

SEPA response to DfE's consultation on Key stage 4 performance measures and targeted RISE extension

The Department for Education (DfE) sought views through a ten-week consultation on the proposals to improve key stage 4 academic performance measures and to extend school improvement support from the DfE's Targeted RISE service.

The DfE's consultation on Key stage 4 performance measures and targeted RISE extension opened on 23 February 2026 and closed 4 May 2026

SEPA Strategic Group submitted a response in April 2026

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Background

The Science Education Policy Alliance (SEPA) represents the leading professional bodies in the sciences, working together since 2008 to influence national science education policy. SEPA brings together the Association for Science Education, Institute of Physics, Royal Society, Royal Society of Biology and Royal Society of Chemistry. SEPA's current Chair is Professor Dame Athene Donald DBE FRS.

SEPA's mission is to bring about systemic improvement, by influencing policy and therefore funding and practice so that all students experience a high-quality, inclusive, accessible and contemporary 5–19 education in the sciences that unlocks individual opportunity, supports economic growth and benefits our society.

SEPA welcomes this opportunity to comment on proposed changes to the Progress 8 performance measure put forward by the Department for Education. Due to the nature of our focus and our expertise, this response will focus on the changes to how science is measured in the proposal. This response does not override or contravene any submissions the member organisations of SEPA may make separately, but is made with the intention of highlighting our shared understanding and thinking about the proposals for science.

SEPA response to consultation questions:

Question 11: How far do you agree that these changes to the Progress 8 model strike a better balance between breadth and flexibility compared with the current P8?

SEPA recognises the inclusion of two dedicated science slots within the new Progress 8 measure as a positive step in strengthening the prominence of the sciences within the curriculum, given the removal of

the EBacc measure as recommended in the Curriculum and Assessment Review.

However, SEPA is concerned that this proposal is out of step with the governments' recent announcement regarding provision of triple science, which all schools will be expected to offer as standard. Offering two slots for the sciences appears to contrast with this requirement and could lead to confusion for schools, so additional advice and guidance should be made available.

As SEPA has previously stated in correspondence with the Department for Education, we remain keen to explore with DfE the implications of an entitlement to triple science, and explore the barriers to schools and within regions – including any implications for accountability as reflected in the Progress 8 proposals.

SEPA published a statement in November 2025¹ in response to the final report of the Curriculum and Assessment Review which noted: careful consideration will be needed to ensure that implementation does not overburden schools and teachers or inadvertently widen disparities. For this entitlement to have a meaningful impact, issues around timetabling, deployment of teachers, choice of qualification route, and the purpose and perception of triple science and Combined Science GCSEs must be acknowledged, addressed, and monitored.

SEPA therefore is supportive of the move to ensuring science has a dedicated space within the measure, but would like to discuss this further with DfE to understand how this interacts with the triple science entitlement.

¹ [SEPA highlights priorities for science education | Royal Society](#)

Question 12: What are your views on the inclusion of a fourth category (science) for breadth slots 5 and 6?

The Department for Education's proposal suggests the inclusion of a fourth category (D) to the 'breadth' slots which would potentially include Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Combined Science, Computer Science and Design and Technology. This category is where the third science subject would sit for a student taking triple science, something which all schools are required to work towards offering after the government's acceptance of the triple science entitlement as recommended by the Curriculum and Assessment Review.

SEPA would like to understand how the government intends to ensure that choice and breadth are balanced across all disciplines through the proposed changes, and to seek clarity on the rationale for reflecting the triple science entitlement in the Progress 8 measure through the implied third 'breadth' slot. On the latter point, SEPA is concerned about the disconnect between the proposal for two dedicated science slots in the Progress 8 measure, and DfE's intention for all schools to provide a triple science entitlement for students.

SEPA would like to know what consideration has been given to a mechanism to identify and prevent any unintended negative consequences of the proposal set out by DfE.

Question 13: Do you agree that Progress 8 should allow technical awards in the breadth and choice slots, with a maximum of two across all slots?

SEPA believes that the proposed Progress 8 model should allow the inclusion of technical awards across the breadth and choice slots. This inclusion will signal the value of high-quality technical qualifications alongside traditional GCSEs, and could help to improve awareness of progression routes to a variety of pathways.

SEPA would like to understand government's objectives and reasoning for the limit of two technical awards across the breadth and choice slots, in the context of ambitions for parity of esteem and flexibility between technical and academic pathways.

Question 15: Do you have any other comments on the proposed changes?

SEPA notes that the proposal to average grades is not possible for combined science, which is awarded on a 17-point scale. The grade a student receives isn't a combination of two grades but a single grade on this 17-point scale, arrived at by totalling the marks the student achieved over all of the papers sat for the combined science GCSE.

If a student received, for example, a grade 7-6, it is not possible to combine these and average out to a single grade of 6.5, as the grade 7-6 is already a single grade reflective of their achievement in the combined science assessments. Further, a student cannot get, e.g. grade 8-4 in combined science, as it is not one of the possible grades on the scale. .5 grades do not exist under the current grading system, in science or in any other subject, so it is hard to understand why this is a possible outcome in the Progress 8 measure for combined science.

Further clarity would be helpful on how accountability measures will support curriculum breadth and enable equitable access to science pathways, while avoiding any unintended consequences.

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