

The English Baccalaureate

INTRODUCTION

The following information was sent to all parents of pupils at Wirral Grammar School in Years 7 to 11 in January 2011 at the point when 'The English Baccalaureate' was first introduced in national performance tables. It sets out an explanation of what the 'EBacc' is all about and the approach taken to it here at Wirral Grammar School for Boys.

Dear Parents

I am writing to all parents in Years 7 to 11 to provide an update on the recently introduced English Baccalaureate and our approach to this development at Wirral Grammar School for Boys.

The 'English Baccalaureate' was first mentioned by the coalition government in June last year and plans for its introduction are now becoming clear. The White Paper, titled 'The Importance of Teaching', published in November, formally announced the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. It is the government's view that the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) will help to promote aspiration and serve to demonstrate attainment across a breadth of core subjects. The EBacc is not a new qualification in itself. It will recognise students' achievements across a core of academic subjects where they secure good passes (grades C and above) at GCSE or iGCSE. The subjects that the EBacc includes are: English, Mathematics, two Science subjects, a Language and a Humanities subject (Geography or History). In the future, the intention is to introduce an English Baccalaureate Certificate, but there is no clear timescale on this at this stage.

What subjects and qualifications will count towards the English Baccalaureate?

The Government is being very prescriptive concerning the subjects that will count towards the EBacc. Pupils will be required to gain A* to C in each of the Baccalaureate subjects. The subjects are set out below and under each subject are the courses that will be accepted.

English

Recognised courses are:

- GCSE in English
- GCSE in English Language
- GCSE Double Award in English
- Cambridge International Certificate in First Language English
- CIE legacy iGCSE in English – First Language

Mathematics

Recognised courses are:

- GCSE in Mathematics
- GCSE in Additional Mathematics
- Achievement of a grade C in at least one of the new linked pair mathematics GCSE qualifications 'Applications of Mathematics' and 'Methods in Mathematics'
- Cambridge International Certificate in Mathematics
- CIE legacy iGCSE in Mathematics

Science

The science component will be awarded if pupils:

- Enter all three single sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics GCSEs, Cambridge International Certificates or CIE legacy iGCSEs) and achieve grades A*-C in two of them.
- Achieve grades A*-C in Science and Additional Science GCSEs
- Achieve grades A*A* - CC in Science GCSE Double Award

Humanities

Recognised courses are:

- GCSE in History
- GCSE in Ancient History
- GCSE in Geography
- Cambridge International Certificate in History
- Cambridge International Certificate in Geography
- CIE legacy iGCSE in History
- CIE legacy iGCSE in Geography

Languages

Recognised courses are:

- GCSEs in Modern Foreign Languages including Welsh and Welsh as a second Language

- GCSE in Latin
- GCSE in Classical Greek
- GCSE in Biblical Hebrew
- Cambridge International Certificate in French
- Cambridge International Certificate in Greek
- Cambridge International Certificate in Hindi as a second Language
- CIE legacy iGCSE in French
- CIE legacy iGCSE in Greek
- CIE legacy iGCSE in Hindi as a second Language

How the English Baccalaureate is being introduced

The English Baccalaureate is set to become a new school performance measure for this month (January 2011) and will therefore apply retrospectively to the 2010 GCSE examination results. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate Certificate for individual students has no defined time scale. At present the introduction of the Certificate is a 'statement of intent'. The likelihood is that certificates will first be awarded from 2012 (i.e. for pupils who are now in Year 10). However, there is a possibility that it may be introduced for 2011 (current Year 11).

National Performance and the situation in our school

Current national estimates suggest that less than 20% of pupils in the 2010 cohort, across the country will achieve the English Baccalaureate. The estimated figure for all schools nationally in 2010 is actually 15%. This is not a reflection of the ability of pupils, but rather how pupils are allowed to opt for subjects at GCSE in different schools. In many schools, both Language and Humanities subjects are entirely optional and pupils choose to follow a wide range of alternative subjects.

At Wirral Grammar School our 'traditional' academic curriculum reflects the structure of the English Baccalaureate well. All pupils study at least two science subjects and the majority study the three separate sciences. All pupils are required to study Geography or History and some study both. All pupils are required to study a Language (French and Spanish) and some study both. All pupils study English Language and Mathematics. From time to time we modify the subject combination to suit the needs of individual pupils. For example, sometimes we consider it to be in a few boys' best interest for them to drop a language subject in order to focus on Maths and English.

The average percentage of pupils reaching the English Baccalaureate standard over the last three years is 78.4%. This is 63.7% higher than the current estimated national three year average of 14.7% for all schools.

How will the English Baccalaureate be used?

At the moment this is unknown territory. We know that the Government wants schools and pupils to aspire to achieving the English Baccalaureate and therefore it will become a feature of national performance tables. It is quite likely that in the future, securing the English Baccalaureate Certificate will become a requirement for entry to some competitive universities and increasing numbers of employers who may also expect the certificate.

Concerns relating to the English Baccalaureate

There are a number of genuine concerns that are being expressed by schools across the country. Many pupils choose subjects at GCSE that are not part of the EBacc – subjects including Art, Design, Music, Media Studies, Geography, Business Studies, Astronomy, General Studies, PE and RE which are all available to pupils at Wirral Grammar School. Universities and employers will continue to expect pupils to engage in a wide range of subjects that reflect their own personal abilities and interests. Furthermore, all of these subjects are of the same academic standard and rigour. There is also a concern that gaining the English Baccalaureate is not necessarily a reflection of a pupil's overall performance at GCSE.

Immediate implications for pupils at Wirral Grammar School

Our prime concern for all our pupils is that they acquire the best possible results in all of their subjects. From the point of view of future university applications and employment prospects, it is the standard of overall attainment that is most important. Our curriculum is a broad and balanced one and provides ample scope for pupils to gain extra GCSE qualifications, some of

which are acquired on an independent basis with periodic tutoring. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate does not require any modification to our options arrangements at GCSE and our curriculum is suitably structured to allow all pupils access to this new certificate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D R Hazeldine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

D R Hazeldine

Headteacher

WIRRAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL for BOYS 2010

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