

EQUITY

Equity submission – Key stage 4 performance measures and targeted RISE extension – Department for Education

About

Equity is the largest UK creative industries trade union with 50,000 members united in the fight for fair terms and conditions across the performing arts and entertainment. Our members are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, models, stage managers, stunt performers, circus performers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, supporting artists and variety performers. They work on stage, on TV and film sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents.

Summary

1. Equity welcomes the opportunity to give evidence on the government's proposed changes to the Progress 8 model. Reforming Progress 8 is a key element of important steps towards restoring the status of creative subjects in the curriculum. However, to see real change, the government must meaningfully support schools to improve their creative curriculum offer, beyond amending accountability measures.
2. The proposed changes fail to recognise the diversity of creative subjects in only allowing for one subject in the creative category to count towards the new breadth slots. In addition, suggestions to include an additional category for science, and to limit the number of technical awards that can contribute to a pupil's Progress 8 score risk undermining the aims of reforms and disproportionately disadvantaging pupils with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. For the government to sufficiently re-balance the curriculum to improve the presence and quality of the creative education that children and young people receive, they must take action to meaningfully support schools to recruit and retain specialist teachers as well as restore funding levels in the education system.
4. Our response to this consultation focuses on the proposed reforms to Progress 8 and therefore our answers relate to questions 11-13, 15, 30-32.

II.	How far do you agree that these changes to the Progress 8 model strike a better balance between breadth and flexibility compared with the current P8?
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5. The intention to reform Progress 8 (P8) is a welcome start in seeking to redress the balance between breadth and flexibility in comparison to current P8 requirements. However, the structure of the proposed model fails to recognise the diversity of creative subjects, and threatens to undermine incentives towards provision of a broad creative curriculum.

6. While including a category for creative subjects in the breadth slot has been predicted to lead to an uptick in entries for subjects in that category, this prediction is based partly on the fact that subjects in category B are less harshly graded than those in category C, languages.¹ However, this relies on the assumption that schools are able to offer a range of subjects in the creative category. As there are only two breadth slots needed to meet P8 requirements, schools are able to fulfil the measure without a student taking a creative subject. It may, therefore, be the case that schools that have up until now focused on meeting EBacc requirements, or have not prioritised the arts, find that they do not have to alter their curriculum offer to meet new P8 requirements.
7. Only one subject from each of the categories can count towards the breadth measure, which fails to reflect the diversity of creative subjects. A student taking both music and design and technology, vastly different subjects, would only see one of their results contributing to P8. This also acts as a disincentive to schools putting on a broad creative curriculum, particularly for subjects that may be more costly to schools.
8. For tangible changes to be achieved in the curriculum offer that schools can give their pupils, reforms need to reach significantly further than amendments to accountability measures. We strongly welcome the government's move to scrap the EBacc and intentions to reform P8, however, urge the government to make meaningful steps towards improving the recruitment and retention of specialist teachers in all creative subjects, restoring funding throughout the education system and to ensure through the curriculum review that creative subjects are meaningfully woven throughout a new curriculum.

12.	What are your views on the inclusion of a fourth category (science) for breadth slots 5 and 6?
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9. We do not support the inclusion of a fourth category for science in breadth slots 5 and 6. To include a fourth slot for science would directly undermine the intention of reforms to P8 to strike a better balance between breadth and flexibility and would reduce the incentive for schools to offer a broader creative curriculum to their pupils.
10. Science is represented in its own bucket, allowing for two GCSEs or relevant AS levels to be used to fill the two slots. To include science in the breadth section in addition to fails to redress the balance between STEM and 'academic' subjects and creative subjects in P8 measures and risks crowding out arts subjects.

13.	Do you agree that Progress 8 should allow technical awards in the breadth and choice slots, with a maximum of two across all slots?
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¹ [FFT Education Datalab, 'How will qualification entry patterns change as a result of changes to Attainment 8?'](#), March 2026

11. Technical awards should be allowed in the breadth and choice slots. The creative industries rely on skills across the technical sphere, and many of the skills involved in being a worker in the creative industries are not taught through GCSE study. All technical awards relevant to subjects in category B should count towards the breadth slots, and the wider range of technical qualifications described by DfE in its technical guidance should count towards the choice slots in addition to those in category B of breadth.

12. Current P8 rules allow for three technical qualifications to count across towards the measure, and this should be maintained. For technical qualifications to count towards a pupil's P8 score allows schools to prioritise student needs whilst also meeting P8 requirements. Restricting the number of technical awards that can count towards P8 may push schools towards encouraging students to enter GCSEs as opposed to technical awards which, as we elaborate below, may be against the best interests of some students.

15. Do you have any other comments on the proposed changes?

13. For the proposed changes to P8 measures to have an impact beyond measuring the current system in a different way, the government must support schools to provide a broader curriculum offer through restoring funding and staffing levels and reforming the assessment system. If funding and staffing levels remain insufficient, schools will not be able to offer more creative subjects.

14. Teacher Tapp polling of 1,916 school leaders found that, despite removal of the EBacc, only 7% of school leaders would increase time spent on creative subjects.² While a third of leaders felt that reforming P8 measures would make a difference to the provision of arts education, there are other significant areas where schools need change to be able to offer a broad creative curriculum. Almost a quarter (23%) of school leaders in secondary said that difficulty finding specialist teachers was a key factor in not being able to spend more time on creative subjects, while 13% said that lack of funding was a factor.³

15. The top change that school leaders felt would have an impact on their provision of a broad creative curriculum was reducing the burden of statutory assessments, with 38% of all respondents selecting this option. In addition, one third of school leaders said that increased per pupil funding would contribute to more time spent on the arts.⁴

² [Teacher Tapp for the Arts and Minds Campaign](#), 'Restoring the value of arts subjects: investment and further reform is needed, say school leaders', 2025

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

16. In order to meaningfully improve schools' ability to offer a broad and flexible curriculum, including a broad creative curriculum, the government must take steps to recruit specialist teachers, restoring recruitment to pre-2010 levels, and to retain new and current specialist teachers, as well as restore school funding to allow schools to invest in arts education and providing a broad, balanced curriculum.

30.	Do you believe the proposed changes (any or all) will have a specific impact on particular groups of learners or staff because of their protected characteristics? Please explain the impact, specifying which proposal your response relates to.
31.	Are there any risks that the proposed changes could unfairly impact on certain types of schools or on certain groups of pupils (e.g. those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with SEND)? Please explain the impact, specifying which proposal your response relates to.
32.	Do you have any suggestions for how any potential negative impacts on particular groups of learners or staff could be mitigated, or positive effects enhanced?

17. If DfE adds a fourth 'science' category to the breadth slots it will undermine the intention to improve breadth in P8 and will weaken the incentive for schools to broaden their creative offer to pupils. This will have a disproportionate impact on students who may not have access to engagement with creative and cultural activities outside school. The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (CPEC) recently reported that there is a large variation in engagement in cultural activities by socioeconomic background and the gap is widening. They found that 51% of people in 'managerial/professional' households have been to the theatre in the last 12 months compared to 26% of those in 'semi-routine/working class' households.⁵ They also found that in almost all cases, Black and Asian people are less likely than those in other ethnic groups to have engaged in the DCMS categorised arts, culture and heritage activities.⁶ If DfE reforms P8 in a way that disincentivises schools from offering a broad creative curriculum, this will have disproportionate impact on pupils from these backgrounds with less extra-curricular access to cultural activities.

18. The proposal to limit the number of technical awards that can count toward P8 to two may have a negative impact on pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This proposal risks pushing schools to prioritise entries to GCSE qualifications over entries to technical qualifications, despite technical qualifications being a more appropriate option for some students. Research by the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE) highlights that, in many subject areas, SEND and disadvantaged pupils often achieve grades closer to non-SEND and non-

⁵ CPEC, *Arts, Culture and Heritage: Recent Trends in UK Workforce and Engagement in England, 2025*

⁶ *ibid*

disadvantaged pupils when taking vocational qualifications as opposed to GCSEs.⁷ The government should maintain current arrangements which allow for up to three technical qualifications to be used.

19. From an industry perspective, the barriers to engaging in creative subjects at school level are compounded at every stage of progression into the creative industries for those who aren't from privileged backgrounds. This has had a significant impact on the current make-up of the industry along a variety of demographic lines and is particularly stark when looking at class. For example, the Sutton Trust recently reported that across TV, film and music, high-profile figures in the creative industries are far more likely to have attended private school than the general population (31% compared to 7%).⁸ Recent CPEC research found that just 8% of workers in film, TV, video, radio and photography occupations were from working class backgrounds.⁹ Reforming P8 and the wider education system to remove barriers to accessing creative subjects at this stage is a crucial step towards beginning to change this picture but the government must take meaningful action to do so.

Contact

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⁷ [NCFE, 'How vocational qualifications can narrow the SEND and disadvantage gap', \[accessed April 2026\]](#)

⁸ The Sutton Trust, *A Class Act*, 2025

⁹ CPEC, *State of the Nations – UK Arts, Culture and Heritage Audiences and Workforce*, 2024