



Department
for Education

Understanding schools' responses to the Progress 8 accountability measure

Briefing note

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Introduction

This research report provides a valuable insight into the level of understanding school leaders have of Progress 8, and the strategies they introduced following its implementation in 2016. The format of the research – qualitative telephone interviews – allowed participants to express their views about what they felt to be the positives and negative aspects of the measure, and the changes they introduced to respond to its implementation.

The responses show that the participants' overall understanding of Progress 8 was high, but there were some points of misconceptions of the policy detail. This document seeks to address any policy misconceptions found during the research to ensure that the findings of the report are not misinterpreted and to clarify some of the finer details of the policy.

Progress 8 – a brief explanation

Progress 8 was introduced nationally from 2016 as one of six headline measures of secondary school performance. It compares the progress pupils make across a suite of 8 qualifications from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4 in comparison to other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

The 8 qualifications which can count in Progress 8 are:

- English – double-weighted where the pupil has taken both Language and Literature (the higher of the two English grades takes the English “slot”; the lower can count in the “open” slots);
- Mathematics – double-weighted;
- Three other EBacc subjects (sciences, languages, humanities); and
- Three further “open” subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects or any other approved, high-value qualifications.

A list of high-value technical qualifications that count towards Progress is available on GOV.UK:

2017 performance tables: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-and-vocational-qualifications-for-14-to-19-year-olds>

2018 performance tables: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2018-performance-tables-technical-and-vocational-qualifications>

The headline measures, which appeared in the 2016 performance tables were:

1. Progress 8: Progress across 8 qualifications
2. Attainment 8: Attainment across the same 8 qualifications
3. Percentage of pupils achieving at least a grade C in English and mathematics
4. Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate
5. Percentage of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate
6. Percentage of students staying in education or employment after key stage 4 (destinations)

Progress 8 is the sole determinant of the floor standard, but the full range of headline measures should be used when considering overall a school’s overall performance.

Main findings and policy explanations

Confidence intervals

Findings from report

Results from the research show that the majority of interviewees (34 out of 38 interviewees) considered their understanding of Progress 8 to be either 'excellent' or 'good'. There appeared, however, to be less overall knowledge regarding the finer details of the Progress 8 calculation, including the role and purpose of confidence intervals.

Policy explanation

We have been clear in published guidance that it is important Progress 8 scores are considered alongside their confidence intervals. This is because it is difficult to say with absolute certainty how much of a Progress 8 score is down to the school's influence (which may have scored higher with a different group of pupils) and how much is down to the pupils (for example, some may have performed well at any school). The confidence interval reflects this uncertainty.

The range of a confidence interval is affected by a number of factors, but the biggest factor is cohort size. Usually, the greater the number of students, the smaller the range of the confidence interval. The results of schools with a small cohort tend to have wider confidence intervals; this reflects the fact that the performance of a small number of pupils taking their key stage 4 exams can have a disproportionate effect on a school's overall results.

The use of confidence intervals protects schools, particularly smaller schools, from the potential volatility of scores based on small numbers of pupils.

Contextual consideration

Findings from report

Some interviewees thought that the previous measures took context into account, and that Progress 8 was disadvantaging schools because it does not allow for any contextual consideration.

Policy explanation

The department previously published a KS2-KS4 'Contextual Value Added' measure, which took into consideration a number of factors that were deemed to be outside a school's control, such as gender, special educational needs, movement between schools, and family circumstances, as these were also known to affect pupils' performance. The contextual measures were discontinued in 2010 because they had the effect of expecting different levels of progress from different groups of pupils based on their ethnic background or family circumstances, which Ministers thought was wrong in principle.

The previous 5A*-C headline measure was a threshold attainment measure, which did not take contextual factors into account; students either met, or did not meet, the threshold. This measure was, therefore, unfair to schools going an excellent job with a low-attaining intake.

Progress 8 takes into prior attainment into account. It compares the progress pupils make across a suite of 8 qualifications from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4 in comparison to other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

Progress 8 also uses confidence intervals, as explained above.

The department also publishes a range of additional measures on the [school performance tables website](#), which allow Ofsted, RSCs and parents to view a school's results in the context of its cohort. For example, it is possible to see how many pupils at a school have special educational needs, or English as an additional language.

Narrowing of the curriculum

Findings from report

During the research, some schools attributed the introduction of Progress 8 to a narrowing of the curriculum. Some school leaders confirmed they were reducing their curriculum offer of creative subjects to maximise the potential to gain additional points for qualifications that count towards the 'core' Progress 8 subjects. Alongside this, there was also concern that vocational qualifications were not recognised adequately in the approved Progress 8 list, and that this was a disadvantage to many learners.

Policy explanation

Progress 8 compares how much progress pupils make from key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4 across a suite of eight subjects, which allows more space for additional subjects than the previous 5A*-C including English and maths headline measure. Progress 8 has a focus on an academic core, with English and maths double weighted in the calculation

to signify their importance and three further EBacc subjects. However, the 'open' bucket of Progress 8 allows up to three high quality non-EBacc qualifications to count towards the measure, which can include arts, creative subjects and approved vocational qualifications. A list of vocational qualifications that count towards Progress 8 is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

While Progress 8 is the measure used in the floor standard and coasting definition, it is not the only headline measure. In addition to Progress 8, we also publish data on the percentage of students achieving the EBacc, and the percentage of students entering the EBacc.

How science subjects are included in Progress 8

Findings from report

The report indicated there was a level of misunderstanding regarding the inclusion of science subjects within the current Progress 8 calculations. For example, interviewees were unsure how many slots science could take up, and in which buckets.

Policy explanation

In 2016, core and additional science GCSE take up one slot each in the Progress 8 measure. Core science GCSE alone takes up one slot – a pupil does not have to take additional science for core science to count in Progress 8. Separate GCSEs in biology, chemistry, physics and computer science each take up one slot, and can count in Progress 8 in any combination. The 'double science' level 1/level 2 certificates can take up two slots in either the EBacc or open elements of Progress 8 where this represents the highest relevant grades achieved (provided they are recognised for inclusion in performance tables). One grade from this qualification can fill one slot if higher grades are achieved in other qualifications.

The points awarded to double science are averaged, which means for example, that in 2017 a double science grade of a grade C and a grade D would be averaged to two 3.5 points to fill either one or two slots as appropriate (a maximum of 7 points across two slots).

Target setting

Findings from report

Some interviewees thought that the introduction of the Progress 8 was making it difficult to set targets for pupils. Interviewees also suggested that their schools were trying to predict their Progress 8 score and the progress of individual learners.

Policy explanation

Progress 8 is a relative measure where a pupil's Attainment 8 score is compared to the national average Attainment score of pupils with the same prior attainment. This means, therefore, that it is not possible to predict a student's Progress 8 score.

Target setting for Progress 8 is not something that is required and we encourage schools to work to ensure that all pupils achieve the best possible grades based on the school's knowledge of their starting point and individual needs and interests. Schools are, however, able to set targets for their students' grades against their own expectations.

AS levels and Progress 8

Findings from report

Some participants thought that AS levels were not eligible to count towards Progress 8.

Policy explanation

AS levels count in the appropriate element of the Progress 8 measure for their subject. If a GCSE in the same subject has been taken, the AS-level will always count in Progress 8 and the GCSE will not count, even if the AS has a lower point score than the GCSE. AS-levels at grades A and B score higher points in Progress 8 than an A* at GCSE.



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