

# Status of the Welsh Baccalaureate:

## Summary of survey with HEIs

November 2018

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The Children, Young People and Education Committee is looking at the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc). As part of its inquiry, the Committee conducted a short survey to gather as many views as possible from universities in the UK.

The survey sought information on whether and on what basis the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) formed the basis of any offers of admission. The survey also asked for comments on whether there was any noticeable impact of the Welsh Bacc on other academic subjects or any advantages or disadvantages for students in terms of their skills for education, employment and life.

Although there were 70 responses, some were clearly completed in error, no answers were given or were vexatious. There were **35 responses** where the name of the higher education institution was included plus one anonymous response from a Welsh university. The information contained in this summary is based on those 34 responses.

It should be noted that with the exception of one institutional response from Cardiff University the responses received to the survey were from individual members of staff within those universities and the views expressed do not represent the formal view of those institutions.



All written submissions to the Committee's full consultation can be found on the [inquiry's webpage](#) however no formal responses were received from universities or their umbrella representative bodies.

## The responses received

One response was from **Cardiff University** and represented its position as an institute. **Ten** responses were from individual members of staff at **universities in Wales** - this includes two responses from individual staff members at the University of South Wales, two responses from individual staff members at Cardiff University and an anonymous response who identifies the university as being in Wales.

**Twenty-two** responses were submitted by individual members of staff at **institutions in England** and **two** from individual staff members at **institutions in Scotland**.

**Sixteen** of the 35 responses related to **Russell Group Universities**. Fifteen were from **individuals staff members** from Russell Group universities, and one from Cardiff University **as an institution**.

A list of all the universities from which individual staff members responded is attached at Annexe A.

## Acceptance of the Skills Challenge Certificate

Universities were asked whether the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) formed part of any offers to students for entry to university.

Of the individual staff member responses, **32 said that their university accepted the SCC**. The two responses that stated that the SCC does not form part of their institution's offer were from Goldsmiths, University of London and Cambridge University. Cardiff University's institutional response stated that it accepted the advanced SCC for all academic departments on the same basis as an A level.

A further eight responses stated that their institutions had some departments that do not accept the SCC. These are:

- **Individual staff member at Bath** – not for mathematical sciences. The SCC element is accepted in the same way as an Extended Project

Qualification (EPQ) (albeit with a lower grade threshold for the Welsh Bacc). Other departments accept it primarily for the project elements which are less applicable for maths degrees;

- **Individual staff member at Birmingham** – not for medicine and dentistry – three academic A levels are required in these areas;
- **Individual staff member at York** – not for natural sciences which require 3 subject specific A levels. For medicine, the SCC is treated as the equivalent of an AS level;
- **Individual staff member at Queen Mary, University of London** – not for law, but it will be taken into consideration at confirmation if the student falls short of the conditions of their offer;
- **Individual staff member at Huddersfield** – not for pharmacy as other specific subjects are required;
- **Individual staff member at Leeds** – not for Arts Humanities & Cultures, Environment, Biological Sciences, Dentistry, Psychology, MAPS, Business School (others accept some part of the Welsh Bacc). Not considered as academically rigorous as A Levels, considered more similar to EPQ and many schools do not make differential offers on the basis of EPQ;
- **Individual staff member at Liverpool** – not for medicine, dentistry or veterinary science. In a small number of areas without subject requirements, departments may specify that the SCC should be the higher grade in the offer so an ABB would require an A in the SCC;
- **Individual staff member at Nottingham** – did not specify which of their departments did not accept the SCC, but stated that there are concerns about its rigour.

A response from an **individual staff member at Edinburgh University** said that while all departments accepted the SCC, not all accepted it on the same basis as an A level. An **individual staff member at Warwick University** said that A level requirements are dropped by a grade if a student gains a grade C in the SCC.

## Those who do not use the SCC in their offers

In explaining why the SCC does not form part of admission offers, the response from an **individual staff member at Cambridge University** said that the institution valued the skills developed within the SCC but offers are normally conditional on three A Level subjects studied as options within the overall qualification. It said that their Colleges aim to admit those with the most academic ability and potential to succeed on the courses they offer. It said that their Colleges find that, in most cases, A Levels (or equivalent) are the most appropriate preparation for our courses. They regard the Individual Project (IP) component of the Certificate similarly to EPQ. However, for their purposes, the seven skills that are developed within the SCC are in the overwhelming majority most effectively evidenced in the minimum-three A Levels that they would expect all Welsh applicants to present. However, for applicants presenting the SCC plus three or more A Levels, they reserve the right to set a conditional offer on the Certificate in addition to the three or more A Levels, if they believe the SCC to be germane to the target degree.

The response from the **individual member of staff at Goldsmiths, University of London** said that the Welsh Bacc is 'not necessary for their admission offers, but would be considered as part of the overall academic profile'.

## Impact on students

The survey asked whether universities had identified any noticeable impact of the Welsh Bacc on other academic subjects. **Individual staff members from nine institutions** responded to this question and comments were broadly positive, although there were also some negatives comments.

**Individual staff member at the University of South Wales:** there are elements of the SCC that are a good preparation for university. The Individual Project (IP) is the closest to the type of work a student will do at university. Students are given training in research and ethics (although they say this this could be much better). They also said that the Welsh Bacc can get students to focus on aspects of their self-development they might not otherwise cover. They also highlighted the importance of the IP for students' transition to university. They say that students learn independent study and that other subjects do not stretch in the same way.

**Individual staff member at Wrexham Glyndwr University:** the Welsh Bacc is a more rounded qualification allowing students to improve their skills in a variety of areas not just a single academic subject.

**Individual staff member at the University of Southampton:** the IP is beneficial in preparation for university study and that it has similarities with the Extended Project Q. They suggest that a possible disadvantage is only having 2 A levels plus the SCC which could limit the breadth of study.

**Individual staff member at Bangor University:** for some Welsh students, the Welsh Bacc has reduced the number of other A levels down to two.

**Individual staff member at Cardiff University:** students with 2 A levels and the SCC are not as well prepared for university as those with 3 A levels and are more likely to struggle in their studies. They say that it is not a substitute for an A level - it is a disadvantage to Welsh students compared to their counterparts in England. They say that the Welsh Bacc is not a fair substitute for a full A-level, and should not be regarded as such.

**Individual staff member at Cardiff University:** students who choose only 2 A levels alongside the Welsh Bacc tend to be noticeably weaker than those who do 3 A levels alongside it, and weaker than English students who do 3 A levels.

## Other comments

Other comments included:

**Individual staff member at the University of South Wales:** were broadly supportive of the Welsh Bacc. However, they had concerns about the potential for an inconsistent student experience which affects perceptions of the value of the Welsh Bacc and may have a bearing on performance.

**Individual staff member at Swansea University:** have noticed an increase in students taking 2 A levels plus the Welsh Bacc and this may have a negative impact on their future employment prospects.

**Individual staff member at Bristol University:** one of the advantages of the Welsh Bacc is that students explore a subject in more detail.

There was also an **anonymous response** from a senior academic at a **Welsh institution** who said that Welsh Bacc students think they understand research methods rather better than they actually do. They suggest that the Bacc seems to communicate superficial and unreliable knowledge. They go on to say that they

would prefer that their department did not make offers including the Welsh Bacc, but as a Welsh institution there are considerable political pressures on them to accept the qualification in spite of their academic judgement.

**Individual staff member at Cambridge University:** would be concerned if curriculum requirements meant that students were mandatorily limited to two or fewer A Levels plus the SCC, since the strongest applicants to Cambridge will be presenting three or four germane and/or technically-focused A Levels (thinking particularly of subjects for which Further Maths is common). They would therefore like all Welsh students to have the option of discussing realistically which curriculum pathway is right for them, as they begin their post-16 studies. The important thing is that the pathway should fit the student, particularly with the student's university and/or employment aspirations in mind.

**Cardiff University in its institutional response:** said that feedback from academic colleagues is that there are early signs that the individual project element of the Welsh Baccalaureate is providing particular benefit, equipping students with independent research and study skills required for degree level study. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that students tend to do well in the Welsh Baccalaureate even if they struggle in their A-levels and it would not be unusual for the Welsh Baccalaureate to lift the tariff of an applicant to allow entry. It also noted that concern has been raised about requiring pupils to complete the Welsh Bacc – which it explains is the equivalent workload of 4 A-levels – could put them at a disadvantage compared with applicants from other parts of the UK who can choose to concentrate on 3 A-levels.

## Annexe A – List of the universities at which the individual respondents worked

- University of South Wales (two responses)
- Aberystwyth University
- Coventry University
- Kings College London
- University of Winchester
- University of Bath
- Wrexham Glyndwr University
- Bangor University
- University of Birmingham
- Swansea University
- University of St Andrews
- University of the West of England, Bristol
- University of Southampton
- University of York
- University of Warwick
- University of Sheffield
- Cardiff University (two responses)
- Leeds Trinity University
- London School of Economics
- Queen Mary University of London
- University of Huddersfield
- Royal Holloway, University of London
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Bristol
- Goldsmiths, University of London
- University of Leeds
- Anonymous,
- University of Liverpool
- University of Strathclyde
- Cambridge University
- University of Plymouth
- University of Nottingham

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