality of their teaching:

"The whole principle is good. ... I welcomed it when [it] came in. I think the way it was brought in had a lot to be desired. ... It needed to be a more gradual process from primary school. And I think it was very much rushed through. It's just the pace of it." (Mathematics teacher, Ashfield, standalone academy with an 'Outstanding')

"The thing about the changes is they are not all bad, so the drive towards students being able to produce work of a high grammatical standard that is clear, that is precise, and them being able to do that without being spoonfed, that's all good stuff [but] it's like playing football when you not only do not know where the goal is going to be, you don't know what kind of ball you are kicking. Because we always knew GCSE reform was coming. ... That had been touted for years, but when it did come the pace of change that was expected was huge. So as a head of English I'm in my second major curriculum rewrite and that's inside ... four years." (I: English teacher, Maple Way, voluntary-aided school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"The reforms are so quick and fast coming that if you had time to explore, of course it would make teaching better, but you don't. You have an exam that you've got to teach for in two years and completely different to the one before, so you're going to look for formulae, you're not going to be able to refocus. I mean we've got a very, very good English department and I'm sure they're going to rise to the challenge but I'm not sure that they will say that teaching is better." (I: Senior leader, Maple Way, voluntary-aided school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

SECTION 5: The new GCSEs

"It was now, 'we are going to change the specifications for key stage three, key stage four, so now you are not only going to have to rewrite the schemes of work according to the different ways of assessing, you now are going to have a whole lot of different stuff you have to teach' ... It was 'crunch', like that." (I: Science teacher and NUT rep, Oak Park, local authority school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

Overall, respondents to the survey and teachers in the case study schools were uneasy about the new changes to the GCSEs. Their overriding concern centred on the impact of the new GCSEs on lower-attaining, SEND, EAL and low-income students. The new GCSEs were characterised as encompassing a "one size fits all" approach which makes it harder for teachers to respond to the diversity of students' needs and disadvantages students who are less able to perform well in written examinations. Many teachers criticised the content of the new GCSEs which they considered to be anachronistic and uninspiring and, in the case of some creative subjects, to place insufficient weight on the teaching and assessment of the practical capabilities which are so integral to these subjects. Teachers also expressed concerns about the lack of information and resources to help them grade students' work and plan lessons adequately, and the simultaneous introduction of multiple changes which were felt to compromise the quality of their teaching. Added to this was a clear frustration and annoyance at what were considered to be unacceptable delays and uncertainty surrounding the new specifications. The overall response highlights the fact that all these concerns have been compounded by the pace at which the new GCSEs have been implemented, giving little time for teachers and students to plan for and adapt to the changes.

Section 6

The impact of Progress 8

6 The impact of Progress 8

Teachers' views on Progress 8 were mixed, combining an appreciation of the positive potential of aspects of the reform with very strong concerns about the reliability of the measure, its use as a mechanism to inform evaluations of teacher performance and decisions on their pay and its substantial workload ramifications.

6.1 The positive potential of Progress 8

Some teachers welcomed Progress 8 as a framework which gives equal value to the progress of all children and which removes the 'artificial' preoccupation with the C/D borderline produced by the previous accountability focus on the proportion of students attaining 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE:

"Ten years ago we said that every child matters, but now we actually genuinely mean it; that, I think, is very powerful." (I: English teacher, Maple Way, voluntary-aided school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"I think across education in a way it should give [SEND] children more of an entitlement in terms of they are going to be seen in published figures, whereas the five A-Cs, those children could disappear quite quickly, I think, across the board. So [with] Progress 8 every child's going to matter." (I: Senior leader, Ashfield, standalone academy with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"The one thing that I think most people would say has made a difference to their mindset in terms of Progress 8 is that removal of that kind of artificial D/C barrier and moving up of lower grades. So me as head of faculty being able to say to my colleagues, 'Yeah, but moving that student up from an E to a D, or from an F to an E, that's really important.' ... That's really going to help us." (I: English teacher, Oak Park, local authority school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

"It has meant that the low ability pupils now matter. A grade D is worth the same to the school as an A if the progress from KS2 is the same. That's something [that will] benefit those who are low attainers who usually get forgotten about over ... high attainers." (W: Science teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"The move to include all students in the measure is positive, in removing the obsession with percentage A-C, which forced us to focus on a relatively small proportion of the cohort who were around the C/D border." (W: Deputy head teacher and science teacher in a standalone academy with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)*

"In a school like mine it helps because it means some resources might get focused on students other than C/D borderline ones for the first time in years." (W: English teacher in a local authority school, Ofsted rating not specified)

In our case study schools, student grouping structures and the matching of teachers to groups were being reconsidered in the light of Progress 8. In Oak Park the English and mathematics departments were being asked to regroup the students with the objective of creating a system which better recognises the diversity of student needs in the hope that this will lead to better progress for all students. The representatives of the English and mathematics departments both argued that their main idea was to group students more 'smartly' by finding a good match between teachers and groups with specific characteristics, and the mathematics faculty created more mixed ability groups on the grounds that:

SECTION 6: The impact of Progress 8

“...we think that teaching mixed ability will ... promote more of a growth mindset for our students, rather than thinking this is where I am, I’m set three, I’m on my set three track to here.” (I: Mathematics teacher, Oak Park)

In the mathematics department at Ashfield, the setting structure was retained but teachers were allocated differently to sets:

“We always put our best teachers in the C/D borderline in the middle sets and ... that’s where the intervention went, it was always on the middle ... Whereas [with] Progress 8 [this] has changed ... Doing the timetable this year was a completely different job from previous years. We need really good teachers [for] the bottom set.” (I: Mathematics teacher, Ashfield)

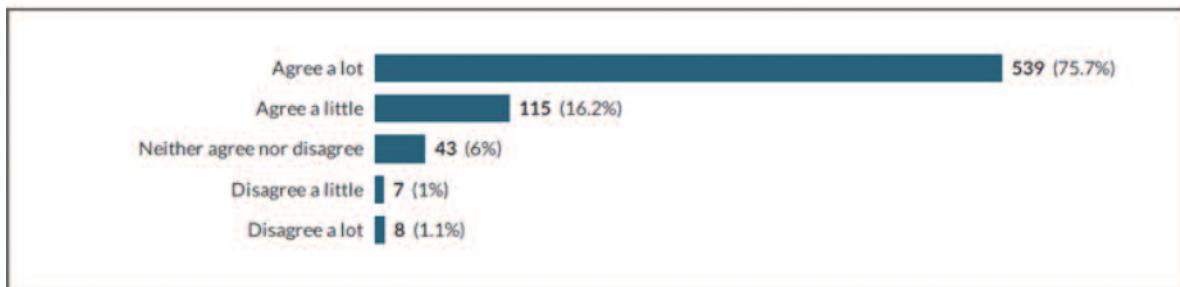
Similarly, in Maple Way, for students in English the setting structures were also retained, but with sets reduced in size as “the level of need increases” (I: English teacher, Maple Way).

Positive evaluations of the pedagogic intention behind the reform and of its positive effects on grouping practices in some schools were, however, combined with very strong concerns and considerable distress about the reliability of the Progress 8 measure and its use as a mechanism to evaluate teachers’ performance and in turn inform decisions about their pay.

6.2 Concerns about the reliability of Progress 8

A substantial majority of survey respondents (93%) agreed that “Key Stage 2 SATS results do not provide an adequate basis for tracking student progress across the whole range of secondary subjects”, with only 3.6% disagreeing with this statement.

Figure 6. KS2 SATs results do not provide an adequate basis for tracking student progress across the whole range of secondary subjects



Many of the written responses elaborated on teachers’ concerns about the use of Key Stage 2 data in the calculation of Progress 8 scores:

“Progress 8 is ... based on inaccurate KS2 data, sometimes not present, and secondly because progress is not linear, and some students are very successful at reaching Level 5 at KS3, but that might be their highest academic attainment.” (W: Head of RE department in a standalone academy, Ofsted rating not specified)

“Targets should be based on individual subjects, not just attainment at KS2 English and maths. My targets are based on how well pupils did in KS2 English which bears no correlation to their ability in my subject, leaving some pupils with completely unachievable targets.” (W: newly qualified MFL teacher in a multi-academy trust school with an ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating)

"Year 7 students have generic target grades for all subjects. This has made some very high performing students feeling that they are failing as it looks like they are not performing." (W: Art and design teacher in local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

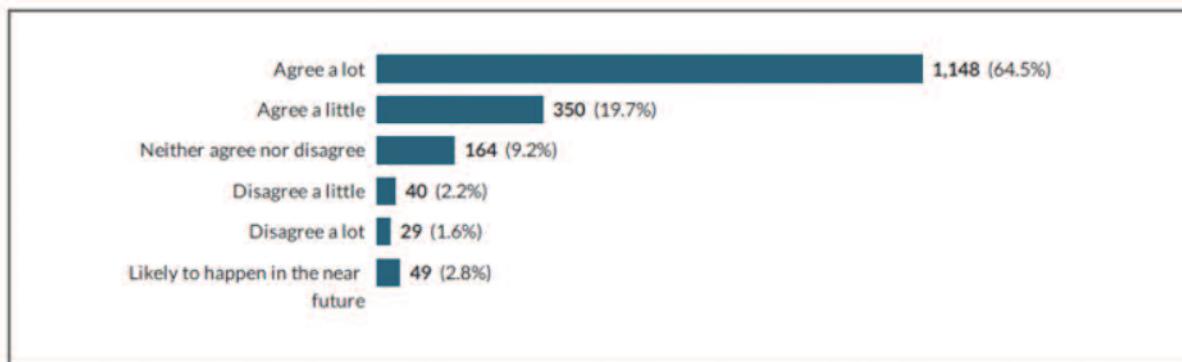
"I do think pupils should all be pushed to do as well as they can. But the pupils who walk into my room are not the same children who they were when they were in KS2. No job would judge you on your work from five years ago even as an adult." (W: Head of year and design and technology teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

6.3 Concerns about the use of Progress 8 to assess teachers' performance and determine their pay

Concerns about the reliability of the Progress 8 measure were exacerbated by concerns that that the measure would be used, or in some cases was already being used, to assess teachers' performance and inform decisions about their pay.

85% of respondents agreed with the statement that teacher appraisal was becoming increasingly data-focused in response to Progress 8 and these concerns were voiced very strongly in the written survey responses:

Figure 7. Teacher appraisal has become increasingly data-focussed in response to Progress 8



"Flawed KS2 data does not [allow] for proper predictions but ... staff can be threatened with disciplinary action over Progress 8." (W: Head of vocational subject department in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"A lot of staff failed performance management last year based on their data targets and it has been made very clear that the same will happen again this academic year even if all other targets are achieved thus blocking pay progression." (W: Head of department of art and design in a local authority school with an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating)

"Teachers are failing performance reviews based on P8 even though they have achieved ... other targets." (W: Design and technology teacher in a multi-academy trust school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating).

SECTION 6: The impact of Progress 8

"It is ridiculous that our pay is determined by KS4 target grades which are created using KS2 data. How can tests in English, maths and science taken at the age of 10 determine the target grade for music or drama etc. at the age of 16? How can students have a target grade that is the same in all subjects? This is a crazy way of deciding teacher pay progression – and particularly unfair when you have a smaller class!" (W: Head of music department in a multi-academy trust with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Appraisal linked to data and results is unfair, as the original basis for P8 is flawed, and progress expected is unrealistic, SATS in Year 6 are unreliable to judge progress and all students are different. Teachers' salary linked to such a system is not fair, we can work ourselves ragged and not get anything to show because students didn't progress ... enough." (W: Head of Key Stage and science teacher in a free school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

As well as expressing concerns about the injustice of basing performance evaluations and pay decisions on what is viewed as a deeply flawed measure, some respondents highlighted the potential for this to incentivise forms of 'gaming' the system:

"Well it is going to be used to judge teachers and how they are paid and that puts massive pressure on staff to work out how to enable students to jump through the hoops." (W: MFL teacher in multi-academy trust with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Teachers pay should not be linked to progress measures – creates a dangerous system meaning it's easier to do the work for them rather than actually helping them to learn." (W: Head of year and design and technology teacher in a local authority school with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"We have learning walks, lesson observations, book trawls, six assessments have to be entered every year – if students are not on target, boxes go red and we are dragged over the coals. Does not encourage honest appraisal". (W: Head of year and design and technology teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

6.4 The workload ramifications of Progress 8

Many survey respondents commented that their workload has intensified with the introduction of Progress 8, with a significant majority reporting increased workload related to 1:1 booster classes (78%), data tracking and data collection (91%) and data analysis (90%).

Figure 8. There has been an increase in the targeting of extra provision (1:1 lessons, boosters, exam preps) in response to Progress 8

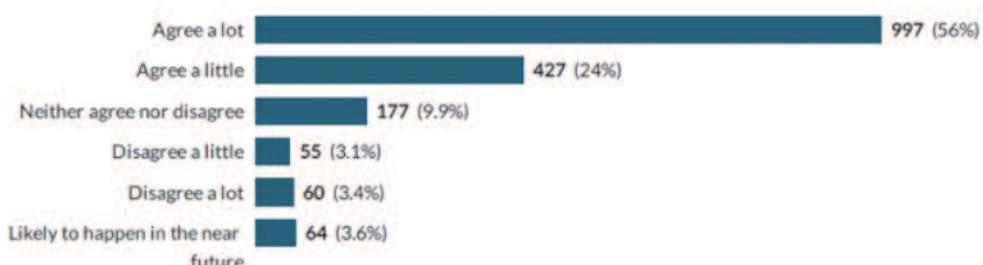


Figure 9. Workload related to data tracking and collection

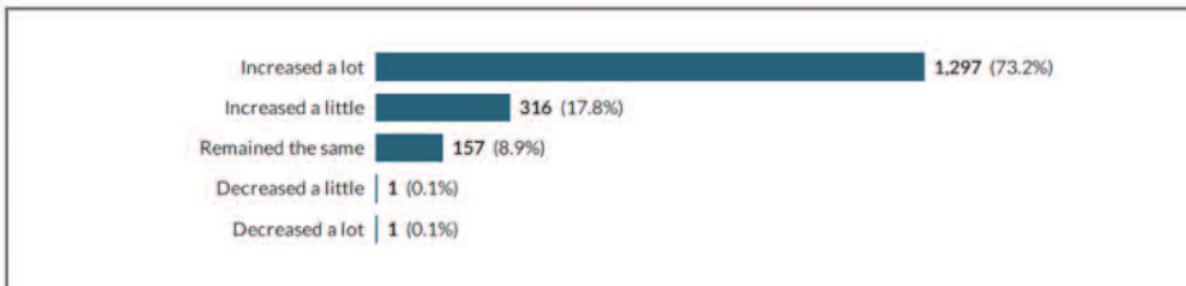
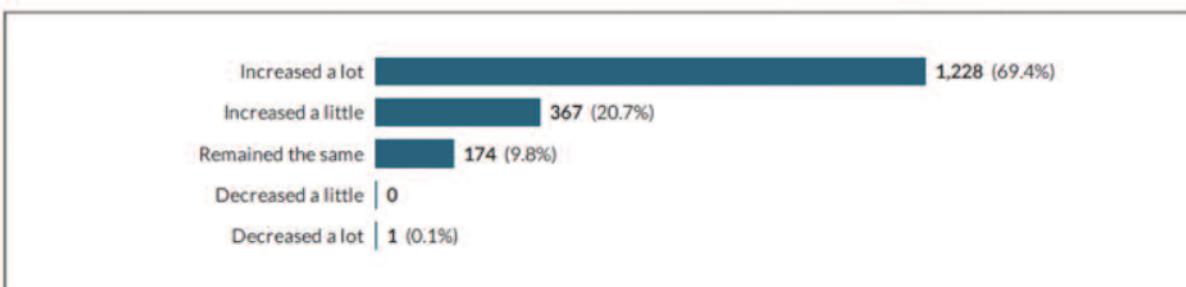


Figure 10. Workload related to data analysis



The following were typical of the written comments elaborating on teachers' Progress 8 related workload concerns:

"My school has shortened lunch to finish earlier to facilitate additional classes." (W: English teacher in a local authority school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"Support sessions are now compulsory rather than voluntary. Yet these hours do not count as contact time." (Head of department and business teacher in local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Some subject have been forced to include an extra 47 hours of intervention in a term. Year 11s have had 'Non-Negotiable' Half Term and Easter classes. (Some Year 11s have been in every day in their February half term and every day in the Easter two weeks.)" (W: Head of dance department in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"It has increased the obsession with data, with reducing students to numbers that can be tracked and measured." (W: Union rep and English teacher in a standalone academy with an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating)

"Incessant meetings about statistics and data." (W: MFL teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

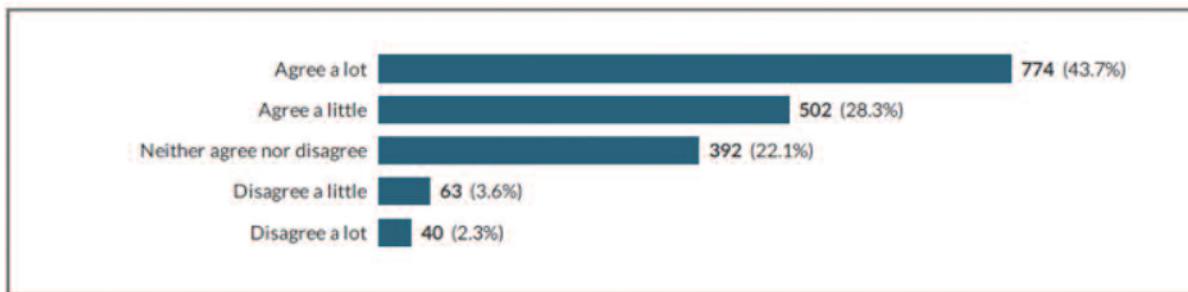
"I have to write a data report every 6 weeks, which can take up to 20 hours on top of [my] teaching workload." (W: Head of department and history teacher in a chain-academy school with an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating)

SECTION 6: The impact of Progress 8

"There have been a third more data-entry windows imposed upon teaching staff. The weight of this extra workload as a HoD has increased significantly enough for me to be signed off work with burn-out for two weeks. (I only took one! I didn't want my ill health to impact pupils.)" (W: Head of department and history teacher in a standalone academy with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

72% of respondents agreed with the statement that Progress 8 takes time away from teaching, and comments about the increased workload associated with Progress 8 were often accompanied by scepticism about its value:

Figure 11. Progress 8 takes time away from teaching



"There seems to be a lot more 'weighing the pig' – very often we're asked to measure intervention before we've actually had time to do anything valuable. It is a slow death by a million Excel spread sheets." (W: Head of department and history and ancient history teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"As a teacher of English, the pressure that has been added is incredible. Further expectations for data collection and reporting on target setting have come into place with no additional time provided, making teaching more about reporting on what you are doing rather than actually doing a good job educating the pupils in your care." (W: Newly qualified English teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"The extra data inputting and marking means less time on focusing on what's important – teachers spending time creating engaging lessons and having enough energy to deliver them." (W: Head of department of media studies in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating)

"More and more data and number crunching that ultimately does not lead anywhere [and] means less time to prepare for lessons." (W: Design and technology teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"Teaching is no longer about doing the best you can for your pupils; it's about data and numbers. Pupils are not children any more; they are dots on a graph which must look a certain way. I am leaving teaching because of changes to teaching. I have seen teachers ignore a class because they have to hit data deadlines because that is what is important these days." (W: Head of year and design and technology teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"The bureaucracy destroys creativity and innovation in the classroom." (W: Mathematics teacher in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating).

"The term 'extra support' needs to be used carefully. The general view of a lot of my colleagues is that extra support is not beneficial and is done to such an extent as to have a negative impact on many students." (W: Geography teacher in a multi-academy trust school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

Overall, an appreciation of the positive potential of aspects of Progress 8 was mixed with very profound concerns about the reliability of the measure and its potential to be used (and in some cases its actual use) within systems of teacher appraisal and pay progression determination. Teachers reported that their workload had increased substantially as a consequence of Progress 8, particularly their workload related to data tracking and collection and data analysis, and they expressed scepticism about the value of this additional work.

Section 7

Workload and wellbeing

7 Workload and wellbeing

In this final findings section we report on the combined effects of the reforms on teachers' and students' wellbeing, with a particular focus on the uncertainty, increased workload, pressure and anxiety being generated by the reforms.

7.1 Coping with uncertainty

Many teachers reported that the reforms had introduced a great deal of uncertainty and confusion for schools attempting to implement them. "Madness", "mire of nonsense", "rushed through", "bit of a mess", "lot of confusion" are just a few of the phrases that respondents used to describe their experiences of the reforms and the ways they were being implemented in their schools. Teachers told us that in some cases the uncertainty had undermined their confidence and made it difficult to communicate the changes to students and parents.

For example, teachers reported feeling uncertain about how to advise students and guide them through the options process and were also extremely puzzled about how to prepare students for their GCSEs without exemplar materials and a clear understanding of the new grading system:

"None of the materials from [the exam board] were ready for September. We were second guessing what to teach and to what level. Workload increased in lesson prep. Textbooks arrived in November. Assessment and levelling has been an experimental process. Despite having extra parents' evenings, the parents are still confused and believe their children are doing worse." (W: Mathematics teacher and union rep in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

"You go from teaching subjects, and you are really confident, you know how to advise students, you know what the bigger picture is, to teaching something completely unknown ... The thing that's made it stressful is doing all of that without even having a specification. We've had to do that with just a draft and then the draft changed quite considerably." (I: RE teacher, Ashfield, standalone academy with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating)

"I personally feel really, really familiar with the old GCSE, the one that's gone now, and I felt really, really confident I could prepare my students for it and I knew what the questions were going to look like, and I can't say that anymore. So it's difficult for us to equip our students with what they need to pass, and so it's also hard to know if it is going to be useful ... I like the idea of the problem solving and the reasoning, but what is that actually going to look like on the paper, what are they going to have to do? So it's hard to know." (I: Mathematics teacher, Oak Park, local authority school with a 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating)

Most of the teachers we interviewed expected that Progress 8 would be the focus of the 2016-2017 school year, and told us it was too early for them to say how it will affect their everyday teaching. Significantly, even one member of the SLT at Oak Park felt underprepared and uninformed:

“...I think what I’m feeling at the moment is there’s a lot more that I don’t even necessarily understand yet about Progress 8 and its effects, and I imagine there’s probably a lot of people feeling similarly. I think I understand bits ... but I don’t know that we all really know what that means, meaning that we still have exams that haven’t even been decided, we have people teaching at key stage 4 that still don’t understand what the grade boundaries will be, we still don’t really understand what that four is. Is it going to be the lower D or is it going to be the C? And [we] don’t have any exemplar material, so all of the usual preparation that you would have behind a scheme of learning, you know, planning, couldn’t [happen]. So that’s another stress for everyone” (I: Senior leader, Oak Park, local authority school with a ‘Requires improvement’ Ofsted rating)

Respondents argued that these sorts of insecurities experienced by teachers can then trickle down to students and raise their stress levels too:

“I think the Year 10 students are feeling the pressure, definitely, and are, yeah, extremely anxious about next year. I think teachers are extremely anxious about next year and I think that’s felt through and through because the teachers aren’t as confident with the content, with assessing the students and then the students are going ‘whoa, teachers are supposed to know everything about the syllabus’ ... when they’re saying ‘yeah, I’m not too sure if you’re a grade 5 or a grade 4, we think you might be a grade 4!’” (I: Mathematics teacher, Ashfield, standalone academy with an ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating)

Teacher narratives strikingly revealed that with such uncertainties comes a feeling of guilt and anxiety for perhaps coming across as unprepared or unprofessional (in lesson planning, communicating with parents, not being able to provide enrichment programmes any more) and powerless in the face of external constraints.

7.2 Workload intensification and the pressure to perform

Teachers reported that both teachers and students are experiencing increased levels of stress associated with a more demanding workload and pressures to meet ambitious performance targets – often within a context of reduced funding:

“The workload has doubled.” (W: Mathematics teacher in a local authority school with a ‘Good’ OFSTED rating)

“The workload has hugely increased in [the] last five years and ... students and teachers are more stressed out than ever before.” (W: Head of RE department in a local authority school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“Constant pressure on teachers to meet [or] exceed targets – extra work/after school, lunch time sessions – no extra pay/time in lieu.” (W: Head of MFL department in a local authority school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating).

“More work and stress for students (with less independent thought and creativity). More work for teachers (with attendant wellbeing consequences). All this in the context of reduced funding, teacher shortages, increasing class sizes.” (W: Science teacher in a Cooperative Trust School with a ‘Requires Improvement’ Ofsted rating)

"Budget cuts mean bigger classes. EBacc means more students of all abilities being pushed to study academic subjects in crowded mixed-ability groups. Add to this the increased difficulty of the exams and you don't have a positive result." (Assistant head and history teacher in a standalone academy with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

For some teachers, their stress is compounded by uncertainty surrounding job security (see section 3.2, above).

Many of the written comments referred to teachers leaving or planning to leave the profession because they felt no longer able to cope with the pressures emanating from a greater focus on data and accountability measures, an increased workload and a sense of reduced classroom autonomy:

"I really am not sure about the impact of the current reforms. What I am sure about is that workload has hugely increased in [the] last five years and that students and teachers are more stressed out than ever before. I know many teachers who are quitting, or who have quit, who were great teachers but constant changes to exam specifications, and a huge decrease in teacher morale due to constant monitoring and accountability measures, which have stifled creativity in the classroom, have led to the very best finding alternative careers, or often quitting with no job to go to, just burnt out and exhausted." (W: Head of RE department in a local authority school with a 'Good' Ofsted rating)

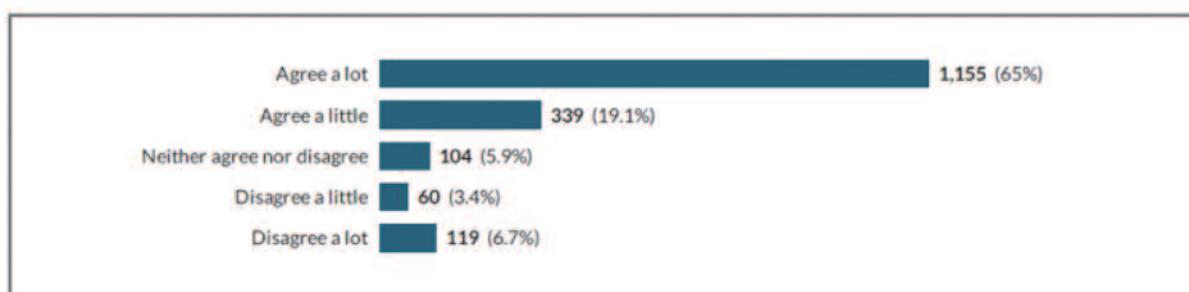
One teacher, who reported feeling "disheartened" about the focus on 'core' EBacc subjects at the expense of a broader curriculum and "gutted" at her school's decision to stop offering Expressive Arts GCSE, commented very powerfully on her own intention to leave the profession:

"After 32 years I feel at a loss as to what is expected of me. I am too scared to stay in role as the accountability is too much. The expectations are daunting. We all try our best for all students and the data is just overwhelming, feeling like a stick to beat us with. I am leaving at 54." (W: Head of department and drama/expressive arts teacher in a multi-academy trust school – Ofsted rating not specified)

7.3 Pupil wellbeing

Respondents also reported concerns about the increased levels of stress, demotivation and mental health problems they observed in their students. 65% of respondents "agreed a lot" and 19% "agreed a little" with the statement that the reforms strengthen an exam culture which undermines students' mental health and wellbeing.

Figure 12. The reforms strengthen an exam culture which undermines students' mental health and wellbeing



SECTION 7: Workload and well being

The following comments illustrate the kinds of concerns underlying this statistic:

“Students are dragged in on holidays, weekends... The pressure on them is relentless.” (W: RE teacher in a standalone academy with an ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating)

“All students have to make at least four levels [of] progress. They are getting too high targets. The teacher has to put in extra intervention to achieve this ... and pupils are actually suffering from stress-related illness because of this.” (W: Mathematics teacher in a chain-academy with an ‘Inadequate’ Ofsted rating)

“I am seeing more young people having emotional and mental [health] issues than ever before. How can we say this is progress?” (W: English teacher in a chain-academy school with a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating)

“We will look back on these days and people will ask how we could do this to our children. It is akin to abuse.” (W: Music teacher and union rep in a multi-academy trust school with an ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating)

“Mental health issues are rising where children are finding it very hard to cope with the exams and stress put upon them.” (W: Art teacher in a standalone academy rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted)

“[There is an] increase in pressure on students and resulting increase in mental health problems.” (W: Head of Year and DT teacher in a local authority school with an ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted rating)

“The exam pressure for a lot of students was a real concern for them ... We did have to sort out counselling [for some of them], and ... there were incidents of self-harming.” (I: PE teacher, Maple Way)

In summary, the combined effects of the reforms have been to exacerbate the pressures and workload intensification already present in a high-stakes accountability context fuelled by data-driven policies. Teachers reported that exam and accountability pressures have had a negative impact on the mental health of both teachers and students.

Section 8

Conclusions

1. The research reported here would appear to confirm the fears of critics that the reforms are resulting in a narrowing of the curriculum offer at Key Stage 4, with the vast majority of the 1800 survey respondents reporting reduced examination entry rates in creative and vocational subjects in their schools.
2. The reforms are reinforcing existing subject hierarchies in schools with increased resources being invested in the teaching of mathematics and English and a concomitant reduction in the time and resources allocated to creative and vocational subjects, the removal of some of these subjects from the curriculum offer altogether and decreased job security for teachers of these subjects.
3. A major concern for teachers is that the steering of students towards EBacc subjects will increase student disengagement and disaffection, particularly amongst lower-attaining students and students who are more creatively or practically inclined. Teachers reported that in some cases this was leading to a deterioration in students' behaviour.
4. Policy reforms are enacted in different contexts and contextual factors such as intake and resources (staffing and buildings etc.) as well as the history and culture of schools play a direct part in facilitating or limiting their capacity to respond to reforms in ways which are felt to be in the best interests of their students.
5. The way in which schools respond to the EBacc is primarily through their options process. Our case studies show that, depending on their context, schools are positioned very differently in terms of their room for manoeuvre in designing option blocks, with larger schools with a more stable and secure context better able to protect creative and vocational subjects in their schools.
6. With regard to the new GCSE specifications, we found no evidence to suggest that the potential identified by Smith (2015) (see Section 1.3.3, above) for the new GCCEs to facilitate approaches to teaching and learning more suited to the attainment of deep knowledge and higher order cognitive skills by learners across the attainment spectrum is as yet being realised. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents reported an increased focus on test preparation and a strong belief that the content of the new GCSEs is less suitable for lower-attaining students, with only a small minority agreeing that the new assessments would lead them to adopt more creative and interactive teaching approaches. This may at least in part be linked to the pace of change, which has not allowed sufficient time for teachers to explore alternative ways of teaching the content, alongside the large volume of content that needs to be covered and the pressures of working in a high stakes results-based accountability context.
7. Some teachers were critical of the traditional content and approach to assessment of the new GCSEs for failing to incorporate the kinds of knowledge and skills that are required in a technological age and, in the case of some creative subjects, for de-prioritising the practical components that are integral to these subjects.
8. The move away from coursework towards assessment by terminal examinations was seen by many teachers as demoralising for students who struggle with exams, particularly lower-attaining, SEND and EAL students. Teachers frequently used phrases such as "setting students up to fail" in this context.

SECTION 8: Conclusions

9. These students are also more likely to attend schools which are more vulnerable to financial and accountability pressures and therefore less well placed to protect the diversity and breadth of their curriculum offer. Some teachers spoke of students from low-income backgrounds who also attend resource-poor schools as being “doubly disadvantaged” by the reforms.
10. A significant majority of the survey sample expressed strong concerns about the impact of exam pressures on students’ mental health and wellbeing.
11. Whilst some teachers welcomed aspects of the new GCSE specifications and the change in focus for their subjects, they also expressed concerns about the pace of change, lack of information and resources to help teachers grade students’ work and plan lessons adequately and the simultaneous introduction of multiple changes. All of these factors were felt to compromise the quality of their teaching.
12. Support for the pedagogically inclusive intentions behind Progress 8 was combined with strong concerns about the unreliability of Key Stage 2 SATs baseline data, and therefore of the Progress 8 measure itself. Teachers were also concerned that Progress 8 scores were already being or would be used to evaluate teachers’ performance and inform decisions about their pay.
13. Teachers reported a significant increase in workload related to data tracking and collection and data analysis as a result of Progress 8 and expressed scepticism about the value of this work.
14. The reforms have introduced a great deal of uncertainty and confusion for schools attempting to implement them which teachers told us has undermined their confidence and made it difficult to communicate the changes to students and parents.
15. Overall, teachers’ responses suggest that the combined effects of the reforms have been to exacerbate the pressures already present in a high-stakes accountability context fuelled by data-driven policies. Schools with ‘Inadequate’ or ‘Requires improvement’ Ofsted ratings are especially vulnerable to these pressures.
16. Many of the written survey comments referred to teachers leaving or planning to leave the profession because they felt unable to cope with the pressures associated with the greater focus on data and accountability measures, increased workload and a sense of reduced classroom autonomy.

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