

## Hansard, House of Lords, 17.10,2018

### Lord Agnew of Oulton

My Lords, there is no evidence that arts subjects have declined as a result of the introduction of the EBacc. Since the EBacc was announced in 2010 the proportion of young people taking at least one arts GCSE has fluctuated across the years, but has remained broadly stable. The best schools in the country combine a high-quality cultural education with excellence in core academic subjects. I reassure my noble friend of the importance, to my mind, of music to brain development, and I shall quote from a study on this; the education system needs to become more aware of it.

“Music’s pitch, rhythm, metre and timbre are processed in ... the brain ... Rhythm and pitch are primarily left brain hemisphere functions, while timbre and melody are processed primarily in the right hemisphere”.

Music is an integral part of our education, and so is EBacc.

### Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab)

My Lords, I am not sure where the noble Lord gets his evidence from. I wonder whether he is aware of research, published just this week and launched in this House, jointly commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company and Tate, from Nottingham University. The unique feature of this research is that it talks to young people about their experience of arts and cultural education. One of the things that emerges from it is that they are clearly getting a strong message that, important as this is to them, it is not valued in the curriculum: consequently they are often discouraged from taking it up. He might, if he has time, listen to the recent appearance of the noble Lord, Lord Bird, on “Private Passions” to hear first-hand testimony of what an impact music can make on one person’s education, particularly someone who did not have a very good start in life. How much more evidence do the Government need before recognising that this is a serious issue not just for future professionals but for all students?

### Lord Agnew of Oulton

To answer the noble Baroness’s first question, about where the research I am using comes from, an initial five-year study by the University of South Carolina showed that music instruction appears to accelerate brain development in young children. I entirely accept that, but let us also talk about the amount of time that is being devoted to the teaching of music in schools. Music as a percentage of teaching time in secondary schools has remained broadly stable since 2010: 2.4% in 2010 and 2.3% in 2017. I get that data—I am conscious of noble Lords saying that we are loose with our data—from the school workforce census, a survey of 76% of secondary teachers and 85% of secondary schools.

## **Hansard: House of Lords, 18.10.2018**

2.30 The Earl of Clancarty (CB) (Nicholas Le Poer Trench, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl)

My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Black of Brentwood, has given us a speech telling it how it is. Music education in schools is under threat in this country. The noble Lord gave us the statistics: a 23% drop in GCSE entries in music since 2010, and 7% in the last year alone. To compare with two EBacc subjects, geography and history, geography GCSE entries have risen 38% and history by 22% since 2010. The Government have made claims that they are doing some kind of counterbalancing measure, yet geography, an important subject, nevertheless has almost seven times the number of GCSE entries as music. This is an extreme imbalance. Of course, because arts subjects are excluded from the EBacc, this is happening not just to music but to all the arts and design subjects, and surely one of the more shocking facts is the drop of over a quarter in arts subjects overall taken at GCSE level in the last three years alone.

More shocking still are the department's figures on the number of teachers and hours taught: a 13% drop in the number of music teachers and a 13% drop in hours taught for music since 2010. The facts are shocking because they more immediately reflect the increasing lack of provision of and commitment to the teaching of music—and again it is the same story in all the arts, with 20% of teachers being lost overall since 2010. All this is backed up by the evidence from the schools themselves: for example, the University of Sussex research, which the noble Lords, Lord Black and Lord Clement-Jones, referred to, and which the noble Lord, Lord Lloyd-Webber, called “an urgent wake-up call”. One of its telling conclusions is a continuing decline in the number of schools offering GCSE music, with no option in 18% of schools and a further fall of almost 6% predicted up to 2020.

It is getting a little frustrating having to quote back to the department year after year its own figures, alongside all the other evidence. It is frustrating to be faced with a department which seems to want to continue to bury its head in the sand. It seems extraordinarily unconstructive that the Government merely ignore the views of expert bodies and schools organisations such as the Association of School and College Leaders. The best that the Minister could do yesterday in response to the Oral Question from the noble Lord, Lord Black, was to cite the old New Schools Network conclusion about the broad stability of the proportion of young people taking at least one arts GCSE—and it is not true, in part because it leaves out design and technology, which is a significant exclusion. Also, what an unambitious standard to want to celebrate, since it ignores all the students who might want to do more than one arts subject since they are often complementary: dance and music, or music and drama, for example. Students should have the clear option to do so if they wish. I recently visited a school in the Midlands which was set up as a specialised visual arts secondary school, and it now does not offer more than one arts subject per pupil at GCSE level. The head of its arts department also has to teach geography, which is a nonsense at that level of

teaching—or in fact at any level. Indeed, the Sussex University research confirms that 70% of secondary school music teachers have had to teach outside their subject area since 2016.

The pressure of course is that the EBacc as an accountability measure now effectively forces schools into a particular straitjacket they do not want necessarily to be in. But this is changing the culture of school education to the extent that arts subject are valued less, as is confirmed by both teachers and, significantly, by students, in the extensive new study *Time to Listen* by Nottingham University, published jointly by the Royal Shakespeare Company and Tate, and which the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh of Hudnall, referred to yesterday. Subjects are valued less so they are not offered—it becomes a vicious circle. Moreover, the Sussex research finds that even where music is offered, in some schools students can be discouraged from taking up that option in order to concentrate on EBacc subjects. But also, at a time when schools are strapped for cash, the teachers will not be taken on either, which is why I am extremely sceptical about the Minister's statement yesterday in answer to the Oral Question of the noble Lord, Lord Black, that there is no crisis because of a low vacancy rate for music teachers. That says nothing at all about whether music teachers should not be taken on, but may speak volumes about the priorities that schools are forced to have to meet the EBacc goal.

It is becoming clear too that the effect of the EBacc culture is not confined to GCSEs. The knock-on effect, as the noble Lord Black pointed out, affects the pipeline of talent. He spoke about A-level music entries dropping by 3% in the last year and a frightening 38% since 2010. At the other end, music is fast disappearing from primary schools, and the Incorporated Society of Musicians has also commissioned a study on this from Kevin Rogers, who was the last county inspector of music in the country—which already says something in itself. He shows that accountability measures are responsible for this decline.

The hope in all of this lies in what I think is a discernible change in the public mood, which is one of increasing concern. The Nottingham University study calls for parity between the arts and other subjects at key stage 3, a proper recognition of the arts in the Ofsted inspection process, and a minimum proportion of time dedicated to creative subjects. It also calls for an arts premium for all schoolchildren and a review of the importance of the arts—this is significant—among Russell Group universities.

I hope that the department will finally listen. Much is at stake, not least the future of music as well as the other arts, many of which interact with and depend on each other, and I ask that the department talks to the DCMS, which should be very worried, as we all should be, about what a continuing and deepening marginalisation of the arts and creative subjects in schools will mean in the long run for the health of the creative industries. Add to that the cuts and the serious problems of Brexit, particularly for musicians, and we have a potentially huge problem.

Written Question from Dame Deborah Bull

Department for Education

**Culture: Education**

[HL10939](#)

**To** ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the conclusion of the report by the University of Nottingham, **Timeto Listen**, published on 15 October, that arts and cultural education offers “systematic ways of developing understanding, new knowledge and skills”; and what steps they are taking **to** ensure that arts and cultural education is sufficiently prioritised in the national curriculum.

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