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DS B.M.

Thank you for your letter of 6 December regarding the inclusion of RE in the English Baccalaureate. Please accept my apologies for the unacceptable delay in responding.

The question of which subjects should count towards this new measure of achievement has inspired a fair amount of comment already. Your letter is another well argued contribution to the debate.

The English Baccalaureate is, above all, a measurement designed to recognise and reward those students who have succeeded in rigorous tests of academic achievement. It reflects what happens in other high performing nations whose education systems equip their students effectively for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In countries such as Holland, Germany, France, Singapore, Hong Kong and the USA, all students are assessed in a core of academic subjects at the age of 16.

Whether or not students subsequently pursue these academic subjects, or follow a more vocational path, it is accepted that every citizen has an entitlement to be educated in these areas.

It is striking that across different countries and cultures there is an expectation that every student should be proficient in their mother tongue, another language, mathematics, the sciences, and one other area, normally one of the humanities. It is equally noteworthy that in this country, our measurement of achievement at 16 is built around just English and mathematics.

If we are to raise standards in our schools and raise the aspirations of all students we should expect to match, indeed outstrip, our competitors. It is no longer good enough simply to compare our educational achievement with the past. When the evidence shows that our schools are sliding down the international league tables and our children are falling behind, we cannot afford to remain insular and backward looking. That is why the English Baccalaureate has been introduced, so our students can see how well they are doing compared to students in other countries.

The English Baccalaureate recognises those pupils and those schools that succeed in securing achievement in the core subjects of English language, mathematics, the sciences, an ancient or modern foreign language and a humanities subject. It is perfectly possible for students to secure GCSEs in every one of these areas and also for there to be ample time in the curriculum to achieve GCSEs in other subjects or to pursue vocational learning.

I understand your particular attachment to Religious Studies. It is certainly true that Religious Education has many strengths as a subject. It helps students to develop an awareness of ethical and moral issues, as well as a sympathetic understanding of the world around them. RE, however, occupies a different position in the existing National Curriculum from history and geography. RE is a compulsory subject until the age of 16; history and geography are not. There has been a precipitate decline in the study of both subjects, especially geography. The English Baccalaureate will, I hope, encourage more students to study history and geography. It will also allow them to study RS alongside these subjects.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write to me on this very important issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Y-S' followed by a stylized flourish.

MICHAEL GOVE