



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

Paper 133/12

18th September 2012

NIAR 680-12

Caroline Perry

Overview of English Baccalaureate Certificates

1 Introduction

On 17th September 2012 Michael Gove, the Education Secretary in England, set out proposals to move from the current system of GCSEs at the end of Key Stage 4 to a system of English Baccalaureate Certificates. Gove made a statement to the House of Commons, highlighting the rationale for the proposed changes:¹

“We believe it is time for the race to the bottom to end. We believe it is time to tackle grade inflation and dumbing down. And we believe it is time to raise aspirations and restore rigour to our examinations.”

This note provides a brief summary of the proposed changes.

2 Background – the English Baccalaureate

The English Baccalaureate was brought in as a new performance measure for schools in the 2010 league tables. Not a qualification in itself, the aim of the Baccalaureate was to highlight the number of pupils attaining GCSEs at grades A*-C across a core of

¹ Department for Education: *Education Secretary Michael Gove's oral statement about the reform of Key Stage 4 exams* [online] Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00213908/oral-statement-ks4-exam-reform>

academic subjects - **English, mathematics, history or geography, the sciences and a language.**²

3 Overview of the changes

The proposals would bring about a number of fundamental changes to assessment.³

Table 1: Overview of key changes to assessment at the end of Key Stage 4

Change	Details
Abolition of GCSEs and introduction of English Baccalaureate Certificates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace GCSEs in the subjects within the English Baccalaureate with English Baccalaureate Certificates • Teaching for the new qualifications in English, maths and sciences would begin in 2015 with the first exams in 2017: the timetable for history, geography and languages is yet to be determined • Ofqual asked to explore how new qualifications could be created to replace GCSEs in subjects beyond those within the Baccalaureate
Move from open market to one exam board per subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Education would identify the best qualification offered by a single Awarding Organisation in each of the core subjects through a bidding competition for a five-year period. Qualifications must be 'world class'.
Move away from modular approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferred approach is to remove internal assessment from the six subjects and base results completely on externally marked examinations
Changes to grading structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be required to achieve "<i>beyond the minimum levels which are currently required to achieve a C grade at GCSE</i>" - there will also be an emphasis on students' literacy and numeracy
All students to take the exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students who now take GCSEs expected to take the qualification; no tiering would be allowed (currently foundation and higher tiers available) • Pupils 'not secure' in English or maths by age 16 (whether or not exam was entered) will be expected to continue to study for an EBC post-16
Restricted use of examination aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of examination aids (such as calculators, source materials and periodic tables) will be restricted where possible.

² Department for Education: *The English Baccalaureate* [online] Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/englishbac/a0075975/the-english-baccalaureate>

³ Department for Education: *Reforming Key Stage 4 Qualifications Consultation*