The Two Cultures:
Do schools have to choose between the EBacc and the arts?

By Ed Fellows
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Forewords

Foreword by The Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools and The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP, Minister of State for Digital and Culture

Arts and culture are part of the fabric of our society. They are one of our most successful exports, support millions of UK jobs and play a crucial role in the happiness of the nation. Thanks to the likes of Pinewood Studios, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Whitworth, the National Theatre, the Ferens, and many others, Britain is a world-leader in arts and culture.

This Government strongly believes that the arts and culture should be for everyone and not just a privileged few. They are hugely valuable in and of themselves, and they have the potential to be forces for openness and social mobility. Britain’s future will be determined by the combination of our creative flair and technical expertise, so it is vital that the next generation is well prepared by having a well-rounded education.

In 2010, the Government inherited a school system where the curriculum had been stripped of the rich knowledge content that all children deserve to be taught. For our society to be socially just and socially mobile, all pupils must be endowed with the core knowledge needed to be culturally literate.

The new National Curriculum drew on evidence from the highest performing school systems in the world. The reforms were twinned with a more rigorous examination system that has ended grade inflation and removed many so-called ‘equivalent’ qualifications, breathing confidence back into the GCSEs and A levels.

The Government’s vision for arts education is encapsulated in two words: equity and quality. This vision has been backed up with concrete action:

— The new Art and Design curriculum has a stronger focus on the teaching of drawing from an early age and a new emphasis on knowing about the historical development of art through a greater focus on teaching about great artists and designers;
— New music education hubs have been set up to improve the quality and consistency of music education across the country;
— Through Government funding to Arts Council England and others, arts and cultural organisations across the country are working with schools and young people in their local communities; and
— The Government has announced a further £300 million to help children from all backgrounds to enjoy the benefits of music and the arts.
The Government recently announced that the History of Art A level would be saved. This was an important step but is part of a much wider effort to protect and extend the opportunities offered by arts education. In the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor announced funding towards a Royal Society for the Arts and an Education Endowment Foundation pilot to examine the impact of cultural education on disadvantaged pupils.

School accountability, particularly the EBacc, has halted the move away from the core academic subjects that must be the foundation of a pupil’s education. Just over 20% of pupils were studying English, Maths, Science, a Language and a Humanity at GCSE in 2010 – this has since risen to 40%, with the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc rising year on year.

The EBacc is ensuring greater numbers of pupils are now taking the combination of GCSE subjects that facilitate pupils pursuing any post-16 path they should choose – including attending one of the country’s world-leading universities.

And crucially, the findings of this report put to rest arguments that EBacc policy is stifling cultural education. Since the creation of the EBacc, the entry numbers to GCSE arts subjects and number of arts GCSEs being taken per pupil have risen. The proportion of pupils in state funded schools taking at least one arts subject has increased from 44.7% in 2012 (the first full academic year after the EBacc was announced) to 48.0% in 2016.

In part, this is because of the deliberate decision to restrict the EBacc to 5 subject areas, to ensure pupils can still pursue a number of other subjects, including the arts. Most pupils take 9 subjects at GCSE – rising to 10 for the most able – leaving ample room for pupils to study a number of arts subjects alongside the EBacc.

To win the argument for the arts in education, we need to follow the evidence, and show, carefully and rigorously, that successful education in the arts and in the EBacc subjects are not contradictory but complementary. This report clarifies the imperative and the feasibility of this view and we welcome its findings.

Of course, everyone can play their part, and we actively encourage leaders in the arts, as in other fields, to make a direct, personal contribution through organisations like Speakers for Schools, which arranges talks in state schools by successful people to inspire pupils.

At all ages, there should be no battle between the arts and other subjects, but instead a battle for stronger, better, well-rounded education. Ultimately, the best schools in the country combine excellent cultural education as a complement to excellence in core academic subjects. They do it because it is right and because it works. Rigorously taught, Music complements Maths; Drama complements English; and the study of Art complements History.
We care deeply about getting the best possible education for Britain's children. We want to see every child study Music, every child attend plays and enjoy the finest arts Britain has to offer, alongside and underpinned by a high quality education in English, Maths, the Sciences, the Humanities and Foreign Languages.

The Government is committed to ensuring that high-quality arts education is the entitlement of every single child.

Nick Gibb
Matt Hancock
Foreword by Toby Young, Director of New Schools Network

Shortly after I arrived at New Schools Network I discovered that my predecessor Nick Timothy had begun a campaign to persuade more arts organisations to set up schools. Some of the most interesting free schools that have opened so far are those with an arts focus, like the Plymouth School of Creative Arts and the East London Academy of Music, and Nick wanted to see more of these. It’s also something I’m interested in, having helped set up a chain of free schools that specialise in music. I’ve long believed that all children can benefit from a classical liberal education, combining science, humanities and the arts. Furthermore, arts education has been a lifelong passion of NSN’s chairman David Ross. So this was definitely a campaign I wanted to continue.

Unfortunately, there was a problem. Many of the arts organisations we approached were put off by the EBacc. How could they set up secondary schools with an arts focus if their students would be under pressure to do well in the EBacc subjects (English, Maths, the Sciences, the Humanities and Foreign Languages)? Nearly all of them believe, as do a majority of people in the arts world, that the introduction of the EBacc in the last Parliament has had a devastating impact on arts education. The message that came back was that if we wanted them to set up schools we should urge the Government to either broaden the EBacc to include subjects like Art, Music and Drama, or abandon it altogether.

That was disappointing, not least because it didn’t tally with my own experience. At the secondary school I helped set up, the students got above average results in the EBacc last year, as well as above average results in their Art and Music GCSEs. Not only that, but the percentage of our students being entered for GCSE arts subjects was also above average. Was the West London Free School an outlier? Or were the arts organisations we’d approached wrong about the effect of the EBacc?

I decided to ask Ed Fellows, a member of NSN’s campaigns team, to take a look at the GCSE data between 2012 and 2016 to see if the EBacc, as well as the accountability measures linked to it, had resulted in a decline in the popularity of arts subjects. Was it true that schools were steering children away from arts GCSEs towards the EBacc subjects in the hope of improving their standing in the league tables? Was the Government forcing schools to make a binary choice between an academic and an arts education?

Happily, the conventional wisdom about the impact of the EBacc turns out to be wrong. If you compare 2012 with 2016, the total number of arts GCSEs taken has risen. By the same token, the average number of arts GCSEs studied by each pupil has increased. Nor is there any conflict between attainment in the EBacc subjects and attainment in the arts. Good results in the two go hand-in-hand. Finally, those schools where students take an above average number of arts GCSEs are more likely to get above average Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores. The West London Free
School isn’t an outlier. Its success in both the EBacc and the arts is symptomatic of a national pattern.

I was relieved that the data was on our side. Next time an arts organisation cites the EBacc as a reason it cannot get more involved in education, NSN will be able to point them to this report. No doubt some people will dispute its analysis and quarrel with its conclusions, but our research goes further than any other analysis we’ve seen and the Department for Education’s statisticians have cross-checked our findings.

This report has re-affirmed my belief that some of the most successful schools are those that combine high expectations in a core of academic subjects with a strong focus on the arts. NSN will continue to do everything in its power to make sure there are more of them.
Executive Summary

This report by New Schools Network affirms the importance of arts education, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and argues that the Government’s introduction of the EBacc and other performance measures are not in conflict with a good arts education.

This report explores the impact of those reforms on the study of arts GCSEs in English state-funded mainstream schools between 2011/12 and 2015/16, focusing on the EBacc, as well as Progress 8 and Attainment 8. After analysing GCSE data for each academic year since 2011/12, we conclude that they have had no discernible impact on the popularity of the arts at GCSE, with the total number of GCSE arts qualifications being taken in 2015/16 having gone up. Similarly, the average number of arts GCSEs studied by each pupil has increased by 7.4%, with 48% of student taking at least one arts GCSE in 2015/16.

We also look at attainment in arts GCSEs in those schools where an above average number of students have obtained the EBacc and conclude that there is a strong correlation between high performance in the EBacc subjects and high performance in the arts. In schools where EBacc attainment was above average in 2015/16, 73.2% of all arts GCSE entrants achieved A* – C, compared to a national average of 71.7%. A similar pattern emerges in schools that achieved above average Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores in 2015/16.

Examining recent trends in the resourcing of arts education, our research also finds that, despite their increasing popularity, arts GCSEs face a growing threat from schools which mistakenly believe that to achieve good Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores they have to discourage students from taking arts GCSEs. We point out that, in reality, students who take an above average number of arts GCSEs are more likely to get above average Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores. Some of the most successful state secondary schools are those that combine high expectations in a core of academic subjects with a strong focus on the arts.

We conclude by urging the Government to improve its messaging around these reforms and calling for arts organisations to become more involved in arts education in schools, including setting up free schools.
Key Findings

Arts education improves students’ job prospects
Studying arts subjects correlates strongly with positive academic and labour market outcomes and is vital in supporting the UK’s burgeoning creative industries.

There is no evidence that the EBacc has affected GCSE arts entries
Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 individual arts entries rose, with more pupils taking at least one arts GCSE in 2015/16 than in 2011/12.

However, it does appear that schools have misunderstood the intention behind the EBacc, using its introduction to reduce funding for the teaching of the arts
While arts entries have risen, the number of GCSE arts teachers has declined, with schools focusing recruitment efforts elsewhere. Similarly, evidence suggests that less contact time is now being given to GCSE arts entrants.

There is no evidence of incompatibility between attainment in arts GCSEs and attainment in the EBacc, Progress 8 and Attainment 8
Higher participation and performance in the arts goes hand-in-hand with high attainment in the EBacc, Progress 8 and Attainment 8. Because grades in arts GCSEs are typically higher, arts GCSEs add more to Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores than other subjects.
Section One: Background to the Debate

For the last thirty years, the arts have formed a key part of the national curriculum. They foster curiosity, encourage confidence and broaden students’ horizons.

In keeping with this, successive governments have encouraged young people to take an interest in the arts, putting in place a wide variety of policies and programmes to ensure that almost every child now has access to the arts from an early age.

Despite this, recent reports have argued that the arts are becoming increasingly marginalised in England’s schools. It has been suggested that the EBacc, alongside a number of other recent new Key Stage 4 accountability measures, has led to a new emphasis on ‘core’ academic subjects to the detriment of the arts.

This report assesses the state of GCSE arts education in England’s schools, analysing how the introduction of the EBacc has influenced decisions about what GCSEs to study, the resourcing of different departments within schools and pupil attainment.

In line with the Department for Education’s (DfE) definition of arts subjects, New Schools Network has defined them as Art & Design, Dance, Drama, Expressive & Performing Arts, Media and Music. We have also looked at the uptake of English Literature GCSE to see whether this has increased in recent years. We have confined our analysis to state-funded, mainstream schools in England because the new accountability measures do not apply to independent schools. We have also excluded Design and Technology from our basket of arts GCSEs. Some people will quibble with this because if you include it, it’s possible to show a decline in the total number of arts GCSEs being taken since 2011/12. However, we think it would be odd to include it, partly because it would be unconventional – Design and Technology is not defined as an ‘arts’ subject in the National Curriculum and the DfE has never treated it as such – and partly because it incorporates disciplines like electronics and resistant materials.

The new Key Stage 4 accountability measures

Much of the debate surrounding the alleged decline in the popularity of arts GCSEs has focused on the Government’s introduction of several new performance measures. The first of these, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), was announced in 2010, followed by Attainment 8 and Progress 8. We give a brief overview of these measures below, followed by an exploration of why their introduction has sparked criticism from the arts community.

The EBacc

The EBacc achievement measure was introduced by the Coalition Government in 2010 with the aim of encouraging more schools to enter children for GCSEs in a core of academic subjects, with the first cohort of children affected being those who sat their GCSEs in 2012/13. However, it is
important to note that EBacc entry is not and never has been compulsory, although that may change in light of the Government’s consultation about the EBacc. For now, it is just another measure in the school league tables.

The EBacc measures schools by the percentage of Key Stage 4 pupils entering and obtaining GCSEs in five subject groups: English, Mathematics, the Sciences, the Humanities and Foreign Languages. While the EBacc requires entrants to take seven GCSEs from this group (they are expected to do two science GCSEs and two English GCSEs), students typically do two or more additional GCSEs. Overall, students are now taking more GCSEs than in previous years, with Key Stage 4 pupils in 2015/16 opting to take an average of 8.8 GCSEs, an increase of 19% since 2011/12.

From 2016, entry and attainment in EBacc subjects has been included in a new set of accountability measures for schools. The Government carried out a consultation between 3 November 2015 and 29 January 2016 about its ambition to see at least 90% of pupils at England’s state schools entered for the EBacc but has not yet made an announcement about what it intends to do in light of this consultation. Though not compulsory, the EBacc is certainly growing in popularity, with the percentage of pupils in state-funded English schools being entered for the EBacc rising from 21.8% in 2011/12 to 39.7% in 2015/16.

**Progress 8 and Attainment 8**
Attainment 8 measures how well children do in the eight GCSEs they did best in; Progress 8 measures the academic progress of pupils in those same subjects from the end of primary school to the end of Key Stage 4, using their Key Stage 2 results as a baseline. These eight subjects must fall into specific baskets, with five of them coming from the EBacc basket, and the other three from a second basket that contains EBacc subjects, other GCSEs, recognised technical qualifications and a graded musical examination at level six or above. It is important to note that while pupils do have to take at least five subjects from the EBacc pot to satisfy the Progress 8 and Attainment 8 metrics, they do not have to be entered for the EBacc. (That requires students to do a particular configuration of at least seven EBacc GCSEs, not simply five subjects from the EBacc pot.) What these new accountability measures mean for arts GCSEs is that pupils can do three or more arts subjects and still meet the criterion for Progress 8 and Attainment 8, provided the other five subjects are from the EBacc pot.

**Criticism of the new GCSE accountability measures**
The EBacc’s introduction has been criticised by prominent members of the arts community, with specific campaigns such as ‘Bacc for the Future’ being launched to lobby for the inclusion of arts GCSEs in the EBacc’s basket of subjects. This debate intensified during last year’s EBacc consultation, with some people in the arts community fearing that the EBacc may be made compulsory for all pupils in England’s secondary schools. Many single out for criticism the EBacc’s focus on a core of academic GCSEs, arguing that the measure gives too much weight to a narrow range of subjects and discourages pupils from pursuing artistic options.
Section Two: The Value of an Arts Education

The arts have long been regarded as a mainstay of the school curriculum, offering children a valuable opportunity to build awareness of the arts while nurturing creativity and confidence from an early age. Numerous studies have now been published demonstrating a range of academic, behavioural, cognitive and economic benefits associated with a good arts education.¹⁰

It is worth noting that, while the Coalition Government did introduce the EBacc in 2010, it also introduced a new national curriculum in 2014 that affirmed the importance of the arts. Art and Design and Music were retained as foundation subjects and must be taught in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in maintained schools. In addition, maintained schools must provide all pupils with the option of doing at least one artistic subject at Key Stage 4.

There is some research evidence that studying the arts has a beneficial impact on progression in other subjects. For instance, Kendall et al. published a paper in 2008 entitled The longer-term impact of creative partnerships on the attainment of young people which found that Key Stage 4 students with regular, structured access to the arts progressed faster in English and the Sciences.¹¹ Several other studies have reached similar conclusions¹² and these gains may be even greater for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds,¹³ suggesting that access to the arts can play a role in closing the attainment gap.

In addition, research suggests there are more general behavioural and cognitive benefits from studying the arts. Regular access to creative subjects has been shown to increase participants’ scores in cognitive tests by up to 19 per cent,¹⁴ while boosting test scores in transferrable skills (such as communication and social competency) by up to 17 per cent.¹⁵ These positive effects may explain why many young people regularly exposed to the arts display greater problem-solving skills¹⁶ and enjoy considerable benefits in wellbeing¹⁷ and motivation.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, benefits like these have been shown to boost labour market outcomes.¹⁹ Arts participants often enjoy better employment opportunities,²⁰ particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are three times more likely to achieve a degree after regularly participating in the arts at school than those who don’t.²¹ Socially, engagement with the arts correlates with considerable benefits for deprived children, with disadvantaged students who engaged with the arts at school being twice as likely to volunteer in later life and 20 per cent more likely to vote.²²

Developing a workforce engaged in the arts is key to supporting the UK’s economy in the future. Since 1997, the growth of the creative industries has outstripped that of many other UK industries,²³ adding a gross value of over £84 billion, or 5.2 per cent of the UK’s GDP in 2014, while supporting 1.8 million jobs.²⁴ This has had a significant impact on the UK’s prosperity, with employees in the arts and culture industries earning, on average, five percent more than the median UK wage,²⁵ while contributing to the UK’s soft power status as one of the world’s top cultural influencers.²⁶ Opportunities are only likely to grow in the future – a 2012 paper by Creative
& Cultural Skills estimated that graduate employment in the cultural and creative industries is likely to rise by 67 per cent between now and 2020.28

“This report puts to rest the argument that the EBacc has stifled cultural education in England’s schools, reaffirming the government’s argument that children can enjoy a successful education in the arts while also excelling in the EBacc. The best schools in the country combine a high-quality cultural education with excellence in core academic subjects and we are committed to ensuring that England’s students continue to have access to both.”

The Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for Schools
Section Three: Uptake of the Arts

Key findings
— A comparison of GCSE entries in 2011/12 and 2015/16 shows a rise in the number of arts GCSEs studied per pupil.
— The number of arts GCSEs being taken has not just risen in absolute terms, but the average number of arts GCSEs studied by each pupil has also increased since the EBacc was introduced.
— Significantly, this pattern has been repeated and accentuated in areas of heightened deprivation, where more children from disadvantaged backgrounds are now enjoying the benefits of arts study at GCSE.

GCSE arts entries
NSN analysed the DfE’s annual Key Stage 4 subject and qualification data releases for the five academic years from 2011/12 to 2015/16.29 With the EBacc being announced in September 2010, we calculate that the measure would have first influenced those embarking on their GCSEs in the academic year 2011/12 and sitting their GCSEs in 2012/13. For that reason, we’ve chosen 2011/12 as our baseline since students sitting their GCSEs in that year, having made their GCSE choices before the EBacc was introduced, weren’t affected by the new measure. As numbers of pupils in the annual GCSE cohort have varied significantly during this period, we have focused on both total GCSE entries and per pupil entries.

An initial inspection of this data shows that in 2011/12 there were 314,418 entries to GCSE arts subjects (Art & Design – including specific subsidiaries such as Applied Art & Design – Dance, Drama, Expressive Arts & Performance Studies, Film Studies, Media, Film and Television Studies, Music and Performing Arts). Despite the introduction of the EBacc, between 2011/12 and 2015/16 GCSE entries in these subjects rose by 6,318, or 2 per cent, to reach 320,736. This rise took place despite the drop in the size of the pupil cohort from 561,308 to 540,689 (a 3.7 per cent fall) in the same period. This means that the number of arts GCSEs per pupil increased from 0.56 per pupil in 2011/12 to 0.59 in 2015/16.

This translates into more students taking at least one arts subject at GCSE. DfE data shows that 48 per cent of England’s GCSE students took at least one arts GCSE in 2015/16, a 7.4 per cent increase on 2011/12 when 44.7 per cent of GCSE students took at least one arts GCSE.

This story holds true for GCSE entries in areas of heightened deprivation. We looked at schools in areas that are rated in the bottom third of the country according to IMD rankings (a scoring system that ranks areas’ deprivation based on a multitude of factors such as illiteracy, crime and income)30 and found that entries to GCSE arts subjects from schools in these areas also increased. There were 70,755 arts GCSE entries in 2011/12 and 80,128 in 2015/16, an increase of 13.3 per cent. This was despite the number of students taking GCSE exams in these areas falling by 3,501 in the same period. Notably, while arts entries per pupil rose 5.9 per cent nationally between 2011/12 and
2015/16, in areas of heightened deprivation it rose 16.1 per cent. While the percentage of arts GCSEs as a proportion of all GCSEs taken in this period has fallen, this is due to an absolute increase in the number of GCSEs being taken, not a fall in the number of pupils taking arts GCSEs or a fall in the average number of arts GCSEs taken by each pupil.31

**English Literature entries**
Adding English Literature to the DfE’s definition of GCSE arts subjects shows an even more positive increase in arts-based GCSE entries between 2011/12 and 2015/16, with entries increasing from 721,031 in 2011/12 to 819,359 in 2015/16, a 13.6 per cent rise. This is also reflected in a rise in per pupil entries to the arts, moving from 1.3 per pupil entries in 2011/12 to 1.5 per pupil entries in 2015/16.

**Independent schools and other entries**
The analysis above only refers to changes in GCSE entries for Key Stage 4 pupils in English state-funded schools between 2011/12 and 2015/16. Over the same period, the number of GCSE arts entries in England’s independent schools declined from 29,303 to 25,516, a 12.9 per cent fall. When organisations like the Cultural Learning Alliance claim that the number of GCSE arts entries has declined since the introduction of the EBacc,32 they are including the data from independent schools (as well as Design and Technology). We have decided to exclude this data from our analysis, partly because the new GCSE accountability measures do not apply to independent schools (so it makes no sense to talk about an “EBacc effect” in the independent sector), and partly because they reflect a general decline in GCSE and IGCSE entries from independent schools over the same period. These schools made 125,404 fewer entries to all GCSEs/IGCSEs in 2015/16 compared with 2011/12 (a 30 per cent fall).

“Science, the humanities and the arts are all forms of investigation, driven by curiosity and delight in discovery. The child who flourishes in one should flourish in the others. The best, the liveliest education would nourish all three.”

Ian McEwan
Author
**GCSE arts resourcing**

Though GCSE arts entries increased between 2011/12 and 2015/16, the number of teachers and taught hours dedicated to the arts fell. Between November 2011 and November 2015, the number of arts teachers at Key Stage 4 in England’s state-funded schools declined from 25,300 to 21,900, a 13.4 per cent fall. By contrast, the number of Key Stage 4 Geography and History teachers increased by 8.5 per cent, although there were still 1,500 more arts teachers in state-funded schools than Humanities teachers.

![Change in Teacher Population 2011-2015](image)

*Figure One: Change in Key Stage 4 Teacher Workforce November 2011 to November 2015. Source: DfE.*

The level of taught hours dedicated to Key Stage 4 arts also fell by 16.4 per cent in this period, while Geography and History saw an increase in teaching time of 22.9 per cent.
“This report highlights that there is not only space in the curriculum for the arts but it is also a necessity. Balance creates opportunity and enhances a child’s achievement. This report reminds us that the richness and enhancement that arts education offers makes for vibrant, successful schools. I have been privileged to work with the Royal Opera House over the past two years and seen how their programmes have challenged both children and their teachers about opera. Their engagement programmes, the training they provide to teachers and the rigorously high musical and artistic standards they expect, show how teachers and school leaders can change children’s lives and contribute to the cultural coherence that is so important to our economic, social and national identity. The NSN report challenges school leaders to re-think the place that arts education has in their schools but also shows that there is a need for more work, perhaps guidance on how it can be done at a time of considerable change both in the taught curriculum and the accountability measures.”

Dr Susan Tranter
Executive Headteacher, Edmonton County School
Section Four: Attainment in the Arts

Key findings

— Schools with higher levels of per pupil GCSE arts entries achieved above average results when it came to attainment in the EBacc, Progress 8 and Attainment 8.

— High attainment in the new accountability measures correlates with good grades in arts GCSEs.

— In those schools where EBacc achievement was above the national average in 2015/16 (i.e. where more than 24.7 per cent of pupils obtained the EBacc), 36 73.2 per cent of arts entrants achieved A* – C compared to a national average of 71.7 per cent.

— This also holds true for Progress 8 and Attainment 8, with schools posting above average scores on those metrics also posting above average GCSE results in the arts. In schools with Progress 8 scores of zero and above, 76.1 per cent of arts entrants achieved A* – C.

We evaluated pupil performance across a range of GCSE subjects to see if there was a correlation between attainment in arts subjects and attainment in other subjects.

GCSE arts attainment

Attainment in GCSE arts subjects consistently outranked attainment in other subjects, with 71.7 per cent of GCSE arts entries attaining A* – C in 2015/16 compared with 68 per cent of GCSE entries across all subjects.

Figure Two: GCSE A* – C Attainment by subject and area. Source: DfE.
EBacc attainment

Our analysis shows that high attainment in the EBacc correlates with above average entry rates and above average results in the arts at GCSE. As shown in figure three, schools with raised per pupil entries to the arts also did well in the EBacc in 2015/16, demonstrating that some of the most successful state secondary schools are those that combine a strong focus on the arts with high expectations in the core academic subjects.

Similarly, in those schools where an above average number of students obtained the EBacc, GCSE arts results were also above average. For example, where EBacc attainment was above the national average in 2015/16 (i.e. where more than 24.7 per cent of pupils obtained the EBacc), 73.2 per cent of arts entrants achieved A* – C compared to a national average of 71.7 per cent.
In schools that entered an above average number of pupils for the EBacc (more than 39.7 per cent of their students) arts results were particularly strong, with an average of 86.4 per cent of arts entrants in these schools getting A* – C (compared with 71.7 per cent nationally).

The effects are even more pronounced in the very top performing schools. Those schools entering more than 90 per cent of GCSE students for the EBacc in 2015/16 achieved an average of 97.5 per cent A* – C grades in the arts; while those schools that saw more than 90 per cent obtaining the EBacc on average saw 93.2 per cent of arts applicants achieve A* – C.

**Attainment 8 and Progress 8**
This pattern is repeated when we assess schools according to their Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores. In both cases, where schools had a higher rate of per pupil entries to arts GCSEs, Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores generally improved; a trend that was repeated in deprived areas.
In those schools where pupils – on average – exceeded the national Attainment 8 score (49.9), arts results were similarly raised, with 79.1 per cent of GCSE entrants getting A* – C (compared to 71.7
per cent nationally). While in schools with Progress 8 scores of zero and above, 76.1 per cent of arts entrants achieved A* – C.

**Figure Seven:** Schools by average progress 8 pupil scores in 2015/16 and the percentage of arts entrants achieving A* – C at GCSE. *Source: DfE.*

Essentially, against all measures, schools that saw high attainment in the EBacc, Progress 8 and Attainment 8, also saw high attainment in the arts.
“Arts and culture play a vital role in the UK, supporting millions of jobs while stimulating innovation and greater wellbeing in society. The arts can be real forces for openness and social mobility, and this is why we are committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy arts and culture, including in our schools.”

The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP
Minister of State for Digital and Culture
Section Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

More analysis needs to be done to build a complete picture of what is happening with the arts in schools but NSN’s preliminary findings are that there is no conflict between the new performance measures and the study of the arts. There has been no fall off in the number of pupils taking arts GCSEs since the introduction of the EBacc and attainment in EBacc subjects goes hand-in-hand with achievement in the arts.

Nevertheless, schools have reduced funding for the arts and while there is no evidence that this has had a negative impact on the study of the arts, at least at GCSE level, it may yet. We believe schools have misunderstood the new performance measures, mistakenly thinking that in order to boost their EBacc results, as well as their Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores, they need to steer resources away from the arts and towards the EBacc subjects. In fact, some of the schools that perform best according to these measures are those that combine high expectations in core academic subjects with a strong focus on the arts.

The Government must shoulder some of the blame for this misunderstanding and should do more to signal its enthusiasm for arts education. That means continuing to provide resources for the arts in schools, as it has done in the case of the Music Hubs and the Cultural Citizens Programme, and making it clear that it does not want schools to steer children towards EBacc subjects at the expense of arts GCSE subjects. One thing the DfE could do to help would be to publish more data about arts GCSEs. Although it releases a national statistic on the proportion of students undertaking at least one arts GCSE each year, this information should be published about individual schools so parents and students can take that data into account when choosing schools.

Arts organisations, too, could do more to promote the study of the arts in schools, as could prominent figures in the arts. Numerous studies have shown that partnerships between arts organisations and schools are very effective at boosting attainment in the arts. One way this can be achieved is by such organisations becoming directly involved in setting up new free schools.

There are already some excellent examples of free schools that are focusing on the arts.

Cobham Free School in Surrey, which opened in 2012, has fostered a close working relationship with the Yehudi Menuhin School. As a result, pupils at Cobham Free school enjoy access to specialist music teaching from the age of five, an opportunity that was singled out for praise in the school’s recent Ofsted report. This has clearly had an impact – the students who will become Cobham’s first GCSE cohort have already chosen their GCSEs and 90 per cent will be doing at least one arts subject.

Similarly, Polam Hall School in Darlington puts a strong emphasis on achievement in the arts and believes it goes hand-in-hand with academic achievement. All students at this school do at least one arts GCSE and achieve grades well above national and local averages. At the same time, students at
Polam are twice as likely to achieve the EBacc than nationally. The school has a strong focus on the creative arts and aims to become a beacon for the teaching of singing, dance, drama and music in Darlington and the Tees Valley.

New Schools Network would like to see more arts organisations across England following in the footsteps of these excellent schools.
“Children shouldn’t be forced to choose between an academic education and an arts education and this report proves they don’t have to. Those schools that combine high expectations in a core of academic subjects with a strong focus on the arts have consistently been getting above average results. Our hope is that this report will help dispel some of the misunderstandings that have arisen and encourage more schools to boost their arts provision and more arts organisations to set up schools.”

Toby Young
Director, New Schools Network
Methodology

In the interests of reliability and good practice, New Schools Network used data sources exclusively published and managed by the UK Government in this report. In every instance, the most recently published data source was used.

Data Sources

The following sources were used in this report:

— The DfE’s performance releases for revised Key Stage 4 qualification and subject data (between each of the academic years from 2011/12 and 2015/16) and revised Key Stage 4 results for all of England. These datasets give a breakdown of GCSE entries by subject, school, school type and results alongside each school’s EBacc entry rate, EBacc attainment, average Attainment 8 score per pupil and average Progress 8 score. This data is available at: https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/

— The DfE’s Edubase database. This dataset gives up-to-date details on the characteristics of every English school including location, faith designation and selection process. Available at: http://www.education.gov.uk/edubase/home.xhtml

— The Department for Communities and Local Government’s release of English indices of deprivation, 2015. File 1: Index of multiple deprivation gives a deprivation score for each English neighbourhood out of ten (referencing over 32,000 neighbourhoods). These scores are calculated on a multitude of factors including the income deprivation, employment deprivation, skills and training deprivation, health deprivation, disability and crime, with each score referencing the decile the area falls into compared with the rest of the country (i.e. a score of one refers to the neighbourhood being in the worst 10 per cent of English neighbourhoods by deprivation). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015

— The DfE’s annual release on the school workforce in England for each year between November 2011 and November 2015. The main table for each year gives a breakdown of Key Stage 4 teachers in English state-funded schools by subject taught alongside a breakdown of total hours taught each week. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2011

— The DfE’s main statistical release on revised GCSE and equivalent results in England. The published headline report and main national table gives overall figures for the size of the pupil cohort reaching the end of Key Stage 4 at the end of each academic year between 2011/12 and 2015/16 alongside statistics on average EBacc entry, EBacc attainment, Attainment 8 scores and Progress 8 scores. The headline report also references the proportion of GCSE entrants in English state-funded schools accessing at least one arts GCSE between 2011/12 and 2015/16. Both available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2015-to-2016
**Calculations**

**GCSE entries**
This data was retrieved from the DfE’s Key Stage 4 qualification and subject data. NSN filtered out the results for independent and non-mainstream schools to give an overview of annual GCSE entries for English state-funded mainstream schools. We used these results to count total entries for GCSE arts (accounting for GCSE entries to Art & Design – including specific subsidiaries such as Applied Art & Design – Dance, Drama, Expressive Arts & Performance Studies, Film Studies, Media, Film and Television Studies, Music and Performing Arts), comparing these with the sum of entries to all subjects. NSN repeated these steps to obtain data on English Literature entries.

In calculating entries by deprivation, NSN cross-checked each school’s Lower Super Output Area with results given in the Index of Multiple Deprivation, assigning each school a deprivation score. To obtain data on ‘the most deprived’ filtering out the data to just show entries from schools with an index of multiple deprivation score of three or below.

**Per-pupil GCSE entries**
Headline figures on per-pupil GCSE entries were calculated by dividing total GCSE arts entries from English state-funded schools with cohort numbers for pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 at each of these schools.

When using these figures for attainment data NSN calculated the per-pupils GCSE arts entries per school. To do this we took the total GCSE arts entries for each school (obtained from the Key Stage 4 qualification and subject data) and divided this by the school’s recorded pupil cohort reaching the end of Key Stage 4 in that academic year (obtained from the Key Stage 4 revised Key Stage 4 results).

**Students taking at least one arts GCSE**
This data was retrieved from the DfE’s 2015/16 headline report on revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2016.

**Key Stage 4 teacher numbers and taught hours**
This data was calculated using the DfE’s annual release on the school workforce in England for each year between November 2011 and November 2015. For each year from November 2011 we counted total Key Stage 4 teacher numbers and taught hours for each of the arts subjects listed (Art & Design, Drama, Media Studies and Music), calculating the change in the sum of these between 2011 and 2015. We did the same for Geography and History. Note: this calculation excluded ‘Combined Arts’, though their inclusion shows very similar trends.
**GCSE arts attainment**

GCSE arts attainment was calculated using the DfE’s Key Stage 4 qualifications and subject data. Collecting figures for total GCSE arts entries and total GCSE arts entries per school, we divided these by the number of A*-C grades achieved in the corresponding subjects to give an A*–C attainment rate for the arts, total GCSEs and arts GCSEs in individual schools.

NSN compared GCSE arts attainment and per pupil entry by each school with the corresponding EBacc entry rates, EBacc attainment rates, average Attainment 8 scores per pupil and Progress 8 scores for that school.
References


4. Qualifying GCSE qualifications which are included in the measure for each year are listed by the Department for Education here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-eligible-qualifications. It should be noted that ‘the humanities’ refers to a GCSE qualification in either Geography or History (including Ancient History), while ‘foreign languages’ refers to GCSE qualifications in modern and classical foreign languages.

5. See ‘Methodology’ section at end of paper for data-sources and workings.


9. ‘Bacc for the Future’ is a campaign that lobbies for the inclusion of at least one arts GCSE in the EBacc measure. It is coordinated by the Incorporated Society of Musicians. http://www.baccforthefuture.com/


Vaughan, T., Harris, J. and Caldwell, B., (2011). *Bridging the Gap in School Achievement through the Arts*. Victoria: The Song Room;

13 AHRC, *Understanding the value of arts and culture*, p.116-7

14 DCMS, *Understanding the impact of engaging in culture and sport*, p.29.

15 Ibid.


23 According to DCMS, ‘Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.’


25 Ibid.


27 The UK is consistently ranked as one of the top exporters of cultural influence and ‘soft power’ (see Portland Communications’ ‘Soft Power 30’ list; The BBC’s annually commissioned GlobeScan/PIPA survey of global influencers).


29 See ‘Methodology’ section at end of paper for data-sources and workings. The data-set is available at: https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/download-data under ‘Key Stage 4 qualification and subject data’.


31 Over the period, total GCSE entries from English state-funded mainstream schools rose from 4,142,793 in 2011/12 to 4,750,650 in 2015/16.


33 Not including teachers in Combined Arts.
35 As above. Data retrieved from the same source.
37 See ‘Methodology’ section at end of paper for data-sources and workings.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 The Department for Education has just announced a continuation of this programme until 2020 with £75million of funding pledged for each year until then. See http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/, (2016). Music Education Hubs. Available at: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/music-education/music-education-hubs