

How likely are academy pupils to attain the EBacc subjects at GCSE?

- *The Government has announced that schools should encourage pupils to study subjects which, in combination, they describe as the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). These subjects are English, Maths, two sciences, a humanities (History or Geography) and a modern foreign language. On average, academy pupils are only half as likely to achieve higher level GCSEs in these EBacc subjects as in non-academy schools.*
- *In a quarter of academies not a single pupil passed the EBacc combination of subjects.*

The Coalition Government, soon after coming into office, introduced the notion of an ‘English Baccalaureate’ (EBacc). This will increasingly be used when evaluating and comparing schools, though it is not a qualification as such for individual pupils. It requires pupils to gain a C grade or above in each of the following subjects:

- English
- Maths
- Sciences (combined science, or 2 separate sciences)
- A Language
- History or Geography.

This was partly a reaction to the problem of ‘equivalents’ but also fits the traditionalist mindset of the current Secretary of State for Education and other cabinet ministers. The declared intention was to create incentives for a broad academic curriculum for KS4, though many have pointed out that the selection of subjects is somewhat arbitrary and, in its own way, limited. For example, the creative arts are excluded and no credit is given for practical or vocational studies. Of subjects with clear relevance to education for citizenship, the list includes History and Geography but not Sociology or Media Studies.

The EBacc will require little adjustment for grammar and independent schools. Firstly, these subjects are standard in those schools; secondly, it is easier to achieve consistent success across a range of subjects in a school with relatively prosperous students than in many urban comprehensives.

Finally, because it was introduced without warning and well after students had chosen their KS4 subjects, the percentage passing EBacc subjects at GCSE has started off from a low base (16% in maintained schools) but will grow rapidly as schools adapt their curriculum, so the Government will be able to claim a dramatic improvement.

Academies and EBacc

It is not surprising, given the social composition and other characteristics of many academies, that EBacc results are lower than other schools, but 8% (half the average for maintained schools) must be embarrassing to Government ministers. This is largely linked to the extent of ‘gaming’, and possibly a

‘never mind the quality feel the width’ rationale which sacrifices breadth and balance to counting points and percentages. In a quarter of academies not a single pupil achieved EBacc.

The ratio between those passing the EBacc combination of GCSEs and those achieving 5 or more A*-Cs or equivalent with English and Maths (5ACemEQ) is also revealing. In academies, a much smaller proportion of the pupils who achieve 5ACemEQ are likely to achieve A*-C grades in the EBacc combination of subjects.

Maintained schools: 1 : 3.7

Academies: 1 : 6.3

Within this, of course, there are large variations. Overwhelmingly the EBacc results in academies were gained by selective schools such as converted grammar, independent or CTCs, or high-achieving comprehensive schools in prosperous areas. Without these, only 1 in 12 pupils with 5ACemEQ achieved A*-C grades in the EBacc subjects.

Among all academies, in eight out of ten cases 5% or fewer pupils gained the EBacc-related GCSEs, and in about 1 in 3 cases no pupils did.