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# UNDERSTANDING BACCALAUREATE FRAMEWORKS IN THE ENGLISH CONTEXT: A SCOPING PAPER

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# March 2012

## 1. Aims of the paper

1.1 The upper secondary education curriculum in the English system has been traditionally choice-based, narrow and specialized with qualifications primarily determining its shape. [[1]](#footnote-1). In general/academic education, the prime goal has been the attainment of high grades in three A Levels in order to access university. This still remains the case, despite repeated attempts at reform over the past 50 years or more to broaden post-16 education[[2]](#footnote-2). Choice-based specialisation can be contrasted with common practice in other systems where young people in upper secondary general education study a broader range of subjects, including mathematics and a modern foreign language[[3]](#footnote-3). Vocational courses also remain relatively narrow in England, lacking the core of general education that is typical of other higher performing national systems[[4]](#footnote-4). Baccalaureates ideas for have become much more prevalent over the past 20 years, although awards of this type still play a relatively marginal role in a system that continues to be dominated by single subjects or qualifications components.

1.2 In the light of these curriculum and qualifications system features, this scoping paper aims to review baccalaureate-type proposals over the last two decades, but particularly over the last 10. The paper surveys curriculum and qualifications reform and assesses the significance of these within the current economic and policy context; it maps the main features of a range of baccalaureate proposals and conceptualises these along six different dimensions. The paper concludes with a set of questions arising from the analysis in order to better understand strategic choices to be made by the Pearson-led *Baccalaureate Development Strategy Group*.

## 2. The current context

2.1 The Pearson-led *Baccalaureate Development Strategy Group* is aiming to develop a unified 14-19 baccalaureate framework in a particularly challenging context arising from the 2008 global banking crash; the policies of austerity being followed by European governments and the specific education policies of the UK Coalition Government.

2.2 A Levels and GCSEs remain the cornerstones of the English upper secondary system and the Government is committed to making them more ‘rigorous’[[5]](#footnote-5) and, by implication, less accessible, unless the government’s school improvement approach (growth of academies; pressure from Ofsted and a greater emphasis on teacher professionalism) can bridge the gap. The Government is committed to the promotion of ‘high value’ subjects in state schools (traditional subjects and with a particular focus on science and mathematics) as the espoused way of promoting social mobility[[6]](#footnote-6). It is also interested in the baccalaureate concept (EBacc and a possible A Bac)[[7]](#footnote-7), although these are conceptualised around a hierarchy of general/academic subjects.

2.3 The future role of vocational qualifications remains uncertain despite the Wolf Report[[8]](#footnote-8). The latter was strong on criticism of ‘institutional gaming’ in Key Stage 4 in response to policy levers (league tables and Ofsted) and sought to elevate those qualifications that have labour market recognition with an additional emphasis on attainment in maths and English. However, employers have traditionally not provided strong signals regarding the role of vocational qualifications[[9]](#footnote-9). More immediately, as a result of the Wolf Report, vocational qualifications will play a less prominent role in Key Stage 4 and possibly a different one than prevailed under New Labour[[10]](#footnote-10).

2.4 At the same time, several baccalaureate proposals have emerged since the rejection of the Tomlinson unified diploma system proposals in 2005. The motives for this are diverse - some were in response to that policy rejection (e.g. AQA Bac; SFBac); others are the result of continued dissatisfaction with GCSEs and *Curriculum 2000* type A Levels (e.g. Pre-U, EBac, A Bac); and others are in response to these (e.g. Mod Bac and Better Bac). These qualifications and proposals inhabit much of the space that any Pearson-led framework would seek to occupy.

2.5 The ‘pull’ of higher education is weakening for 18/19 year olds. Fewer are applying for university and the number of courses on offer is contracting[[11]](#footnote-11). In this context, young people are increasingly interested in apprenticeships and employment at a time when both are in relatively short supply. This suggests that any future baccalaureate framework should have a strong vocational dimension.

2.6 The wider economic context is the worst in living memory with over a million 18-25 year olds unemployed[[12]](#footnote-12) and the situation shows little sign of improvement. This is not only a severe problem for these young adults; the crisis for young people also seeps into 14-19 education because worklessness and the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance could undermine the motivation for some groups to continue participating in post-compulsory education and training and/or to make it more difficult for them to participate[[13]](#footnote-13).

2.7 The context for the local delivery of the 14-19 curriculum is fragmenting as the role of academies grows, local authorities recede and 14-19 partnerships evolve or weaken[[14]](#footnote-14). This poses a problem in particular for vocational learning, which depends in part on local collaboration in order to ensure an optimum range of opportunities, the development of progression routes and coherent relationships with local employers and regeneration agencies.

## 3. Challenges and opportunities

3.1 For a unified baccalaureate framework, several challenges flow from the new context related to the effects of Government policy; the fragmentation of the ‘Tomlinson consensus’ over the past seven years and the wider effects of the economic crisis on young people.

3.2 The Coalition Government (or more precisely the Conservative Right) has mounted a serious education challenge around the role of ‘powerful knowledge’ in 14-19 curriculum and qualifications linked to ideas about social mobility[[15]](#footnote-15). These cannot be ignored by a unified baccalaureate framework proposal because any new framework will be regarded as second best if it does not promote challenging study.

3.3 At the same time, government policy is more likely to produce social division than social mobility. Its focus on, at one end of the spectrum on high value academic subjects and at the other end on apprenticeship threatens to create a void for those groups of young people who have been termed the ‘overlooked middle’[[16]](#footnote-16). A unified baccalaureate framework has to be able to address the needs of all young people but with a particular focus on the overlooked middle so as to provide them with the motivation, knowledge and skills to progress.

3.4 The state of the economy and austerity is arguably a game changer. Should we consider promoting a ‘new vocationalism’ in which upper secondary education provides more viable vocational routes, supported by an enhanced vocational education that plays a positive role nationally, in localities and in regional and local economies?

3.5 Any new framework will have to contribute to local collaboration to combat an increasing fragmentation. Qualifications, institutional arrangements and policy levers, such as league tables, combine at the local level to promote either competition or collaboration. The question is whether a qualifications framework can encourage greater collaboration and a new type of professionalism not only within institutions and providers but also between them to meet the needs of 100 per cent of learners in a locality.

3.6 The professional consensus that existed for the Tomlinson unified proposals in 2004 has fragmented over the recent period. A reflection of this is the proliferation of ideas and blueprints for unified baccalaureate awards (e.g. the Mod Bac and Better Bac Campaign) that have emerged in the last seven years. Those proposing a new framework have to decide how to work in relation to these initiatives. Will it be yet another one in competition with others or will it try to relate these in a baccalaureate-type alliance?

3.7 Baccalaureates and programmes of study remain on the policy agenda. They never really went away following Tomlinson, because of the continued existence of historical system problems – curriculum narrowness, over specialization, the academic/vocational divide with a lower status attached to vocational education and the lack of a strong work-based route[[17]](#footnote-17) and the mechanistic learning arising from the qualifications reforms of the previous government combined with top-down performance indicators that encouraged gaming[[18]](#footnote-18). More specifically, the Government’s own agenda of promoting high status subjects offers an opportunity and a challenge. The Government’s proposals for the EBac and possible ‘A Bac’ raise questions about ‘high status’ learning, breadth and depth of study that are achievable by a relatively small part of the cohort in current conditions. There are, therefore, opportunities to raise in the debate the type of learning required by all young people in the new context, particularly the ‘overlooked middle’.

3.8 The challenges of the future and the weight of the past remain. The English 14-19 system is dominated by either academic subject specialization or the needs of particular sectors or occupations and in this culture the development of a rounded set of skills for all young people often takes second place. At the same time, independent schools supplement an impoverished curriculum with a rich diet of extra-curricular activities and they continue to dominate attainment of the more ‘difficult subjects’ prioritised by selector universities. We have to decide how breadth of experience is created for all and how ‘powerful knowledge’ is made both accessible and valuable for all.

3.9 Given that there are no obvious solutions that command widespread support, a new consensus on the way forward has to be carefully crafted. This paper will review the debates on baccalaureate development over the last 20 years and the main models that have emerged in the past decade. This attempt at exercising policy memory and undertaking policy learning will be applied to the challenges of the current context to raise questions and help to map out options for the *Baccalaureate Development Strategy Group.*

## 4. Qualifications reform and baccalaureates

**Qualifications reform in England**

4.1 Baccalaureates have featured around the margins of the English upper secondary (14-19) system. The main reforms in general education over the last 50 years have been to single-subject, academic qualifications. These have moved through several phases of change, but without the development of full baccalaureate-type reform. These included ‘proposals without reform’ during 60s, 70s and 80s[[19]](#endnote-1) (e.g. Majors & Minors, Qualifying & Furthers, Normals & Furthers and the Higginson five lean A Levels); the creation of GCSEs to replace O Levels and CSEs in the late 1980s; the molecular internal evolution of A Levels during the 1980s and 1990s with new subjects, changes to assessment and modular developments[[20]](#footnote-19); the mild broadening of A Levels through *Curriculum 2000* and, more recently, the introduction of an EBac performance measure.

4.2 Vocational qualifications have been the subject of even more intensive reform since the mid-1980s. The main developments here have been the creation of competence-based NVQs, the introduction of the ‘middle track’ qualifications such as GNVQs; the creation of applied A Level type qualifications in the form of Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education; the flirtation with 14-19 Diplomas and the realignment of BTEC awards within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

4.3 While the academic brand names (A Levels and GCSEs have remained), this has not been the case with vocational qualifications. Virtually all government initiatives have either failed to make significant impact (e.g. NVQs) or been withdrawn (e.g. GNVQs, AVCEs, 14-19 Diplomas). Furthermore, traditional vocational qualifications have been altered to fit within an equivalences national framework. This could be viewed as the breaking up of the tradition of vocational grouped awards (such as BTEC National and Firsts), which had a balance of knowledge and skill, were based on a partnership with employers and providers and which could operate flexibly within a validation model.

**Baccalaureates**

4.4 In response to concerns about the limitations of current 14-19 qualifications, support for baccalaureate approaches has grown amongst education professionals. Baccalaureates, on account of their grouped nature, are able to represent a holistic curriculum embodying clearly identifiable values and purposes, something that the elective single-subject A Level curriculum cannot. The International Baccalaureate (IB), for example, has a clear set of aims concerned with promoting internationalism, critical thinking and the ‘intellectual strength to question conventional beliefs’. Due to their high volumes of study, baccalaureates can also encourage greater breadth and demand of study. Moreover, programmes of study are able to promote different types and combinations of learning and opportunities for new and creative learning, particularly if general and vocational study has been deliberately designed into a single or unified framework. As such, these frameworks are seen as able to better prepare young people for further study and adult and working life than narrower general or vocational courses.

4.5 Baccalaureates, however, come in different forms as we shall see in Section 5. Those ‘group awards’ that have been introduced into the English system at the national level have been located either within the general or in the vocational education qualifications tracks rather than encompassing both. Examples include the introduction of the International Baccalaureate in the late 1960s and the introduction of the AQA Bac or Pre-U during the last decade. The EBac is also an example of track-based reform, as is the mooted A Level Bac[[21]](#footnote-20). Vocational group awards, such as BTEC National Diplomas, could be seen as baccalaureate-type examples in the vocational education track, although this vocational model has been under pressure from repeated national reforms and now comes in a variety of sizes[[22]](#footnote-21).

4.6 At the same time, qualifications that have linkages features between the tracks have steadily grown in importance in the English system. These include GNVQs and 14-19 Diplomas that tried to combine both general and vocational learning while co-existing alongside powerful A Levels and established BTECs in their respective tracks. A perceived problem of qualifications with linkages features is that they have ended up being ‘neither fish nor fowl’ – not sufficiently high status nor sufficiently practical[[23]](#footnote-22).

4.7 Since 1990 unified approaches have sought to reform general/academic and vocational qualifications within a single framework. This process started with the publication *of A British Baccalaureate* by IPPR[[24]](#footnote-23) and was followed by a wave of other proposals for a unified curriculum and qualifications system over the decade. These could be broadly divided into two types - ‘grouped/prescriptive’ and ‘open/modular’. Those arguing for the former with a combination of subjects wanted to ensure breadth of study and to address the culture of dropping ‘difficult’ subjects such as mathematics, sciences and modern foreign languages. This approach can be seen in the proposals contained in *A British Baccalaureate* (1990) and in those from the Royal Society (1991)[[25]](#footnote-24) and National Commission on Education (1995)[[26]](#footnote-25). Those arguing for an open modular design were in favour of a more flexible curriculum and qualifications approach and wanted to retain the elective, open and choice-based features of the English qualifications system (e.g. AfC *et al.* 1994)[[27]](#footnote-26). The English Baccalaureate System designs and the Tomlinson proposals of 2004, both discussed below, tried to balance both these approaches.

4.8 Since 2005 and the political rejection of Tomlinson, the idea of a more unified approach to the whole 14-19 system has being championed by local areas (e.g. Surrey Graduation Certificate), by teacher unions and professional associations (e.g. SFBac); by political parties in Opposition to the Government, such as the Liberal Democrats (2009)[[28]](#footnote-27) or in the form of initiatives seeking to uptake nationally (e.g. the Mod Bac or Better Bac).

4.9 Elsewhere in the UK, in more ‘social democratic’ national systems, unified concepts of curriculum and qualifications have become official policy. In Wales there is the *Welsh Bac* and, in Scotland, the unified modular *Higher Still*, *Curriculum for Excellence* [[29]](#footnote-28)andthe Scottish Baccalaureates (SQA 2009)[[30]](#footnote-29)*.* The first and the third of these represent the ‘grouped prescriptive’ end of the spectrum and the second the open modular end. In ‘neo-liberal’ England, on the other hand, track-based or linkages qualifications approaches have continued to dominate.

## 5. Mapping baccalaureate approaches

5.1 Debates and proposals in the education profession have a substantial history going back to the late 1980s and provide a rich background of discussion and design that have been incorporated in various forms over the past decade into both ‘official government’ and ‘unofficial’ baccalaureate blueprints[[31]](#footnote-30). Here we map the main proposals over the past decade and their key features in three categories:

1. Broadening track-based general/academic education
2. Vocational/linkages programmes of study
3. Unified general and vocational proposals

**Broadening track-based general/academic education**

5.2 Proposals to broaden post-16 general/academic education include an international award, the IB Diploma, national qualification frameworks such as Pre-U, AQA-Bac, and local initiatives such as the Harrow Diploma. Standing somewhat separate from these is the Government’s EBac that prioritises the attainment of five traditional subjects at Key Stage 4.

### IB Diploma Programme

5.3 The International Baccalaureate Diploma for students aged 16-19 has been implemented internationally for over four decades. It is now offered in 2311 schools and colleges worldwide, 205 of which are in the UK and this figure is growing.

*Figure 1. The IB model*



5.4 The IB Diploma comprises a common core and six academic areas. The core contains an extended essay, theory of knowledge and community action service and is seen as ‘central to the philosophy of the Diploma Programme’. Students have to attain in all six academic areas; three at ‘higher level’ and three at ‘standard level’. Recently the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) has allowed institutions to offer school-based syllabuses and inter-disciplinary courses to count in some of the academic areas at standard level.

5.5 In comparison with a standard A Level programme, therefore, the IB is considerably broader, with a strong international flavour, more holistic in curriculum terms and more structured. It is highly regarded, but is considered to be a tough option because of its demands in terms of breadth of achievement, particularly the requirement of two modern foreign languages and it is expensive to deliver.

### Cambridge Pre-U

5.6 Introduced in September 2008, following discussion with admissions tutors in universities as well as representatives from schools and colleges, this award is primarily designed to prepare young people for higher education. While initially mainly of interest to independent schools, now 40 per cent of those institutions taking the award are in the state sector.

5.7 To gain the Pre-U students must successfully complete:

* a minimum of three Principal Pre-U subjects
* an Individual Research Report
* a portfolio on Global Perspectives.

5.8 There are 27 Pre-U Principal subjects to choose from, none of which are compulsory. These differ from A Levels in that they take a linear rather than modular form – assessment is at the end of two years of study and relies heavily on externally set and marked examinations. To reflect their purpose of preparation for university, the Pre-U Principal subjects are graded differently from A Levels. There are nine grades – Pass 1, 2 and 3, Merit 1, 2 and 3 and Distinction 1, 2, and 3 – with Distinction 2 being equivalent to an A\* at A Level and Distinction 1 indicating performance at a Level above that.

5.9 These features of the Cambridge Pre-U mean that it potentially provides many of the requirements higher education tutors say that they wish to see in university applicants, for example depth of study and the ability to research independently and its grading structure is deliberately designed to differentiate performance at the upper end. The Pre-U appears to privilege depth over breadth while moving beyond a three A Level diet. However, it does not ensure subject breadth in the same way as the IB, because there is no prescription attached to the three Principal subjects studied and there is a narrower range of subjects to choose from.

**The** **Harrow Diploma**

5.10 The Harrow Diploma was launched in 2009 to encourage Harrow students to engage with a broad education that is attractive to both universities and employers. Harrow School expects that in a typical year about 60 per cent of its Year 13 students will achieve the Diploma. The Harrow Diploma very much reflects an independent school culture with its emphasis on high academic achievement and co-curricular engagement. It has been accredited by Edexcel.

5.11 In each of the seven areas listed below, students have to achieve a defined minimum level of two activities in each category.

*Academic results (to achieve both)*

9 GCSEs grades A\*-C

4 AS-levels A-C

*Cultural activity*

* GCSE Art or Music or AS Photography
* Grade 5 on a musical instrument or singing
* Speaking part in a play or significant non-speaking contribution to a play
* Membership of a choir or an orchestra for a term at least
* Membership of a Glee or Twelve (XII) group

*Physical activity*

* Membership of a School sports team for five terms (can be different sports)
* Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, Silver level achieved
* Competed in the Endurance Event Competition
* Competed in the Drill Competition
* Long Ducker: 10 miles run, 200 lengths of the School swimming pool or 10,000 metres on a rowing machine

*Communication*

* A pass in the Lower Sixth Literacy course
* Participation in a Debating team
* Membership of a House public-speaking team
* Have had an article or creative writing published in any School magazine
* Read a lesson in Chapel
* Have been part of a House Chapel Service or Thought for the Day
* Helped to write House website
* Place in the Finals of a School lecture competition

*Service to others*

* Community Service: one term minimum
* Conservation: one term's service
* House Monitor
* Raised £100 for charity (including Long Ducker)
* Have been in charge of a Society or Activity for at least one term
* Bishop's Licence to administer Communion (Christianity)
* Another type of service recognised by House Master

*Developing a skill*

* Young Enterprise Team membership
* AS-level Critical Thinking
* Contributed to a School exhibition - in the OSRG, Pasmore Gallery or Shepherd Churchill Foyer
* First Aid course
* Life-Saving course
* Cookery course
* Introduction to Investment Certificate
* Canoeing course
* Duke of Edinburgh Award, Silver level
* Rifle Corps membership for two years
* Participation in the Engineering Education Scheme
* Completion of the Extended Project.

*Work experience*

A work experience placement lasting at least 5 days

The Harrow Diploma thus encourages breadth across the curriculum but without prescribing subject breadth.

### AQA Baccalaureate

5.12 Like the Cambridge Pre-U, this Level 3 award is focused on application for university. It is advertised as helping students ‘stand out from the crowd’. Pilots for an ‘English Baccalaureate’ as it was originally called, started in 2008 and over 100 centres were involved by 2009.

5.13 The AQA Bac framework comprises four main components:

* Specialist depth of study – three A Levels of the student’s choice
* Extended Project
* Enrichment activities (two of three areas - work-related learning, community participation and personal development) totalling a minimum of 100 hours and recorded in the AQA enrichment diary
* Broader study – a minimum of an AS General Studies, Critical Thinking or Citizenship.

5.14 Unlike the IB and the Pre-U, the AQA Bac uses pre-existing A Levels. The award is graded at three levels – Pass (Es at A Level and Extended Project), Merit (C at A Level and Extended Project) and Distinction (As at A Level and Extended Project). Its strengths lie in its demand for breadth beyond three A Levels and its emphasis on the wider skills and attributes that are recognised by universities and employers, without disrupting the embedded English approach of free choice of subjects.

**The English Baccalaureate Performance Measure**

5.15 The English Bac, was introduced part way through 2010 by the Coalition Government. The DFE states *‘The English Baccalaureate was introduced as a performance measure in the 2010 performance tables. It is not a qualification in itself. The measure recognises where pupils have secured a C grade or better across a core of academic subjects – English, mathematics, history or geography, the sciences and a language’.[[32]](#footnote-31)* The espoused reasons for its introduction has been the decline in participation in some of these subjects and that students, particularly from low-income backgrounds were not studying those subjects required by Russell Group universities. Critics argue that far from broadening general education, the English Bac narrows it because of the subjects left outside the performance measure.

**The A Bac**

5.16 Building on the idea of the English Bac performance measure, Elizabeth Truss writing for Centre Forum has proposed the idea of an A Bac performance measure with similar purposes. It would comprise a selection of three what are described as ‘core academic subjects’ (English, mathematics, sciences, languages, history and geography) including a minimum of AS mathematics and an AS in history, English or a language. In order to ensure depth as well as breadth, it is suggested that the old style vertical AS should be introduced to replace the current horizontal variety. The benefits of such a system are seen both as providing students from all backgrounds with a chance to gain places at Russell Group universities and, because the A Bac would become one of the measures in performance tables, a means of ensuring schools and colleges offered the ‘hard’ A Level subjects to a wider range of students. It is unclear whether this proposal has had much traction yet with the Coalition Government.

**Vocational grouped awards and technological baccalaureates**

5.17 The broad thrust of the development of vocational qualifications over the last 20 years has been to reform them to fit within various national qualifications frameworks, whether these be National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ); National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or, more recently, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Taking the example of BTEC National Diploma, this now exists in different sizes from a 180-credit award (equivalent to three A Levels) down to a 30-credit Certificate equivalent to an AS Level.

5.18 A recent emphasis has been on the mixing of both GCSEs and BTEC awards at Key Stage 4 and using the smaller BTEC qualifications alongside AS and A Levels at advanced level. This follows a trend that started with GNVQs, which were designed to facilitate a limited mixing of general and vocational study and which was continued more overtly with the 14-19 Diplomas, where a wide range of general and vocational qualifications were on offer for use in the Additional/Specialist Learning component of the awards.

5.19 On the other hand, the idea of a ‘Technological Baccalaureate’ was discussed 20 years ago by City and Guilds. Conceived as a multi-level award that would promote academic and vocational parity, it was designed to combine general education and vocational specialist elements. However, the City and Guilds Tech Bac remained a blueprint and never emerged in practice. More recently there has been talk of a ‘Technical Baccalaureate’ being developed by the Baker Dearing Education Trust. This would initially be developed in Key Stage 4 and could comprise GCSEs in English, maths, science and another subject alongside a technical qualification, such as an engineering diploma or a construction course. Students would also be expected to study a language, but not necessarily to GCSE standard.

5.20 Compared with baccalaureate developments in general education, relatively little thought has gone into vocational counterparts. The main reason, as we will see, is that the conception of a vocationally focus baccalaureate has been seen as possible within more unified designs. Moreover, a quasi-baccalaureate tradition was being quietly developed within a large BTEC National Diploma award, although recent developments have stressed flexibility and mixing of general and vocational study, rather than creating a vocational baccalaureate out of these awards. Finally, and controversially, a reason for the lack of development of a vocational baccalaureate was perhaps that students within the English system were deemed incapable of achieving something so demanding.

**Unified baccalaureate frameworks and systems**

5.21 As we have seen, unified baccalaureate proposals emerged as far back as 1990 and no fewer than 30 have been published over the past 20 years. This process continues. Here we can see that over the past 10 years they have emerged as both national and sectoral/local blueprints. Only the sectoral and local proposals exist in pilot form because national governments have refused thus far to embrace this more radical and comprehensive curriculum and qualifications model of upper secondary education in England.

**English Baccalaureate System (2003)**

5.22 Unlike Michael Gove’s track-based English Bac performance measure aimed at a minority of the cohort, *The English Baccalaureate System from 14+* was a fully-fledged unified baccalaureate proposal to meet the needs of the whole cohort. Developed by the Institute of Education in 2002/3 after several years of discussion within the education profession and particularly with teacher unions and professional associations, it proved influential in the Tomlinson Working Group.

5.23 The main design features of The English Baccalaureate System were**:**

* *Four levels* - Entry to Advanced and which interlock (e.g. an Intermediate Level English Bac would require a majority of attainment at Level 2, but would also allow the accreditation of some Level 1 and Level 3 learning). This would encourage both breadth and progression.
* *Common Core* of knowledge and skills comprising at least English, Mathematics, ICT, a Modern Foreign Language, Citizenship and Community Action and Service, and an Extended Project.
* *Two types of Bac,* open/general and specialized/named, cutting across all forms of learning in the 14-19 phase. Specialized/named baccalaureates were only be available post-16 in order to prevent premature specialization and to allow for learner maturation. English Bacs, in their specialized/named form, would also have the capacity to be used as a learning framework for apprenticeships.
* *Credit* as the currency of the English Bac system. Learner achievement would be recorded as a combination of credits, grades and narrative.
* *A diploma transcript*, a paper or/and electronic document would be used to record achievement that could be summarized at key transition points and used to promote progression.
* *Accreditation of the whole learner programme* in order to recognize the broad variety of learning activities and experiences within and beyond the classroom.
* *Utilization of existing qualifications and components*, thus building on the strengths of the current qualifications system and allowing for a gradual transition process.
* *Assessment for learning* to ensure recognition of learning in different contexts; provide a greater role for teacher professional judgment (although external examinations would remain at key points) and reduce the assessment burden of the current system.
* *Information, advice and guidance* to be built into the Bac entitlement to support effective choice and progression within and beyond the Bac system.

**The Tomlinson Diploma System Proposal (2003-2004)**

5.24 These ideas fed into the Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform, which was tasked by the then Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, to consider the longer-term future of 14-19 education and training. During its deliberations over a period of some 18 months, the Tomlinson Committee proposed ‘a new diploma framework’ for all 14-19 year olds covering the whole of their learning programme, rather than existing individual qualifications such as GCSEs, GNVQs, A Levels and NVQs.

5.25 The main design features of the Tomlinson Diploma System were:

* four inter-locking levels of diplomas - Entry, Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced
* a core/specialisation curriculum model
* core learning, which would occupy about one third of the learner’s programme and include: Functional mathematics, Literacy/Communication and ICT; Common Knowledge, Skills and Attributes to promote reflective, effective, social and internationally aware learners; an Extended Project; and Wider Activities underpinned by Personal Review, Planning and Guidance
* main learning, taking up about two thirds of a learner’s programme and made up of specially designed components based on existing qualifications
* One ‘Open Line’ and 20 specialised or named Lines of Main Learning
* Diplomas with an overall volume of 180 credits, equivalent to or above the demands of existing programmes and containing learning at two levels, to facilitate breadth and progression;
* credit as the basic currency
* balanced assessment with a greater role for assessment by teachers and lecturers
* a transcript of achievement
* a finer grained approach to grading with an overall grade for diplomas and several grades at the upper end to distinguish between good and outstanding achievement.

5.26 The Tomlinson unified proposals were not adopted by government; politics intervened as the result of an approaching general election and a subsequent change of ministers. In the event, some of the features of a unified baccalaureate system were adapted for the designs of the 14-19 Diplomas – the Extended Project, the idea of Principal, Generic and Addition/Specialist Learning and the language of Diplomas and Lines of Learning, which became, as we have stated earlier, a ‘linked’ approach within a track-based system.

## The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (2003 – present)[[33]](#footnote-32)

5.27 At the same time as the 14-19 Green Paper was being discussed in England, the Welsh Assembly Government published ‘Learning Pathways 14-19’, which had many of the features of the English 14-19 Green Paper, but also contained ideas about a Welsh Bac Qualification. The Welsh Bac was seen as an appropriate overarching award for recognising all types of qualifications for 14-19 year olds and was piloted at Intermediate and Advanced Levels in 2003. The Welsh Assembly Government decided pragmatically to offer English qualifications rather than to introduce a distinctive Welsh qualification based on the IB. Following a positive external evaluation in 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) proposed that it should be available at Advanced and Intermediate Level for all 16-19 year olds by September 2007. It also suggested that this should be extended to 14-16 year olds by 2009, when a Foundation Level would also be available. Since September 2010, the Welsh Bac has been offered as an entitlement for all 14-19 year olds. The award was initially offered in 18 pilot schools in 2003 but has grown very quickly in popularity. By 2012, 70,000 learners are involved, double the number participating in 2010.

5.28 The Welsh Bac is a unified core/specialisation model, expressed as and ‘Core Programme and ‘Options’. The former, which is awarded 120 UCAS points with an A grade, comprises:

* Key Skills Qualifications at an appropriate level
* ‘Wales, Europe and the World,’ study of political, social, cultural and economic issues, including a modern foreign language module
* Work-Related Education and a period of work experience
* Personal and Social Education, including an activity in the local community
* An Individual Investigation

5.29 To satisfy the ‘Options’ element, students are expected to make up the rest of their learning programme from established, approved courses/programmes (e.g. GCSEs, AS/A Levels and NVQs). Interestingly, the 14-19 Diplomas were not adopted in Wales, although from September 2009 elements of Diplomas (e.g. Principal Learning and the Extended Project) could also be used within the overall framework.

### The Surrey Graduation Certificate

5.30 This award was initially developed in one school in Surrey (George Abbot) in 2000 as a response to the *Curriculum 2000* reforms. The opportunity to take more subjects and to mix study through *Curriculum 2000* stimulated further thinking about ‘a local overarching certificate alongside a broader curriculum’. The main aim of the Surrey Graduation Certificate was to prepare students better for entry to higher and further education and employment, as well as to improve overall standards of achievement. Since then, the award has been taken up by a number of schools within Surrey and has been developed at Intermediate as well as Advanced Level. A local validation system has been established involving senior managers from participating institutions. The University of Surrey has supported the Surrey Graduation Certificate and has hosted graduation ceremonies. This initiative also informed work by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority on a Graduation Certificate.

5.31 Main design features of the Surrey Graduation Certificate

####  Academic element

* Minimum of 18 units Advanced (L3)
* 5 ‘units’ amounting to at least 15 hrs per week of full-time study for Intermediate (L 2)

 *Applied skills element (portfolio assessed)*

* Opportunity for accreditation of all six key skills
* Communication/ Numeracy/ ICT
* Improving Own Learning integral to the portfolio
* Problem Solving/ Working With Others (all based on the national Key Skills criteria)

#### Citizenship element

* School and/or community service
* Individual achievement

### BSix Baccalaureate Programme

5.32 The BSix Baccalaureate Programme was developed by Hackney BSix Sixth Form College in response to students’ need to prepare for progression and higher education from an area where learners had not traditionally taken this route. There was also a widespread feeling that achievement of A Levels alone was insufficient to support personal progression requirements.

5.33 The BSix Baccalaureate Programme is designed at four levels – Entry to Advanced and comprises:

1. Main Learning Programme – A Levels, BTEC awards, Diplomas, Foundation Learning

2.Core

* Learning and thinking skills
* Functional skills
* Individual project
* CV/UCAS form

3. Preparation for life programme (e.g. citizenship/community, student transcript)

4. Progression programme (e.g. a unit of work at the level above current programme)

5. Graduation Ceremony.

**Sixth Form Baccalaureate (SFBac)**

5.34 Organised through the Sixth Form College Forum (SFCF), the SFBac is not a qualification: it is a framework for the 16-19 phase which enables institutions to offer and recognize a range of wider activities alongside existing national qualifications.  The framework is inclusive, as it can be awarded at three levels of study, and is highly flexible in that it can accommodate institutions and students with differently shaped curriculum programmes.  Currently involving about 15 colleges, institutions are validated to offer the SFBac by a peer review committee organized by the SFCF.

5.35 Four themes underpin the award– *subjects, skills, values and breadth* –which colleges adapt to their own circumstances, and no specific qualification is compulsory.

* For a level 1 or 2 course, a student has to accumulate 600 hours of learning,
* For a level 3 the requirement a student has to accumulate 1,200 hours over two years.
* The subject requirement is 450 hours on a one-year level 1 or 2 course and 900 hours for a level 3 course over two years.
* The remaining hours – 150 at levels 1 and 2 and 300 hours at level 3 – should cover the skills and values elements of the framework and may or may not involve examined qualifications.

In this sense the SFBac is much closer to the ‘open/modular’ design described in 4.7.

**The Modern Baccalaureate (Mod Bac)**

5.36 The Mod Bac has been developed by a group of academies in the Hull area as a direct response to the Government’s EBac, which it describes as a ‘missed opportunity’. In its publicity Andrew Chubb, the headteacher leading this initiative, states:

*The Modern Baccalaureate is an attempt to close the gap between the classroom and the workplace, and to explore the fertile ground between the pursuit of knowledge and the application of knowledge and skills in real life contexts. We have all the elements available to us: Modbac helps to join them together, without huge investment or massive curriculum upheaval.*

5.37 The Mod Bac is currently being piloted in 17 schools with an aspiration that it will be offered more broadly following this phase. It will be awarded locally and functions presently like an accredited curriculum and certification framework rather than a qualification. Student achievements are recognised via a three-part transcript that records knowledge (i.e. attainment in all types of qualifications); experience (e.g. work experience, music, drama, sports, community service) and skills (e.g. problem solving, working with others). A grading system indicates the extent of effort in each of the areas.

5.38 The Mod Bac organisers hope that universities will give it their ‘seal of approval’; that it gets national buy-in and can promote a dialogue with the Secretary of State. While these aims may not be fully achieved, the Mod Bac provides a useful example of ways to broaden the Key Stage 4 curriculum using the mixed general/vocational approach promoted by the previous government.

**A Better Baccalaureate**

5.39 A Better Baccalaureate is a campaign promoted by Whole Education, the Curriculum Foundation, the Independent Academies Association, Archbishop Sentamu Academy and the Association of School and College Leaders.

5.40 At present the Better Bac comprises a broad set of aims and design principles. These are underpinned by the concepts of skills, breadth and values. So far, the Better Bac has not been designed in detail. It aims to promote:

* coherent pathways
* the recognition of knowledge and skills
* student engagement
* flexibility and challenge
* multiple accreditation routes
* balanced assessment
* credibility with employers and HE.

5.41 As Figure 2 suggests, the Better Bac revolves around Main learning plus Other learning experiences. Main learning contains existing qualifications (general and vocational followed at Levels 1, 2 and 3). The function of additional learning is to encourage students to cover the required knowledge and skills. There is, however, mention of a Core that has to be achieved in order for a student to gain the Bac .

*Figure 2. The Better Bac model*



5.42 The Better Bac is a 14-19 baccalaureate framework to be offered at Levels 1, 2 and 3. A Bac is awarded on the attainment of breadth of learning, passes in maths and English and assessed skills. The other distinguishing feature of the Better Bac proposal is that it is awarded at 18/19 at the end of the 14-19 phase on the basis of accumulated points. There is no award at 16.

**Summary**

5.43 The common feature of all these proposals is that existing national qualifications are supplemented by additional learning activities, thereby constituting a more holistic curriculum. This is what is meant by ‘baccalaureateness’ in the English context. Interestingly, apart from the IB which is an international award and the Pre-U, to some extent, with its new advanced level qualifications that replace A Levels, none of these proposals suggests the abolition of GCSEs or A Levels. The majority approach is for proposals to build on existing qualifications in the first instance.

5.44 In developing what can be termed a core/option or main learning/additional learning models, these proposals are attempting to develop a wider range of knowledge and skills in order to produce a better upper secondary education for the 21st century.

5.45 Beyond this the proposals differ in a number of ways – some are confined to general/academic education and others cover both general and vocational; there are different degrees and types of breadth and depth; some are more prescriptive and others more choice-based; some include all the levels (entry to advanced) while others are offered at certain levels only. The proposals also vary according to whether they are an international qualification, a national qualification, a proposal seeking national buy-in or a sectoral or institutional framework for curriculum enrichment. These differences can be conceptualised along six dimensions and are explored below in Section 6.

## 6. Baccalaureate frameworks – six dimensions of design

6.1 In order to realize a variety of potential functions and purposes, baccalaureate-type frameworks have emerged in various guises. Reflecting on the models described earlier in this paper, we suggest that there are six main design dimensions that characterise these proposals and developments and that various baccalaureate/curriculum framework models lie at different points on these continua:

1. commonality/distinctiveness
2. breadth/depth
3. prescription/choice
4. inclusivity/exclusivity
5. qualifications/curriculum frameworks
6. international/national/local

**Dimension 1. Commonality/distinctiveness**

6.2 The most established baccalaureate-type frameworks are to be found in general education – the IB and latterly the AQA Bac and Pre-U. Here the main aim has been to broaden general education, not only in terms of the number of subjects studied but, more commonly, to combine A Level specialisation with additional learning activities.

6.3 Interestingly, there are no vocational baccalaureate models in the English context at present, unless a 180-credit BTEC National Diploma is considered as such.

6.4 Instead, the main thrust of recent proposals from the education profession has been for common or unified proposals comprising both general and vocational education underpinned or supplemented by a range of additional learning activities and experiences.

### Dimension 2. Breadth/depth

6.5 Breadth has been seen as the main strength of baccalaureate-type frameworks. However, many have attempted to balance breadth with depth of study in order to capture some of the traditional strengths of the English system.

Below are 10 different approaches to breadth that can feature as part of baccalaureate-type frameworks:

1. Number of subjects
2. Contrasting subjects
3. Combining academic and vocational learning
4. Broadening subjects (e.g. Critical Thinking)
5. Breadth of learning within subjects (design of specification)
6. Key skills – the main three and the wider ones
7. Inter-disciplinarity/connectivity (e.g. Extended Project)
8. Varied pedagogy (e.g. lecture, group tasks, off-site learning, individual investigation)
9. Range of assessment modes (e.g. oral, written, performance)
10. Different learning contexts (e.g. schools, post-16 providers, extra curricular activities and work-related learning)

6.6 Depth of learning and achievement can be supported alongside breadth by some of the features listed above (e.g. e, g and h). In addition, depth can be encouraged by linear rather than modular assessment and by a sampling rather than an exhaustive or mastery approach to assessment and examination.

6.7 Recent innovations, such as the AQA Bac, have been based on three A Levels, to ensure depth, to which have been added some of the dimensions of breadth listed above. The Pre-U pays more attention to depth because of its use of linear syllabuses designed specifically for this award. The Harrow Diploma and the SFBac, on the other hand, attempt to produce the breadth through additional activity.

6.8 More unified frameworks, including the Welsh Bac and local or sector developments (e.g. Surrey Graduation Certificate and the BSix Bac), include many of the dimensions of breadth listed above as well as making provision for the inclusion of vocational awards.

### Dimension 3. Prescription/choice

6.9 A common perception of baccalaureate qualifications is that they have high levels of prescription. However, the review of past and current proposals and developments in the English system suggests that there is a spectrum of prescription and choice, allied to the observations about breadth and depth discussed above. No fewer than eight models of baccalaureate-type frameworks on the prescription/choice continuum can be identified:

1. Prescribed subjects (e.g. the A Bac)
2. Subjects chosen from prescribed domains (no English models of this type)
3. Prescribed core + prescribed domains (e.g. IB)
4. Core menu + choice from prescribed domains (e.g SF Bac)
5. Prescribed core + menu of academic subjects (e.g. AQA Bac)
6. Prescribed core + free choice of area of study/subjects (e.g.Surrey Graduation Cert, Welsh Bac)
7. Core menu + free choice of area of study/subjects (e.g. Harrow Diploma)
8. Main Learning and Additional Learning within which there are core achievements (e.g. Better Bac).

6.10 As we have seen, the English (and Welsh) designs tend towards the choice-based end of the spectrum and several take a core/specialisation approach.

### Dimension 4. Inclusivity/exclusivity

6.11 Another criticism levelled at baccalaureates is that they are exclusive because of the degree of prescription and that the breadth and volume of achievement required to matriculate will discriminate against certain groups of learners.

6.12 Below five dimensions of inclusivity/exclusivity are indentified:

1. Level (e.g. one or more, separate or inter-locking)

2. Volume and demand (e.g. the amount and depth of required study)

3. Types of learning

* academic/vocational
* skills/knowledge/experiences
* location- inside and outside education institutions
* mode - full-time/part-time

4. Age range (e.g. 14+, 16-19)

5. Assessment and accreditation (e.g. linearity/modularity; credits and transportability; internal/external; individual/collaborative; degree of compulsory attainment; rules of compensation).

6.13 A review of the English models reveals that this is not necessarily the case and that they can be located on a spectrum from inclusive to exclusive. The BSix Bac, for example, with its four levels from Entry to Advanced, its recognition of both academic and vocational learning and its menu-driven approach makes it potentially much more inclusive than the Pre-U, which exists only at Level 3, does not accredit anything other than academic learning and actively promotes a linear mode of assessment.

6.14 Inclusivity has its penalties however. The greater the type of learning and learners that are brought within a framework, the more complex the design has to be in order to meet different needs. A balance may have to be struck between the degree of inclusivity and the complexity of the design. In reviewing historical and current baccalaureate-type models, those that are track-based and confined to a single level appear far simpler to understand than multi-level linked and unified models.

**Dimension 5. Qualifications/curriculum frameworks**

6.15 It is important to distinguish between baccalaureate-type frameworks that are also recognised qualifications (e.g. IB, AQA Bac) and those that exist more to provide a curriculum framework (e.g. Surrey Graduation Certificate, SFBac).

6.16 The former have specific demands in terms of volume, breadth/depth and level of attainment and are more likely to be national/international. The qualification is either achieved or not achieved and always involves varying degrees of external scrutiny. Curriculum frameworks, on the other hand, are more likely to use lighter touch accreditation processes to recognise a wide range of activities and do not use as much external scrutiny, although there is usually some form of moderation or validation.

6.17 The strength of a qualification is that it has more international/national currency or ‘exchange value’ (i.e. it is more recognised by end-users), but this has to be balanced against limitations on its ‘use value’ (i.e. its perceived value and usefulness as a learning programme by teachers and learners) because of the specific demands of assessment and accreditation (e.g. teaching to the test and validity of assessment modes).

6.18 Curriculum frameworks in the post-16 English system have been the product of institutional, local and sector initiatives because they have been viewed as more flexible and responsive than nationally/internationally qualifications. One of the ways of attempting to combine features of qualifications and curriculum frameworks is through a quality assurance process of local/institutional moderation or validation.

**Dimension 6. International/national/local**

6.19 As we have seen, some baccalaureate proposals have international/national intent and recognition, but not all. Presently, schools and colleges can offer the IB, AQA Bacc and Pre-U as recognised international and/or national qualifications. These are all confined to the general education track. One of the dangers here is that high attaining students in general/academic education will be receiving an enhanced education while those taking vocational qualifications experience a much poorer diet.

6.20 In the absence of the implementation of Tomlinson, a number of post-16 proposals have sprung up which are institutionally-based (e.g. the SFBac, Surrey Graduation Certificate, Harrow Diploma). And more recently, two post-Tomlinson proposals for a unified qualifications system that also encompasses Key Stage 4 have emerged seeking national recognition and uptake (e.g. the Mod Bac and Better Bac).

6.22 So far we have not seen the development of area-based baccalaureates that might arise from school/college/work-based collaborations, even though there are now experiments in developing an area-based curriculum (e.g. by the RSA). As well as sharing a curriculum perspective, collaboration could take place around assessment and quality assurance in relation to demanding research projects, such as those required by the Extended Project Qualification.

## 7. Questions and options for development

7.1 What are the underlying purposes of the Pearson-led baccalaureate? Will it be another blueprint with its own specific purposes (e.g. in relation to BTEC qualifications or a wider set of criteria) or a framework and a process of alliance building that makes sense of or links to other initiatives?

7.2 In the light of the current economic context for young people and one million unemployed, how far should a Pearson-led baccalaureate seek to enrich vocational education, create clearer vocational pathways and improve transitions at 18+?

7.3 On the other hand, how far does such a framework seek to respond to the ‘Gove knowledge challenge’ and include an emphasis on ‘high status’ subjects or what has been termed ‘powerful knowledge’[[34]](#footnote-33)?

7.4 Will the proposed baccalaureate be a qualification or a curriculum framework? If it is a qualification, it will be one of several on offer and seen as Pearson’s own product. If it emerges as a curriculum framework, there can be a dialogue with other framework proposals to find a common way forward (e.g. Better Bac) and a way of helping institutions to design their 14-19 curriculum. If this is the case, how will this dialogue to take place?

7.5 Whatever path is followed, what will be its key principles and how will these relate to other baccalaureate proposals currently being debated?

7.6 Will the aim be to maximise ‘exchange value’ or ‘use value’? If a curriculum framework precedes the emergence of a qualification, then the immediate emphasis will be on ‘use-value’ to the institution and the student.

7.7 Whether it is a qualification or curriculum framework, what will be the main design features:

* distinctive or unified
* types of breadth and/or depth of study
* prescriptive, choice-based or combination of both
* offered at one or more levels
* modes of assessment employed
* focused on local collaboration or institutionally-based
* moderation/validation processes?

7.8 How will any new framework cope with the power and influence of national policy steers – funding, performance measures, inspection and the nature of current national qualifications, some of which go against the grain of larger programmes of study. In this context, institutional motivation has to be strong and the aims and purposes of a framework will have to very clear in order to appeal to staff, students, parents, universities and employers.

7.9 How will the baccaluareate encourage local collaboration in the interests of all students in an area?

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31. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. We have included this qualification even though it is not an English award because of its widespread use and the fact that students from Wales will be applying with this award to English universities. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)