



27 January 2016

CONSULTATION ON IMPLEMENTING THE ENGLISH BACCALAUREATE

This response to the Consultation noted above is from the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) and the National Association for Music in Higher Education (NAMHE) and the Standing Conference for Dance in Higher Education (DanceHE). SCUDD represents drama and performance departments in UK Universities, and currently has 85 members, including specialist institutions, representing over 1200 academic staff and postgraduate students and circa 24,000 students. NAMHE currently has 38 members including music conservatoires and music departments in universities across the UK. DanceHE currently has 18 department memberships and supports a range of independent academics working across dance and performance departments in the UK.

The Consultation assumes that the EBacc will be rolled out along the lines outlined in the document, and that what remains to be decided is how that will happen. We start from a different position, and urge the Minister to rethink the proposals as they now stand. We do so because of the demonstrable and detrimental effect the rolling out of the EBacc will have - indeed, is already having - on arts education in schools.

The Government's stated intention is to ensure that school pupils receive the best possible academic education for everyone, wherever they come from and whatever their social background. These are laudable objectives and SCUDD, NAMHE and DanceHE members would endorse them: however, it is our view that the introduction - imposition - of the EBacc will not achieve these aims.

The Consultation assumes that space has been made for the EBacc in the school curriculum by stripping out unnecessary, low-level qualifications, and that there are no further implications. This is not the case, however, and despite the government's

commitment to arts education up to Key Stage 3, and in contradiction of the Prime Minister's recognition that 'culture should never be a privilege: it is a birthright that belongs to us all', the law of unintended consequences has ensured that the provision of arts subjects at GCSE and A Level is under threat.

It is clear, for example, that the use of the 5-subject EBacc as a performance measure in schools has led to a decline in the number of school students taking arts subjects. As research conducted by Ipsos Mori in 2012 for the Department of Education demonstrated, 15% of schools surveyed reported that they had withdrawn an arts subject because of the EBacc, 21% of schools with a high proportion of free school meals reported withdrawing arts subjects, and entries to arts GCSEs fell by 14% in 2015 compared to 2010, the year the EBacc was introduced¹. Alarming for SCUDD members, Drama teacher numbers have fallen by 14% and the hours they teach by 8 (although these hours include teaching time from non-specialists)². And of course music, drama, dance and other creative arts subjects tend to be more expensive to deliver in schools, so are all the more susceptible to being cut when times are hard and budgets tight.

The Department of Education's own figures, which suggest that the number of students studying arts subjects has increased, have been challenged. On the one hand, Design & Technology are omitted from consideration as is the introduction of the broader accountability measure, 'progress 8', which allows eight varied qualifications to count and which Michael Gove, the former education minister, called a 'more meaningful accountability measure'. On the other, the data used also includes early entry for AS level exams but not for other creative industry relevant qualifications such as the BTEC: no rationale for this has been given.

It is not difficult to see why schools might think twice before investing in post-GCSE arts subjects. The government refers to EBacc subjects at GCSE as representing the 'five pillars' of academic attainment. This means, in effect, not five subjects but seven, because of the way that English and Science are taught. Given that the norm for English school students is to study eight subjects, room for manoeuvre is limited. Indeed, there is pressure to ensure that the remaining subject(s) are also taken from the EBacc list, since schools are required to report on EBacc progress six different times: Progress 8, Attainment 8, EBacc numbers, EBacc achievement, Ofsted and EBacc average point score. In addition to increasing the bureaucratic burden placed on schools - a reason for rethinking the proposals in itself - this preferential treatment for EBacc subjects makes it more likely that schools will encourage pupils to take, say, History *and* Geography rather than History and Drama, since it will give schools two opportunities, rather than one, to score highly against EBacc measures.

The EBacc proposals argue that the preferred subjects are the most academically stretching, offering the key to academic success. The corollary of this - and it seems to run throughout the Consultation document - is that other, non-EBacc subjects are not sufficiently academic. We would challenge this strongly, and argue that arts subjects are

¹ Cultural Learning Alliance, *English Baccalaureate Research*, 2013
<http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence.asp>

² School workforce in England: November 2014
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-workforce>

not only academic in their own right, teaching much-needed critical thinking and analytical writing skills, but are also linked to the achievement of other academic objectives. As research sponsored by the DCMS in 2010³ demonstrated, students who have participated in 'structured arts activities could increase their academic attainment scores by 1% to 2%, on average, above that of non-participants'. Additionally, a recent study (2010), funded by the EU, of the impact of educational theatre and drama on educational attainment found that students exposed to drama showed, amongst other things, increased confidence, improved reading and communication skills and better awareness of what it means to be an 'active citizen'. The study involved twelve nations and 5,000 children between the ages of 13 and 16⁴.

It is no answer, in our view, to argue that there are opportunities to engage with the arts outside of the school curriculum, as these are not available to all: as a report from the Child Poverty Action Group found, in 2013, that 19% of young people qualifying for free school meals, 12% of young people from low-income families and 19% of young people from better-off households reported not participating in after school clubs and extra-curricular activities due to either the cost of the club itself or associated transport costs⁵.

The arts are a vital component of the creative industries, which, as several reports have demonstrated, are central to our economic health as a nation, contributing an estimated £79 billion each year⁶. There is a real danger of a circle of decline, in which fewer pupils taking arts subjects at GCSE leads to fewer studying these subjects at A Level, and then at degree level: the result will be an impoverishment of the skills base of the creative industries, and of the national culture generally.

As educators of future generations of arts and culture professionals, and as teachers, practitioners and researchers who believe passionately in the wider importance of culture to individuals, communities and employers, we ask that the Government reconsider its proposals. In requesting this, we are joining the vast majority of educators and many arts professionals, who have also recognised the dangers inherent in the current proposals.

Yours sincerely,



Chair, Standing Conference of University Drama Departments

3 CASE: *Understanding the drivers, impact and value of engagement in culture and sport*, July 2010 p.27

4 <http://www.dramanetwork.eu/>

5 Rhys Farthing, *The costs of going to school, from young people's perspectives*, London: Child Poverty Action Group, 2013.

6 *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, 2015 Report by the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value.

Dr Fiona Bannon

Chair, DanceHE -Standing Conference of University Dance Departments

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Gage". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chair, National Association for Music in Higher Education