

South Wales West Regional Committee

SWaWR (2)-01-06 (p. 5)

Date: Friday 17 March 2006

Time: 9:30am to 12:30pm

Venue: Pencoed Welfare Hall, Bridgend

Title: Presentation from UCAC

The Welsh Baccalaureate

Advantages

- Exciting - with many advantages. The greatest advantage perhaps is that it recognises what pupils already do and acknowledges the value of the experiences and skills that cannot be acknowledged elsewhere.
- Encourages the development of skills and provides a variety of experiences.
- Builds on good practice and recognises a wide range of skills and experiences
- Many schools/colleges were already offering a range of opportunities to young people of charity work, young enterprise, community projects, and opportunities to work as a team and to develop key skills. The Bac provides a framework for these to be recognised and accredited.
- It works well where establishments had already developed a framework/structure for charity/community work, key skills etc.
- The Key Skills are embedded and some claim there is now more explicit use of them in the subjects. The Bac will also ensure that Key Skills become compulsory for every educational establishment 16-19.
- Transferable skills – young people may feel more engaged in learning. It encourages them to look more formally at their learning and assess how they can improve their performance – encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. Encourages greater co-operation as well as greater autonomy.
- Encourages establishments to work closer with the community – community understanding.
- Staff welcome the Qualification which accredits experiences/skills which are difficult to measure and encourage students to learn more about Wales, Europe and the World, encourages bilingualism and language study and allows students to become more aware of Wales and the World and cultural diversity.
- Heard exciting examples of a projects (Wales, Europe and the World) e.g. a link with Japan (pupils working together on a project about natural disasters); Learning Circle involving schools from 10 countries with every school in turn posting a weekly question on line for the other schools to respond – topics such as Child Soldiers etc. Schools/Colleges are clearly searching for different avenues to forge links with other countries.

- Useful for students – in terms of developing skills, providing a range of experiences and developing confidence – all very important for their future whether they decide to apply for Higher Education or for a job or training scheme, The experiences proved a wealth of topics for discussion at interview but more importantly develop their skills and expand their horizons.
- 120 points for UCAS equal to "A" grade at "A" level (for the 6 key skills and the full Bac) – a very good way of marketing the Bac to parents and pupils.
- The extended project??Encourages pupils to develop problem-solving skills, to be enterprising and work with others as part of a team
- Value – provides balance and breadth e.g. if pupil is taking 3 science based subjects.
- A lot of work but the students benefit a great deal from it.
- A lot of work but students gain a great deal
- One school spoke of allowing students to take only 3 AS/A level subjects to ensure they would be able to complete the demands of the Bac as well as they felt 4 subject +the Bac was too much
- Some students need more tutor support to develop but completing the Bac is important in terms of UCAS points and also the skills and experiences they have by the end, which improve their applications for course/ work. The Bac gives them an advantage. It prepares them for further independent study that will be necessary in Higher Education and prepares them for the workplace.

Challenges/ Concerns

- The 6 key skills will provide the greatest challenges in some establishments. It's likely that where there has been a focus on the development of key skills since 2000 and where students are already receiving a range of experiences there will be fewer problems adapting to the demands of the Welsh Bac.
- Some aspects need to be timetabled and have a definite structure e.g. numeracy while other aspects of key skills will be naturally covered in the chosen subjects.
- In order to ensure the necessary focus on the key skills some timetabled lessons are required – this adds to costs.
- Establishments need time to prepare – at least a year ahead for the challenges of the Bac (to create links, train and prepare staff, prepare resources and market the idea to pupils and parents)
- The 6,000-word project task is welcomed as it requires research and developing the knowledge and understanding of the student but the marking and moderation of the tasks is an extra demand on the teachers' workload. There is an added cost too of releasing staff for moderation.
- The role and time of the mentor is crucial – an extra cost too – finding mentoring time etc – staffing and timetabling implications here.
- A lot of work and may be too heavy if expecting students to take 4 AS/A level Subjects.
- There's a fast pace – it can be difficult keeping everyone up to speed with developments.
- Cost – providing a wide range of experiences involves visits (local, national and international) and has cost implications (not only the cost of the trip but also in terms of staff and staff cover). Also some concern that the demands of the AS/A level subjects have to be considered too; students need to be present in lessons to complete their courses.
- Volume of paper work for pupils and teachers.

- Having to accredit the six key skills, complete the portfolio etc as well as 3-4 "A" level subjects is a great deal of work to complete in two years.
- One establishment mentioned receiving a number of visits to appraise the course - proper appraisal is necessary but receiving 4 visits in one academic year is heavy – Estyn, WJEC, University of Bath, University of Nottingham.
- Fears about future direction of financing.
- Pupils and teachers perceive unfairness/ lack of parity, which can undermine attempts to "sell" the Bac:
 - achieving the 6 key Skills at level 3 = 120 UCAS points
 - the Welsh BAC (including the 6 key skills) = 120 UCAS points

This needs to be looked at.

- Also seen as unfair is the pass/fail notion – if they fail to complete one element then there is no accreditation.

Marketing

- More work needs to be done on marketing – parents, students, schools, colleges, Higher Education
- Needs to be "sold" as a Qualification that is attractive to Higher Education.
- More marketing to Higher Education is required. The old Universities e.g. Oxford, Cambridge, Bath and Universities in Wales know about it (and central admissions very often) but more information needs to reach other universities about the advantages of accepting a student who has completed the Welsh Bac.

Vocational Education

Developments

- Even where the academic curriculum works very well there is an element of disillusion with education as that curriculum is not suitable for all pupils, so the development of vocational education is not only necessary in our most disadvantaged areas.
- There are good examples now of establishments working together to provide vocational courses for students e.g. schools and colleges of further education, schools working together, schools and the workplace, schools, colleges and the workplace – in order to provide more vocational courses and also to provide courses through the medium of Welsh.
- Courses such as: Building, Plumbing, Engineering, Hair and Beauty, Childcare, etc are becoming more common.
- Important to ensure that courses are of a good standard not just that there is a variety of courses

available.

Welsh – medium courses

- It is important to ensure that courses being offered are of a good standard and available through the medium of Welsh.
- Welsh medium schools are taking an active role in ensuring that courses will be available through the medium of Welsh by looking for Welsh Medium providers with whom to work.
- Staff training/skills: it is a positive development that establishments in Further Education are recognising the opportunity to work with schools to be co-providers of courses through the medium of Welsh (it's important to note Estyn's criticism of Welsh medium courses in the Further Education sector).
- Also important to note that for Welsh medium courses to succeed the wholehearted commitment of staff and the establishment are necessary.
- In some areas staff can teach through the medium of Welsh, in others they are happy to speak to students about their work through the medium of Welsh but not to deliver the course in Welsh or to provide Welsh-medium materials for them. Is there training available for these? We have to move on from this position. This needs further attention if more courses are to be delivered and developed through the medium of Welsh.
- Can the examination boards deliver examinations/ assessment materials etc through the medium of Welsh in a variety of courses? Problems:
 - with some examining boards translating pupils' work before marking it; with translation of papers;
 - examination boards urging teachers to become examiners but not acknowledging the already increased workload involved in producing course materials, through the medium of Welsh, for a new course when very little – if any - in terms of resources already exist.
 - Problems finding partners to deliver their part of the course/ work experience through the medium of Welsh.

The Rural setting

- Timetabling difficulties – due to distance between establishments.
- "Learning Pathways" is a document that has a bias towards the town/city/ geographically small county setting and does not show enough awareness or understanding of rural issues. (Also sometimes not enough awareness of school issues e.g. timetabling that has to meet the needs of pupils 11+).
- Steps have been taken to move the agenda forward – a lot of partnership working going on already and in many settings the use of video- conferencing is a way around some of the difficulties; this only works well though in certain situations:
 - when the students are engaged and motivated
 - when high quality course materials are available
 - when students can e-mail work to the tutor who can also set work and perhaps mark on line
 - the tutor can visit the pupils occasionally to maintain a sense of personal contact

- a member of teaching staff at the establishment can be a link person and support the students within the school/college.
- (Not necessarily then the best way forward for those students who may already be a little disillusioned and lacking in motivation). Video- conferencing needs further investment to provide equipment, train staff and share best practice.
- ELWa emphasises that to avoid unnecessary costs there should be no duplication BUT it is more cost effective in some areas e.g. to establish a workshop within a school than to pay a host of other costs such as transport to the nearest town (also remember the disruption to the students' day as they spend time travelling to and from various venues and also the added timetabling difficulties due to distance. How much of the students' time is wasted? ELWa is inflexible on this point but their attitude reflects a lack of understanding of education in a rural setting.

Finance

- ELWa continues to cause dissatisfaction.
- ELWa encourages working in partnerships – but there is money available to establish courses that involve partnerships but there is insecurity about the future funding.
- Learning Pathways emphasises that there should not be competition between educational establishments e.g. schools and colleges and each other but this is difficult when they are competing for numbers for funding. Funding e.g. according to pupils numbers or ELWa grants for special projects must be looked at again. There is a funding fog, insecurity and a system that continues to encourage competition.
- Hidden costs: academic subjects may be squeezed in terms of numbers so that the Vocational Subjects can be available for groups with smaller numbers.
- Costs and time for travelling – to a work placement or college – where partners are available.
- Counties have to fill in a set of forms for WAG for 14-16 funding and another set of forms for post 16 and ELWa funding. (Have already received information from WAG but still waiting from ELWa). This is an extra burden. Accept that there must be accountability but this is unnecessary.
- ELWa expects counties/establishments to plan for new courses (timetabling, staffing, resources) etc without knowing if the money will be available.

Other Issues

- Vocational courses need to be seen as a valid choice for anyone – quality is paramount.
- Vocational subjects: numbers often have to be limited due to health and safety regulations.
- How can the developments be sustained with falling rolls and therefore less funding likely?
- Hidden costs of maintaining academic courses as well (i.e. offering a wide ranging curriculum but to fewer pupils in the end)
- Is there a danger of losing some traditional subjects?
- Problems finding suitable partners – especially through the medium of Welsh.
- In the rhetoric there is an emphasis on a Curriculum, which meets the needs of the students, which is "student centred"; there is also an emphasis on the needs of the "employer". There is however no emphasis at all on those involved in the teaching, whether teacher, lecturer, trainer

etc. This is a matter of concern to us as a union that represents teachers and lecturers, as there are many implications for staff especially in times of change, (which can be exciting but also very demanding e.g. increased workload, stress, changes in status and perhaps working conditions). We also believe that the relationship between the teacher and the student is a crucial one to ensure success.

Elaine Edwards (Swyddog Polisi / Policy Officer UCAC)

01970 639950

ucac@athrawon.com

elaine@athrawon.com