

## Making the case for GCSE Full Course (for all?) in your school



At the start of the new calendar year, many schools begin to turn their attention to planning their curriculum for the next academic year. The fact that from 2014 the short course no longer counts towards the performance measures, even though it remains an accredited GCSE qualification for pupils, has put some provision for RS at risk. It is NATRE's position that short course remains a valuable means of accrediting pupils' learning at key stage 4. This article suggests however, that in many schools around the country, full course RS for all might be a serious and viable option which is in the best interests of both the pupils and the school as a whole.

A new method of calculating school performance based on each student's progress between key stage 2 and 4 was confirmed by the government in October 2013. This measure is called the Progress 8 score. The Progress 8 score will complement the Attainment 8 score. Reformed GCSEs will be awarded at grades 1 – 8 as they are introduced. Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures will be used to measure school performance from 2016.

These two indicators of school performance are based on pupils' performance across 8 subjects. These subjects are:

- A) a double weighted English element (the best result of the English Language and English Literature qualification will count for this element, but will only be double weighted if the pupil has also taken both qualifications);
- B) a double weighted mathematics element;
- C) three slots reserved for other EBacc subjects (sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages).
- D) three slots that can be taken up by further qualifications from the range of EBacc subjects, or any other high value arts, academic, or vocational qualification. RS GCSE counts as one of these 'high value' academic qualifications. The other English qualifications not counted in (A) can also count in this group of subjects.

### How will Progress 8 work?

Pupils with a point score of 29 on their Key stage 2 tests achieve, on average, 8 C grades at GCSE. If a pupil with this level of prior attainment achieves 8 B grades in a GCSE then she has made an average of one grade more progress than expected. The average of all pupils' progress scores across 8 subjects will create a school's result.

The Progress 8 measure replaced the 5 A\* - C score as the main measure in performance tables. This means schools will be deemed to fall below the floor standard if pupils make an average of half a grade less progress than expected across their 8 subjects. However, schools in which pupils make an average of one grade more progress than expected across their 8 subjects will not be inspected by Ofsted during the next academic year.

So a school that wishes to give its pupils the best opportunity to demonstrate the most progress and also wants to achieve the highest possible Progress 8 score should obviously be looking closely at the value added scores of individual subjects, especially those in category D above. In many schools, most students already take two sciences, in which case, only ONE further EBacc subject is required to complete category C.

Some students, despite the best teaching, find particular subjects, including EBacc subjects more difficult than others. This may apply to languages for example or history/ geography. In these circumstances schools that have compelled all students to study each of the EBacc subjects may not only be reducing pupils opportunity to demonstrate the best progress and attainment, but may well find themselves falling down the performance tables.

Likewise, schools that maximise their students' opportunity to achieve the highest value added score will be encouraging them to study the subjects where they are most likely to make most progress within a broad and balanced key stage 4 curriculum. These schools will usually be rewarded by a break from OfSTED for the next year recognising the good service they are providing their pupils.

**So how does the value added score for RS full course in your school compare with other subjects in category D? If RS is one of the top three, then the argument is compelling that all students should study full course RS and study it for the recommended time of 120-140 hours**