

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 04

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Ieuenctid Conwy
Response from: Conwy Youth Council

It was recently suggested by Ann Jones AM and Hannah Blythyn AM that we write to you on our objections to the current Welsh Baccalaureate programme and its implementation. It should be noted at this point that we agree with the principle of Welsh Baccalaureate, but as the current system is multi-faceted, there are flaws that we believe need correcting.

Welsh Baccalaureate is in theory a practical, coursework-based, real-world applicable subject. This is a strong foundation for a strong future, and gives a superb opportunity to less academically-based students that works to level the playing field of the modern education system. Sadly, this seems to be more or less where the positives end. The subject is reviled, rejected and badly received by an overwhelming majority of the student body. This is not good.

For many students, Welsh Bacc exists as a fundamentally pointless endeavour that they are forced to undertake, directing a high level of disdain toward it. Part of this exists due to a breakdown in communication over the goals of the WJEC, teaching staff and the students themselves, resulting in difficulties fulfilling the given criteria. To quote an independent review by Wavehill Social and Economic Research Department at UCL, "although the skills at the heart of the qualification are highly relevant for future study and employment [the qualification] is far too complex and a great number of pupils, teachers and parents do not understand it." The subject exists in obscurity, and this must be corrected.

The most considerable complication, which in turn causes many of the major limiting flaws, is the current method of teacher training and repurposing of teachers who may not be specialists in what they're told to teach. The vast majority of Welsh Baccalaureate teachers are PE based, in the experiences of our Youth Council, and are not particularly comfortable teaching the subject off the back of their relatively limited Welsh Bacc training. If taught correctly by qualified professionals who have a grasp of the subject then students would learn vital skills that are relevant if not essential to future study and employment. In the case of Christian McCann, one of the co-authors of this email, his Welsh Bacc teacher didn't understand what they were supposed to be teaching for the next two years, or even have an outline of the subject. This highly qualified individual was left wholly in the dark without a way to

proceed in teaching, without the necessary support or assistance to improve themselves and others, which in turn negatively impacts on the students.

Another issue is that 14 of the universities in the Russell Group do not accept Welsh Bacc as a qualification of any real merit, and since the program was made compulsory Welsh young people's University attendance in England has fallen by an alarming 10%, thus it could potentially be said the present form of Welsh Bacc is leaving Welsh students in a less desirable position than their English counterparts.

There seems to be an issue with the structure of the subject's tasks. In a subject designed to be based around real-world skills and experiences, it seems odd that the vast majority of the work done is essay-based. Over the course of Zacchaeus Hayward's, one of the co-authors, Welsh Bacc, he wrote no fewer than 6,000 words. It seems odd that the core focus of the subject does not match up with the application of such in the classroom.

Finally, some students feel it pointless to try in Welsh Bacc at GCSE Level, as they believe it makes very little difference to them in the long run-primarily because they go on to complete a similar syllabus at A-Level anyway, one which seems essentially to be a resit.

It has been noted that without a plan that can be piloted and utilised, this letter is absolutely useless to you as a disagreement with the subject; if we can't bring ideas, you can't provide solutions. Therefore, we have a few possible applicable solutions, generally structured to be fleshed out as any possible reform progressed.

- Issue standardised information packs with a basic summary of what students are required to do, with a step-by-step course guide for teachers with explanations if they perhaps aren't based in the key skills of the course-what skills are the students using, how can they be developed and how can teachers help them improve? Condescension should obviously be avoided, teachers know what they're doing with the help of their PGCE, but given how insurmountable the current divide seems, this might go some way towards repair.
- More rigorous, specific and accessible teacher training for Welsh Bacc, made with a view to asking teachers based in dissimilar subjects to attempt a shortened version of the course if they haven't participated in it while they were in school. This would help to build their understanding of the subject and what the pupils are going through. The subject isn't particularly valued by teachers or students, as we said, it's seen as an undertaking without a cause, and this alteration would not only explain to teachers the sense of apathy they have to work with, it also gives them unique new ideas for student engagement and an understanding of what they need to get across. This would give them a firm grounding, and one that would help them support the young people under their tutelage.
- Discussion must be had on reforming the course to be less writing-based and more for helping students develop real, applicable practical skills and assisting young people's participation in society, in the process of which the balance

between the two aspects of the subject would hopefully be readdressed. This would bring the course back to what it was originally intended to be at its conception, a new dawn in building a socially, physically and mentally skilled nation, one prepared for the future.

- A consultation should be held on making the Welsh Bacc optional and supplementary at 6th Form level to allow students who may not feel the Welsh Bacc suits their skill set and career plans, or it might clash with an A-Level subject as was found in the case of Joshua Cleverley, another of our members. This could also help to inspire greater effort within the subject as students will feel they have something to gain through putting the work in. This should be done in tandem with the opening of a dialogue between the universities authorities in England and the WJEC to ensure Welsh students aren't being unfairly treated in that their education is not as valued as a London counterpart's might be-that the Welsh Bac is treated with the respect it deserves, not dismissed and used as a demerit against the student body of Wales who have worked every bit as hard for the same thing any English student will have, but may come up short because bureaucracy and curriculum flaws have failed them.

We appreciate that it's hard to make real, effective, lasting reforms. We understand every student has a different relationship with the Welsh Baccalaureate. But we know it's time Welsh students got the chances they deserve and so sorely need in life. Let's change the future, one step at a time, together.

Since this letter was written, a Welsh Bacc consultation has been opened. We're looking forward to seeing what comes from it, and we hope that you'll consider the suggestions we've made when drawing conclusions in committee.