

Introduction

In September 2015, a new, more rigorous Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) 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 new Welsh Bacc is a composite qualification made up of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC), which is a graded qualification and supporting qualifications. The SCC is a standalone qualification. It can still be achieved and awarded even without the other qualifications that make up the Welsh Bacc.

A student is awarded the Welsh Bacc by achieving a specified combination of qualifications.

At Key Stage 4 (KS4) there are two levels; Foundation and National. The SCC is equivalent to a GCSE. To obtain the Welsh Bacc at KS4, learners have to achieve:

- the Skills Challenge Certificate;
- GCSEs in English or Welsh Language, and Mathematics or Mathematics-Numeracy; and
- 3 more GCSEs of which 2 can be vocational equivalents.

At post-16 / Key Stage 5 (KS5) there are three levels; Post-16 National, Post-16 Foundation and Advanced level. The Advanced level SCC carries UCAS tariff points and is equivalent to an A level. As with KS4, in order to gain either the Post-16 or Advanced level Welsh Bacc, learners will have to achieve:

- the Skills Challenge Certificate;
- GCSEs in English or Welsh Language, and Mathematics or Mathematics-Numeracy (or Essential Communication and Number Skill at Level 1 or 2); and
- a choice of Level 1, 2 or 3 or A levels (dependent on the level of the Welsh Bacc)

The Welsh Bacc, 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.

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 Bacc 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.

The development of the Welsh Bacc 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 Bacc provides learners with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of society, the community in which they live and an awareness of global issues, events and perspectives. The emphasis in the Welsh Bacc is on applied learning i.e. acquiring and applying a range of transferable skills. Learners will develop skills in the context of purposeful tasks and appropriate knowledge and understanding.

The recent review of the Welsh Bacc, commissioned by Qualifications Wales, found that “learners and teachers reported many rewarding elements of the SCC. There were many instances where learners told us that they had enjoyed specific aspects of the SCC, such as going out into the community or learning business skills.” However, “teachers reported that the documentation to support the delivery of the SCC is not always clear and consistent, leading to difficulties in implementation. Many learners also pointed towards what they perceived to be a lack of consistent information and messaging about the SCC.”

The review recommended that Qualifications Wales, WJEC and Welsh Government should review the information available about the SCC and the Welsh Bacc to ensure that it is clear, consistent and accessible. This work is being taken forward.

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

The revised Welsh Bacc has a renewed focus on developing the skills that all learners need and issues associated with the rigour of the assessment of the previous Bacc have been addressed. The revised assessment focusses on real life contexts that will engage learners.

However, the Qualifications Wales review of the SCC found that the volume of assessment is too high and that some teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time assessing and standardising learners’ work. The Design Group that has been established to take forward the recommendations of the review will be giving due consideration to the assessment model amongst other matters.

A 2018 UCAS report provides findings on institutions offering and understanding of the Welsh Bacc¹:

- 85% of respondents offer the Advanced SCC. Of those respondents, 69% offer it alongside two A levels, and 24% alongside three.

¹ UCAS (2018) UCAS qualification provision survey
https://www.ucas.com/file/171231/download?token=Bhu10d_s

- 69% felt that universities and colleges had a good to reasonable understanding of the Welsh Bacc, with 3% feeling they have no understanding at all.

The WJEC website includes information about Universities that accept the SCC. The current situation is that all Welsh Universities will include the Advanced SCC in their offers. Most other universities and most courses within other universities also accept the Advanced SCC. Even the most competitive courses such as Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science will accept it as an alternative to an A level grade:

e.g. Medicine – Cardiff, Exeter, Leicester, Manchester, Plymouth, Southampton
 Veterinary Science/Medicine – Bristol, Liverpool, Nottingham
 Dentistry – Bristol, Cardiff

Offers for other courses can take on the following formats:

- Accepted in a 3 grade offer as an alternative to an A level or vocational qualification. e.g. Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Exeter, Lancaster, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, LSE, Loughborough, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield, Southampton, UCL, York
- Accepted as fourth grade (B or C) alongside a reduced 3 grade offer. e.g. Bath, Warwick
- Accepted in tariff points offer. e.g. Brighton, Chester, Edge Hill, Harper Adams, Hull, Liverpool John Moores, Manchester Met, Oxford Brookes, Plymouth, UWE.

Oxford and Cambridge Universities may take a different approach. In their consideration of assessment for admission, they assess applicants holistically. Students are encouraged to draw upon relevant SCC experiences when writing their personal statement and should refer to them at interview, even taking a copy of their Individual Project with them. Generally the SCC is not included in their 3 A level grade offers, however, it may be used as part of an offer.

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

As I outlined in my letter to the committee in January this year, we will expect the Welsh Bacc to be offered in the programmes of learning for all 16-19 learners with a view of achieving full adoption for enrolment in 2019/20.

Headteachers and principals are expected to use their professional judgement in determining the right learning programme for their learners, which will include considerations of the young person’s well-being and their ability to reach their potential. There are no criteria that can accurately determine who these apply to beyond the exemptions in the guidance, and school and college leaders are best placed to reach those decisions.

In terms of future encouragement, as part of the new suite of post-16 performance measures, we will be including measures for Welsh Bacc, although no final decision

has yet been made on when these will be published for individual schools and colleges.

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

Schools are best placed to plan a local curriculum offer that meets their specific requirements, the selection of courses offered to learners for their GCSE options is determined by the individual school, working in partnership with the local authority and is not decided by the Welsh Government.

The Learning and Skills Wales (Measure) 2009 requires schools to offer learners a minimum of 25 courses with at least 3 vocational qualifications in their KS4 local curriculum offers. Learners who are 16-18 are able to choose from 30 courses, of which 5 must be vocational. This ensures all learners have a broad and balanced curriculum.

Schools and colleges should be providing opportunities that are in the best interest of the learner and we would expect them to use their professional judgement in determining which learners should be undertaking the Welsh Bacc.

The Welsh Bacc has seven essential and employability skills for development at its core, these are:

- literacy
- numeracy
- digital literacy
- critical thinking and problem solving
- planning and organisation
- creativity and innovation
- personal effectiveness.

In *Successful Futures*, Professor Donaldson noted that these skills should be embedded within the Areas of Learning and Experience and introduced at the beginning of a child's education and developed throughout their time in school, providing clear routes for skills progression from Foundation Phase through to the Welsh Bacc. The Welsh Bacc therefore provides an opportunity to assess learners' progress in developing and applying these skills.

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

The benefits of undertaking the SCC can be found in the case studies available on the WJEC website and in their newsletters. Some of the examples are:

- A learner who wanted to study History at Oxford University. The offer was an A* in History and an A* and A grade in two other subjects. They achieved an A* in History the Skills Challenge Certificate provided the second A*. In addition the work undertaken on the Global Citizenship topic helped with their

Geography A level. Their individual project was based on Welsh history and the Welsh language which they were able to discuss at their interview.

- A learner applying for a place to study Law in Cardiff University achieved an A* in the Skills Challenge Certificate which contributed to the entrance requirements for the course. They were able to discuss their individual project at their interview as it was law based.
- A learner who took up an apprenticeship with an employer said that the SCC had taught them employability and time management skills that would be invaluable in the workplace.

Whilst the qualification has clearly helped learners progress to higher education and employment, the Qualifications Wales review of the SCC found that it may be criticised in its potential for repetition and overlap. All three Challenges involve the development of essential and employability skills, regardless of whether discrete skills are a specific assessment focus. The benefits of pursuing all three Challenges as separate tasks, as opposed to fewer in a more focused and consolidated way, are not clear. This is compounded for those who follow the SCC at Post-16 Foundation, National or Advanced levels after completing the SCC at KS4. They therefore complete a further three Challenges of a very similar type, albeit at a potentially different level with a new brief deemed appropriate for Post-16 learners. The design of the Welsh Bacc is being reviewed based on the recommendation of the report, with a view to addressing some of these issues.

The Seren Network and the Welsh Baccalaureate

The Seren Network seeks to engage young people who have the aspiration and academic excellence required to pursue highly competitive academic courses of higher education. Seren provides master-classes and other enrichment opportunities designed to stimulate participants' own further study and engagement beyond A-levels and Welsh Baccalaureate. Seren also seeks to provide information, advice and support to both young people and professionals within the schools and colleges, equipping them to navigate through what can be complex and demanding application procedure.

Oxbridge Universities recognise that the Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate provides applicants with the opportunity to develop their research and academic skills, particularly through the independent research project. Both universities encourage candidates to make their research project relevant to their chosen course of study and to draw upon their relevant Welsh Baccalaureate experience when writing their personal statement and during their interview.