

Consultation Response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning

• Consultation on implementing the English Baccalaureate

••• The Society is pleased to respond to the consultation on implementing the English Baccalaureate.

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the UK learned society and professional body for geography and geographers. The Society maintains a strong overview of the discipline, its standing and practice in schools, higher education, and the workplace, including professional accreditation. We advise on, and support the advancement of, geography; the dissemination of geographical knowledge to the public, policy makers and other specialist audiences including teachers, scholars, and those involved in expeditions and fieldwork; and training and professional development for practising geographers. We have 16,000 members and Fellows and our work currently reaches more than three million people per year. Each year the Society works with teachers and pupils from about 50% of English secondary schools, providing CPD support to over 1,000 teachers and our online educational resources receive 1 million+ 'user sessions' annually. The Society's Education Committee advises on its work with schools.

This consultation response, set out on the following pages, is not confidential and an official response on behalf of the RGS-IBG.

Please contact the Society if you would like any further details about our views and work.

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The Society strongly supports the need for all pupils to experience a high quality and academically rich education which can stimulate a lifelong intellectual curiosity and prepare young people for further study and the world of work.

This should provide curriculum breadth and balance and, particularly through the study of key disciplines, expose pupils to robust ways of explaining, interrogating and understanding the world. The study of geography makes a distinctive and invaluable contribution to a broad and balanced academic curriculum. It is an academically robust discipline which spans the social and physical sciences; promotes a lifelong interest and fascination in how the world works; and helps young

people better understand many of the local, national and global issues that affect people, places and environments in the 21st century, for example from flooding to migration.

The Society is strongly supportive of the English Baccalaureate becoming the default option for all pupils, and considers that schools should be able to determine the small minority of pupils for whom taking the whole EBacc is not appropriate.

The Society believes that it is right for the EBacc to identify a range of core subjects and that the right subjects (and number of subjects) are currently included within it. It should continue to provide the current (limited) option choices for students, such as within the sciences or the choice of a modern or ancient language. In addition, the reporting of Progress 8 ensures that the full range of GCSEs, within and beyond the EBacc, is fully recognised through the school accountability measures. This enables students to study up to three subjects outside the required five from within the EBacc choices, thus accommodating a breadth of individual interests across the wider arts, humanities, social sciences or vocational choices.

Information on Geography and the EBacc is included as an Appendix to this response.

Consultation Questions

- 1. Is there any other information that should be made available about schools' performance in the EBacc?**

The Society would welcome the reporting of the proportion and number of students in a school sitting geography or history within the EBacc.

The Society would also wish to see Ofsted publish regular and ongoing subject specific inspection reports for the EBacc subjects. These reports are the only national reporting mechanism for assessing the improving health (or otherwise) of a subject. They are an invaluable, authoritative and impartial benchmark for identifying both good practice and where additional attention needs to be focused. Ofsted's most recent subject specific report for geography was in 2011, five years ago, entitled *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference* (Feb 2011).

- 2. How should this policy apply to UTCs, studio schools and further education colleges teaching key stage 4 pupils?**

No comment made

- 3. What challenges have schools experienced in teacher recruitment to EBacc subjects?**

From our regular contact with teachers and geography ITT providers, we understand that many schools are facing challenges in their recruitment of subject specialist geography teachers. We note that in November 2015 the TES reported that only 83% of geography ITT places had been filled¹. This led some schools to face challenges in meeting the rising demand for geography at GCSE (and A Level).

The Society also understands that, as a result, some schools have (understandably, but regrettably) time-tabled their subject specialists to teach solely or predominantly GCSE and A Level geography. As a result their KS3 curriculum is increasingly being taught by non-specialists. This can only weaken KS3 provision and will provide a real challenge for teaching the new KS3 curriculum which has considerably more depth of content than previously.

¹ <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/teacher-shortage-fears-deepen-almost-one-five-secondary-trainee>

Ofsted identified in 2011 that, “*relatively weak achievement in Key Stage 3 (geography) often contrasted with the good progress of those who had chosen to study geography at Key Stage 4. Uninspiring teaching and the lack of challenge (at KS3) discouraged many students from choosing geography at GCSE.*” Such trends are still of concern in schools with weaker provision in geography, in spite of the general recovery in GCSE entries since 2011. The recent increased uptake of GCSE and A Level entries in geography can only be maintained by continuing to work on Key Stage 3 teaching quality and student engagement at that level. This needs subject specialist teachers at Key Stage 3.

These trends of teacher shortages and a potentially weakening of KS3 teaching are of significant concern to the Society and are likely to be of concern for other EBacc subject disciplines. Indeed, the publication of Ofsted’s *Key Stage 3: the wasted years?* (September 2015) identified that, “Inspectors reported significant weaknesses in all three subjects (MFL, history and geography). Too often, inspectors found teaching that failed to challenge and engage pupils ... Achievement was not good enough in just under half of the MFL classes observed, two-fifths of the history classes and one third of the geography classes”.

4. What strategies have schools found useful in attracting and retaining staff in these subjects?

The Society welcomes the introduction of bursaries for ITT provision in geography. It also notes that teachers/schools engagement with, and membership of, their subject specific professional bodies can have a positive impact on teachers’ professionalism and commitment.

For example, the [Ofsted Good Practice case study for Greenford High School](#) specifically noted that, “*One of the school’s most successful areas in recent years has been the continuing professional development of all members of staff. Geography teachers have actively participated and have used links with the geography subject associations, notably (in this case) the Royal Geographical Society, to enable the teachers to enhance their skills and to indulge their passion for geography.*”

The Society believes that further encouragement should be given to Senior Leadership Teams to value and support the contribution that subject specific professional bodies can provide to their EBacc subject teams. This may include subject specific CPD, individual and/or departmental membership or a colleague’s application for a relevant professional accreditation, such as Chartered Geographer (Teacher)².

5. What approaches do schools intend to take to manage challenges relating to the teaching of EBacc subjects?

The Society understands that some schools have faced challenges, in the face of rising numbers, in the provision of geographical fieldwork – which is an explicit requirement of the GCSE specifications for this subject. The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is well placed to provide essential guidance and support on how to organise and run meaningful, curriculum relevant local fieldwork.

6. Other than teacher recruitment, what other issues will schools need to consider when planning for increasing the number of pupils taking the EBacc?

Schools will need to plan appropriately to ensure they properly meet the fieldwork requirements of the new GCSE courses for geography; and that their teachers are skilled in delivering the data skills now embedded in the Geography GCSE criteria. (Note: the Society has recently launched a national programme – Data Skills in Geography – supported by the Nuffield Foundation, to address the enhanced demand for quantitative / data skills within GCSE and A Level geography.)

² With comparable Chartered scheme being also available for English, history, mathematics and science teachers.



7. What additional central strategies would schools like to see in place for recruiting and training teachers in EBacc subjects?

Bodies such as the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) can both provide leadership for their respective subject discipline, connect teachers and trainee teachers with examples of good practice and also provide bespoke support within their field.

The Society would like to ensure that appropriate ITT guidelines are in place to ensure secondary teachers are appropriately trained in the context of the discipline as well as in the specific topics and skills required in the study of key stages 3, 4 and 5, and in teaching fieldwork.

The Society would like to see a requirement for a set minimum number of hours of **subject specific** CPD for all existing secondary teachers so that they can maintain good subject knowledge. Geographical knowledge is constantly evolving and it is vital that teachers stay up to date.

8. Do you think that any of the proposals have the potential to have an impact, positive or negative, on specific pupils, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics'? (The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.) Please provide evidence to support your response.

No comment made

9. How could any adverse impact be reduced to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it? Please provide evidence to support your response.

No comment made

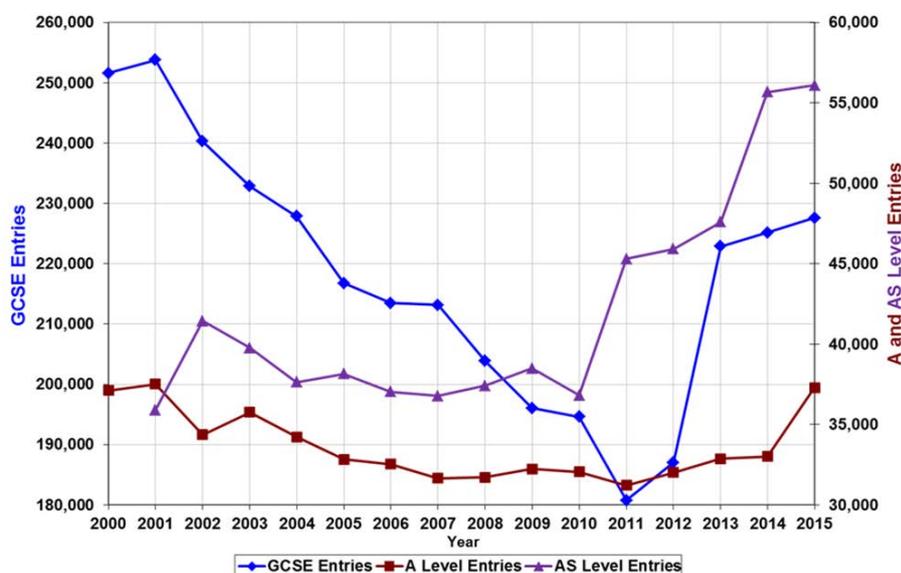
Appendix 1.

The positive impact on the numbers of pupils taking the EBacc subjects at GCSE has been clearly identified in the consultation materials.

The Society would wish to highlight the positive impact of the EBacc on the position of school geography, and hence on young peoples' knowledge and understanding of the people, places and environments in the contemporary world. Moreover, A level geography is independently recognised as a 'facilitating subject' (Informed Choices, Russell Group of Universities 2011) and its graduates experience among the lowest levels of unemployment.

As shown in the following graphic, entry levels for geography GCSE (and A Level) experienced significant decline during the early 2000s for reasons associated with the school targets existing at that time. Since 2010 the numbers studying geography at GCSE (and A Level) have recovered. This, we believe is beneficial to young people, for all the reasons given above.

GCSE and GCE Geography



In providing new online resources, CPD training, inspiring and engaging presentations from our Geography Ambassadors and professionally accrediting teachers as Chartered Geographers, the Society has already supported teachers by responding positively to the opportunity of the EBacc. We celebrated this positive change in an opinion piece for the TES [Geography keeps getting more popular - what's the subject's secret](#) and the Society's President Nick Crane has stated, "there is no better time to be studying this enjoyable, exciting and highly relevant subject."

20 January 2016