



The Royal Society of Chemistry's response to the Advanced British Standard (ABS) consultation

March 2024

In October 2023 the Conservative Government announced their proposals for 16-19 reform in England in the form of the Advanced British Standard, a new Baccalaureate-style qualification framework for 16-19 year-olds. The consultation sought views on the policy proposals underpinning the new qualification, with the

11. We propose several overarching aims and principles that should underpin the introduction

12. What do you think is the most important thing that the Advanced British Standard could achieve?

There are a number of things that the ABS could and should aim to achieve.

To be most effective, the pre-16 and post-19 landscape should be considered in conjunction with the ABS. Progression between phases must be planned so that each stage of education builds on what has come before, whether learners follow the occupational or more academic route.

Employers need to understand and have confidence in the grades that a young person gains as part of this qualification, and (initially) how they compare to the system this qualification will supersede. There must be comparability of grades between different subjects.

Any institutions that may take on a student who holds the new qualification (employers, HE etc) need to be well informed and consulted in this reform process. These institutions will need to know what these young people are able to do and the knowledge they should possess.

The ABS needs to target a genuine parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes. We

language delineates the qualifications and naturally separates them. There needs to also be proper student choice for each pathway through equity of access at their post-16 provider.

Chapter 2 - Section 1

Advanced British Standard. Section 1 focuses on the Advanced British Standard programmes that students will study and what these will look like.

14. We propose two main programmes at Level 3: Advanced British Standard and Advanced British Standard (occupational). Each will contain a range of separate components to support students. To what extent do you support the proposed design for the Level 3 Advanced British Standard programmes? If you have further views on this, please share below.

Somewhat oppose

In principle we welcome the proposal to include some form of maths and English for all students to 18. Maths is important for chemists as is written communication the challenge will be making the offering useful for a range of subject combinations.

We are concerned that the perceived lack of parity between current technical and academic routes will

brackets but not having a similar bracketed description for highlights their differences. We recommend that both Level 3 ABS routes have the same name, the combination of options taken will make it clear which route a candidate is following.

Efforts to create parity between academic and vocational options are welcome

Chapter 2 - Section 2

Advanced British Standard. Section 2 focuses on the design of the component parts of the Advanced
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21. Once rolled out, we anticipate that the Advanced British Standard qualification framework will supersede the varied Level 3(a)-302 116 (y)20 ()](e)16 (l)-3 (3(-5 (a)16 (t)-6 (io)9 (loyi9 (k)-3-8 (r)2l (p)-5 (a)-3

27. If you have views or evidence on how time for employability, enrichment and pastoral (EEP) can best be used, please share below. We particularly welcome views and evidence about how to support students with additional challenges, e.g. lower prior attainment or the most disadvantaged.

We welcome the inclusion of time for EEP as a part of the ABS. Teachers we consulted agreed that a well-run EEP programme would be a positive addition to the ABS. They felt that this was an opportunity to develop a broader range of knowledge and skills which were separate from academic studies. They also recommended that students should be given a recognition certificate to celebrate their achievements on the EEP programme. However, it is important to note that teachers were opposed to this component being assessed through traditional written examinations.

Chapter 4

43. What strengths in the current approach to 16-19 education should we aim to preserve under the Advanced British Standard?

HE providers have told us that the practical endorsement aspect of A-level chemistry has been good for fostering practical skills in students starting undergraduate courses. ABS chemistry majors and minors must include development of practical skills.

A strength of the existing A-level system is that it is well understood by HE providers and employers. The ABS will need to be clearly explained to stakeholders, especially employers so that they can

Both science routes contain a lot of shared content. The additional content in separate sciences adds breadth rather than taking learners to a higher level. However, many schools that offer triple science teach it on a compressed allocation of lesson time resulting in the course being more challenging.

With a single route, all learners will have the opportunity to explore the sciences and to see if further study is for them. It should ensure all learners studying ABS science subjects are starting from the same strong foundations

49. If you have views on how students can be supported to make informed choices for their Advanced British Standard programme or apprenticeship – linking to their prior attainment, abilities, interests and future ambitions – please share below.

It is important for young people have links with employers and sound careers advice during their education. Careers advice and information about the range of courses and qualifications available should start early

51. If you have views or evidence on the additional support that may be needed to enable other groups of students to access the Advanced British Standard, please share them below. Examples of these groups include disadvantaged students and students with caring responsibilities.

Whilst we acknowledge the benefit of increased guided learning hours, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, FE providers told us that some of their students need to take on part-time work alongside their studies. Flexibility around this may be needed to make the ABS accessible for such students.

52. If you have views on how to ensure the Advanced British Standard provides effective pathways into post-18 education or study, please share below.

To provide effective pathways to post-18 education and study, there needs to be effort to ensure that ABS provides parity of esteem between technical and academic routes. However, naming the qualification routes ABS and ABS (occupational) automatically introduces disparity.

Clear careers guidance will be needed to ensure that students choose combination of courses that are require a major rather than a minor for entry onto certain courses. And double occupational specialisms may not be accepted by some HE providers.

We also recommend that connections are developed between educational institutions offering the ABS and universities. This would provide opportunities for students to explore post-18 education.

53. If you have views on how to ensure the Advanced British Standard reforms meet the needs of employers, please share below.

When implementing the ABS reforms, it is crucial that a representative sample of employers are consulted, particularly employers that might offer placements for the ABS (occupational) programme, and those who hire school leavers. Employers should have a say on the skills and knowledge requirements for students, so that young people are sufficiently equipped to enter the workforce.

It is also essential that students are given clear career guidance. This should help inform ABS subject choices and make students aware of the vocational and academic pathways available to them after completing the ABS.

We advise that there is a strong consideration of whether industry placements will be feasible as a part of the ABS (occupational) route, making sure that the challenges from the T-level placements are considered. We are aware that there has been difficulty finding placements for young people taking the T-level courses.

Connections should be developed between educational institutions offering the ABS and employers. This would provide opportunities for young people to explore career pathways available to them.