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Dear Lynne

We welcome the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report on the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc).

We are pleased that its findings acknowledge our work on the Welsh Bacc's Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) and that our own independent research<sup>1</sup>, published last year and cited in the report, has been considered along with recognition of the steps we have taken since.

The work of our Design and Practitioner Groups<sup>2</sup>, established to help develop and consider proposals for change to the SCC, is continuing apace. Both groups have suggested changes to further improve and strengthen the current model. Over the coming months, we will engage more widely with stakeholders, including employers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), to review and refine the proposals. This work will result in a public consultation on proposed changes to the SCC early next year.

Please find below our response to the committee's recommendations relating to our work (recommendations 2, 4 and 7).

## Recommendation 2

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/welsh-bacc-report-2018/>

<sup>2</sup> The Design Group comprises representatives from Welsh Government, WJEC, the Regional Education Consortia, ColegauCymru, Estyn as well as qualifications and assessment experts. The Practitioner Group comprises teachers and SCC/Welsh Bacc Coordinators

*That the Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales work together to deliver a focused awareness-raising campaign for business and higher education institutions. This campaign should aim to increase understanding of the skills developed under the Welsh Bacc and encourage greater collaboration with the sectors in its design and delivery, to secure their engagement and buy-in.*

The independent review that we commissioned<sup>3</sup> recommended that we build a greater understanding of the Welsh Bacc, the SCC and the skills it develops. In response, we have been running an information campaign which has included sending leaflets to learners and their parents/guardians<sup>4</sup>. We produced a short animation video<sup>5</sup> to explain what the Welsh Bacc and SCC are about. On our website, we have published personal stories from past students talking about how the SCC helped them gain a university place and how what they had learned helped them when they got there, as well as testimonies from universities and community groups explaining why they value the SCC<sup>6</sup>. We ran a radio campaign across local and national stations and Spotify to raise awareness of the Welsh Bacc and explain where to get more information about it.

We have consulted with employers to discuss the skills they feel are important for young people to develop. One of our most recent engagement activities involved meeting with members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), who were eager to share their views and be involved in our work. We see engaging with representative bodies as an important route into larger organisations. Working with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the FSB is equally as important to us so that we capture a range of employers' views as we consider changes to the SCC. We are keen to do further engagement to encourage greater collaboration with employers in the future design of the qualification and to secure their support for it.

We are working with Welsh Government and WJEC to organise a joint communications campaign which will include targeting businesses and universities. Working together will facilitate a coordinated and focused approach and will also strengthen the work that we're already doing to raise awareness and secure engagement in these sectors.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*That Qualifications Wales consider urgently whether one higher education liaison officer is sufficient to establish a picture of the higher education landscape in relation to the Welsh Bacc and raise awareness and understanding of it across the sector. Resources should be re-allocated as necessary to provide more focus on – and deliver more progress in – this area, including the appointment of an additional higher education liaison officer(s) if necessary.*

We welcome the committee's recognition of the work that we are undertaking to help raise awareness and understanding of the SCC and Welsh Bacc within the higher education (HE)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/welsh-bacc-report-2018/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/media/3398/what-is-the-welsh-baccalaureate.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/qualifications/welsh-baccalaureate/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/qualifications/welsh-baccalaureate/case-studies/>

sector, including the appointment of a dedicated HE Engagement Officer who liaises with universities across the UK.

Since taking up his position in September 2018, the HE Engagement Officer has established positive working relationships with many universities. To date, he has engaged with universities that receive the most applications from Welsh students as well as Russell Group universities to advise and support them on matters relating to the SCC and the Welsh Bacc to help make sure that their publications and procedures for admissions are based on full and accurate information.

Through the HE Engagement Officer's work with universities and UCAS, we are building a comprehensive picture of the HE landscape, and we are encouraged by the feedback we are receiving, which signals a growing awareness and understanding of, as well as confidence in, the SCC, and the value it brings to learners.

As well as improving understanding across universities, the HE Engagement Officer helps us gather intelligence and feedback to provide accurate and practical information and advice to colleges and sixth forms of universities' views and position regarding the SCC and other Wales-specific qualifications and matters.

This recommendation asks us to consider recruiting another HE Engagement Officer. Given that this is a relatively new post, we feel that it is too soon to consider an additional appointment. However, we recognise the importance of engagement with, and strong relationships with, HE so will keep this aspect of our work under review and make any changes as necessary.

## **Recommendation 7**

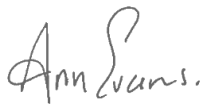
*That the Welsh Government ensures the mental health and wellbeing of learners is at the forefront of all considerations and activity it undertakes in relation to the future of the Welsh Bacc. The Welsh Government should also engage with Qualification Wales to ensure that the work of its Design Group has the mental health and wellbeing of learners at its centre.*

As we reform the SCC, we are working with members of the Design and Practitioner Groups, and other stakeholders, to consider the matters raised in the independent review by learners and teachers regarding the manageability of the qualification. This includes considering learners' mental health and wellbeing.

One of the great strengths of the SCC is the fact that it allows learners to focus on topics that are of direct interest and relevance to them and their future. Students are assessed throughout the course, which avoids some of the pressures associated with end-of-course exams. The skills they develop help them to gain confidence and resilience that will help prepare them for future study and work. In considering any improvements to the qualification, we will look to build on and enhance these positive features.

We support the interest the Children, Young People and Education Committee has in this area and we are committed to doing our part to evolve the qualification so that it secures the best possible benefit to our young people.

Yours sincerely



Ann Evans  
**Chair**



Philip Blaker  
**Chief Executive**

cc to members of the Children, Young people and Education Committee