

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Statws y Cymhwyster Bagloriaeth Cymru | The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification

WB 12

Ymateb gan: Coleg Sir Benfro

Response from: Pembrokeshire College

Pembrokeshire College welcomes the opportunity to comment on the inquiry that is being undertaken by the Children, Young People and Education Committee into the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.

- 1. The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is understood and valued by learners, parents, education professionals in schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers.**

Pembrokeshire College acknowledges the breadth and benefit that the WBQ programme can bring to learners. Examples of benefits include development of independent learning and academic writing skills and this is recognised by many of the teaching staff in the college, some higher education institutions and fewer employers. However, one of the biggest challenges is convincing learners and parents of the value of the WBQ which in itself suggests that the qualification is not universally understood.

Most learners have previous experience of the level 2 WBQ and a significant proportion see the qualification as repetitive, for example, the similar challenge titles and many feel that the qualification is of little value. Parents can be quite vocal at the application stage – they do not want their children to follow the programme.

A levels is a particular issue as many learners would prefer to study 4 AS qualifications rather than 3 AS and the WBQ. The College strategy is to try to convince learners not to do 4 AS qualifications but many learners feel that they are reducing their option of dropping the subject in which they perform least well in at the end of the first year of study. Where the WBQ does fit well is where it is chosen as an AS option alongside 2 AS to give the learners a full time 3 AS equivalent programme of study.

In terms of HE, there is an inconsistent picture. As far as employers are concerned, the qualification is still not well understood.

2. **The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate is considered by learners, education professionals in schools and colleges, employers and higher education to be an equivalent, rigorous qualification.**

The WBQ is still not valued by all stakeholders as an equivalent qualification to a comparable level 3 programme. As for learners, however, the qualification is challenging, has rigour and if anything, is over assessed when compared to equivalent programmes.

With employers and universities, recognition of the qualification is still mixed and the lack of awareness means that the rigour associated with the programme is not understood either. The inconsistency at HE can be seen in the examples of universities in Wales as well as in England not expressing interest in the WBQ. The changes in how the qualification is graded is not well understood. Acceptance and recognition of the qualification can even vary between departments in the same university. Learners find out about this issue during their study and, as a consequence, this can affect their interest in attending and working towards the WBQ.

The other issue which affects retention on the WBQ is the number of universities now making unconditional offers to learners. Once such offers are received learners quickly become disengaged from the programme and this situation is occurring more frequently.

3. **The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in schools and colleges, including the Welsh Government's target for universal adoption and the potential impact of this approach;**

The College strategy is to deliver on level 3 vocational courses (with a few exemptions e.g. Performing Arts because of the time spent on rehearsals for shows; Destinations programmes where a sector focussed employability programme is delivered alongside the main qualification in Health (with the NHS); Tourism and Engineering; Sports Academy Students who have professional coaching sessions, training and fixtures alongside their programme of study). A level students can choose the advanced WBQ as one of its options choices.

At level 2 our experience is that the qualification cannot be delivered alongside the vocational provision as learners inevitably following GCSE resits. Therefore a key issue that needs to be taken into consideration is learner workload. Universal adoption of the WBQ would potentially overload many learners who are following main qualifications alongside components of a suite of skills based qualifications e.g. ESQ, GCSE Maths and English/Welsh resits.

Programme directories were created to allow individual learner pathways enabling learners to follow the qualifications that best meet their needs and universal adoption would be a move against the original intention.

#### **4. The wider impact of studying the Welsh Baccalaureate on other curriculum subjects and education provision.**

The WBQ is a valuable programme of study, but it is not suitable for all learners to pursue. The programme is not always well received by learners. We have had learners state they will leave the College rather than undertake the WBQ alongside their main qualifications. This provides the vocational course teams with a challenge in terms of balancing retention against fulfilling the full programme of study.

In order to gain the WBQ Advanced qualification, all learners at the end of 2 years of study must have achieved their main qualification and Maths, English/Welsh GCSE (at C or above) and the Four Skills Challenge certificate. For many learners, this is too great a challenge and can lead to high levels of stress and ultimately withdrawal from the programme.

#### **5. The benefits and disadvantages of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification to learners, schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers.**

The response to this question reiterates some of the points already made.

- We recognise the value of Advanced L3 programme in equipping those learners where the course meets their needs;
- The course can prepare learners for high levels of learning and employment;
- The programme raises awareness of wider issues outside the framework of the main qualification;
- The course encourages learners to engage with their local communities which helps them to become more socially aware;
- The allocation of UCAS points to the Skills Challenge certificate does give recognition for the work undertaken;

Whereas the disadvantages are:

- A 'one size fits all' qualification is not appropriate;
- Other qualifications at level 3 are one year programmes and the structure of the WBQ does not align to this – learners who leave with a 90 credit Diploma after one year cannot gain credit for their WBQ challenge work undertaken during that year;
- The lower level WBQ are too challenging to deliver on a one year programme;
- Not all university departments accept the WBQ;
- The repetitive nature of the qualification does not engage learners.