Why choice in qualifications matters

Mike Cresswell

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Every young person

"The important thing is not so much that every child should be taught but that every child should be given the wish to learn."

John Lubbock (1834 – 1913)

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Every Child Matters website

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" … the primary professional responsibility of teachers … is to maximise the learning opportunities of their students …"

Coffield, Moseley, Hall and Eccleston (2004)

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Learning styles

	Meaning-directed	Application-directed	Reproduction-directed	Undirected
Cognitive processing	Look for relationships between key concepts/theories: build an overview	Relate topics to everyday experience: look for concrete examples and uses	Select main points to retain	Find study difficult; read and re-read
Learning orientation	Self-improvement and enrichment	Vocational or 'real world' outcomes	Prove competence by getting good marks	Ambivalent; insecure
Affective processes	Intrinsic interest and pleasure	Interested in practical details	Put in time and effort; afraid of forgetting	Lack confidence; fear of failure
Mental model of learning	Dialogue with experts stimulates thinking and engagement with subject through exchange of views	Learn in order to use knowledge	Look for structure in teaching and texts to help take in knowledge and pass examinations. Do not value critical processing or peer discussion	Want teachers to do more; seek peer support
Regulation of learning	Self-guided by interest and their own questions; diagnose and correct poor understanding	Think of problems and examples to test understanding, especially of abstract concepts	Use objectives to check understanding; self-test; rehearse	Not adaptive

Vermunt (1990)

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Choice improves motivation and success

"Providing students with a sense of control and choice over their school lives enhances intrinsic motivation."

Deci and Ryan (1985)

"When Students have choices … they also report more interest in course content, value the subject more, and are more focused on learning…"

Pintrich, Roeser and De Groot (1992)

"Providing choice enhanced intrinsic motivation, effort, task performance, and … competence."

Patall, Cooper and Robinson (2008)

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Choice of subject

"Students who reported they selected subjects based on their *Interest* in the subject or perceived *Utility/Importance* of the subject demonstrated significantly higher academic achievement."

Meyer, Weir, McClure, Walkey and McKenzie (2007)

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Most A-level students do not specialise

Subject Area	Percentage of all candidates in the subject area doing	
	2 or 3 A-levels within the area	1 A-level within the area
Sciences	59%	41%
Humanities	27%	73%
Social Sciences	14%	86%
Languages	13%	87%

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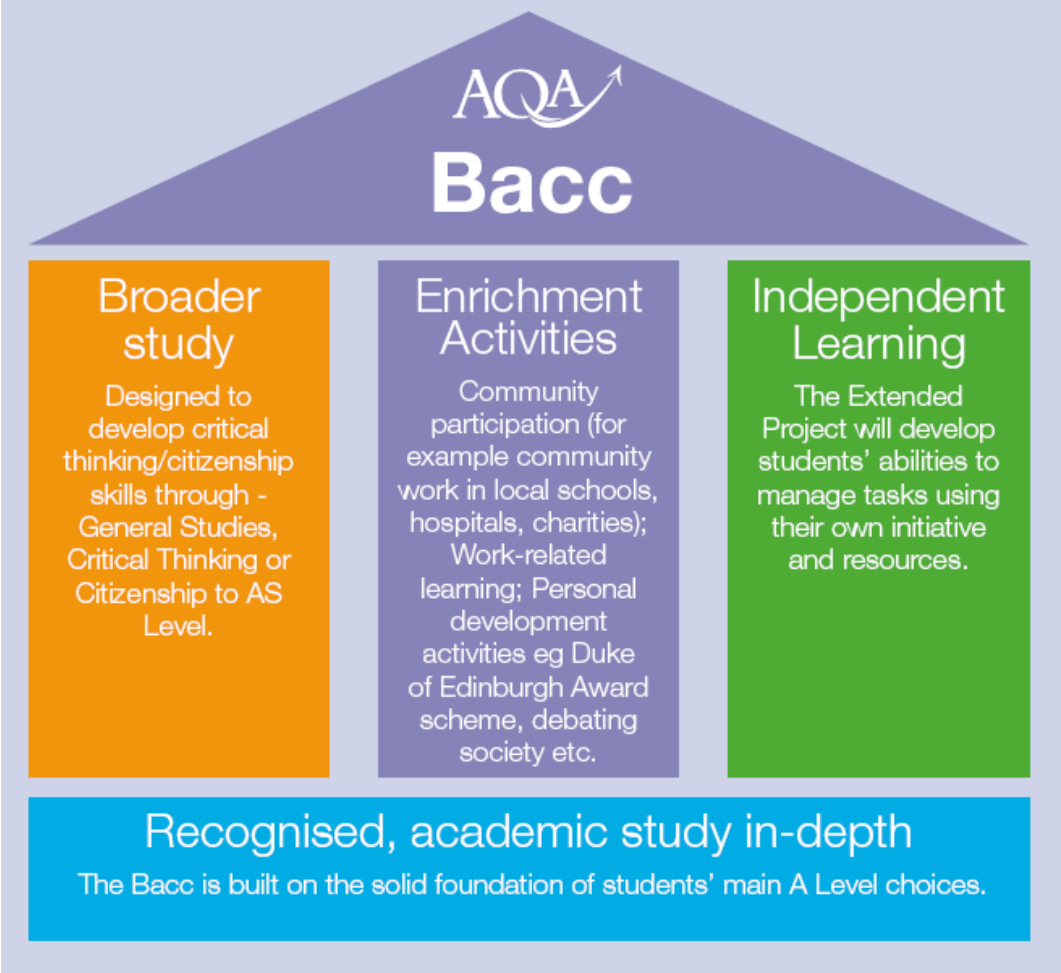
Choice and breadth of learning and skills



To achieve an AQA Bacc:

- at least 3 A Levels in any subjects
- a 'breadth' subject to at least AS level
  - General Studies or
  - Critical Thinking or
  - Citizenship
- an Extended Project
- Enrichment activities
  - Community participation
  - Work-related learning
  - Personal development
- prior achievement of 5 A* to C GCSEs, including English and Maths

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Summary

- Choice between Diplomas, GCSEs and A-levels (+ Apprenticeships) facilitates a wide range of learning styles.

- The choices available within Diplomas, GCSEs and, especially, A-levels are a major strength of the current and developing qualifications system.

- Choice in qualifications matters because it:
- is appreciated and used by young people
- facilitates learning in different ways for different learners
- improves motivation and achievement
- And is therefore important for the engagement of more 14 – 19 year-olds in successful learning.

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