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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf / Your ref
Ein cyf / Our ref : MA(P)/KW/4648/17

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

23 January 2018

Dear Lynne,

I am happy to provide further information regarding the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ).

The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate at post-16

I encourage schools and colleges to move towards universal adoption of the redesigned WBQ in two main ways: the wealth of supporting evidence and through planned performance measurement.

Firstly, the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales*, Estyn¹ and Qualifications Wales² were clear that the WBQ is valuable - even more so where there is full adoption as there is often a broader range of activities in these colleges and schools for young people. The new WBQ Skills challenge Certificate is a Level 3 graded qualification and has added extra rigour to the qualification. The development of the WBQ was itself evidence-based and involved HEIs, employers and experts from across the UK. This approach is working and there is broad support for the WBQ. Qualifications Wales noted in their report in March last year that, '*In general, there is widespread support for the Welsh Baccalaureate and its aims of developing learners' skills and experiences for further study and employment.*'

Secondly, with regards to monitoring arrangements, as part of the planning and funding arrangements, the Welsh Government collects data on the planned WBQ take-up from local authorities and further education institutions and we monitor these figures through the year. In this process, I expect them to report to us on their approach to reaching full adoption by 2019/20.

¹ Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification provision at level 3 in secondary schools. Estyn, July 2012

² Review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate from September 2015. Qualifications Wales,

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Therefore, we will expect the WBQ to be offered in the programmes of learning for all 16-19 learners. My predecessor issues a Ministerial Written Statement in 2014 noting a transition period with an expected year-on-year increase of take up. This has been further clarified in the guidance you noted to being full adoption to deliver the WBQ for enrolment in 2019/20.. Until then, we won't be imposing financial penalties for failure to meet this target. I have not yet reached a conclusion on the monitoring or incentivisation of the WBQ from 2019/20.

With respect to the 'where appropriate' point, the guidance document, *The post-16 Welsh Baccalaureate: recording and measuring outcomes* clearly notes that "...the aim is that those learners entering the post-16 Welsh Baccalaureate will be entered at **the appropriate level for the learner.**" My annual letter to the post-compulsory school sector outlining my priorities also makes clear the appropriateness of the WBQ. For instance, I would not expect learners to sit a post-16 WBQ at Level 2 if they have already achieved this level. I am happy to share this letter with the Committee.

Headteachers and principals are expected to use their professional judgement in determining the right learning programme for their learners, which will include considerations of the young person's well-being and their ability to reach their potential. There are no criteria that can accurately determine who these apply to beyond the exemptions in this guidance, and school and college leaders are best placed to reach those decisions.

In terms of future encouragement, as part of the new suite of post-16 performance measures, we will be including measures for WBQ achievement, although no final decision has yet been made on when these will be published for individual schools and colleges.

The view of universities

The purpose of my letter to university vice-chancellors was to update them on changes on the WBQ to reassure them of the added rigour in the reformed qualifications. I did not request responses. Officials had previously tested the admissions policies with universities and their faculties, and I have asked officials to keep this updated. In the meantime, they are engaging with Russell group, and other, universities to brief and reassure admissions officers and respond to any questions regarding the value of the WBQ. UCAS note that phasing in of the WBQ as a national entitlement will increase take-up, meaning that admissions tutors will see a number of iterations of the Welsh Baccalaureate:

We know that a number of Russell Group universities, are clear that they value the WBQ and are taking an increasingly flexible approach to recognising it in their offers. Those that don't accept as a specific entry requirement still value it for the broader skills and experiences that it gives the young person, and it can enhance applications.

As a final point on this, I would remind the Committee that the value of the WBQ goes beyond university entry.

Qualifications Wales review

In March 2016, Qualifications Wales led and published their *Review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate from September 2015*. Within that review was a recommendation for them to review how the Skills Challenge Certificate is assessed and structured. I understand that the review will be published in the new year. This evidence will help the Welsh Government keep the WBQ under review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', is centered below the text 'Yours sincerely'.

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