

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Children, Young People and Education Committee entitled Bacc to the Future: The status of the Welsh Bacculaureate Qualification.

The Welsh Bacculaureate is a wide-ranging qualification that embraces the teaching of fundamental learning skills. It enables pupils to become more independent, more critical in their thinking and more flexible in the way they work.

In September 2015, a new, more rigorous Welsh Bacculaureate was introduced for teaching at Foundation, National and Advanced levels, based on recommendations from the Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales. The development of the Welsh Bacculaureate involved higher education institutions (HEIs), employers and experts from across the UK, and the content of the specification presents schools with a choice of delivery models, so a creative approach to curriculum requirements can be taken.

The Welsh Bacculaureate, as a revised qualification, is relatively young and will continue to develop over time. At this point there have only been two sets of results since its implementation in September 2015. A review of the Skills Challenge Certificate was published by Qualifications Wales in 2018, and work is progressing to address the recommendations.

I would like to thank the members of the Children, Young People and Education Committee for their report on the Welsh Bacculaureate. I am particularly pleased to see the Committee's recommendations are broadly in line with our current and future plans. I have set out my response to the Report's individual recommendations below.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government issue a clearer statement about its vision for the Welsh Bacculaureate, underpinned by guidance that details its expectations in relation to the consistency of the qualification's delivery in Wales and the resources schools and colleges should make available to teach the qualification effectively.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government is currently reviewing the guidance available on the Welsh Bacculaureate and its delivery, and will publish clearer guidance on the website in due course.

Qualifications Wales and WJEC have freely available information and resources, including case studies, on their websites.

Financial Implications: None. This work will be undertaken by existing Welsh Government staff.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales work together to deliver a focussed awareness-raising campaign for business and higher education institutions. This campaign should aim to increase understanding of the skills developed under the Welsh Baccalaureate and encourage greater collaboration with those sectors in its design and delivery, to secure their engagement and buy-in.

Response: Accept

My officials are working closely with Qualifications Wales and WJEC to develop a joint communications plan to ensure that we all play our part in explaining and promoting the Welsh Baccalaureate, and in particular the Skills Challenge Certificate to parents and learners and ensure that universities and employers understand the skills that learners develop whilst undertaking this qualification.

Qualifications Wales and WJEC already provide a wealth of information about the Welsh Baccalaureate online, including case studies, videos, blogs and testimonials. The aim of the communications plan will be to ensure that we reach the different audiences with appropriate messages.

Financial Implications: Any costs related to implementing the communications plan will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government undertake work to provide a comprehensive list of those universities that accept the Welsh Baccalaureate in their offers. This list should include details of exactly how each university treats the Welsh Baccalaureate and whether:

- It is accepted as an equivalent A-level;
- It is used to enable an alternative offer to be made by lowering the grade requirements in other subjects;
- It is considered only as part of a candidate's personal statement.

Response: Accept

The WJEC regularly collects information on universities that accept the Welsh Baccalaureate and the way in which it is accepted. Welsh Government will work with WJEC, Qualifications Wales, UCAS and other stakeholders to ensure that this information is systematically collected and continually updated and is made accessible to learners, parents/guardians and schools.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends:

That Qualifications Wales consider urgently whether one higher education liaison officer is sufficient to establish a picture of the higher education landscape in relation to the WB and raise awareness and understanding of it across the sector. Resources should be re-allocated as necessary to provide more focus on – and deliver more progress in – this area, including the appointment of an additional higher education liaison officer(s) if necessary.

Response: It is not appropriate for the Minister for Education to accept or reject this recommendation as it is directed at Qualifications Wales and they should be the ones to make this decision based on their requirements.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government issue as a matter of priority strengthened and more detailed guidance on the policy of universal adoption. This guidance should set out clearly the circumstances in which learners may be exempt from studying the SCC, and be subject to a rigorous and comprehensive children's rights impact assessment.

Response: Accept

As noted in response to Recommendation 1, Welsh Government is currently developing updated guidance on the Welsh Baccalaureate and its delivery for publication on the website. The policy of universal adoption of the Welsh Baccalaureate will be included in this guidance.

The Welsh Baccalaureate is not a statutory subject in the national curriculum, and is therefore not compulsory for all pupils. A learner is awarded the Welsh Baccalaureate by achieving a specified combination of qualifications. Every learner should have the opportunity to benefit from studying the Skills Challenge Certificate - it is invaluable in developing the skills learners need for further study and work. It also supports learners to perform well in their other subjects, giving them greater confidence and a more rounded educational experience. However, when deciding which learners study the Welsh Baccalaureate, headteachers and principals are expected to use their professional judgement to determine the right learning programme for their learners, which will include consideration of the young person's wellbeing and their ability to reach their potential.

A children's rights impact assessment will be undertaken by the Welsh Government.

Financial Implications:

None. This work will be undertaken by existing Welsh Government staff.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government engage with schools and FEIs to establish whether:

- Learners in border areas are choosing to study in England in order to avoid the WB; and
- Colleges and sixth forms are using flexibility in relation to the WB to market attractiveness to learners.

and report back to the Committee within six months on its findings.

Response – Accept in principle

Currently, Welsh Government is only aware of anecdotal evidence about cross border movement of learners. We will investigate methods to identify the scale of cross border study post-16. Having established a robust evidence base on the scale of the issue we will explore the feasibility of undertaking research to understand the extent to which the Welsh Bacc is a key driver in terms of decision making for this group and explore other factors influencing choices.

With regard to using flexibility in relation to how the Welsh Baccalaureate is marketed to learners, Welsh Government will commission a review of how colleges and sixth forms are currently marketing their provision.

The timescale to undertake both pieces of research is not feasible given where we are in the academic year and what will be required to capture meaningful data. It is for this reason that we are accepting the recommendation in principle. Welsh Government will aim to commission this work to start during the next academic year.

Financial Implications: Any costs related to undertaking the research will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government ensures the mental health and wellbeing of learners is at the forefront of all considerations and activity it undertakes in relation to the future of the Welsh Baccalaureate. The Welsh Government should also engage with Qualifications Wales to ensure that the work of its Design Group has the mental health and wellbeing of learners at its centre.

Response: Accept

The health and wellbeing of learners is central to our education reforms. Our aim is to enable all learners to reach their potential. As outlined in response to Recommendation 5, every learner should have the opportunity to benefit from studying the Skills Challenge. However, headteachers and principals are expected to use their professional judgement to determine the right learning programme for their learners, which will include consideration of the young person's wellbeing and their ability to reach their potential.

The mental health and wellbeing of learners will also be one of the considerations of the Design Group that is currently reviewing the Skills Challenge Certificate. Qualifications Wales will be consulting on the revised Skills Challenge Certificate in due course and would welcome any feedback on whether the proposed changes could have an impact on the health on wellbeing of learners.

The Committee will also be aware of our work in response to their earlier Mind Over Matter report, as outlined in the April 2019 update we provided to the Committee on activity to date. The establishment of the Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group is examining all aspects of how we support learners emotional and mental wellbeing to ensure they can maximise their learning experience.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government undertake work to monitor on an ongoing basis the impact of the Welsh Baccalaureate and other education reforms on the wider curriculum.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government will consider this recommendation in the design and development of future research and monitoring work to evaluate the impact of our education reforms.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government improve the delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate by:

- Ensuring that both initial teacher education and continuous professional development are fit for purpose for its delivery;
- Ensuring a system for the sharing of best practice is established across schools and colleges in Wales;

- Issuing guidance outlining the expectation that all schools follow best practice by having a designated, specialist Welsh Baccalaureate co-ordinator;
- Exploring whether better Welsh Baccalaureate materials/resources are needed, and delivering to them if so.

Response: Accept

The response to this recommendation follows the order of the bullet points

- Following independent accreditation four initial teacher education (ITE) partnerships will be delivering programmes of ITE in Wales from September 2019. As part of meeting the requirements of accreditation these partnerships will ensure new teachers are able to teach the four purposes of the curriculum and the areas of learning and experience. The skills and pedagogy of teaching the new curriculum are closely aligned and can be transferred to teaching the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification. All professional learning delivered by WJEC and regional consortia to support the teaching of the Welsh Baccalaureate will be in line with the National Approach to Professional Learning. The Welsh Government is currently undertaking a scoping study on professional learning in the post-16 sector, which will report in the summer with recommendations on practitioner qualifications and continuous professional development for the sector.
- WJEC Regional Support Officers identify best practice in schools and FE colleges, and these are shared through network and Regional Consortia meetings. Welsh Government will discuss with WJEC, Qualifications Wales and regional consortia how best practice can be shared through other means, e.g. via Hwb (which is currently being extended to include accounts for post-16 practitioners).
- It is not for Welsh Government to specify to schools or colleges how they structure their staffing to deliver the curriculum. However, Qualifications Wales has recently undertaken a questionnaire of centres delivering the Welsh Baccalaureate to better understand how it is delivered, timetabled, resourced etc. The aim is to develop case studies of best practice based on the findings of this work, which could include having a designated Welsh Baccalaureate co-ordinator, or other effective models of delivery.
- Qualifications Wales and WJEC have freely available information and resources, including case studies, on their websites. As the development of the revised Skills Challenge Certificate progresses, Welsh Government will discuss with the Design Group and other stakeholders whether new resources are needed and if so, how best to develop these resources to support delivery.

Financial Implications: None at present. Any financial implications would need to be considered once we determine whether new resources are needed. Advice on the outcomes of the Post-16 Professional Learning Scoping Study will be submitted in the autumn.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends:

That the Welsh Government ensure that lessons learned since the new Welsh Baccalaureate's introduction in 2015 are reviewed systematically and used alongside the conclusions of the Wavehill Report and the forthcoming results of the Qualifications Wales Design Group's work to inform the design, implementation, resourcing and communication of the new curriculum in Wales.

Response: Accept

We are driving the single greatest period of educational reform for decades, delivering a transformational curriculum for our children and young people in Wales. Our National Mission sets out how the school system will move forward, securing implementation of the new curriculum from 2022, with a focus on leadership, professional learning, and excellence and equity within a self-improving system.

It is therefore vitally important in taking forward Curriculum for Wales 2022 that we learn the lessons from the delivery of previous programmes, including the roll out of the Welsh Baccalaureate in 2015, and we will be considering carefully the conclusions of the Wavehill Report and the forthcoming results of the Qualifications Wales Design Group's work.

We are already applying the lessons learned from this report and other evidence. The new curriculum and assessment arrangements have been made available for feedback; they have been designed by the profession in partnership with regional consortia, Estyn, Qualifications Wales and a range of other stakeholders and experts including learned societies, Higher Education and business.

An additional £24 million has been made available to schools for the professional development of the staff to prepare for the new curriculum.

During this next phase of co-construction we are inviting feedback from a wide range of stakeholders so the practitioners who developed it can further refine the new curriculum, we'll review the lessons learned as part of this process.

Financial Implications: An additional £24 million has been made available to support professional development opportunities for the new curriculum (£9m in 2018-19 and £15m in 2019-20). Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.