



# Curriculum Review 2019

## ABSTRACT

In response to significant changes to both qualifications and national performance measures, Edgbarrow School has recently completed a review of its Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 curriculum provision. Several options were considered to ensure that students have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and have the opportunity to reach their potential, without sacrificing their well-being.

At Key Stage 4 it was felt that while other curriculum models had some benefits, the existing curriculum model was appropriate for most students and recent results show that students are continuing to make excellent progress on the new GCSEs and high-value vocational courses. We encourage our high prior attainers to take the full EBacc but we do not believe it should be made compulsory. Therefore there will be no major change in the Edgbarrow School curriculum for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

At Key Stage 5, small changes were proposed to the subjects offered in order to increase the range of options for students and to ensure that pathways existed from level 2 into level 3 for all students. The proposed changes were adding level 2 courses into the Year 12 options and introducing AS statistics to support students studying courses with significant mathematical content. These changes were accepted by SLT and have been included in the Sixth Form prospectus for September 2019.

## Background – Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4

Over the past few years, there have been significant changes to the GCSEs and vocational courses that comprise the Key Stage 4 curriculum. New GCSEs have been introduced which include more content and more rigorous assessment, including a reduction in the amount of coursework. Vocational courses also now have an increased element of external assessment and more rigorous assessment criteria, in order to make them more equivalent to GCSEs.

At the national level, performance measures have changed including an increased focus on progress rather than attainment. This means that the highest ability students need to be achieving the highest possible grades in order to make progress compared to their results at the end of primary school. The government is also pushing uptake of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), with an increasing expectation that students study both history or geography and a foreign language in addition to their core subjects of English, maths and science.

The existing curriculum model is as follows:

- Key Stage 3 lasts three years, from Year 7 to Year 9
- In Key Stage 3, students study 15 subjects, covering a wide variety of disciplines
- Key Stage 4 lasts two years, Year 10 and Year 11
- Students study the following subjects across Key Stage 4:
  - English Language and English Literature
  - Mathematics



- Double Science
- 4x Options, chosen from a list of 26 subjects presented in four blocks
  - Triple science is one of the available options
  - All students choose one EBacc subject, either history, geography, a language or computer science
  - Students can opt to follow the full EBacc if they wish, but are not required to opt for both a humanity and a language. This year, those on an academic pathway have been strongly encouraged to choose the full EBacc.
  - Each option is studied for five hours per fortnight
- At the end of Year 11, students take exams in all their subjects, leading to nine grades for most students
- Some students study more, or fewer, subjects depending upon their educational needs

Current results under the existing model are strong, with a Progress 8 score of +0.43, which is above the national average. This suggests that students are achieving good grades across all their subjects. ALPS (a subject-specific performance indicator) puts the Key Stage 4 results for Edgbarrow School in the top 25% nationally, which indicates that the curriculum model is working for the majority of students.

However, we note that other schools locally have different models and also achieve good results using the national performance data. We have also had the existing curriculum model for many years and so the time seemed appropriate for a curriculum review to ensure that we are still offering the best possible choices to students.

There are statutory requirements on the teaching of English, maths, science, PE and PSHEE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education), so the only available place to make a change to the curriculum provision is in the options offered to students. A key concern was the amount of time available to teach the new courses, in particular whether students would be able to access their best grades across nine subjects, and this was a focus of the review.

Another consideration was the need for the curriculum to fit the local situation. STEM careers, particularly those in IT and computer science are significantly higher in Berkshire compared to national figures, and this is reflected in our current curriculum provision. For example, we currently offer optional courses in both computer science and vocational IT in order to support a broad range of student pathways. Each of these routes continues into an equivalent course in Key Stage 5 (discussed later) and we have had employer involvement in planning and delivering these courses. We have maintained provision for triple science as an option for our high-ability students and we have already introduced new courses, such as engineering, where there was demand from students and local employers.

## Methodology – Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4

Initially a small working party was convened in the summer term 2018, comprising members of the SLT, the data team and other senior staff. After an initial meeting, members researched the curriculum models at other schools in order to determine some starting options. The group identified two possible changes to the curriculum model that might allow increased time to deliver the new GCSEs and vocational courses. These were:

- Increasing Key Stage 4 to three years, thus increasing the amount of time available to teach the new courses



- Decreasing the number of options studied by students so that students focused on a smaller number of options

This led to four possible options for the Key Stage 4 curriculum as follows:

*Option A: No change*

At the moment students study 4 options over two years and achieve grades in nine qualifications.

*Option B: Reduce the number of options*

Under this model, students would only choose three options in Year 10, leading to grades in eight qualifications. The time that would have been spent on the fourth option can then be allocated to the other options, increasing their hours to six per fortnight.

*Option C: Increase Key Stage 4 to three years*

Under this model, students would choose their options at the end of Year 8 and study each course for three years. Students would still choose four GCSEs or equivalent courses.

*Option D: Combine option B and option C*

Under this model, students would choose three options at the end of Year 8 and study these across three years.

The working group then debated the merits of these options across several sessions, with widening participation. This included:

- Discussion at the Curriculum Development Group (CDG) which is attended by representatives from each department and faculty across the school, including teaching departments and support staff
- Widening the working party to include representatives from all departments, plus link governors (in total 22 staff attended at least one of three meetings for the working party)
- Discussion with students
- Discussion with parents

## Results – Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4

The general feeling was the same across all stakeholders in that student choice was a key priority. While more time to teach Key Stage 4 subjects would be desirable for some subjects, results are strong anyway on the existing provision.

The benefit of option B, *reducing the number of options*, was that students would gain increased time on their other options, potentially leading to higher outcomes. Furthermore, studying a reduced number of options may reduce the stress on students during examination periods.

However, the impact is to reduce the choices available to students. Where students might opt for both triple science and the full EBacc, students would have no remaining subject choices. The concern would then be the impact on student numbers in the arts and technology subjects. Edgbarrow already has a system in place to offer a reduced curriculum to students where their specific educational needs require it; on average, 10% of students already make use of this system.



Therefore, this option was rejected as the curriculum choices would be too narrow to meet the needs of all students.

The benefit of option C, *a three-year Key Stage 3*, is to increase the number of taught hours for each examination subject. This is particularly relevant for options that are new in Year 10, such as sociology; an all-through subject like science can already start teaching Key Stage 4 content in Years 7 – 9, whereas some subjects only get lesson time in Years 10 and 11, so there is no mechanism for them to “start early”.

However, the impact again is reduced choice for students. Students already drop many subjects at the end of Key Stage 3, and so reducing Key Stage 3 to just Years 7 and 8 would significantly reduce their exposure to a broad range of subjects. Concerns were raised over the maturity of students in Year 8 and their capacity to make their GCSE choices at such a young age. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that Year 9 students are able to start on the Key Stage 4 work; previous experiments with this approach have shown that students lack the maturity to either manage the Key Stage 4 content or write at a GCSE standard. Therefore the gained time is less useful than initially supposed. There is also a significant and prohibitive cost implication for teaching the option blocks for an additional year.

Therefore, this option was rejected on the grounds that it was not financially viable, students would not benefit from making their option choices a year early and students would lose access to several subjects if Key Stage 3 time was reduced.

Option D *is a combination of options B and C*, and so was rejected for a combination of all the reasons stated above.

## Conclusion – Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4

Therefore, the only remaining option of those considered is option A, which is to leave the curriculum offer as it stands. The working group wanted to ensure that the merits of each option had been considered and we were not just settling for the status quo. However, the group also agreed that because the existing system was working well in the vast majority of cases, there would need to be significant evidence of the benefits of an alternative model before making sweeping changes that would last for many years.

The benefits of the existing system are:

- Students have a range of choices, including several vocational options, triple science and the option to follow the full EBacc if they wish
- Students are already very successful, with all subjects performing in line with or better than the national average on the new courses, and with the whole-school performing in the top 25% in the country
- The curriculum has been designed to support students in line with local careers and opportunities for further education and training
- Mechanisms are already in place to support students who cannot access all nine subjects
- Many subjects can start to introduce Key Stage 4 material in Year 9 where appropriate
- There was no strong desire to change, from any of staff, students or parents

**Therefore, in light of the strengths of the existing model and the lack of strong evidence favouring a different approach, the working group has recommended to the SLT and the governors that we maintain the existing curriculum model across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.**



## Further Work – Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4

It should be noted that no system is perfect and the existing model leaves some questions to be addressed. These include:

- How do we ensure that students make good option choices at the end of Year 9, so that they have the best chance to complete all nine subjects?
- How do we maintain and improve standards as the GCSEs and equivalent courses become harder, without increasing available curriculum time?
- How do we manage the pressures on our highest ability students, who may be targeting top grades in every subject?
- Does every student have a pathway from Key Stage 4 into Key Stage 5? (This question is addressed in the next section.)

These questions will continue to be addressed at Raising Standards meetings across the school and further guidance will be given to parents and students ahead of the options process so that students are supported in making their choices.

A continued focus on quality teaching first, revision techniques, exam preparation and targeted intervention will allow us to maintain and improve standards across the curriculum, while continuing to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all students.

## Key Stage 5

### Background

As part of the Key Stage 4 review, the pathways from Key Stage 4 into Key Stage 5 were considered. All GCSE or equivalent courses have a pathway into level 3, so that a student who has studied a particular option in Year 10 and 11 may continue in a related subject in Sixth Form. However, students need to meet the entry requirements for a subject in order to choose it for further study. This is around a grade 6 at GCSE or a merit on a vocational courses.

The entry requirements are important, as changes to A-Levels and level 3 vocational courses mirror those for GCSE, and all courses now include more content, harder content and more rigorous assessment. All courses require a higher standard of literacy and also include specific mathematical content. Vocational courses now include more external assessment and fewer opportunities to redraft portfolios. Therefore it is important that students are ready for the courses they wish to study, so that they have an enjoyable and successful experience in Sixth Form.

Based on this, we identified a gap in our provision where there are a number of students who gain pass grades or equivalent at the end of Year 11 (i.e. pass grades on vocational courses and grade 4+ on new GCSEs) and who are ready for further study, but who may not be able to access three full A-Levels or equivalent qualifications.

### Level 2 Courses for Sixth Form

A common solution to this problem is to introduce level 2 courses, i.e. courses equivalent to GCSEs as an option for Sixth Form students. These courses allow students with pass grades at Key Stage 4 to continue their studies for another year, possibly leading to full level 3 courses later. These courses are



vocational in nature and provide good experiences for students who may consider an apprenticeship in the future.

It is important that the courses chosen are not just repeats of courses studied in Years 10 and 11. Rather, this is a chance for student to broaden their skills and deepen their understanding within related vocational options.

Various models were considered and the following was considered to be the most useful for students and the most viable within the timetable:

- Students who are not able to access the normal Sixth Form curriculum may choose the level 2 pathway
- The pathway comprises a fixed set of complementary vocational courses, which are studied as a complete set
  - In the first year, these subjects are to include business studies, IT and tourism; these will be reviewed annually.
- The pathway includes provision for students to re-sit maths or English if required
- The pathway includes significant work-experience or other related careers education, to support students into further education or training

This models was debated at SLT and CDG and the relevant departments were consulted before the pathway was agreed. **SLT accepted that this model would help to support students who wished to continue into our Sixth Form and it has been offered to Year 12 starting in September 2019.**

### AS Statistics

Many courses now include significant mathematical content, especially subjects such as sciences, social sciences and economics. There is also a drive from the government to increase the uptake of mathematics post-16 (based on the Smith review) in order to ensure that school leavers are able to compete in the global marketplace. This is particularly relevant to our local situation, where a higher proportion of local jobs are STEM-related compared to national data and so we feel it is important that students are equipped for this market.

In the past some students have studied mathematics A-Level in order to support their work in other subjects or to facilitate their university application. However, this is not always a good option if:

- Students are already studying three other A-Level courses or equivalents
- Students need only a small part of the mathematics syllabus, mostly the statistical methods, in order to support their wider learning

In these cases, a small number students either do not take mathematics at all, or take it reluctantly and then struggle with the content; neither of these outcomes seems ideal.

Therefore, we proposed to introduce an AS-level in statistics, as it was felt that this would cover the most content required by students. As an AS over two years, the additional course is only equivalent to half of a full A-Level, so the overall load on student is still manageable. AS statistics has the following benefits:

- It qualifies for the government maths premium funding, if additional students take the course



- The content supports the skills required in other subjects, especially sciences and social sciences
- The qualification can be delivered in-house by existing staff with minimal additional training required
- As a true AS course, the delivery and assessment model is familiar to staff

We did consider the new core maths certificates as an alternative option for students, however we did not feel that this qualification was either well enough established or resourced at this time. Further analysis of the skills required within a range of A level subjects suggested that AS statistics would better meet the needs of our students on a range of programmes of study, especially given the existing expertise in our mathematics department. Core maths may be another alternative to consider in the future for some students and will be revisited next year.

**SLT accepted this recommendation and we have added AS statistics as an option for students starting Year 12 in September 2019.**

## Further Work

As the transition from the new A-Levels to the new GCSEs becomes more established, we will continue to review the Key Stage 5 provision to ensure that students have appropriate pathways to follow and are ready for their post-16 studies. This will include on-going review of the wider curriculum, including enrichment opportunities and high-value work experience, to support all students into their future destinations.