

Grammar School Heads' Association

Newsletter - Edition 12
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Report from the Admission Advisory Group

The group of 9 headteachers has met twice since its inception following the admissions seminar held at King's College earlier this year. We initially agreed to carry out a survey of all GSHA schools.

58 schools responded, (40% of membership), 86% are Academies. 30 of the respondents are a single admission authority, 8 are in a consortium, 20 continue to have their tests administered by the LA, in some cases this was because the LA continues to cover the cost of testing.

There is strong evidence that a significant number of schools are concerned about the predictability and validity of the tests and their vulnerability to coaching. Concerns were also expressed about their reliability and the poor correlation with other assessments such as CATs and schools' own internal assessments. Those schools that identified CEM as the test provider expressed high satisfaction with the testing process and reported that results are providing a more reliable indicator of ability.

Whilst it is accepted that any test will have its limitations, the group discussion identified it as key for grammar schools to select by using tests that can reliably indicate potential, are effective in testing for literacy and are as free from being coachable as is realistically possible. It was also agreed that tests need to be flexible enough to serve the needs of individual schools, bearing in mind that circumstances vary from school to school and area to area. Testing should also provide good value for money and be perceived as fair and equitable to all children irrespective of their socio-economic background.

The Group met with Sue Stothard and Catherine Bailey of CEM who outlined the features of CEM tests. They reiterated that CEM tests reliably distinguish between the able child who has not been coached and the average child who has. It is clear that there is considerable scope for adapting and varying provision through CEM to meet specific school or area needs. We explored the possibility for GSHA to commission CEM to produce tests which GSHA members could use. This could potentially send out a strong message that GSHA is united in trying to address the impact of coaching and open up grammar schools to the children for whom they were intended in the first place. The cost of commissioning bespoke tests is high but would be considerably reduced if a significant number of schools shared the costs. In the interim CEM can provide tests based on its current bank of questions. This arrangement would allow for a GSHA test to be produced in time for the next round of testing and new tests could be commissioned once the consortium reaches a size that produces economies of scale.

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Report from the Admission Advisory Group (cont.)

If a common test were achieved in regions, it would reduce the need in some areas for children to sit more than one test. There is another potential development which could be undertaken, that is the creation of a national database that would provide a benchmark measure for tracking the performance and progress of children through longitudinal research. CEM were also interested in tracking the progress of children who had not yet attended a grammar school, having sat the 11+, a possible development for selective authorities, a number of whom have, or are in the process of switching to CEM already.

The format recommended is 50% V.R +25% Numerical Reasoning +25% NVR

- The papers are designed to test the process of reasoning rather than the speed of processing questions. All papers can be readily completed
- Tests consist of 2 papers each of 45 minutes
- Maths reasoning includes no topics/concepts that children will not have met by Year 5. Where specific information is required, such as the area of a triangle, then the formula is included in the paper. This removes a coaching need but it is also an aid to early testing
- Papers can be weighted to match need to the local context. It is also possible to build in the flexibility to weight a standardised score to the context of groups of applicants, if CEM is provided with the necessary detail
- CEM can create a result package that enables schools to set a pass level around a specific ability level so that schools can manage eligibility lists whilst still having a rank order
- Data can be provided in a range of formats depending on school needs
- The turnaround from testing to results would be 4 weeks.

CEM can provide familiarisation materials that give an overview of the tests, including information on marking, the types of questions and the form in which answers are required. The guidance can also outline why coaching is unlikely to produce any gain. This would be useful information to pass on to parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. CEM advise that this paper is sent out to all parents who register their child for the tests.

Next Steps - CEM will develop an outline proposal and costings which will form the basis of any recommendation to member schools; it is expected shortly.

Nicole Chapman - (Chair of the Admissions Advisory Group) nchapman@cchs.essex.sch.uk

... Dates for the Diary / Events ...

- **16th January Skinners' Hall London - DfE Conference for Grammar Schools - Supporting and Sponsoring Academies**
- **18-19th June Annual Conference. RAF Club, London**
- **Steering Committee Meetings - 1st March King Edward VI Five Ways
- 10th May King Edward VI Five Ways**
- **Executive Officers Meeting - 1st February, London**
- **March Ofsted Seminar (date and venue TBC)**
- **4th July Conference for Sixth Form Leaders (venue TBC)**

All Change

All Change

The education landscape is transforming with a rapidity that is sometimes breathtaking. All the major examination boards are currently conducting reviews of their qualifications and seeking stakeholders' views about what the new A Level and EBacs should look like. Although there have been some pronouncements from ministers, there is a chance here to shape the future. We can try to ensure that there is some joined up thinking and that the needs of the most able learners (whatever kind of school they attend) are not overlooked in the rush to create a single qualification without tiers at sixteen and an A Level qualification that meets the needs of young people, universities and employers.

There are some big issues to be decided. If there is only one board for each of English, Maths and Science for the EBac how will that work in practice? What will the knock on effect of this be at A level? In particular, given current concerns over the quality of marking, what can be done at the design stage to improve the accuracy and efficiency of marking without compromising the quality of learning or creating a situation in which the test dominates the curriculum and creativity, originality, problem solving disappear?

GSHA has set up a network of subject specialists spread across its schools who will be working with the boards on their new proposals. As co-ordinator of this network, I would like to say a big thank you to all the colleagues who have kindly agreed to represent the association. There's a role in this discussion for everyone. If you haven't already done so, please respond to the DfE consultation on KS4 examination reform which closes on 10th December and have your say.

Public examination reform will be on the agenda for our summer conference. In the meantime if there is anything that you would like me to feed into the meetings that we are having with the boards, please email me:

martenc@rugbyhighschool.co.uk.

Charlotte Marten



... Snippets ...

- ◆ **GSHA has representation on the DfE Admissions and Access Group. If there any issues relating to admissions or access then please e-mail BSindall@aol.com**
- ◆ **The consultation on key Stage 4 Examination reform closes on 10th December. A briefing paper has been sent to schools and a copy can be found on the revamped GSHA website.**
- ◆ **Heads are reminded that membership subscription (50p per student on roll) should be sent to King Edward VI Ways School, Birmingham.**
- ◆ **GSHA has representation on the minister's Post 16 Reform of Curriculum and Funding Group and has now been invited to participate in the Key Stage 4 EBC Consultation Group.**
- ◆ **Agreement has been reached with Stone King, a leading firm of educational solicitors, about no obligation support to member schools. Stone King will provide a free telephone advice service that covers quick queries. In addition member schools will be able to access regular briefing bulletins on educational issues. The wider services of Stone King, which include H.R will be available at a discount to members. Full details will be circulated to each school.**

Experiences of the New Ofsted Framework

At 12.35pm on Tuesday 25 September my PA interrupted me whilst on the telephone to a parent to say an HMI was on the line. I then spent the next hour making scribbled notes of what documents and arrangements she wanted us to put in place for our Section 5 Inspection which was to take place on 26-27 September.

- ◆ Over the next few hours on that Tuesday afternoon we had to do the following:
- ◆ Arrange 20 paired ½ lesson observations for periods 1 and 2 the next day (five inspectors paired with myself and my four deputies) covering the full range of students' abilities, year groups, subjects and teaching quality.
- ◆ Arrange various meetings with myself, other senior and middle leaders, Governors and students. None of these could be at lunchtimes as they needed to be out and about talking to students.
- ◆ Email Tribal a summary of our self-evaluation, if we had one (we did have something).
- ◆ Wait for them to email us the inspection notice and leaflet for parents and distribute them that day to all parents (a statutory requirement - we used Parentmail).
- ◆ Post a notice of the inspection on our website and at the school gate or reception (another statutory requirement!)
- ◆ Print off and distribute hard copies of the staff questionnaire to all staff.
- ◆ Inform all Governors.
- ◆ Prepare for the next morning five sets of lists of all SEN and FSM students, staff lists – indicating NQTs, maps, timetables and five keys for their base room
- ◆ Provide information about any provision we had to improve reading.
- ◆ Arrange food and drinks – including some quite specific requirements – plus, of course, an invoice for these!
- ◆ Reserve four car parking spaces.

All of the above were things I was asked to arrange. I of course also decided, as you might expect, to email the staff and then hold a briefing for them at 3.30pm.

On Wednesday 26 September my senior team met with the inspection team at 7.45am. Following the joint observations we met with the inspection team for one hour (break and period 3) to compare judgements – we were typically half a grade higher than them. They then spent most of the rest of the day doing further lesson observations. At 3.45pm we met with them again to observe them making provisional judgements: we were also able to chip in.

On Thursday 27 September they did more lesson observations – they ultimately did 50 in total – had various meetings and as always had us running around to supply extra bits of evidence and information. At 3.00pm we observed them making their final judgement and did a lot of chipping in. The final feedback meeting with Governors scheduled for 5.00pm happened at 7.00pm.

In the end we got there with Outstanding judgements in all categories. The process of reaching judgements was very rigorous. They went through each sub-phrase within each bullet point of the grade descriptors and adopted a best fit approach. Of the 3½ hours doing this less than 10 minutes was spent on Behaviour & Safety and about 15 minutes on Leadership & Management where in both cases they quickly agreed a strong fit to the Outstanding criteria. They spent over one hour on Achievement and two hours on Quality of Teaching.

The problem with Teaching & Learning is the height the bar has reached. Our rather complex action point is about being even better at assessing progress of all individuals against prior attainment data within and beyond lessons and then differentiating teaching.

The issue with Achievement is of course that six of the seven bullet points are about Progress and only one is on Attainment.

For Outstanding they look for better than expected progress in all year groups including the sixth form. As well as overall progress they will look specifically at:

- **English and Maths**
- **The other three Ebacc areas – I wasn't expecting the question: why is your Raise Online Humanities VA not sig+?**
- **For academies any specialist subjects in your Funding Agreement**
- **Groups of students (ethnicity, gender, SEN)**
- ***Individual* FSM and LA students.**

The last point is important. For other groups in Raise Online where numbers are small they were not too concerned. However, due to the pupil premium they have been told to look at individual students' progress for FSM and Looked After. The Governors also need to be able to tell them how the Pupil Premium money is being spent. Bear in mind also that since April you have been getting Pupil Premium for students who have had FSM in the last six years identifying who they are is another matter, especially for Year 7!

They were interested in this year's exam results and VA measures such as ALPs which were already available. However, they were at least as interested in evidence we had for all year groups about progress and current attainment levels, as well as how we set individual student targets and intervene if students are not making the progress to be on track to achieve these.

Of course we are very happy with the outcome. However, some staff are understandably disgruntled that the time pressures on the Inspection Team made it very difficult to get lesson observation feedback. The Inspection Team were impressively rigorous and professional. However, as I hope I have made clear at the start of this article, I have fed back to Tribal that I feel the time pressures that this framework creates are unreasonable for both schools and the Inspection Teams.

James Skinner
Headteacher
Beths Grammar School

25 October 2012



Grammars add rigour to the Academies Programme

All too often in the past, grammar schools have been marginalised in terms of the contribution that they can make to national policy. It is many years since a minister organised a conference targeted specifically at grammar schools, but in the near future Lord Hill will be inviting all heads and chairs of governors to a conference on 16 January at Skinners' Hall London.

The theme of the conference is, 'Grammar Schools Supporting and Sponsoring Academies'. Speakers will include Lord Hill, Liz Sidwell (Schools' Commissioner), and Lord Adonis. There will also be case study presentations by heads that are already involved with sponsorship, as well as a carousel session involving schools, DfE officers, and educational solicitors.

The event will provide an opportunity both to explore the implications of sponsoring either secondary or primary schools and to hear about changes in the range of grants to support the establishment of partnerships.

GSHA strives to work with all political parties and the cross party dimension of the conference is welcomed

Grammars add rigour to the Academies Programme

Autonomy is at the heart of the most successful school systems in the world. The government's policy of supporting schools to become independent Academies means that the UK is leading the way by creating a more autonomous system. Becoming an Academy provides heads and teachers with greater freedom and flexibility to deliver a more innovative curriculum, which will ultimately help to raise the standard of education across the board; schools becoming Academies is pivotal to the government's strategy of transforming the lives of young people from non-privileged backgrounds and raising the overall quality of the British education system.

Many Academies, typically those which have been established to replace chronically underperforming schools, have what is known as an Academy sponsor. The role of a sponsor is to generate and help implement strategic vision, which will lead to an improvement in educational attainment. This means that sponsors are entirely accountable for school performance; this is of course an exciting prospect which comes with great responsibility.

Sponsors make a huge contribution to Academies, bringing drive, expertise and capacity, as well as experience from a wide variety of backgrounds and sectors. The concept of sponsorship is based upon the idea that successful individuals from different fields will bring a fresh and innovative energy to the school, thus providing the impetus for change. Sponsors come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some are existing Academies, grammar schools or further and higher education institutions with excellent track records in improving performance. Others are organisations, such as diocese, businesses, charities or educational foundations and some philanthropists with a passion for improving education.

Grammar schools are some of the best schools in the UK and many are already accepting the challenge of engaging in Academy sponsorship. This is an incredibly exciting prospect, as Grammar schools have a wealth of knowledge, skills and expertise to share with an underachieving school. Ministers are very keen to develop a large pool of sponsors that will bring a diverse range of experience, skills and opportunity to help deliver a sustained transformation in schools with a long history of underperformance. Grammar schools, it is envisaged, will be great contributors to this movement. To help build capacity for new sponsors Ministers have recently agreed funding to support some of the set-up costs.

For details about this funding email sponsorapplication.OSC@education.gsi.gov.uk

Dr Gary Holden, head teacher at Sir Joseph Williamson Mathematical School and Executive Principal of the Williamson Trust, has taken full advantage of becoming an Academy sponsor. Since 2009, the Sir Joseph Williamson Mathematical School has been partnered with nearby Hundred of Hoo School. The successful partnership was strengthened in September 2011, when the Hundred of Hoo converted to Academy status as part of the Williamson Trust. The involvement of the Grammar school has transformed the performance of the school removing it from Special Measures. The school has achieved its best ever results at GCSE and A level in 2012. Key results have more than doubled in three years; a fantastic achievement and one that adds real credibility to the support that a grammar school can offer to an underperforming school. The trust is expanding further, with the Elaine Primary Academy which opened in September 2012 and High Halstow Primary, which converted to an Academy in April 2012, also joining the Trust. These Multi-Academy Trusts are behind the fantastic aspirations, achievement and improvement in life chances for students at the schools.

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools – Lord Hill of Oareford and the Schools Commissioner Dr Elizabeth Sidwell CBE, are attending a joint GSHA/DfE conference on 16 January at Skinners Hall in the City of London.

If you or your Chair of Governors are interested in attending, please register for the event by emailing OSCEvents@education.gsi.gov.uk.

**Interested in becoming an Academy sponsor? - visit our website:
www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/sponsors**

Matthew Mitchell - matthew.mitchell@education.gsi.gov.uk



A Level Reform

At a GSHA event held at King's College London, Mark Fenton (GSHA Chairman) reflected with delegates on the current state of play with regard to A Level reform...

'For too long, the secondary and higher education in this country have developed on separate and not always complementary tracks. The fact is that we need to understand each other better and face our challenges together if we are to do the best by the many thousands of students who make the transition from grammar schools to leading universities each year.

It's probably fair to say that some university colleagues have felt for a long time that the qualifications structure in schools has left students woefully ill-prepared for much of what they encounter at university. It's certainly true that a student with straight A's in 2012 may very well not have the same capabilities as a student who had apparently similar qualifications thirty years ago. Perhaps we shouldn't expect that. But I do think we need to exercise some care in making such judgements. Today's students undoubtedly have a wider range of skills and attributes to offer than their predecessors, even if their grasp of some specific areas of subject knowledge may appear weaker.

In 2012, we stand at something of a crossroads. Tuition fees are beginning to change how students think about the value of higher education – in some ways, I feel, for the better. At the same time, the government has opened the door to a reform of qualifications at both 16 and 18, an opportunity which usually only comes along once in thirty years.

We would all like to see greater challenge and rigour in the qualifications our students are expected to obtain; a greater focus on higher order skills; a genuine world class system which stands up favourably to international comparison and which commands public confidence; along with examination boards which can deliver all of this consistently and reliably. Upon all of these things, I suggest we can agree.

One of the biggest steps proposed in the consultation is the involvement of universities and so-called 'learned societies' in the design of A Levels. To pave the way for their involvement, the government is proposing to sweep away all the rules about A Level content which are currently in place.

In many ways this is entirely to be welcomed. It would have been all too easy for ministers to try to determine content themselves, as a previous Conservative government did when the National Curriculum was introduced in the late 1980s. However, the consultation sets out only the vaguest prescription for how the involvement of higher education is to be achieved. In the absence of any of the prescribed content and given that any new A Level only has to have the support of 12 leading research institutions, we might end up with two A Levels in Philosophy, both supported by 12 universities but consisting of entirely different content. There are also very serious questions to be asked about the both the capacity and expertise of universities to play the kind of role which the government has in mind for them.

I also have a concern that 'consultation with schools' came a distant third in OFQUAL's list and was relegated to ensuring (and I quote) 'that the qualification is manageable for successful delivery'. They do seem to have overlooked the fact that there are many teachers who know a great deal about their subject, a good number of them employed in grammar schools.

The point, surely, is that rigour and challenge do not just come about simply on the back of an agreed body of knowledge. Rigour and challenge spring from a combination of content, pedagogy and assessment. If we get the style of assessment wrong rigour will evaporate, however 'hard' the content may appear. Challenge comes from the way students interact with teachers and the way students are encouraged to interact with each other and with the content. These are areas where schools – and I would suggest grammar schools in particular – have invaluable relevant expertise which cannot, I would argue, necessarily be found so readily in universities or, for that matter, in learned societies. On a positive note, it is encouraging that the Examination Boards are keen to involve representatives from GSHA to contribute to their subject panels and I hope that this will pave the way for wider involvement in the design of the new A Levels.

A Level Reform

The greatest concern we all share about the current system is the chronic unreliability of marking. Our colleagues in the independent sector have been waging a full scale public assault over recent weeks on the 'incompetence' of the examination boards. While GSHA members share their frustration with a system which appears unable to differentiate consistently at the top end of the ability range, I think there are more fundamental underlying issues at play upon which we should be focusing our attention.

Under fire from HMC a couple of weeks ago, one of the exam board chiefs shot back with the comment that if HMC schools provided more examiners, then there might not be such a problem. I think he has a point. Last week, I was asked by a senior official at the DfE if I could explain why the standard of marking had declined. Somewhat surprised by the question, I reminded him that 20 years ago many more examiners were experienced serving teachers who often needed the money to top up salaries which had then fallen well behind in real terms. Now the situation is very different and most teachers only do examining work to gain, for the sake of their students, as brief as possible an insight into a world they find baffling and opaque. The more everyone (rightly) rails against inconsistency of marking, the more the Exam Boards try to make the whole process ever more mechanistic in an effort to wring a more consistent performance out of their inexperienced examiners. It is the system itself which is broken.

In developing a new system, we therefore have an opportunity to design out some of these structural problems which have bedevilled us for years. Any new qualification which seeks to challenge the more able must be consistent with the capacity of the boards to deliver reliable marking and assessment at that level. We must not assume that the more challenging assessments which we would like to see are capable of being marked by the average standard of examiner currently at the Exam Boards' disposal. There need to be separate components which focus on higher order skills which can then be marked exclusively by more experienced or better quality examiners, or at the very least specific sets of questions within components. Who knows, maybe more grammar school teachers would want to put themselves forward as examiners if they felt they would be allowed to assess in a more professional and less formulaic manner.

On a practical level, the two issues which will surely be high on most Heads' agendas are the timing of implementation and its funding. Last week, Glenys Stacey, issued a clear warning to Michael Gove about rushing the implementation of reformed qualifications and this was echoed by Graham Stewart, the Chairman of the Education Select Committee, who advised the Secretary of State to stop 'taking the urgency pills'.

In the consultation, OFQUAL anticipates a phased roll out from 2015 to 2018 with some 'priority' subjects starting in 2014. While we would all favour having enough notice for teachers to get to grips with the new courses before they have to start teaching them, I think that the kind of phasing outlined in the consultation doesn't quite stack up.

Students in our schools choosing their A Level subjects in the Spring Term 2014 (that's the current Year 10) could be faced with the added complication that some of their potential subject choices would be the 'new, substantially more rigorous' A Levels while others were still the old 'presumably deemed not rigorous enough' model. In the autumn of 2015, universities will similarly be faced with applicants sporting a mixture of 'new' and 'old' qualifications. Are they to treat the 'old' and the 'new' exactly the same?

If so, then one of the potential advantages of increased rigour and challenge could be lost very early on. If not, then how can such a transition possibly hope to treat candidates fairly? And if not in 2014, when exactly would university admissions tutors start to see the benefits of reformed A Levels? 2020, when the final subjects to be reformed are examined for the first time? Surely it would make more sense to defer the introduction of the first subjects for a year and then aim to introduce the full range at the same time, thus levelling the playing field for everyone.

A Level Reform (cont.)

In a similar vein, no new system of qualifications can hope to succeed unless schools can provide the resource to deliver it effectively. By funding each student at a standard rate with no success factor, the new arrangements make sense for wide ability schools as they will have some students for whom a slimmer (and therefore cheaper) programme will be more appropriate and others who would benefit from a much higher volume (and therefore more expensive) programme. Catering as they do largely for the top quartile of the ability range, Grammar School Heads have no such ability to target their funding in this way. By the same token, it would be highly damaging if leading independent schools are able to continue to offer a 4 A level or IB programme to all comers, while that opportunity is denied to students in grammar schools with the same ability and aspirations. What hope, then, for increased social mobility?

One way to address these concerns would be for the government to define the range and volume of study which is appropriate for sixth form students aspiring to university. There is much made in the consultation about 'core skills' within subjects, but scant mention of any form of over-arching skills which cross subject boundaries. Given the success and popularity of the Extended Project Qualification, there is surely a strong argument for the EPQ to become part of a 'higher E Bacc' sitting alongside Level 2 English and Maths and reformed A Levels.

Such a model would have many attractions. Given that almost every other country in the world defines a volume of study Post 16, it would greatly aid international benchmarking. It would support a more rational funding model and secure a level playing field for students in the state and independent sectors.

Michael Gove is often derided by his critics for being doctrinaire and motivated by ideological concerns. I think this criticism is well wide of the mark. Although this government has clear views about what it believes to be important, more often than not those positions are ones with which a large body of intelligent education professionals actually agree. I welcome the fact that instead of trying to determine the form and content of the future of A Levels themselves – as I suspect many politicians past and present would try to do – Mr Gove and his colleagues are sensibly turning the challenge over to the people who should be in a better position to make those difficult judgements.

The challenge for universities and schools is to seize that opportunity and help the government, through exercising our collective influence, to turn its aspirations into reality in a way that is both rational and in the public good.

Mark Fenton - Chairman GSHA



THE TIMES

GUIDE TO BRITAIN'S TOP SCHOOLS

Congratulations to all members of GSHA whose schools populate The Times Top 200 State Secondary Schools. Whilst we would all claim, as did Russell Ellicott of Pate's, that beyond academic qualifications we all offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities, it is reassuring to see our students meeting and indeed exceeding expectations at GCSE, 'A' Level and IB. Such schools as ours are flagships of academic excellence and such public acknowledgement as this league table – The Times Schools Guide to Britain's Top Schools – can only serve to encourage leading politicians of all parties to do business with us. GSHA has grown in stature and it is gratifying to see our members represented on numerous government bodies and engaged in so many national initiatives; thanks to our credibility our quiet diplomatic voice is being clearly heard and our positive approach readily acknowledged.

Roy Pike

Examination Reform

Post 16 qualifications and funding

The recent Ofqual announcements about post 16 examination changes are not unexpected. Current year 12 will not be able to take re-sits in January and future Year 12s will continue to take A/S. It is clear, however that further changes will be announced

A few weeks ago, The Times reported that the Secretary of State is considering the possible introduction of a Higher Baccalaureate with a core that would include EPQ as well as work experience and some form of community work. Media reports suggested that there would be a requirement to study 3 reformed A levels and an A/S, and one of the four subjects would have to demonstrate evidence of appropriate breadth.

The reports could just be media speculation but the response of DfE to the questions of journalists suggests that the claims may have substance. There was no outright denial, only an affirmation that A levels would be retained within any new structure. Since the cabinet reshuffle, Liz Truss has been responsible for qualifications, and she is known to be an admirer of IB. It is also interesting to see that Stephen Twigg has expressed support for the idea. It is, however, difficult to see how the higher bacc can be introduced until the review of all subjects has been completed

Opinions are divided, even in the grammar school sector, about the value of A/S. Some view A/S as a stepping stone to A2 for weaker candidates, others see it providing breadth, but a significant number of heads are concerned that its dominance of Yr.12 time holds back the progress of able students. There could be a degree of neatness in the concept of a higher baccalaureate, for it would provide a rationale for A/S based on breadth.

It has already been acknowledged by ministers that we need to resolve what the 16-19 academic curriculum should look like in terms of breadth and depth and that funding should not drive the decision. The Bacc programme above requires considerably more time and resource than a two A

level programme. At the level of each individual institution, the costs to a school that has all its students on such a programme would be considerably higher than that of an institution where significant numbers followed a lesser programme.

Ofqual has concluded that retaining A/S increases participation but figures suggest that it is far from convincing platform for A2. Currently, 27% of all students on A/S programmes do not complete A2 (in F.E colleges the figure is 38%). Of those that do undertake A2, about 30% do fewer than 3 subjects. Each year about 20,000 students drop out in Yr 12 without completing A/S and a further 54,000 do not go on to Yr 13. If we are on the threshold of some definition about the depth and breadth of academic courses, then there must be an overwhelming case for reviewing the universal 600 GLH base model, so that funding reflects the real range of each student's study and, in turn, the cost of provision for each institution.

It is encouraging that ministers have left open the option to explore the funding for large volume courses, including IB. Any progress will depend on finding ways of establishing criteria that will prevent schools placing students on high volume courses just in order to gain a funding bonus. It is a valid objective, but equally there is a need to ensure that waste is not funded at the expense of schools where all students follow full programmes.

The ministerial group on Reforms to Post 16 Education and Funding will meet again in December. The issues are wide ranging and hence it is unlikely that there will quick outcomes.

There is an intimate link between curriculum reforms and funding and GSHA officers are expecting to meet this month with Michael Gove and Elizabeth Truss to discuss the issues.

Barry Sindall

(The slides of the presentations made at the recent A Level Reform Seminar are available on the GSHA website)



Executive Committee



Chairman:

Mark Fenton - Dr Challoner's Grammar School

Vice Chairman (Chairman Designate for 2013/14):

Charlotte Marten - Rugby High School

Vice Chairman:

Roy Pike - Torquay Boys' Grammar School

Treasurer:

Yvonne Wilkinson - King Edward VI Five Ways School, Birmingham

Regional Representatives

Kent	Rosemary Joyce, Matthew Bartlett, Paul Danielson
Medway	Christine Probyn
Buckinghamshire	Stephen Nokes, Phillip Wayne
London	James Skinner, Liz Allen
Lincolnshire	Tim Clark, Roger Hale
South West	Ian Carter, Stuart Smallwood
Gloucestershire	Jon Standen, Ewa Sawicka
Birmingham	Colin Parker
Reading/Slough	Mercedes Hernandez
Lancs/Yorks/Cumbria	Martin Pearman
Essex	Nicole Chapman
Midlands	Tim Swain, Michael Barrett
Trafford	Tim Gartside, Mike Thompson
Merseyside	Elaine Cogan
Warwickshire	Ian Blaikie, Charlotte Marten