

Let me try to explain my thinking about the push-pull effect of Progress 8 against EBacc (please bear with me it's a bit complicated):

Progress 8 and [Attainment 8](#) are secondary school accountability measures introduced in 2016 to encourage the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. They sit alongside the EBacc measure and help Ofsted and Government to make judgments about how well a school is performing compared to other schools in similar circumstances. Progress 8 measures a student's progress across their best 8 subjects that must fit into 3 distinct categories or 'buckets'. Attainment 8 shows a student's average performance across the same 8 subjects, 5 of which are EBacc subjects and will include English and Maths.

How schools are managing the [3 buckets](#) is key to my theory about what's happening in relation to arts subjects. Bucket 1 has two slots - one for English (language or literature - double weighted if both are taken) and the other for Maths (also double weighted); bucket 2 has slots for three EBacc qualifications (including the second English subject if taken, so that the English qualification in bucket 1 can be double weighted); and bucket 3 is the open bucket with slots for three 'other' qualifications that can include additional EBacc subjects or other approved qualifications including arts.

The aim of the Progress/Attainment 8 game is for individual students to get as many points in each bucket as possible.

Under the new system GCSE's are allocated points from 1-8; 1 being equivalent to a Grade G in the old system and 8 being equivalent to A\*. The 'Attainment 8' score is calculated by adding the point scores of a student's best 8 GCSEs (slotted into the right buckets) and dividing the total by 10. Students don't have to take 8 GCSEs but any empty slot will be given a 0 score. Only EBacc qualifications can be counted in buckets 1 and 2 so any unfilled slots there will be given a 0 score.

As Schools' Minister Nick Gibb and his DCMS colleague Matt Hancock point out in their [foreword](#), the EBacc demands that students study just 5 specific subjects while schools encourage most students to take 9 or 10 GCSE's. In theory young people have the option to study four or five non-EBacc qualifications including arts subjects. Great eh? Not really!

In reality the EBacc takes up at least 6 of the 8 slots across all 3 buckets. For the average 'able' student the first five slots in the EBacc buckets are likely to be filled quickly. Maths and one English qualification will fill bucket 1. The second English will go into bucket 2 (to ensure the English in bucket 1 can be double weighted). To satisfy the EBacc measure students will need to study at least double science (or three separate sciences) alongside a language and a humanities subject, and faith schools will likely insist RE is taken too. That's potentially all the 'bucket's filled leaving space for one, possible two, other subjects to be studied. Some schools will want to hedge their EBacc bets by encouraging borderline students to study more than enough qualifying subjects to ensure the highest scores will be able to count towards that important measure. The introduction of the EBacc means that, as we all suspect, many young people are being directed away from studying arts subjects they would have been inclined to choose.

On the flip-side, for students deemed to be 'less-able' and therefore less likely to achieve high point scores in EBacc subjects, the tactics change to focus more on the Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures. Remember this is a points game and as well as helping to secure progression for young people, points influence a school's position on the league tables and are used by Ofsted to make key judgments about a school's performance. Arts subjects often provide a valuable opportunity for

young people who don't excel in academic subjects to shine and have their creative talents recognised and celebrated. And of course, as the data in Ed's report suggests, it's easier to achieve higher points scores in Arts GCSEs (tongue firmly in cheek and eyes rolling). The story I hear from staff in schools is that the Progress 8 measure is bolstering arts subjects at Key Stage 4 because they create a route to higher points scores for less academically inclined students who aren't expected to achieve the EBacc. 'Less [academically] able' students are in many cases being directed towards arts subjects.