

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 08

Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

Response from: Individual

We summarise our concerns below, in relation to Key Stage 4/GCSE:

- At GCSE, children are faced with selecting only 3 additional subjects outside the core/compulsory subjects, which include the WBQ.
- This severely limits choice and has an impact on achieving a balanced set of GCSE qualifications. It prevents students from progressing other subjects that are highly valued and enjoyable.
- Staff at school explain that, although the WBQ is not 'a statutory requirement', performance measures and inspection regimes means that it is in effect 'compulsory'.
- In contrast, Welsh Government advise that any flexibility is a matter for the school. However, against a background of specific policies, targets and performance measures, such flexibility simply does not exist.
- There is in effect, a total lack of transparency that surrounds the status of the WBQ. Students are caught in the middle and parents lack clarity as to who has ultimate responsibility for the current situation.

We summarise our concerns below, in relation to the link to the decline in take up of other subjects:

- We have followed media reports relating to the decline of Modern Foreign Languages at both GCSE and A Level with interest and have suggested a potential link to the WBQ in limiting choice.

We summarise our concerns below, in relation to post 16/Advanced Level:

- No matter what information emerges from Welsh Government, the WBQ is not accepted as a traditional A Level by many of the best Universities. Whilst it may be recognised as a qualification, many top universities will not accept the WBQ as an A level alongside another two A Levels when making offers. This means that any student aspiring to a top university will find themselves having to sit 4 subjects (given the compulsory nature of the WBQ) to even

obtain an offer. This cannot be right and places them at a distinct disadvantage to other UK students in terms of workload, pressure and stress. This is not equitable or fair to Welsh students. The reply from Welsh Government is that the WBQ is 'valued', but this is very different to being accepted as an A Level.

- Many students will want to sit 4 traditional, recognised A Levels. It gives them a broad certificate and taking 4 A levels can in many instances provide some form of 'safety net' were they to fall below their expected grade or standard in one of their subject choices. The fact that the WBQ is in effect compulsory, makes the option of sitting 4 recognised A Levels alongside the WBQ extremely difficult and challenging, not to mention grossly unfair, when compared to other students in the UK competing for a limited number of top University spaces.
- The stark reality is as follows. If students elect to return to sixth form to progress Advanced Level study, there is only one subject that is compulsory for study. It is the WBQ. When we took this matter up with Welsh Government, we were advised, rather unhelpfully that the WBQ is not compulsory at post 16 as students do not have to follow any qualifications at post 16. Technically correct, but not particularly useful in adding anything of value to the debate.
- There is an apparent paradox between initiatives such as Seren, aimed at getting the most talented and able students to Oxbridge (and other top universities) and limiting the choices and increasing the pressures on students by reason of the compulsory nature of the WBQ at Post 16. This seems to us to be an obvious 'unwelcome consequence'.
- A key issue relates to choice and giving students the right to choose what is in their best interest, based on their aspirations and informed by their academic performance. If students feel that they will benefit from the WBQ, then it can be selected as an option. If students feel that they want to sit 3 or 4 traditional A Levels that are fully recognised and accepted by all Universities, then they can elect not to follow the WBQ. Surely such an approach would still allow the Welsh Government to retain the WBQ, but to do so in a way that does not bring significant unwelcome consequences.