

WB 19

Ymateb gan: Estyn

Response from: Estyn

Introduction

Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees the right of every child and young person in Wales to receive a comprehensive education. In doing so, children and young people can expect to access a broad, balanced and holistic learning offer – one that makes the most of their individual talents, interests and abilities. Therefore, education should be aimed at ensuring that essential life skills are learnt by every child and that no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life. Basic skills include not only literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as the ability to make well-balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner; and to develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, creative talents, and other abilities which give children the tools needed to pursue their options in life¹.

Estyn welcomed the Welsh Baccalaureate when it was introduced in 2007 and since then, as it has the potential to make a strong contribution to realising the UNCRC principles. As an over-arching qualification it has the potential to bring coherence to the variety of learners' learning experiences. It can also provide learners with rich opportunities to develop skills and dispositions, such as independent study skills and critical thinking skills that are essential for employment, higher education and lifelong learning.

The Welsh Baccalaureate is one of the most distinctive aspects of curriculum policy. It has been subject to a number of reviews since its introduction. Although these reviews found some inconsistencies of delivery², they recognised the overarching potential of the Welsh Baccalaureate – calling for increased rigour and for it to be placed at the heart of the school learning offer in Wales³.

Estyn also published a *New Qualifications*⁴ report in July 2018. This report provided an overview on how schools and colleges are implementing their curriculum after the introduction of the new GCSEs and the Welsh Baccalaureate. It considers the quality of teaching and assessment, curriculum planning, staff development and leadership.

While our report supports the many findings of previous reviews, Estyn continues to support the Welsh Baccalaureate's overarching vision. However, since its rollout, the national vision for this qualification has become blurred and its current position in the 14-19 curriculum is not well enough understood.

In principle, Estyn supports universal adoption of the Welsh Baccalaureate across Key Stage 4 – particularly in the context of a new and changing school curriculum. Estyn would also support a universal entitlement to the Welsh Baccalaureate in the post-16 sectors. However, further work needs to be carried out before either of these can be achieved, namely:

¹ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001) *General Comment No. 1: Aims of Education*. [.pdf] Available online at: <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsiQql8gX5Zxh0cQqSRzx6Ze%2f9ZHeLgWbpr0TqNk7n2KwvLTyUpYZrr02J%2f7DotFSXAJUShXkO3j7y04tA46d54m4kcgEa%2b5RtThvOH2pDQf> Accessed on: 17/09/2018

² Welsh Government (2012) *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales: Final report and recommendations*. [.pdf] Available online at: <https://qualificationswales.org/media/1234/121127reviewofqualificationsen.pdf> Accessed on: 17/09/2018

³ Qualifications Wales (2018) *Review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate from September 2015*. [.pdf] Available online at: <https://www.qualificationswales.org/media/1631/qw-review-of-new-welsh-bacc-230316.pdf> Accessed on: 17/09/2018

⁴ Estyn (2018) *New Qualifications*. [.pdf] Available online at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/New%20qualifications%20-%20en.pdf> Accessed on: 17/09/2018

- Clarify Wales' national vision for the long-term development of the Welsh Baccalaureate and how it aligns with the new curriculum's four purposes
- Ensure it enjoys high status with learners, parents and education institutions
- Remove repetition within and across the varying levels of the Welsh Baccalaureate
- Support a drive to improve delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate, improve teacher understanding of the Welsh Baccalaureate, and support the dissemination, promotion and use of good practice
- Improve information arrangements for key stakeholders, particularly for post-16 learners, promoting the benefits of Welsh Baccalaureate and clarify expectations

Consultation Questions

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;

The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is one of the most distinctive aspects of Welsh curriculum policy. In recent years, communication around the WBQ has lacked coherence and this has impacted on how a range of important stakeholders view this qualification. Since its rollout, our national vision for this qualification has become blurred and its current position in the 14-19 curriculum is not understood well enough by teachers, leaders, pupils and parents. The WBQ has the potential to provide the young people of Wales with the experiences and opportunities to develop or refine the critical thinking skills important for higher education and lifelong learning. However, despite many strengths, its current structure and assessment arrangements have led to repetition and overassessment of the three challenges.

As we look to refine our qualifications 14-19 to align with curriculum change, an overarching Welsh Baccalaureate could provide young people with the opportunity to enjoy a range of enrichment opportunities as well as develop the employability and life skills important for further/higher education and employment.

Learners

In schools, many learners value the experiences that the WBQ offers. They enjoy the level of independent choice they have in some of the activities and the opportunity to work in teams, for example when completing the enterprise challenges. The Enterprise and Community Challenges tends to be more valued than the Global Challenge.

However, the quality of provision is variable both within and between schools and this impacts on the experiences of learners. A minority of learners find the structure of the Skills Challenge Certificate confusing and are not always clear about the purpose of activities. Post 16, many aspects of the course appear repetitive and both national and advanced level, too much time is spent on planning/reflection at the expense of the activities themselves.

In Further Education colleges, at Level 2, many learners are motivated to complete their programmes and note the potential benefits of studying the WBQ Qualification, for example, to develop their enterprise, planning and research skills. While many learners recognise the potential value of the skills they are developing, only a minority would take the qualification out of choice if it were not a compulsory part of their curriculum.

On the whole, at Level 3, learners studying vocational courses value the Welsh Baccalaureate's Skills Challenge Certificate when it is delivered in an integrated way through their vocational qualifications. However, only a minority of A-Level learners value

the opportunity to use the Skills Challenge Certificate to gain an A-Level equivalent qualification to gain entry to university. The majority of learners would rather concentrate on their A-Level qualifications rather than Welsh pursuing the Welsh Baccalaureate. This is particularly true for more able and talented learners.

Teachers

Teaching the Welsh Baccalaureate skills challenges requires a different set of skills from those needed to teach GCSE subjects. In a majority of schools, teachers understand how to organise pupils' project work and plan suitably to utilise pupils' skills. However, the ability and confidence of teachers in developing pupils' specific skills, especially those of numeracy and ICT, are too variable.

The majority of schools place insufficient emphasis on providing the time, resources and training to support effective delivery of the course, and this has a negative impact on teachers' attitudes to the Welsh Baccalaureate. Only a minority of teachers highly value the course. This is reflected in their enthusiasm for and commitment to its effective delivery.

In general, the quality of teaching is higher in schools where the course is planned and delivered by a dedicated, specialist team. In these schools, teachers are more enthusiastic about the course, they have a deeper understanding of the course requirements, and use a wider range of stimulating teaching materials and strategies.

From the perspective of further education colleges, the majority of teachers teaching the Level 2 Welsh Baccalaureate through vocational programmes are vocational specialists with a strong background in their discipline. Many teachers plan activities well to appeal to the vocational interests of learners in their groups and link skills challenges and individual projects effectively to their main programmes. For example, hair and beauty learners develop business plans for mobile salons, engineering learners use aspects of the design process to develop and manufacture products, motor vehicle learners develop 'workshop manuals' to carry out vehicle maintenance operations. These teachers value the additional skills that the Welsh Baccalaureate intends to provide.

Most teachers have received appropriate training and understand the requirements of the specification well. However, only a minority of teachers have access to networks of good practice, or high quality shared resources. Further consideration could be given to exploring mechanisms to support improvement can be used to help facilitate the dissemination of good practice. For example, this could include cluster-based meetings for Welsh Baccalaureate Coordinators meetings, support provided by regional consortia and/or greater use of Hwb.

Parents

We have less robust evidence on this, but it is safe to say that their attitudes vary widely, and there is a clear link to the quality of leadership and teaching in their children's school. The impact of Welsh Baccalaureate provision on other aspects of curriculum provision (especially option choices) is a significant factor among those with negative attitudes, as is the perception that the qualification is insufficiently rigorous.

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;

Grading the advanced Welsh Baccalaureate in the same way as A level helped build its reputation as an equivalent, rigorous qualification, but more needs to be done now in terms of strengthening and building on the elements that bring rigour, such as the individual project, and reducing weaknesses such as the repetitive nature of the three challenges.

Learners

In schools, many learners who take the Welsh Baccalaureate are motivated to complete their programmes and describe the potential benefits of studying the qualification, for example in developing skills of enterprise, planning and research. Hair and beauty learners value the business planning activities they carry out, and see their relevance to their future careers. While many learners recognise the potential value of skills they are developing, only a minority would take the qualification out of choice if it were not a compulsory part of their programme. Learners value aspects of the Welsh Baccalaureate but do not necessarily see the Skills Challenge Certificate as an academic equivalent to their other GCSE subjects. They do prioritise the Welsh Baccalaureate in the same way as they would their GCSEs or A levels.

A minority of learners at a few colleges are under the mistaken impression that the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification at National level (Level 2) helps them directly in applications to university. While the qualification at Level 2 may develop skills that universities value, it does not carry UCAS points that can be used in the application process.

This is often as a result of poor advice and guidance from the college for learners on the status of Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in higher education. All children and young people have the right to access up-to-date, relevant and accurate information (Article 13 of the UNCRC). Therefore, consideration could be given to improving information arrangements available to the learners.

There are a wide variety of views expressed by Level 3 learners and the extent of their support for the Welsh Baccalaureate is often dependent on whether or not it can be used to improve their chances of accessing higher education when they leave sixth-form or college.

Teachers

In both schools and colleges, the attitude of teachers towards the Welsh Baccalaureate varies widely. As discussed in the question above, this is closely linked to the status given to the Welsh Baccalaureate by their senior leadership team and to the level of training and support provided for them.

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 support that senior leaders provide has a significant impact of the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in schools and colleges. Where the qualification is highly valued, the quality of provision is often better and outcomes are stronger. There is anecdotal evidence that in border areas, post-16 providers in England use the fact that learners do not have to study the Welsh Baccalaureate as a positive, promotional

feature. In a few parts of Wales where an FE college may be in direct competition with a school for A Level learners, the college uses the fact that the Welsh Baccalaureate is not compulsory in its recruitment campaign.

The interim changes to key performance indicators are leading some schools to reconsider their commitment to universal adoption.

In a few instances, if Year 13 learners identify that the Welsh Baccalaureate is not 'needed' in university entry requirements there is pressure from learners and parents to drop the Welsh Baccalaureate to focus on other A levels.

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

Although schools are free to determine how they plan and deliver courses in key stage 4, a number of factors influence their curriculum offer. These include the introduction of the additional mathematics-numeracy qualification, the inclusion of the Welsh Baccalaureate to performance measures from 2018 and the focus on GCSEs in English language and Welsh language in the main performance measures. These factors contribute to schools' increasing curriculum time for mathematics and mathematics-numeracy, and the Welsh Baccalaureate. To facilitate this change, most schools have reduced the number of optional courses available to pupils. Most schools have reduced the number of options from four to three, and a very few only offer two. In many cases, subjects previously offered in more than one option block are now only offered in only one. Nearly all of the schools visited as part of this survey say that they have maintained their offer for pupils to follow GCSEs English literature or Welsh literature. However, the proportion of pupils sitting English literature and Welsh literature has declined by around 10 percentage points since 2012 (see appendix, figure 9, *New Qualifications*, Estyn (2018)⁵). There have also been notable reductions in the number of pupils studying other subjects at GCSE, especially modern foreign languages, design technology, history and geography

The way that secondary schools organise their Welsh Baccalaureate provision varies widely. However, most schools choose to deliver discrete Welsh Baccalaureate lessons, usually providing between an hour and an hour and a half of lessons a week. A very few schools offer up to two and a half hours a week. In general, pupils are more positive about their Welsh Baccalaureate provision and attain better when they have greater curriculum time to complete their work.

In many schools, there is not enough detailed planning to extend the more able pupils. In the few schools that do this successfully, teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They offer pupils good support that allows these pupils to understand what is required of them to reach the very highest levels of attainment.

Only a very few schools deliver the skills challenge through a cross-curricular approach. In these schools, pupils are prepared for the challenges through activities in, for example, religious education or personal and social education lessons. Pupils complete their individual project by investigating a topic related to the study of one of their examination courses. This helps pupils develop their wider skills while deepening their understanding of one of the subjects that they have chosen to study.

A minority of schools have introduced a key stage 3 version of the Welsh Baccalaureate, often called a 'Mini-Bacc'. This is generally undertaken in Year 9, although a very few schools are beginning to deliver this across the whole key stage. In many cases, this

⁵ Estyn (2018) *New Qualifications*. [pdf] Available online at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/New%20qualifications%20-%20en.pdf> Accessed on: 17/09/2018

approach is useful in developing pupils' skills, especially planning, organisation and teamwork, and is helpful in preparing them for the key stage 4 skills challenge. In a minority of cases, the impact of this approach is limited by shortcomings in planning or insufficient time being allocated to the activities.

Many schools devote a series of full days, usually in the summer term, to the delivery of skills challenge activities. Most commonly, schools plan between two and four of these days, although a very few arrange up to 10 days. Usually, these days are used to accommodate the final, assessed activities in the Enterprise and Community challenges. This approach provides pupils with sufficient time to undertake meaningful activities. In addition, it helps schools to plan to use their expertise of partners, such as members of the local business community.

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

As noted already, there are clear benefits for learners studying the Welsh Baccalaureate where the provider has a clear vision for the qualification and its place in the curriculum and teaching is good. It has a positive impact on developing learners critical thinking, promotes the importance of teamwork and develops learners' confidence. Studying the Welsh Baccalaureate helps learners and schools to strengthen community links and provides useful opportunities for them to work with local businesses, primary schools and other partners.

In a minority of instances, where planning to deliver the Welsh Baccalaureate is weak, provision is not well planned and this can have a negative impact on curriculum breadth and choice for learners. It can also have a negative impact on teachers where there is a need to continually upskill staff. In around half of secondary schools, a combination of new qualifications at GCSE and the promotion of universal adoption have led schools to reduce the option choices available to learners.