

P-05-938: Make Welsh universities consider the Welsh Baccalaureate as an A Level

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 25 Chwefror 2020
Petitions Committee | 25 February 2020

Reference: RS20/11539/1

Petition Number: P-05-938

Petition title: Make Welsh universities consider the Welsh Baccalaureate as an A Level

Text of petition: As it is compulsory for young people studying AS and A Levels to complete the Welsh Baccalaureate, surely universities in Wales should accept the qualification, just like other A levels, for all courses.

An example of courses in Wales that do not accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as an A Level, is Speech and Language Therapy at Cardiff Met University. There are no other Speech and Language Therapy courses in Wales.

1. Summary

Following a [Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales](#), in September 2015 the new Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) was introduced for teaching with a policy of 'universal adoption', meaning it was available to all schools and Further Education (FE) colleges to offer to learners but it is not compulsory for pupils to study. Whilst the [Welsh Government have publicly said](#) that "undertaking the Skills Challenge Certificate is not compulsory", some individual schools have made it compulsory for their students.

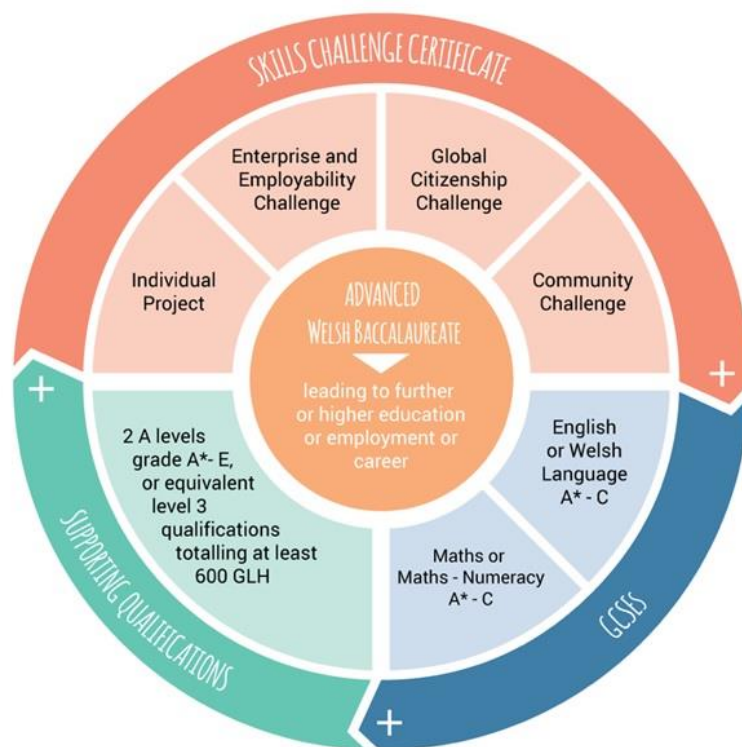


Universities are autonomous bodies who award their own degrees using their degree awarding powers (DAPs). Each university sets its own admission criteria for its own awards. This is known as institutional academic freedom and is set out in the *Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015*. Additional information about academic freedom in legislation can be [found here](#).

Cardiff Metropolitan University does consider the Welsh Bacc for the [Speech and Language Therapy course](#) referred to in the petition.

2. The Welsh Bacc and University offer-making

The Welsh Bacc is based on a combination of qualifications including the Skills Challenge Certificate and can be taken at three levels. The Advanced level of the Welsh Bacc includes the [Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate](#), which is the same “size” as an A-level and also carries UCAS tariff points. The Skills Challenge Certificate is a standalone qualification and it can be awarded without the supporting qualifications that make up the Welsh Bacc. The below diagram, [from the WJEC](#), shows the structure of the Advanced Welsh Bacc.



With regard to how offers can include the Welsh Bacc, the [WJEC says](#) that “all Welsh universities will include the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate in their

offers”. Offers including the Welsh Bacc can be made in several ways, including it being:

- Accepted in the three-grade offer as an alternative to an A-level or vocational qualification;
- Accepted as a fourth grade alongside a reduced three-grade offer (as with the [Speech and Language Therapy course at Cardiff Metropolitan University](#)); or
- Accepted in a tariff points offer.

While the Welsh Bacc is accepted within Wales, the picture is not as consistent across the rest of the UK. Other universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, may take a different approach to the above and may not include the Welsh Bacc as part of their A-level grade offer. This picture is made more complex with the potential for individual departments and faculties within large universities to differ in their approach to admissions and including the Welsh Bacc in their offers.

As previously highlighted, universities are autonomous bodies. Section 48 of the [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), states that the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) must take into account the importance of protecting academic freedom when exercising its functions. This includes the freedom of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) “to determine the criteria for the admission of students and apply those criteria in particular cases”.

3. Assembly and Welsh Government actions

In September 2018 the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee began an [inquiry into the status of the Welsh Bacc qualification](#). The [Committee found](#) that “there is a lack of clarity about the meaning and implementation of the Welsh Government’s universal adoption policy”. This led to the Committee’s recommendation that, as a matter of priority, the Welsh Government should issue more detailed guidance on the policy of universal adoption.

In [November 2019, the Minister wrote to the Chair](#) of the Committee to provide an update on the Welsh Government’s work in response to the Committee’s recommendations. Addressing the recommendation that guidance should be published on the Welsh Government’s policy of universal adoption, the Minister highlighted [new guidance on the Welsh Bacc](#) published in October 2019.

This new guidance says that the Welsh Bacc “should be offered to all learners in schools and further education colleges [...but] undertaking the Skills Challenge

Certificate is not compulsory”. It goes on to say that “for some learners, undertaking the Skills Challenge Certificate may not be the right choice, and we therefore need some flexibility”.

When exploring universities acceptance of the Welsh Bacc, the CYPE Committee’s report noted that:

[Its] ability to confirm whether individual universities accepted the qualification were [...]complicated by the fact that admissions policies are generally a matter for – and vary between – individual schools within institutions.

The Committee recommended that “the Welsh Government undertake work to provide a comprehensive list of those universities that accept the Welsh Bacc in their offers”. The Committee suggested that this list should include details on how each university treats the Welsh Bacc. The Welsh Government ‘accepted’ this recommended and said that it “will work with WJEC, Qualifications Wales, UCAS and other stakeholders to ensure that this information is systematically collected [...] and is made accessible”.

During a Plenary debate on the Committee’s report held on 4 February 2019, the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams AM, said that “I have been provided with a list of selected offers from universities that the WJEC has received that included the Skills Challenge Certificate. There are over 650 courses here”. At the time of writing, neither this list nor the comprehensive list the Committee called for appears to be available in the public domain.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.