

South Wales West Regional Committee

Minutes (SWaWR (2)-01-06)

Date: Friday 17 March 2006

Time: 9:30am to 12:30pm

Venue: Pencoed Welfare Hall, Bridgend

Assembly Members in Attendance

Assembly Member	Constituency
Peter Black	South Wales West
Alun Cairns	South Wales West
Janet Davies (Chair)	South Wales West
Janice Gregory	Ogmore
Brian Gibbons	Aberavon
Edwina Hart	Gower
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Dai Lloyd	South Wales West
Gwenda Thomas	Neath

In Attendance

Name	Representing (if applicable)
Alwyn J Thomas	Head teacher, Bryntirion School
Fay Apsee	Student, Bryntirion School
Richard Jones	Student, Bryntirion School
Mark Jones	Principal, Bridgend College

Louise McGibbon	Welsh Baccalaureate tutor, Bridgend College
Robert Evans	Assistant Principal, Bridgend College
Laura Williams	Student, Bridgend College
Pili Keen	Welsh Baccalaureate co-ordinator, Neath Port Talbot College
Jane Morgan	Assistant Afan campus manager, Neath Port Talbot College
Kristina Southcott	Student, Neath Port Talbot College
Richard Giannini	Student, Neath Port Talbot College
Darren Isaac	Student, Neath Port Talbot College
Elaine Edwards	UCAC

Committee Service in Attendance

Name	Job title
Jane Westlake	Committee Clerk
Sara Mansour	Deputy Committee Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Assembly Member	Constituency
Val Lloyd	Swansea East

Item 1: Welcome and introduction.

1.1 The Chair welcomed Committee Members, presenters and members of the public.

1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

Item 2: Education for 16 to 19-year olds, in particular the Welsh Baccalaureate.

2.1 Mr Alwyn Thomas made a representation on behalf of Bryntirion School on the Welsh Baccalaureate. He made the following points:

- people are able to carry on with A levels and do subjects that interest them, as well as gaining important key skills;
- it has a core and an options element. The core components consist of
 - key skills,
 - Wales, Europe and the World,
 - Work –related Education and
 - Personal and Social Education.
- Bryntirion School was accepted as a third cohort centre during June 2004 after submitting an application to the WJEC and the National Assembly;
- the year's planning period was crucial to success.
- a working group of staff meets on a regular basis to review progress;
- the Welsh Baccalaureate was officially launched at Bryntirion in April 2005 and it started in September;
- the qualification is now widely recognised by universities;
- the qualification is in demand and universities are looking for key skills which the Baccalaureate provides;
- it allows students to be credited with a number of different activities that A levels alone do not offer;
- students have been on a number of visits and intend to visit the Houses of Parliament and the Senedd at the National Assembly for Wales;
- they also had "Question Time" with Carwyn Jones as a guest speaker;
- these activities have improved students communication and debating skills, and have also given them an insight into politics.

2.2 Mr Mark Jones, Mr Robert Jones, Ms Louise McGibbon and Miss Laura Williams made a representation on behalf of Bridgend College on the Welsh Baccalaureate. Mr R. Jones made the following points:

- he outlined the general format of the Welsh Baccalaureate;
- in the college it is exclusively a vocational qualification;
- Bridgend College joined the pilot as they saw it as an opportunity to accredit existing activity;
- as part of their planning they visited other colleges and schools that had already introduced the Baccalaureate;
- 130 students enrolled on the Welsh Baccalaureate this year and they hope to expand this to 300

students next year.

2.3 Ms Louise McGibbon made the following points:

- the requirements of the Welsh Baccalaureate have been embedded into the components of the main programme of study;
- they have met and overcome the challenges;
- individual lecturers were encouraged to re-visit their own subjects and re-evaluate teaching methods;
- students were committed to the course;
- in addition to the qualification students were better developed and equipped with the necessary skills for their future.

2.4 Miss Laura Williams made the following points:

- through the Welsh Baccalaureate students have been on a number of visits and have covered issues such as drug addiction, drink-driving, citizenship, community work;
- the students have also had a talk from the Electoral Commission;
- the course has been very enjoyable and has increased students' confidence and improved their communication skills.

2.5 In response to questions from Members, presenters made the following points:

- as a result of the Welsh Baccalaureate students have learnt more about politics and the relationship of Wales to other countries;
- it has given students a wider general education;
- the Welsh Baccalaureate does not jeopardise other qualifications as they are embedded, the International Baccalaureate is different as it replaces A levels and other vocational qualifications;
- the Welsh Baccalaureate has given students an exciting additional dimension to their studies;
- it is being evaluated by two universities and the students' views are taken into account;
- the qualification is recognised by Welsh universities and English institutions are starting to follow;
- the School of Medicine welcomes the evidence of breadth of experience and interpersonal skills demonstrated by successful students;
- the Baccalaureate brings parity between vocational and academic qualifications;
- there would be benefit in starting studies at an earlier age, perhaps 14, as 16-18 years is slightly too late;
- there is a vocational pathway and tutors are always looking at students' needs and whether the level is appropriate, the curriculum is always changing to suit the students' needs.
- the Welsh Baccalaureate does not interfere with her A level studies.
- Bryntirion School offers 26 A level subjects as well as GNVQ's and NVQ's;
- Bridgend College offers 22 A level subjects;

- the college also offers "twilight" A level courses to school students in subjects that the school might not otherwise be able to offer;
- disabled students integrate as much as possible;
- colleges and schools will learn from the experiences so far and will continue to assess how the qualification is progressing;
- a foundation course at key stage four would help prepare pupils for the Baccalaureate course.
- nothing needs improving currently;
- there should always be student feedback and evaluation to assess the student's progress.

2.6 In response to a question from a member of the public from Swansea, presenters said :

- Laura Williams is not doing A levels;
- Richard Jones is studying the following A levels: Maths, Music, Geography and Computer Studies;
- Fay Apsee is studying the following A levels: Biology, Chemistry, Geography and Finance.

2.7 Cynthia Thomas, from Pencoed said that her great-nephew who is disabled is not receiving enough support from his school and she asked how she could improve this.

2.8 Peter Black advised that the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee was conducting a review on educational needs which is currently taking place. Alun Cairns said that local authorities have an obligation regarding this matter and advised Ms Thomas to discuss further with one of the AMs.

2.9 Ms Jane Morgan, Ms Pili Keen, Mr Richard Giannini, Miss Kristina Southcott and Mr Darren Isaac made a representation on behalf of Neath Port Talbot College on the Welsh Baccalaureate. Ms Jane Morgan made the following points:

- the College offers a wide range of courses and is the main provider of 16-19 education in the county.;
- the Welsh Baccalaureate was introduced in September 2003 to 18 students;
- the success rate has been excellent.

2.10 Ms Pili Keen said:

- vocational students and academic students are working together for the first time and they are very enthusiastic about this;
- time is allocated on a Wednesday for Baccalaureate work to avoid other clashes;
- the college runs it as a two year course, some institutions do it in one year, but that is considered to be too demanding.

2.11 Mr Richard Giannini made the following points:

- the Welsh Baccalaureate is good in that it offers key skills important for university and ensures people are more equipped for the working world;
- he is earning about topics that A levels do not cover;
- two hours set aside for the Baccalaureate makes it easy to study the Welsh Baccalaureate alongside A levels;
- the qualification results in 120 UCAS points although some universities do not accept it;
- there is no exam, only coursework.

2.12 Ms Kristina Southcott explained the elements she has covered in the course, making it clear that students take part in a variety of activities;

- she applied to six universities in total but only three accepted the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification.

2.13 Mr Darren Isaac made the following points:

- during his time in Swansea University the skills he had acquired from the Baccalaureate have proved very useful;
- the assignments and presentations he had to make during the Baccalaureate increased his confidence and he has gained new improved skills.

2.14 Elaine Edwards made a presentation on behalf of UCAC. She made the following points:

- she endorsed the positive elements submitted by the other presenters;
- a firm structure is essential to making the Baccalaureate work;
- Preparation is crucial to making it a successful qualification;
- schools and colleges involved in the piloting of the Baccalaureate receive specific funding for the additional costs, but schools and colleges that have not been involved in the pilot may not receive additional funding if it is mainstreamed;
- the 120 UCAS points is unfair as there is only a pass or a failure mark, no grading;
- more marketing is needed, particularly with regards to universities;
- the Welsh language should be used more, it is essential for the development of Wales.

2.15 Richard Giannini replied to a question from Sarah Philips from Scope Cymru He saying that:

- the International Baccalaureate is not studied along side A levels , it replaces them;
- the Welsh Baccalaureate has a broader curriculum and complements A levels.

2.16 In response to questions Elaine Edwards said:

- the Welsh Baccalaureate aims for a broader education and it would be useful undertake it at a younger age;

- the difficulties with extending the Welsh Baccalaureate to younger students is that they have a fuller timetable;
- coursework puts key stage four students under a lot of pressure;
- UCAC looks at the interest of Members so it is not their job to promote the Welsh Baccalaureate but they promote whatever their members support;
- universities complain about lack of skills students have when they arrive, but the Welsh Baccalaureate equips them with the necessary strengths they seek, it is therefore essential to promote this qualification;
- Oxbridge and other older universities are more receptive to the Welsh Baccalaureate than some of the newer universities;
- it might not be so easy for schools in rural areas to work in partnership with colleges, or to offer such a wide range of subjects as urban schools.

2.17 Sarah Phillips from Scope Cymru expressed concern regarding a particular individual with surplus palsy who is not allowed to attend summer school even though the Children's Act 2004 places a duty on them to help.

2.18 In response the Chair asked Ms Phillips to forward her concerns to the Clerk in writing.

2.19 Gwenda Thomas, Chair of the Equal Opportunities advised that the Committee is currently undertaking a review on services for vulnerable young people. The report would be published soon.

Action:

2.20 The minutes of the meeting would be sent to Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning and to Peter Black, Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee.

Item 3: Minutes

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October were agreed.

Date of Next Meeting

4.1 The date for the meeting is 9 June. Energy has been suggested as a topic but Members are welcome to suggest other topics through the Clerk.

4.2 Members thanked the Committee Chair for her work in the past year. The Committee also expressed appreciation to the Secretary of the Welfare Hall.

Committee Service

March 2006

