

## **Response to the Education Select Committee Inquiry into the English Baccalaureate**

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1. The 1994 Group welcomes the invitation from the Education Select Committee to submit evidence to its inquiry on the English Baccalaureate.
2. The English Baccalaureate is a new addition to the UK education system and as yet there is uncertainty about the impacts of its introduction on higher education. It does however bring a welcome opportunity to encourage pupils to increase the breadth of their Level 2 (GCSE and equivalent) study. This has the potential to increase opportunities for all students at higher levels of study. The implementation of the Baccalaureate must however be in harmony with the principle that pupils should study a broad range of subjects, appropriate to them, taking into account their aptitude and interest. Currently there is no desire within 1994 Group universities for the English Baccalaureate to be included within university admissions criteria. In terms of Level 2 study it is most important that students gain a broad education which is appropriate to them to maximise their options for further and higher study.
3. We are supportive of measures which encourage all students to have a broad-based secondary education. Universities mainly take Level 3 (A Level and equivalent) qualifications into account when considering admissions. However, Level 2 (GCSE and equivalent) qualifications are taken into consideration as part of broader measures of attainment and to assess an applicant's suitability. Therefore, there are few direct effects anticipated on university admissions requirements, at least in the short to medium term. There are, however, a number of wider implications which may have an effect upon higher education which we would like to draw to the Committee's attention.
4. Although the effects of the English Baccalaureate on university study are difficult to predict the inclusion of a foreign language within the English Baccalaureate has been received positively. Demand for degree level languages has been in decline, having a damaging knock-on effect on the abilities of UK graduates to study and work abroad. It is vital that pupils are encouraged to take up language study at GCSE level and earlier in order to counteract this trend. It is hoped that the inclusion of languages in the Baccalaureate will be one way of encouraging take-up of a foreign languages. It should be remembered, however, that GCSE level study may not necessarily translate into degree level study, the languages should also be promoted at Level 3. Nevertheless studying a foreign language at GCSE is a move in the right direction.
5. Widening participation in higher education is a top priority for the sector. There are signs that the English Baccalaureate could make positive contributions to this agenda. If the English Baccalaureate can promote take-up of academic Level 2 qualifications this will increase options for students when looking to further and higher study. One of the problems currently facing widening participation students is they have too often been channelled into vocational qualifications at Level 2 thus leaving them with reduced options later on. It is recognised that pupils who attend schools without a good track record in the Baccalaureate subjects would be disadvantaged by the addition of the English Baccalaureate to university entry requirements, especially given the short lead-

in time. This is one reason why 1994 Group universities do not plan to introduce such a requirement. As part of widening participation measures universities take non-traditional and vocational qualifications as well as contextual information into consideration as part of entry requirements.

6. There is a potential risk associated with the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. With the Baccalaureate contributing to the performance measurement of schools the Government is strongly incentivising take-up of the English Baccalaureate. Students should be encouraged to have a broad Level 2 education and it is hoped that the students will not be forced to turn away from art-related subjects and wider humanities subjects such as religious studies, philosophy, economics, law and sociology because of the English Baccalaureate. This would be a most unwelcome side-effect. For higher education this may have knock-on effects on degree level subject choice. At Level 2 pupils should be encouraged to take a broad range of subjects which they have interest and aptitude in. It should be ensured that the introduction of the English Baccalaureate compliments this principle.
7. It is important that there is clarity about the Baccalaureate term, which is potentially confusing for students. Elsewhere in the world a Baccalaureate is used to refer to a school leaving certificate. In the UK the English Baccalaureate is a new form of terminology applied to a particular group of GCSE's as part of a wider GCSE profile. Other Baccalaureate qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate are at Level 3 and therefore considered as part of admissions requirements. The English Baccalaureate being at Level 2 as previously considered will not be treated in the same way.
8. Currently there is no intention to include the English Baccalaureate within HE admissions criteria. The English Baccalaureate has been implemented quickly with schools having extremely limited chance to respond. Universities would not wish to disadvantage students who chose their GCSEs prior to the introduction of the English Baccalaureate nor those from schools with a poor track record in Baccalaureate subjects at Level 2. If the Baccalaureate were to emerge as an area which universities use in admissions criteria it would not be possible to do so until schools and the sector have been able to monitor and respond to the changes.
9. To conclude, as yet there is uncertainty about the impacts of the English Baccalaureate on higher education. It does however bring a welcome opportunity to encourage pupils to increase the breadth of their Level 2 study. This has the potential to increase opportunities for all students at higher levels of study. The implementation of the Baccalaureate must however be in harmony with the principle that pupils should study a broad range of subjects, appropriate to them, taking into account their aptitude and interest. Currently there is no desire within 1994 Group universities for the English Baccalaureate to be included within university admissions criteria. In terms of Level 2 study it is most important that students gain a broad education which is appropriate to them to maximise their options for further and higher study.

## Appendix 1

The 1994 Group represents 19 of UK's leading student-focused research-intensive universities. It was established in 1994 to promote excellence in University research and teaching.

12 of the top 20 universities in the Guardian University Guide 2011 league tables published on the 8th June 2010 are 1994 Group members. In 17 major subject areas 1994 Group universities are the UK leaders achieving 1st place in their field (THE RAE subject rankings 2008). 57% of the 1994 Group's research is rated 4\* 'world-leading' or 3\* 'internationally excellent' (RAE 2008, HEFCE). 10 of the top 200 universities in the 2010-11 THE World University Rankings are 1994 Group members.

The 1994 Group represents: University of Bath, Birkbeck University of London, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Goldsmiths University of London, Institute of Education University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of York.