

2011/22

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Policy Watch – Moving into a new era of school accountability

Introduction

The headline indicator of 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and maths stays, the EBacc remains pretty much as conceived and the current system of equivalencies, given short shrift in Wolf, remains in place for the next couple of years while a new set of criteria is hammered out.

These are the headline messages from the Statement of Intent issued this week by the DfE setting out what will go into the make up of this year's school 'league' tables. There are, however, plenty of other changes both for now and the future. Indeed the Annexes that list all the details of the changes have the moniker 'new' plastered all over them.

It's twenty years since John Major first announced that school results would be published as part of a new Citizen's Charter but now it seems that all Parties want a more refined model. Michael Gove set out his ideas in last autumn's [White Paper](#), "*central to our approach is the need to make it easier for parents and the public to hold schools to account,*" while for the Opposition, Andy Burnham confirmed just last week that his [schools policy review](#) "*is looking at whether it is possible to reform league tables so that schools are judged by the difference that they make with each individual learner.*"

So where does this leave league tables now let alone the future?

Headline changes to the 2011 league tables

First, the EBacc, where despite entreaties from various subject bodies and some passionate evidence to the current Select Committee Inquiry into the EBacc, things remain much as before. The Secretary of State is apparently "*mindful to leave the subjects unchanged*" which means English, maths, two sciences, history or geography and an ancient or a modern foreign language remain the constituent subjects. This may disappoint those working up alternative and more flexible forms of Bacc but the Secretary of State has claimed the moral high ground here; these are the subject areas that best support progression and all pupils should have an opportunity to take them. Last year, 15.6% of pupils achieved an A*-C in the five EBacc subjects so it will be interesting to see what happens this year given the stories of schools switching furiously to EBacc subjects.

A couple of modifications have, however, been made for this year's EBacc. First relevant AS levels taken early, typically before the end of Key Stage 4, will now count towards the EBacc and secondly, further detail will be added about the cohort 'pool' including the number of pupils entered for each EBacc subject, the percentage that gain an A*-C and a school's VA (Value Added) score in enhancing the progress made by pupils in each of the EBacc subjects. All perhaps intended to expose EBacc activity to greater sunlight.

In addition, a VA 'score,' based on a pupil's "*best eight*" results, will also appear though outside the EBacc data, to indicate progress made between Key Stages 2 and 4. Collectively these VA measures are intended to help to fill the gap left by the now defunct CVA measure.

Second, some changes to provide greater detail about the performance of all pupils of whatever ability. This is something that the Government has been talking about for some time partly as a way of ensuring that schools don't focus exclusively on the D/C borderline pupils but consider the needs of all ability groups, and partly because the Government is keen to record in some way the impact of the additional investment being provided through the Pupil Premium. Effectively this means two things. One, that the tables will include comparative percentages of the number of disadvantaged pupils, that's looked after children, those on free school meals and children of service personnel, all typically recipients of the Pupil Premium, gaining A*-C in English and maths GCSE against attainment levels of all other pupils in the same subjects. This will help identify how far performance gaps are closing between the more and the less

advantaged. Two, that for the first time this year, the tables will indicate how different ability ranges are performing. Users will be able to see how low, middle and high attaining pupils, defined as such by their performance in earlier Key Stage tests, are doing against other pupils in a cohort and against the national average.

This is all part of the additional level of performance detail that the Government is keen to see introduced and will include for example average grades per exam entry, an average total points score and results in the most popular subject areas both for GCSE and vocational. All of this, along with the more established basics and progress measures in the core subjects of English and maths, the percentage of pupils achieving A*-C in these subjects and the progress made between the Key Stages for different attainment groups in these subjects, will be added to the bulk of data being provided through this year's tables.

Third, more detail will be given about the nature of individual cohorts. The tables have traditionally recorded such standard information as the number of pupils on roll at each learning stage as well as the number with for instance SEN statements. This year, the dataset will include the percentage of pupils in a cohort eligible for free school meals, the percentage with English as an Additional Language and the relative position of learners at the start of a particular Key Stage: at the expected level, above or below it? Again all part of the finer grain detail that the Government is keen to push out.

What of the future?

The context here is the Government's 'Open Government' agenda, the desire to use the explosion of data in recent years to hold provider performance to account while demonstrating Government willingness to be more open and transparent. With consultation due out shortly on a new Transparency and Right to Data Strategy, the Prime Minister has recently committed Depts such as Education to releasing much more information into the public domain. Numbers going on to university, wider destination data, rolling averages of pupil performance, stronger pupil progress measures, success in accredited applied learning, efficiency of output, all have been mentioned as possible performance measures, some of which may appear in league tables.

Progression on to higher education, for instance, has been included in the recent [HE White Paper](#), is [supported](#) by the Chief Executive of UCAS and has been highlighted recently in a [Report](#) by the Sutton Trust on social mobility. It ticks a lot of boxes and seems likely to be included in the future; other destination data may be more difficult to gather until a new careers service is in place. Rolling averages that can give a more rounded picture of performance over time is another popular shout at the moment and was accepted by the Government in its [Response](#) recently to Lord Bew's Report on Key Stage 2 assessment and accountability. They will feature in the 2012 tables. Measures of pupil progress in the basics currently defined by floor standards at both Key Stage 2 and 4 will, as Michael Gove has already [indicated](#), be raised so that in a school 60% of pupils achieve a Level 4 in English and maths at the end of primary and from next year, 40% of GCSE pupils achieve 5 A*-Cs including English and maths.

For many people though a more immediate question is what qualifications will count on league tables for 14-16 year olds in light of the Wolf Review. This is now the subject of [consultation](#) with the Government proposing that two "*non-GCSE qualifications per pupil*" will be recognised on league tables but that they must meet defined criteria on size, progression potential, track record, rigour of assessment and challenge. All such qualifications permitted will get equal billing on league tables in the sense that they will each have a similar value of one with as opposed to differential values. These changes are intended to take effect for 2014

Finally, for those who would like to see what the future looks like in this area, the 'One Stop Shop' interactive [tool](#) recently developed by the Centre Forum think tank, which brings together school choice and accountability on to one website for all users, offers an interesting glimpse.

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New forms of accountability July 2011