

Right Honourable David Cameron MP
10 Downing Street
Westminster
SW1A 2AA

May 2016

Future of Business and Design Technology Education

Dear Prime Minister,

We write as MPs supporting the campaign to include the new, vastly improved Design and Technology GCSE within the English Baccalaureate qualification which is being championed by the James Dyson Foundation, the Design and Technology Association, the Royal Academy of Engineering and a host of businesses and organisations.

It is widely acknowledged that in order for businesses in the UK to flourish, a highly skilled workforce is needed in order for them to remain competitive in research and development in specialised technologies and to retain our competitive advantage. Many of our constituencies suffer from severe skills gaps that threaten our businesses and fuel the local and national productivity process.

The UK face a number of challenges:

- An annual shortage of 69,000 trained engineers
- Only 6% of the UK's engineering workforce is female

As constituency MPs, businesses are telling us that they cannot recruit adequately trained staff; it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that our education system delivers on that shortfall.

The Government needs to do a lot more to inspire young people into engineering. We applaud the Government's commitment to ensuring that education is rigorous. However, the push towards the new English Baccalaureate in its current form threatens to undermine any progress being made in addressing the stigma associated with careers in engineering.

We believe that the answer lies in the recently improved, scientific and academic Design Technology GCSE.

As you will be aware, the content for the new Design and Technology GCSE has recently been finalised, ready for September 2017. The new curriculum is a vast improvement on the previous qualification; having been designed over years in partnership with businesses; it is a robust, science based, academic, valuable option for GCSE.

However, there are many challenges facing the Design Technology GCSE;

- A problem of perception leading to poor subject take-up
- A 57% recruitment shortfall in trainee design and technology teachers (recruitment into D&T Initial Teacher Training (ITT) has been 50% below target for the past 2 years)
- 1,200 fewer secondary D&T teachers are in the system than will be needed from September 2016. 1 in 3 schools will be a teacher short. The reasons for the shortage of qualified D&T teachers are the uncertainties around D&T career prospects and status.

Secondary schools are judged on pupil's GCSE grades in EBacc subjects. Its exclusion from this important qualification is reducing the incentive for Design and Technology teaching.

As a result of schools being judged on their EBacc results, many of them are pushing their students – particularly 'academic' students – to do as many Ebacc subjects as possible; more than the minimum five. The result is that D&T is being squeezed into a single or double option box, to compete with subjects like Photography and Dance for a single place among student options. This is a problem in any case but would be tragic for the new D&T GCSE - which is academically rigorous and sits comfortably alongside the EBacc subjects.

The improved D&T qualification will have the same academic rigour as other EBacc subjects, as well as reinforcing learning across other core EBacc subjects of Maths and Physics. While teaching will not begin until next year, the subject's potential should be endorsed now in order to mitigate damage to D&T. The best way to do this is to announce, as soon as possible, that the new D&T course will be given Ebacc status as a single science subject when teaching begins in 2017.

Following several conversations with the department of Education, we understand that there is an openness to explore this option. However, we must stress that it is not only crucial that D&T is included within the EBacc but that an announcement is made as soon as possible. Every month that this announcement is delayed, there are less schools focussing on the subject and a gradual erosion of the viability of this valuable GCSE qualification.

We believe that including D&T as part of the science option for the EBacc would strengthen the course and, importantly, take a small step in addressing the growing skills gap.

There is precedent for the inclusion of Design Technology. In recognition of a changing economy, the former ICT qualification was re-vamped as Computer Science to cater for the UK's economic need for computer programmers and the shortfall in skills in the digital industries. The skills shortfalls in design, manufacturing and engineering are even greater than those in digital industries.

There is currently a unique opportunity to include the new, robust and rigorous D&T course within the EBacc as one of the science qualifications as an either/or option with Computer Science. This opportunity must be seized upon.

We believe that the skills shortage is a ticking time-bomb and must get a grip of it if we are to remain at the forefront of global product design. Bolstering the Design and Technology GCSE with inclusion in the EBacc is an important step towards addressing the skills shortage.

We would be grateful for the opportunity to meet you to discuss this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Donelan MP

And XXX others:

First name Surname (constituency)

First name Surname (constituency)

First name Surname (constituency)