# Greater Manchester Combined Authority – Parents’ Survey 2023

## Context

The topline findings for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Parents’ Survey 2023 are set out below. The findings are divided under three headings: **(1)** attitudes towards school curriculum; **(2)** awareness of 16+ options; **(3)** awareness of and support for the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc). Finally there is a summary section to analyse the insights as a whole.

Fieldwork took place between 20th July – 1st August 2023. Data has been weighted to be representative of parents across Greater Manchester using information from the 2021 Census and the Greater Manchester Residents’ Survey.

BMG interviewed a total of 975 parents across Greater Manchester. To take part in the survey, respondents needed to have at least one child of school age. The proportion with a child at each educational stage is shown in the table below.

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| Educational stage | Percentage with a child in this stage |
| Pre-school age child/children | 27% |
| Primary school-age child/children, years 1-6 | 45% |
| High school-age child/children, years 7-11 | 35% |
| High school-age child/children, years 12-13 | 21% |

Q1. Are you a parent or carer of a school-age child/children? Please select all that apply.

**Attitudes towards school curriculum**

While 2 in 5 (41%) parents aren’t sure what schools currently place more focus on in their curriculum, if they are aware they are most likely to say there is more focus on academic subjects such as maths, science, and languages (32%, rising to 54% if “don’t know” is removed). In terms of what schools should focus on, parents are most likely to think there should be an equal focus on both academic and technical subjects (44%, rising to 66% if “don’t know” is removed), however a third (33%) are still unsure where the focus should be.

Parents whose children are in years 12 and 13 are more likely than average to say there is more focus on academic subjects (39%) suggesting that those who have been through the 16+ process feel it was weighted to academic subjects.

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| Focus | Currently place… | Should place… |
| more focus on academic subjects (such as maths, science, and language) | 32% | 9% |
| more focus on technical subjects (such as construction, engineering, arts, and creative) | 7% | 14% |
| an equal focus on academic and technical subjects | 20% | 44% |
| Don't know | 41% | 33% |

Q4. Please consider the point in Year 9 that your child/children are choosing their future subjects, do you think schools...?

Parents are fairly evenly split on whether businesses should have a role in influencing the subjects taught at local schools. Almost 2 in 5 (37%) think they should have an influence, however over 2 in 4 (27%) think only schools should decide, and 35% didn’t feel able to provide an opinion. Those who believe that there should be more focus on technical subjects within schools are more likely to see a role for businesses in deciding the curriculum (60%), as are those from C2 socio-economic backgrounds (51%). Conversely, those from an AB background are less likely to agree with this (30%).

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| Statement | Percentage selecting |
| Local businesses should have an influence on the subjects taught at schools, to help young people get the jobs that the local area needs | 37% |
| Only schools should decide which subjects they teach in line with the national curriculum | 27% |
| Don't know | 35% |

Q5. Which of the below statements comes closer to your view?

**Awareness of 16+ options**

Parents are most likely to be aware of A-levels (76%) as a 16+ option for their children, though more than 3 in 5 are aware of apprenticeships (69%) and BTECS (61%). Awareness is lower for Higher technical qualifications (33%), T-levels (24%), and the English Baccalaureate/EBacc (18%). Awareness of 16+ options is generally higher amongst parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds and educational levels.

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| Educational option | Percentage aware of this |
| A-levels | 76% |
| Apprenticeships | 69% |
| BTECS | 61% |
| Vocational (practical courses) | 45% |
| Higher Technical qualifications | 33% |
| T-levels | 24% |
| English Baccalaureate (EBacc) | 18% |
| Other | 8% |
| None of the above | 11% |

Q2. Which qualifications are you aware of as options for your child/children after year 11? Please select all that apply.

Two-thirds (66%) of parents say they are familiar with the steps required for their child to attend university. This is slightly higher than the awareness of the alternative steps required to into employment with training at 16, but awareness of this is still good with almost 3 in 5 (57%) saying they are aware.

Familiarity with the steps required for university is much higher for those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, as the degree of that familiarity – for example, those from ABC1 backgrounds are significantly more likely to be “very familiar” than those from C2 backgrounds, while C2 are more likely to be “somewhat familiar”. However, there is less of a notable difference between socio-economic grades in the awareness of the steps required to go into employment with training.

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| Future option | Percentage familiar with the steps required for a child to do this |
| University | 66% |
| Employment with training at 16 | 57% |

Q3. How familiar, if at all, are you with the steps required for your child/children if they want/wanted to go into…?

Familiarity with the steps required to take A-levels is good amongst those aware of them as an option for their children, with 86% saying they know what is required. However, even if parents are aware of Higher Technical qualifications or T-levels as options for their children, familiarity with the steps required for their child to take these is much lower – Only 3 in 5 of those aware of Higher Technical qualifications (57%) and half of those aware of T-levels (47%) would know how to support their child to take these.

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| Future option | Percentage familiar with the steps required for a child to do this |
| A-levels (amongst those aware of A-levels only) | 86% |
| Higher Technical qualifications (amongst those aware of Higher Technical qualifications only) | 57% |
| T-levels (amongst those aware of T-levels only) | 47% |

Q3. How familiar, if at all, are you with the steps required for your child/children if they want/wanted to go into…?

**Awareness of and support for the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc)**

Awareness of the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate is low, with only 15% of those in Greater Manchester familiar with it. Familiarity with it is highest in Manchester (23%) itself, suggesting that those living in the center of the region are more likely to have been exposed to information about it. Those without a university education are significantly more likely to be aware of the MBacc (24%) than those with a bachelors degree or higher (13%), but those from C2 (8%) and DE (13%) are less likely to be aware of it than those from an AB background (17%).

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| Familiarity with the MBacc | Percentage  |
| Very familiar | 4% |
| Somewhat familiar | 11% |
| Not that familiar | 21% |
| Not at all familiar | 64% |
| NET: Familiar | 15% |

Q6. In Greater Manchester there is a proposal to introduce the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (or MBacc). This is designed to provide children aged 14-16 an education option that focuses on technical subjects such as engineering, construction, or digital skills. The aim being to provide a route into further technical education as an alternative to university. Before today, how familiar were you with proposals to introduce a Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc)?

Regardless of prior awareness, support for the MBacc is high, with 3 in 5 (59%) supportive of it, while just 4% oppose it. Support is marginally higher amongst those parents with children currently in school years 7-11 (64%), whose children are most likely to be choosing their options currently or in the next few years. Likewise, those who believe there should be more focus on vocational subjects in schools, or an equal focus with academic subjects are much more supportive of the MBacc (79% and 74% respectively).

However, those without a university education (54%), or who are from a lower socio-economic background (C2=53%, DE=50%) are less likely to be supportive of the MBacc, and more likely to be neutral or say they “don’t know” about its introduction.

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| Support for the MBacc | Percentage  |
| Strongly support | 32% |
| Somewhat support | 27% |
| Neither support nor oppose | 14 |
| Somewhat oppose | 3% |
| Strongly oppose | 1% |
| Don't know | 22 |
| NET: Support | 59% |
| NET: Oppose | 4% |

Q7. To what extent do you support or oppose the proposal to develop the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc), which aims to provide a route into further technical education as an alternative to university?

**Summary**

There is a sense amongst Greater Manchester parents that schools do lean towards more emphasis on academic subjects when advising children in year 9 about their future, and that they would support a more equal approach – though it should be noted that there are many who feel they “don’t know” about this.

There is also currently a gap between parents’ awareness of A-levels and apprenticeships, and the other qualifications available to their children, especially when it comes to more technically focused academic routes. Indeed, even amongst those familiar with technical courses like Higher Technical qualifications or T-levels, there is a much lower familiarity with how their children can take these courses than there is for taking A-levels or going into employment with training at 16.

The Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) aims to provide children in Greater Manchester with further options for pursuing a technical qualification and support amongst parents is high, especially for those at or approaching the age where they start to make educational decisions. However, awareness of the MBacc is low amongst parents, especially outside of Central Manchester, limiting the potential for children to take this course if it were introduced in the future.