

Bacc to the Future: The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification

April 2019



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Bacc to the Future:

The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification

April 2019



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016. Its remit can be found at: www.assembly.wales/SeneddCYPE

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Aberconwy



Siân Gwenllïan AM
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The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry.



Michelle Brown AM
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North Wales



Llyr Gruffydd AM
Plaid Cymru
North Wales



Julie Morgan AM
Welsh Labour
Cardiff North

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Chair's foreword

Since our establishment as a Committee, concerns about the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification (the Welsh Bacc) have appeared periodically in the news and in our constituency and Committee inboxes alike. Anecdotal reports of universities choosing not to accept the qualification, parents and pupils expressing concern about its impact on learner choice and success in other subject areas, and teachers feeling ill-prepared to deliver the Welsh Bacc rang alarm bells for us.

We wanted to hear directly from those on the frontline – pupils, parents, teachers, employers and universities – about their experiences of the Welsh Bacc to establish how widespread the challenges raised with us were. We found that negative perceptions of the Welsh Bacc are attributable to both a lack of understanding of the qualification's purpose and content, and the inconsistency in its delivery across Wales. Nevertheless, we also found that understanding of the Welsh Bacc is growing and with it a greater sense of the value it can add to learners' skills and experiences.

Despite our initial doubts, the evidence we gathered showed clear merit to studying the Welsh Bacc, particularly in terms of the breadth of skills developed by learners for future learning, employment and life. However, we concluded that the way in which the qualification is currently delivered and publicised is having a detrimental effect on its actual and perceived value.

Learners, parents and education professionals need to be assured that the Welsh Bacc is valued at a level commensurate to the effort required to complete it. Employers and universities – key stakeholders and intended benefactors of the qualification – remain under informed about the qualification. Centres of learning remain worryingly inconsistent in their approach to its teaching, and duplication of effort and unmanageable assessment requirements are leaving teachers and learners understandably fatigued.

For the Welsh Bacc's potential to be fully realised, these issues need to be addressed as a matter of priority. Clarity is also needed about the Welsh Government's policy of universal adoption - the circumstances in which learners may be exempt from studying the Welsh Bacc need to be set out clearly for all schools and colleges to follow. If the changes we outline are delivered, we believe that the future of the Welsh Bacc – and its learners – is bright.

Lynne Neagle AM,
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. That the Welsh Government issue a clearer statement about its vision for the Welsh Bacc, underpinned by guidance that details its expectations in relation to the consistency of the qualification’s delivery in Wales and the resources schools and colleges should make available to teach the qualification effectively.....Page 27

Recommendation 2. 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 those sectors in its design and delivery, to secure their engagement and buy-in.....Page 27

Recommendation 3. That the Welsh Government undertake work to provide a comprehensive list of those universities that accept the Welsh Bacc in their offers. This list should include details of exactly how each university treats the Welsh Bacc, and whether:

- it is accepted as an equivalent A-level;
- it is used to enable an alternative offer to be made by lowering the grade requirements in other subjects;
- it is considered only as part of a candidate’s personal statement.

.....Page 38

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..... Page 38

Recommendation 5. That the Welsh Government issue as a matter of priority strengthened and more detailed guidance on the policy of universal adoption. This guidance should set out clearly the circumstances in which learners may be exempt from studying the SCC, and be subject to a rigorous and comprehensive children’s rights impact assessment.....Page 45

Recommendation 6. That the Welsh Government engage with schools and Further Education institutions to establish whether:

- learners in border areas are choosing to study in England in order to avoid the Welsh Bacc; and
- colleges and sixth forms are using flexibility in relation to the Welsh Bacc to market attractiveness to learners.

and report back to the Committee within six months on its findings. Page 45

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.Page 47

Recommendation 8. That the Welsh Government undertake work to monitor on an ongoing basis the impact of the Welsh Bacc and other education reforms on the wider curriculum. Page 55

Recommendation 9. That the Welsh Government improve the delivery of the Welsh Bacc by:

- ensuring that both initial teacher education and continuous professional development are fit for purpose for its delivery;
- ensuring a system for the sharing of best practice is established across schools and colleges in Wales;
- issuing guidance outlining the expectation that all schools follow best practice by having a designated, specialist Welsh Bacc Coordinator;
- exploring whether better Welsh Bacc materials/resources are needed, and delivering them if so.....Page 55

Recommendation 10. That the Welsh Government ensure that lessons learned since the new Welsh Bacc's introduction in 2015 are reviewed systematically and used alongside the conclusions of the Wavehill Report and the forthcoming results of the Qualifications Wales Design Group's work to inform the design, implementation, resourcing and communication of the new curriculum in Wales.Page 55

1. Background

1. In May 2018 we agreed to undertake an inquiry into the status of the revised Welsh Bacculaureate (the Welsh Bacc) qualification, introduced for teaching from September 2015.
2. We agreed to look at the qualification at Key Stage 4 (14-16 years old) and post-16, focusing on:
 - the extent to which the Welsh Bacc is understood and valued by learners, parents, education professionals in schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers;
 - the extent to which the Welsh Bacc is considered by learners, education professionals in schools and colleges, employers and higher education to be an equivalent, rigorous qualification;
 - the status of the Welsh Bacc in schools and colleges, including the Welsh Government's target for universal adoption and the potential impact of this approach;
 - the wider impact of studying the Welsh Bacc on other curriculum subjects and education provision;
 - the benefits and disadvantages of the Welsh Bacc to learners, schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers.
3. We collected written evidence and oral evidence between May and December 2018, full lists of which are provided in Annex A and B to this report. We also conducted surveys with parents and learners, and higher education institutions across the UK and sought employers' views through an online dialogue platform.¹ We hosted a roundtable event with education professionals and visited Bangor, Llanelli and Crickhowell to hear directly from young people currently studying, or who had previously studied, the Welsh Bacc.²
4. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to our inquiry.

¹ Full analyses of the [parents and learners survey results](#), and [higher education institution survey results](#), have been published. [Results from the Dialogue](#) platform are also available, however the level of engagement was low – this is discussed in more detail in a later chapter of this report.

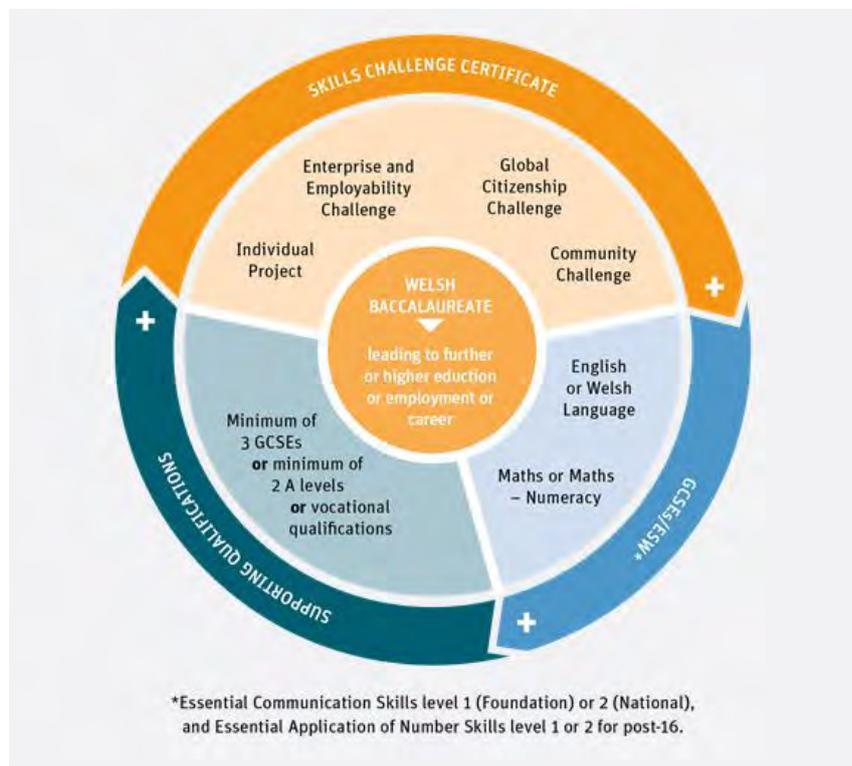
² Notes of the [roundtable events](#) and [visits across Wales](#) have been published.

2. The Welsh Bacc: context

The Welsh Bacc qualification is a framework that aims to enable learners to develop skills for further learning, employment and future life. The qualification in its current form was introduced in September 2015, building on the predecessor Welsh Bacc which was introduced just over a decade earlier.

What is the Welsh Bacc?

5. The Welsh Bacc is comprised of a number of component qualifications:
- the skills-based Skills Challenge Certificate qualification;
 - GCSEs in English or Welsh Language, and Mathematics or Mathematics-Numeracy. The literacy and numeracy components of the Essential Skills Wales qualification can also be used; and
 - a choice of supporting qualifications – GCSEs, A levels or vocational.



Source: Qualifications.Wales

6. The Welsh Bacc is awarded at three levels: Foundation (level 1) at key stage 4 or post-16; National (level 2) at key stage 4 or post-16; and Advanced (level 3) at post-16.

7. A student is awarded the Welsh Bacc by achieving the specified combination of qualifications for each level. The Welsh Bacc at each level is graded as a pass or fail.

Re-design of the Welsh Bacc

8. New versions of the Welsh Bacc at Foundation, National and Advanced levels were introduced for first teaching in September 2015 following recommendations made in the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales*.³ The design of the Welsh Bacc is now considerably different from its predecessor and has required significant change in practice within schools and colleges.⁴

What is the Skills Challenge Certificate?

9. The Skills Challenge Certificate forms one part of the Foundation, National and Advanced level Welsh Bacc. It is a skills-based qualification, comprising four components:



Source: [Qualifications Wales](#)

³ Welsh Government, [Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales](#), November 2012

⁴ Written evidence, WB FI 01 - Qualifications Wales

10. Each of the four components aims to develop skills in the fields of literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving, planning and organisation, creativity and innovation, and personal effectiveness.

11. Qualifications Wales states that, at Foundation and National levels, the Skills Challenge Certificate is the same size as a GCSE, and at Advanced level the Skills Challenge Certificate is the same size as an A level. The Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate carries UCAS tariff points.⁵

Assessing the SCC and Welsh Bacc

12. All components of the SCC are assessed by teachers in schools and colleges. After internal standardisation, a sample of work is moderated by the awarding body, the WJEC, to ensure fairness and consistency across centres.

13. Each component of the SCC is marked individually and a candidate must pass all four components to be awarded a grade for the SCC. If a learner does not achieve all the required supporting qualifications to be awarded a pass for the Welsh Bacc, but has achieved the SCC, the SCC can still be awarded.

	SCC	Overall Welsh Bacc
Foundation level 1	Pass or Pass*	Pass or Fail
National level 2	A - C	Pass or Fail
Advanced level 3	A* - E	Pass or Fail

Qualifications Wales reviews

2016 report

14. As the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales, Qualifications Wales monitored and reviewed the introduction of the re-designed Welsh Bacc in 2015. An initial report about the implementation of the new Welsh Bacc was published in March 2016.⁶

15. The 2015-16 review considered resources, training and supporting materials for the new Welsh Bacc, administration and e-portfolio arrangements, assessment of the SCC, the structure of the Welsh Bacc, and wider policy considerations.

⁵ Qualifications Wales, [Skills Challenge Certificate](#), accessed 27 February 2019

⁶ Qualifications Wales, [Review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate from September 2015](#), March 2016

16. Qualifications Wales reported widespread support for the Welsh Bacc and its aims of developing learners' skills and experiences for further study and employment. It also stated that stakeholders agreed with reforming and strengthening the Welsh Bacc. However, a number of concerns about the re-designed Welsh Bacc were highlighted as part of the review, including:

- the practical impact of universal adoption;
- the impact of requiring all qualifications taken as part of the Welsh Bacc to be taken at the same level (1, 2 or 3) as each other;
- the feasibility and manageability of expectations set by the funding policy;
- the lack of awareness and understanding of the Welsh Bacc among staff, learners, parents, employers and higher education.

17. Among the 2016 report's recommendations was one suggesting a further review be undertaken to consider the structure and assessment of the SCC.

2018 report

18. In response to the recommendations of the 2016 report, Qualifications Wales commissioned Wavehill Ltd and the Institute of Education at University College London to conduct a review of the design of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc. This comprised a desk-based review of the main documents supporting delivery of the Welsh Bacc, focus groups with a sample of schools and FE centres, and interviews with teachers, lecturers and Welsh Bacc coordinators. Views from employers and higher education institutions were not sought.

19. In April 2018, the *Review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate, and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate Report* ("the Wavehill Report") was published.⁷ The review found that the overall purpose of the Welsh Bacc had laudable principles, with the Challenges and Individual Project providing opportunities for learners to develop "highly relevant skills". However, it also concluded that:

- delivery of the SCC alongside the curriculum is complex to manage and requires extensive curriculum coordination;

⁷ Wavehill Ltd and UCL Institute of Education, [Review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate, and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate](#), April 2018

- the design of the SCC is complex and there is repetition in content, learning outcomes, methods of assessment and assessment criteria across each level;
- there is repetition across the four components of the SCC;
- teachers felt they had a good understanding of the design of the Welsh Bacc and the SCC but found it challenging to explain to learners and parents, other teachers and in some cases, senior managers;
- learners did not fully understand the SCC and there was confusion about the way it is assessed.

20. The Wavehill Report made eight recommendations all of which were accepted by Qualifications Wales. These related to reviewing the information available about the SCC and the Welsh Bacc, increasing awareness of the qualifications, and improving continuous professional development. It also recommended that Qualifications Wales review the design of the SCC including its structure and content.

The Design Group

21. Qualifications Wales has established a working group (referred to as “the design group”) to help develop and consider proposals for change based on the Wavehill Report’s recommendations. The group includes representatives from the Welsh Government, the WJEC, Estyn, the regional consortia, ColegauCymru and independent assessment experts.

22. A wider group of stakeholders, including students, teachers, employers and universities will be used to “refine and validate” the design group’s proposals. A practitioners’ group, comprising approximately 25 teachers who deliver the SCC from a broad range of schools and colleges across Wales, has also been established to test proposals and provide feedback to inform developments.⁸

⁸ Qualifications Wales, [Skills Challenge Certificate](#), accessed 27 February 2019

3. Value and understanding

Evidence to our inquiry suggests that understanding of the Welsh Bacc is relatively low among key groups, not least parents, employers and universities. The value attributed to the qualification tends to correlate with an individual's understanding of it – the higher the understanding, the more it tends to be valued. Significant work is needed to raise awareness and understanding of the Welsh Bacc if it is to be valued by those on whom it aims to have a positive impact.

23. The stated aim of the Welsh Bacc is to enable learners to develop skills for further learning, employment and future life. Evidence to our inquiry suggested that understanding of the Welsh Bacc varies significantly, as does the value attributed to it as a qualification.

Perceptions of the Welsh Bacc

24. Perceptions of the Welsh Bacc were very mixed in the evidence we gathered.

25. A number of areas in which the qualification – particularly the SCC – was valued were identified. These included opportunities the qualification offered to:

- build young people's skills and confidence;⁹
- allow choice and control for learners;¹⁰
- enable young people to undertake critical thinking;¹¹
- encourage independent learning;¹²
- develop skills in young people that employers are asking for;¹³

⁹ Written evidence, WB06 – Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru

¹⁰ Written evidence, WB06 – Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru

¹¹ Written evidence, WB22 – National Education Union Cymru

¹² Written evidence, WB18 – Regional Consortia for Wales

¹³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 328], 22 November 2018

- enable young people to reach university (either by being considered within the admissions process as interchangeable with A-levels, by enabling an alternative offer, or through strengthening a learner's personal statement).¹⁴

26. Nevertheless, a number of examples of poor perceptions of the Welsh Bacc were also highlighted, including:

- being viewed as “inhibitive” by learners, education professionals and parents in terms of its impact on a young person's choice of subjects, success in other qualifications, and general wellbeing;
- poor staff resourcing and training leading to negative experiences of the Welsh Bacc, including it being perceived in some cases as an “add on” for teachers with surplus in their timetables rather than expertise in the qualification;¹⁵
- a belief that universities do not value and/or accept the qualification;¹⁶ and
- a feeling among learners that it is repetitive in nature between Key Stage 4 and Advanced levels.¹⁷

27. There was mixed evidence about the extent to which the Welsh Bacc exposes learners to experiences and training in skills that would otherwise not be available through standard qualifications. The Association of School and College Leaders Cymru felt that the Welsh Bacc did this,¹⁸ however others – including young people and parents who responded to our survey¹⁹ – expressed the view that these skills could be developed via other curriculum subjects.

28. The influence on learners' and parents' perceptions of studying the Welsh Bacc at Key Stage 4 was raised. Young people who spoke with us during our visits around Wales explained that a bad experience early on did not encourage

¹⁴ CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019

¹⁵ Written evidence, WB22 – National Education Union Cymru and WB11 – NASUWT

¹⁶ Written evidence, WB22 – National Education Union Cymru

¹⁷ See written evidence WB02 – Individual, WB06 – Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru, WB10 – Children's Commissioner for Wales, WB12 – Pembrokeshire College and WB13 – ColegauCymru and CYPE Committee, RoP [para 245], 14 November 2018 and RoP [paras 46 and 55], 28 November 2018

¹⁸ Written evidence, WB14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru

¹⁹ CYPE Committee, Summary of survey results, published October 2018

enthusiastic uptake at post-16 level. This was reinforced by Dafydd Evans, Chair of ColegauCymru, who told us:

“...don’t underestimate the fact that if you had a poor experience of the Welsh Bacc at school, that perception is very difficult [...] to change.”²⁰

29. Some suggested that the three levels of the Welsh Bacc were viewed differently, with the value of the foundation and national levels described as “questionable” by further education representatives.²¹

30. The tendency for learners to see retrospectively the value and benefits of studying the Welsh Bacc was highlighted.²² The Association of School and College Leaders Cymru summarised:

“Discussions with former students who return to visit school after they have left to go to university or into work reveal that, in retrospect, they understand and value greatly the benefits of having done the qualification, but acknowledge that, at the time, they did not. This is not an unusual response with regard to many aspects of education and shows how perspectives can change with time and experience. Interestingly, we have come across a few cases of students who did not do the WBQ and subsequently have stated that they felt they missed out on some important and potentially valuable learning experiences.”²³

Understanding of the Welsh Bacc

31. The majority of those who gave evidence identified the level of understanding of the Welsh Bacc as a key influencing factor in the value attributed to the qualification. This was summarised by our discussions with education professionals, who reported:

“The more it is understood, the more it is valued [...] acceptance is growing and its value is increasing.”²⁴

²⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 127], 28 November 2018

²¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 48-53], 28 November 2018

²² CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 24, 197 and 303], 14 November 2018 and Notes of roundtable stakeholder group and Notes from school visits, published March 2019

²³ Written evidence, WB14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru

²⁴ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

AS PART OF OUR SURVEY ON THE WELSH BACC WE ASKED LEARNERS AND PARENTS...

...how useful the Welsh Bacc is in preparing for work and life

Over **50%** of respondents felt that the Welsh Bacc was less useful than other qualifications in preparing for work and life.

66% of respondents did not feel the Welsh Bacc would be valuable to future careers.

...about the amount of time it takes to study the Welsh Bacc

Almost **70%** of respondents felt that the Welsh Bacc was more time consuming than other 'equivalent' qualifications.

...what impact studying the Welsh Bacc had on studying other qualifications

Half of respondents felt it had a negative impact with **57%** of saying it was too time consuming

...what other comments they had about the Welsh Bacc

Many respondents mentioned the effect of the Welsh Bacc on getting into university



WBQ has had a HUGE and very positive impact on my future and the universities I have been able to apply for. This is because it counts as a full A level which is hugely beneficial for someone like myself who is much better at coursework based subjects. Having WBQ means I have 4 A levels and I am able to say I got an A in A level which is extremely appealing to universities /employers.*



I believe that Welsh Bacc takes time away from lessons that I'd rather be doing/need for my future. If I decide to go to uni in another country such as England or Scotland, I feel like it would be useless, and that they don't look for any qualification from Welsh Bacc.

Some of you thought the Welsh Bacc is a good qualification but wanted a choice about whether to study it or not



The Welsh Bacc, especially at A Level standard, should NOT be compulsory. If learners choose to study it then they should be allowed to, but those who don't want / need to study it should not be forced to do so.

Survey promotion and analysis

The survey was publicised through committee networks, twitter, the Assembly's Education and Young Engagement school visits and Outreach workshops.

1,203 responses were collected, **777** of which were from young people and **426** from parents/guardians. It does not provide a representative sample of the population.

32. Nevertheless, the evidence received indicated clearly that an insufficient level of understanding of the Welsh Bacc exists among parents,²⁵ employers,²⁶ education professionals who do not have direct experience of the qualification,²⁷ and higher education institutions²⁸.

33. In relation to employers, we were told that general understanding of the Welsh Bacc was low, but that it varied according to the size of employer. It was argued that larger businesses were more likely to be able to keep up with developments than their smaller counterparts.²⁹ We were told that those who were aware of the qualification and understood it valued the skills it developed in young people.³⁰

34. With regard to parents, we were told there is a “big job” to be done in helping them to understand that qualifications beyond A-levels exist.³¹ However, it was stated that while many parents do not understand or value the Welsh Bacc initially, when it is set in the context of higher education, parents develop a more positive view.³² The Association of School and College Leaders explained that the level of enthusiasm and support shown by school leaders and staff has a significant impact on parents’ perception of the Welsh Bacc.³³

35. In terms of higher education institutions, we were told that understanding varied according to individual admissions tutors.³⁴ While some reported improvements in universities’ understanding of the Welsh Bacc, it was felt that more needed to be done to raise awareness.³⁵ It was suggested that this was especially necessary beyond the border as understanding of the qualification tended to decrease the further the distance travelled from Wales.³⁶

²⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 129], 28 November 2018

²⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 15], 28 November 2018

²⁷ Written evidence, WB18 – Regional Consortia for Wales

²⁸ Written evidence, WB18 – Regional Consortia for Wales

²⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 228], 22 November and [para 12], 28 November 2018

³⁰ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

³¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 129], 28 November 2018

³² Written evidence, WB13 – ColegauCymru

³³ Written evidence, WB14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru

³⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 58], 28 November 2018

³⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 26, 240, 250 and 256], 14 November and [para 222], 22 November 2018

³⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 66], 28 November 2018

36. As well as attributing some of the lack of understanding of the Welsh Bacc to it being a relatively new qualification,³⁷ its complexity was also cited by some as a barrier. Rebecca Williams of Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru, explained:

“...it is a qualification that is essentially difficult to understand. There are things that could be done to simplify it in terms of structures and content and assessment [...] that would perhaps facilitate understanding and appreciation amongst teachers and learners and parents similarly.”³⁸

37. The qualification’s name was also raised as a potential barrier to understanding by learners³⁹ and education professionals⁴⁰:

“...the title of the Welsh Bacc is [not] helpful, because it doesn’t say what’s happening on the tin [...] the skills challenge certificate is a better title, and is something that people understand a lot better than the Welsh Bacc.”⁴¹

38. Some witnesses stated that while they believed the original intention for the Welsh Bacc was good, its implementation had not met expectations. Nick Brazil, Deputy Principal at Gower College Swansea and representing ColegauCymru, elaborated:

“...the initial vision for the Welsh Bacc [...] was a really good, good vision [...] It was going to be an overarching qualification that developed these skills, and certainly employability skills, and I think it’s lost its way since then [...] it’s become very much focused on outcomes rather than necessarily skills.”⁴²

39. Estyn also commented on the vision for the Welsh Bacc and its subsequent roll out:

“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

³⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 43], 14 November and [para 234], 22 November 2018

³⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 8], 14 November 2018

³⁹ CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019

⁴⁰ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

⁴¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 9], 28 November 2018

⁴² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 31], 28 November 2018

14-19 curriculum is not understood well enough by teachers, leaders, pupils and parents.”⁴³

40. Hannah O’Neill of the National Education Union Cymru summarised the general view about the level of understanding of the Welsh Bacc:

“...there needs to be more information to employers, parents and the community about this qualification and its value as well, because, if you get them all on board with it, I think it does change the perspective from the children; they value it a lot more [...] It’s a good qualification, there’s a lot of merit within it, but I don’t think it’s as widely understood as other qualifications out there at the moment, because it is a new qualification.”⁴⁴

41. Qualifications Wales recognised the need to increase understanding of the Welsh Bacc and pointed to the findings of the Wavehill Report:

“[the report found that] there was a need to enhance understanding and to explain in simpler terms what this qualification, the skills challenge certificate, is about, its value, how it works [...] that was partially because the design of the qualification is relatively complex [...] But it’s also worth saying that it’s a new qualification, it’s an innovative qualification, and, therefore, it is quite understandable in a way that there is a need to continue with the work of explaining, raising awareness and understanding of the qualification.”⁴⁵

42. Its representatives explained that, to help raise awareness and understanding of the qualification:

- a communications campaign was being put in place in cooperation with the WJEC and the Welsh Government;
- a higher education liaison officer had been appointed to engage with universities within and outside Wales, and sixth form colleges; and
- work was underway to build links with employers, despite being aware of the “notorious” difficulty of engaging with business.⁴⁶

⁴³ Written evidence, WB19 – Estyn

⁴⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 43], 14 November 2018

⁴⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 234], 22 November 2018

⁴⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 221-223], 22 November 2018

43. Responding to the concerns about the understanding and perception of the Welsh Bacc, the Minister for Education Kirsty Williams AM (referred to as the Cabinet Secretary for Education at the time she gave evidence) stated:

“I as the Cabinet Secretary value the qualification very much indeed. I believe that it helps ensure that we are able to give our young people in Wales a broad and balanced curriculum, recognising the need to develop knowledge and skills in core subjects but recognising also that the purpose of education is to help prepare our children for further study and the world of work, and I believe that the skills challenge element of the baccaLaureate does just that.”⁴⁷

44. The Minister identified the Welsh Bacc’s status as a new qualification as a “challenge”, accepted that “there is always room for improvement”, and acknowledged the need to undertake ongoing work to communicate its value alongside better-known traditional qualifications.⁴⁸

45. When asked about the qualification’s name, the Minister said she was happy to reflect on the evidence, but warned:

“...one of the issues that we have is developing an understanding of the brand and what that qualification is, and if we move away from ‘Welsh Bacc’ and suddenly start to call it something else, I think that could be even harder and set us back from where we are.”⁴⁹

Variability in delivery

46. A key theme in the evidence received was the variability in the delivery of the Welsh Bacc in different schools and colleges. Witnesses linked this to the variation in the level of value and understanding of the qualification across Wales.

47. There was a broad consensus that where the Welsh Bacc is taken seriously by a school, it is delivered well. Neil Butler of NASUWT explained:

“Where a school leadership team takes the Welsh Bacc seriously, it is well resourced, it’s well staffed, it’s well presented.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 7], 12 December 2018

⁴⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 8-9], 12 December 2018

⁴⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 52], 12 December 2018

⁵⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 29], 14 November 2018

48. The importance of senior leadership was emphasised by witnesses. Rebecca Williams of UCAC told us:

“...leadership is extremely influential in terms of how [the Welsh Bacc is] presented and introduced, and of the priority that the Welsh Bacc is given, and then the value that people feel that the qualification has.”⁵¹

49. Tim Pratt of ASCL Cymru concurred, but highlighted that not all schools place the same weight on the Welsh Bacc:

“It is quite noticeable where you’ve got real commitment from the leadership of a school just how important the Welsh Bacc is viewed, whereas if you’ve got lukewarm support, it doesn’t have the same impact. Now, what we are finding from our members is that the majority of schools do have that level of support, but there are still schools where it isn’t perceived as that important.”⁵²

50. The variation in approach to the delivery of the Welsh Bacc was attributed to a range of factors:

- a lack of respect and understanding of the Welsh Bacc in certain schools meaning they are using it as a “filler”. As a consequence, staff who deliver it are those with spare timetable capacity rather than particular expertise or enthusiasm for the qualification;⁵³
- the size of the school, with smaller schools in particular struggling to maintain stable patterns of staffing in the current financial climate;⁵⁴
- the training provided by schools to teachers to deliver the qualification, with those lacking training viewing it as an unwelcome add-on to an already heavy workload;⁵⁵
- the willingness of the senior leadership team to allocate dedicated resource, which could include a Welsh Bacc Co-ordinator, to the qualification;⁵⁶

⁵¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 165], 14 November 2018

⁵² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 188], 14 November 2018

⁵³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 4], 14 November 2018

⁵⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 161], 14 November 2018

⁵⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 66], 14 November 2018 and Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

⁵⁶ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

- the relative stability of the team delivering the Welsh Bacc, and the associated structure this gives to the delivery of the qualification;⁵⁷ and
- a lack of sharing of best practice, information and professional development to, within, and between centres of learning.⁵⁸

51. The variation in the delivery of the Welsh Bacc was most clearly demonstrated by the accounts given to us by learners and education professionals of the way in which the qualification is timetabled. While some scheduled regular lesson slots throughout the year, others left a significant part of the work to a few weeks at the end of term.⁵⁹

52. The Children’s Commissioner for Wales pointed to feedback she had received from young people about the variability in the Welsh Bacc’s delivery, and the influence teachers’ perceptions of the qualification has on them:

“Young people have told my office that at both Key Stage 4 and post-16 ‘loads of teachers hate Welsh Bacc’ and explained that this makes it hard for them to feel enthusiastic about it themselves. This is reinforced by Estyn’s findings that young people’s attitudes generally reflect the status accorded to the qualification by their teachers and noting that while there are generally positive attitudes towards the SCC among young people there is also ‘too much variation’ in the enthusiasm and expertise among teachers delivering the course.”⁶⁰

53. Qualifications Wales suggested there may be variability in the way schools are delivering the Welsh Bacc because some have been delivering it for a decade while others have only taught it since 2015. Philip Blaker, Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, told us that approaches vary across all subjects and that the SCC’s relative newness and different approach to learning “is bound to increase that degree of variability between schools”.⁶¹

54. In response to the evidence on the variability between centres of learning in the delivery of the Welsh Bacc, the Minister and her officials acknowledged this as a “known issue” and pointed to the work underway by the Qualifications Wales

⁵⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 6], 14 November 2018

⁵⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 16], 14 November 2018

⁵⁹ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group and Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019

⁶⁰ Written evidence, WB10 – Children’s Commissioner for Wales [The Estyn report to which the Commissioner refers is the [New Qualifications](#) report published by Estyn in July 2018]

⁶¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 24], 22 November 2018

Design Group to map existing practice and develop a more uniform model of delivery of the SCC across Wales.⁶²

55. The Minister acknowledged the crucial role leadership plays in this area and recognised that students' experiences can be heavily influenced by the attitude of the teacher(s) delivering the course.⁶³ The Minister stated:

“...if you're being taught by someone who is telling you, 'Oh, I don't know why we're having to do this', then, obviously that's going to colour how you feel about it.”⁶⁴

56. When asked about the varied perceptions of the Welsh Bacc, the Minister stated:

“I suspect that that [learner negativity] has got more to do with how [the Welsh Bacc] is being delivered in their institutions than it has about the quality of the qualification. So, we need to keep ensuring that those who are tasked with this see it as important, communicate that to students, and have the confidence and the ability to deliver a really positive experience.”⁶⁵

57. To address the inconsistencies in support for the Welsh Bacc in schools, the Minister explained that work was underway to address issues around teacher workload, duplication for learners and wider professional learning (areas which are addressed in more detail later in this report). She also added that the Welsh Bacc will form part of the wider set of performance measures to ensure more consistency in approach, but that, in her view, “in the end, [...] it is professional learning and teacher training, ITE, that will make the biggest difference”.⁶⁶

Employers

58. Despite the Welsh Bacc's aim of developing skills in young people that prepare them for the workplace, we received very little evidence from employers. Both the Confederation of British Industry and the Federation of small Businesses declined our invitation to give written and oral evidence. Our efforts to seek employers' views via online engagement generated a very low response.

⁶² CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 23-26], 12 December 2018

⁶³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 15], 12 December 2018

⁶⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 15], 12 December 2018

⁶⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 16], 12 December 2018

⁶⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 47], 12 December 2018

59. Of those who did respond, the majority identified a lack of awareness and understanding, and therefore a low perception, of the Welsh Bacc.⁶⁷ They, and education professionals we spoke to,⁶⁸ suggested that understanding tended to be better if they had children who studied the Welsh Bacc. They explained that better communication was needed if the skills developed as part of the Welsh Bacc were to be appreciated and understood by business.

60. The Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) told us:

- there was a significant lack of awareness and understanding of the Welsh Bacc in its sector;
- employers who do understand the qualification tend to value it as they recognise the skills and behaviours it cultivates; and
- the qualification has not been really “sold” to employers.⁶⁹

61. While Qualifications Wales stated that the skills provided by the SCC are what employers are asking for,⁷⁰ it acknowledged that business was “notoriously difficult” to engage⁷¹.

62. Representatives from further education suggested that employer involvement was key to securing engagement and buy-in:

“...the only way we’ll get employer buy-in is that if they feel ownership of what’s being done. Because I think that’s what the vision was for the Welsh Baccaalaureate—that it was going to improve skills for employment. But, somehow or other we’ve lost our way [...] I think having more input from employers would be a great help.”⁷²

63. The Minister acknowledged that there were “lots of reasons why we need greater working between education and employers” but that this can prove difficult.⁷³ She stated that more clear communication with employers about the nature and value of the qualification was needed, especially as they are often more familiar with traditional qualifications like GCSE or A-levels, and pointed to

⁶⁷ CYPE Committee, Summary of online dialogue with employers, published October 2018

⁶⁸ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

⁶⁹ Written evidence, WB07 – Civil Engineering Contractors Association

⁷⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 328], 22 November 2018

⁷¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 223], 22 November 2018

⁷² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 23], 28 November 2018

⁷³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 40], 12 December 2018

the work underway between the Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and the WJEC.⁷⁴

Higher education

64. Universities' understanding of the Welsh Bacc, and their willingness to include it as part of an admissions offer, was a key theme in how valued the Welsh Bacc is, particularly among learners and parents. University acceptance of the Welsh Bacc is dealt with in more detail in chapter 4.

OUR VIEW ON VALUE AND UNDERSTANDING

65. The evidence we received suggests the negative perceptions of the Welsh Bacc are attributable to both a lack of understanding of its purpose and content, and the inconsistency in its delivery across Wales. Nevertheless, it is also clear that understanding appears to be growing and with it a greater sense of the value the qualification can add to learners' skills and experiences.

66. Some learners reported clear benefits of studying the Welsh Bacc, not least skills for future learning and employability that would not otherwise be developed under more traditional qualifications. Notably, it is with the benefit of hindsight that most learners recognised these positive outcomes. Those witnesses from the school, further education, higher education and business sectors who engaged with our inquiry recognised many of these benefits, especially given the demands from business to support young people develop such skills before entering the workforce. In light of this, we recognise the value the Welsh Bacc – and the SCC specifically – can bring when delivered effectively.

67. Nevertheless, the negativity associated with the Welsh Bacc cannot and should not be ignored. Too many examples have come to light of learners and education professionals experiencing unmanageable workloads, impacting negatively on their wellbeing. Similarly, cases of the Welsh Bacc being treated as an inconvenient “add-on” to what is deemed “core” education do little to encourage, enthuse or reassure young people already stretched by the expectations and challenges they face in their teenage years.

68. The factors that underpin these views must be addressed. It is clear from the evidence we received that much more work is needed to give the necessary assurances to learners, parents and education professionals that this qualification is valued at a level commensurate to the effort required to complete it. Employers

⁷⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 41], 12 December 2018

and universities – key stakeholders and intended benefactors of the qualification – remain under informed about the qualification. Centres of learning remain worryingly inconsistent in their approach to its teaching, and duplication of effort and unmanageable assessment requirements are leaving teachers and learners understandably fatigued.

69. For the negative perceptions of the qualification to be overcome, sufficient clarity about the Welsh Bacc’s purpose, its benefits for all key groups, the resources required and available to deliver it, and the expectations about the consistency with which it ought to be taught, are key. While the evidence has shown that there is clearly merit to studying the Welsh Bacc, the way in which it is currently delivered and publicised is having a detrimental effect on its actual and perceived value.

70. In light of this we welcome the work underway by Qualifications Wales, through its Design Group, to consider the changes necessary to improve the structure, assessment and manageability of the SCC. We also welcome the Minister’s acknowledgement that professional learning and initial teacher education will play a crucial role in addressing current barriers to the realisation of the Welsh Bacc’s potential. We remain concerned, however, that organisations such as Estyn describe the national vision for the qualification as “blurred”.

Recommendation 1. That the Welsh Government issue a clearer statement about its vision for the Welsh Bacc, underpinned by guidance that details its expectations in relation to the consistency of the qualification’s delivery in Wales and the resources schools and colleges should make available to teach the qualification effectively.

71. We recognise that fixing problems at the school level alone will not enable those who study the Welsh Bacc to flourish in further learning or employment. Improved communication about the qualification, to increase understanding among parents, universities and employers of its benefits, is vital. We welcome the work Qualifications Wales, the Welsh Government and the WJEC are doing to improve communications, but believe that a more concentrated, high-profile drive is necessary if perceptions are to be changed.

Recommendation 2. 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 those sectors in its design and delivery, to secure their engagement and buy-in.

4. An equivalent and rigorous qualification

The SCC is benchmarked against other qualifications, and both it and the Welsh Bacc are regulated in the same way as A-levels and GCSEs. The independent regulator also stated that they are subject to the same level of scrutiny and monitoring. Nevertheless, perceptions of the rigour and equivalence of the qualification are mixed and acceptance among universities remains a key source of influence.

72. The Welsh Government states the following in relation to the status and equivalence of the Welsh Bacc as a qualification:

“**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 three more GCSEs of which two 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.”⁷⁵

73. Important factors identified as influencing how people understand and perceive the qualification as a rigorous equivalent to more traditional, well-known qualifications included:

⁷⁵ Written evidence, WB23 – Welsh Government

- confusion between the overarching Welsh Bacc and the SCC as one of its component parts;⁷⁶
- variability in the delivery of the Welsh Bacc across different centres of learning;
- the extent to which universities accept the qualification.⁷⁷

The Skills Challenge Certificate

74. Evidence we received suggested that while the grading of the SCC since 2015 has helped build its reputation as an equivalent, rigorous qualification, more work is required to consolidate and extend that view across key stakeholders.⁷⁸

75. We found that while learners may recognise the potential value of the skills it develops, only a minority reported that they would take the qualification out of choice.⁷⁹

76. Furthermore, the results of our survey of parents and young people suggest that, at post-16, a number of them would prefer the option of studying an extra A-level instead.⁸⁰

Rigour

77. Teaching unions and stakeholders who attended our roundtable discussion expressed the view that those with direct involvement in teaching or studying the SCC and Welsh Bacc understand its rigour.⁸¹ It was also stated that the grading of the Advanced level SCC has improved its standing.⁸²

⁷⁶ Written evidence, WB11 – NASUWT, WB13 – ColegauCymru, WB14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru, and WB18 – Regional Consortia for Wales and CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

⁷⁷ CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019 and RoP [paras 45, 74, and 215], 14 November and RoP [para 236], 22 November 2018

⁷⁸ Written evidence, WB19 – Estyn

⁷⁹ Written evidence, WB19 – Estyn and CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019, and RoP [paras 233 and 237], 14 November 2018

⁸⁰ CYPE Committee, Summary of survey results, published October 2018

⁸¹ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019 and RoP [paras 177 and 233], 14 November 2018

⁸² Written evidence, WB19 – Estyn and CYPE Committee, RoP [para 224], 14 November 2018

78. Some witnesses believed that work is required to ensure that the requirements for assessing and achieving the Welsh Bacc are not overly onerous.⁸³ Dafydd Evans, Chair of ColegauCymru and Chief Executive Officer of Group Llandrillo Menai, explained:

“...it’s become a very rigorous, very large qualification. Actually, it’s probably larger than an A-level by now.”⁸⁴

79. In contrast, others expressed the following views about the qualification:

- it lacks rigour and pupils are “spoon fed”;⁸⁵
- marking varies, with some elements “passively marked” and grades inflated;⁸⁶
- it was introduced without clearly defined expectations, which undermines the qualification’s comparability;⁸⁷
- there is confusion about how the qualification is graded;⁸⁸ and
- there is little rigour in its sampling and moderation.⁸⁹

80. Some of those who gave evidence queried the extent to which higher education institutions viewed the qualification as rigorous. This was summarised by ColegauCymru who stated that universities had “a highly variable response and understanding of the rigour of the Advanced WBQ” and suggested that further work was needed to explore the extent to which different admissions offers were based on perceptions of the qualification’s rigour.⁹⁰

81. Further education representatives queried whether the qualification could achieve all it set out to deliver:

⁸³ Written evidence, WB14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru and CYPE Committee, RoP [para 36], 22 November 2018

⁸⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 71], 28 November 2018

⁸⁵ Written evidence, WB09 – University and College Union and WB11 – NASUWT and CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019

⁸⁶ Written evidence, WB11 – NASUWT and WB22 – National Education Union Cymru

⁸⁷ Written evidence, WB22 – National Education Union Cymru

⁸⁸ Written evidence, WB13 – ColegauCymru

⁸⁹ Written evidence, WB11 – NASUWT

⁹⁰ Written evidence, WB13 – ColegauCymru

“...perhaps the Welsh Bacc is trying to be all things to all men. At one end of the spectrum it’s trying to be a rigorous qualification that stands up to a Russell university’s expectations, and on the other hand, it’s trying to develop softer skills and employment skills for people going into work from a vocational area. Can the same product deliver those two outcomes?”⁹¹

82. They went on to state that while the intention behind the Welsh Bacc – to “create inquisitive young people” with skills for work and further learning – was very positive, “the chances are that we’ve lost some of that by trying to fit it into being a specific qualification”.⁹²

83. Qualifications Wales stated that the SCC is regulated in the same way as A-levels and GCSEs, with the same level of scrutiny and monitoring. It stated its view, as the independent regulator, that the qualification is rigorous.⁹³

84. In response to the mixed evidence received, the Minister for Education stated that she believed the grading of the SCC had “added rigour” and that had been “particularly important in ensuring that there’s real value in students undertaking that work”.⁹⁴ She explained that it had been benchmarked against A-levels, has a UCAS tariff associated with it, and “is used by universities as a means of qualification that gains entrance into a university in just the same way as an A-level is. So, therefore, I don’t have any concerns about the rigour of the qualification”.⁹⁵

85. In relation to allegations of the “spoon feeding” of learners, the Minister stated:

“...one of the reasons why universities like the qualification is that it’s very difficult, for instance, in the individual project work to be spoon-fed. It is very demanding of individual students, and is very difficult [...] with the Welsh Bacc, it is individual students that have to think, for instance, of their own project. You can’t get those off a shelf, and you can’t necessarily just find that information easily.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 71], 28 November 2018

⁹² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 82], 28 November 2018

⁹³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 253], 22 November 2018

⁹⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 13], 12 December 2018

⁹⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 55], 12 December 2018

⁹⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 56], 12 December 2018

86. When it was put to the Minister that our visits had revealed some learners were being offered a short and narrow list of subjects on which they could do their personal project, or encouraged to re-submit work done at foundation or national level with some minor additions,⁹⁷ the Minister stated:

“...that would be really disappointing [...] denuding the students of the very valuable experience this qualification has to offer.”⁹⁸

87. The Minister added that it is a “professional responsibility” for education professionals delivering the qualification to “respect” its ethos and the skills it seeks to develop.⁹⁹

Equivalence

88. When asked about comparability with other qualifications, the NASUWT and National Education Union Cymru said they believed the grading of the SCC had improved perceptions. However, they stated that mixed views about the parity of qualifications still existed among their members. They attributed this to the relative level of teachers’ exposure to - and training on - the Welsh Bacc, stating that the higher their level of understanding, the more rigour and parity they tended to associate with it.¹⁰⁰

89. The Wales Alliance for Global Learning stated that while the skills developed within the qualification are increasingly important to employers, it is not generally seen by parents, learners, and schools as an equivalent compared to GCSEs and A-levels.¹⁰¹

90. UCAC emphasised that comparing traditional qualifications and the SCC was not comparing like with like:

“It’s a very different qualification to A-levels or BTECs or anything else, [...] asking whether it’s as rigorous as the others is coming at it from the wrong direction, because it’s not an issue of learning information. The emphasis is very different, isn’t it? It’s about giving more freedom to the individual and creating more rounded individuals who make decisions about which direction they want to go in in terms of projects and so forth, and developing skills—there’s more emphasis on developing skills.

⁹⁷ CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019

⁹⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 66 and 68], 12 December 2018

⁹⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 56], 12 December 2018

¹⁰⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 64-66], 14 November 2018

¹⁰¹ Written evidence, WB15 – Wales Alliance for Global Learning

So, while we need some kind of parity in terms of respect and status, it's never going to be the same; fundamentally, it's a different animal."¹⁰²

91. In relation to equivalence, Philip Blaker, Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, explained:

"In terms of 'equivalent', it comes down to what one means by 'equivalent'. So, if we took the advanced skills challenge certificate as an example, it's a level 3 qualification, which is the same as an A-level in terms of its position within the qualifications framework, and it's the same size in terms of the number of guided learning hours. So, it's the same size and it's the same level as an A-level, but it is a different qualification, and that's its strength in many ways, that it complements that academic route of the A-level. It attracts the same UCAS points as an A-level, which is a useful thing. So, it has equivalence, but it is different."¹⁰³

92. He went on to say:

"...if you think about the advanced skills challenge certificate, half of it is the individual project, which is about deeper learning in the subject that somebody wants to take on to university, So, it is very much aligned to their progression ambitions, and half of it is about the development of broader skills. Those broader skills are things that universities and employers value. So, the view would be that it does have a direct relationship with academic study and it does have a direct relationship with developing the skills that enable people to progress their learning even further. So, direct equivalence is perhaps different to value, and those things can get confused quite easily."¹⁰⁴

93. When asked about studying at university, Mr Blaker stated that three A-levels alongside the SCC is "probably the best solution" for a learner.¹⁰⁵

94. When asked about the equivalence of the SCC, the Minister for Education stated:

"It's not a question of if this is an equivalent qualification; this is an equivalent qualification. There is a rigorous process that is undertaken

¹⁰² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 72], 14 November 2018

¹⁰³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 25]4, 22 November 2018

¹⁰⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 255], 22 November 2018

¹⁰⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 276], 22 November 2018

to evaluate these qualifications independent of the Government, and it's not a question. Is it a different model and a different way of studying? Yes, of course it is, and that's why we do it. That's why I want children and young people to do both sets of qualifications, because it does engage and expand the acquisition of knowledge and skills. So, yes, it's different. Is it equivalent? Yes, it is, and that's why, since the graded qualification came in, it is regarded by independent bodies as an equivalent to an A-level, and it has a tariff for UCAS in the same way as A-levels would have tariffs."¹⁰⁶

University acceptance

95. Establishing a clear picture of the extent to which the Welsh Bacc is accepted by higher education institutions was a significant challenge.

96. Invitations to provide evidence on behalf of universities were declined by Universities Wales, and our ability to confirm whether individual universities accepted the qualification were further complicated by the fact that admissions policies are generally a matter for – and vary between – individual schools within institutions.

97. To seek to overcome this difficulty we undertook a survey with higher education institutions. Individual responses to that survey provided a snap-shot of opinions, however most respondents replied with their personal views, rather than on behalf of the institution they represent.

98. In relation to acceptance of the Welsh Bacc by universities, we heard:

- there is a significant lack of consistency in the understanding of the qualification in higher education, although understanding is increasing and with it the level of value attributed to the Welsh Bacc;¹⁰⁷
- the way in which the SCC is accepted for admission differs between universities and between departments within universities;¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 62], 18 December 2018

¹⁰⁷ CYPE Committee, WB13 – ColegauCymru

¹⁰⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 45 and 47], 14 November 2018

- schools have developed expertise in knowing universities' subject experience and whether the Welsh Bacc is accepted more than others;¹⁰⁹
- understanding of the Welsh Bacc tends to be better within Wales' universities than those beyond the border;¹¹⁰ and
- there can be a difference between a university's policy in relation to the Welsh Bacc and experience of that policy "on the ground".¹¹¹

99. Evidence we received suggested that the range of ways in which university admission processes treat the SCC include:

- using it interchangeably with A-levels;
- using it to enable an alternative offer to be made (e.g. lowering the grade requirements in other subjects);
- impacting positively on a candidate's personal statement due to the skills developed and experiences provided.¹¹²

100. Some evidence was received suggesting that Welsh students were potentially at a disadvantage when compared to their counterparts across the border. It was argued that this could occur as learners would be able to get more or better A-levels if they were not having to complete the Advanced Welsh Bacc.¹¹³ This position was summarised by Gower College Swansea's evidence:

"Welsh students are fighting for places against Scottish, Northern Irish and, potentially, English students who are studying three subjects, whereas our Welsh students potentially could be doing three A2s, three A-level subjects plus the Welsh Bacc. And, as we talked about earlier on, the Welsh Bacc has evolved into quite a rigorous, you could say complicated, qualification, which puts added pressure on a learner in year 2 when they're trying to get possibly three A* grades. So, I think we need to consider that."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 261], 14 November 2018

¹¹⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 66], 28 November 2018

¹¹¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 66], 28 November 2018

¹¹² CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 259-261 and 274], 22 November 2018

¹¹³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 62], 28 November and written evidence, WB11 -NASUWT and WB13 – ColegauCymru

¹¹⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 62], 28 November 2018

101. When asked about university acceptance of the Welsh Bacc, the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, Philip Blaker, stated:

“The vast majority of universities perceive it very well and there’s lots of evidence for that. There are some universities—and there can be quite a lot of emphasis around particular Russell Group universities that don’t make offers based on it, but a lot of universities do make offers based on it and value it. [...] it’s not all just about offer strategies, it’s about the value that’s placed on the qualification.”¹¹⁵

102. Mr Blaker went on to say that where universities take a position on the SCC, it is important to establish whether it is based on an understanding of the qualification or a perception. He stated this was the reason why Qualifications Wales had appointed a Higher Education liaison officer to engage with universities across the UK “to get out to those universities who maybe aren’t including it in offer strategies or don’t have a clear policy statement around the skills challenge certificate to understand what the basis for that is”.¹¹⁶ Mr Blaker also highlighted work underway “to build a comprehensive picture of what HE’s perspective is on the qualification” over the next year.¹¹⁷

103. In her written evidence the Minister for Education stated that all universities in Wales include the SCC in their offers.¹¹⁸ In oral evidence, the Minister acknowledged that while some universities do not use the Welsh Bacc as a basis for offers, they still value the skills provided by the SCC.¹¹⁹ She went on to state:

“The message I get consistently from universities is that there are significant advantages to Welsh learners taking this qualification [...]

Whilst there is a variety of approaches to how they regard the qualification in terms of offers, consistently, absolutely across the board, all universities tell me that the Welsh baccaLaureate is a valuable qualification.”¹²⁰

104. In response to concerns raised about Welsh learners being at a potential disadvantage as a result of studying the Welsh Bacc, the Minister stated:

¹¹⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 284], 22 November 2018

¹¹⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 287], 22 November 2018

¹¹⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 292-293], 22 November 2018

¹¹⁸ Written evidence, WB23 – Welsh Government

¹¹⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 80], 12 December 2018

¹²⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 80 and 82], 12 December 2018

“...in the conversations I have had with Russell Group universities, what they say is that there is certainly no detriment to any Welsh student undertaking this qualification. They value the qualification. They think it is useful [...] I think it is a myth—I would go as far as to say that it’s a myth—that Welsh students are disadvantaged in any way by taking this qualification.”¹²¹

105. When the Minister was asked about evidence suggesting that some more able and talented students were being exempted from studying the SCC, she said that sometimes centres of learning make the decision that four or five A-levels is an advantage for a student. She added, however, that she believed that Russell Group universities, and Oxford and Cambridge, want students with three good A-levels and the Welsh Bacc:

“I think that’s really, really an important message to get across—that it is not necessary to do four or five A-levels if you aspire to go to these Russell Group universities, or if you decide you want to apply to Oxford and Cambridge.”¹²²

OUR VIEW ON EQUIVALENCE AND RIGOUR

106. We note the Minister’s reassurances that universities within and outside Wales value the skills developed as part of the Welsh Bacc and that the qualification features in many universities’ admissions processes. However, it is clear that perceptions on the ground are different, with many learners, parents and education professionals expressing concern that the qualification is not accepted by all (including some of the best) universities.

107. The variability with which university admissions offers treat the SCC and the wider Welsh Bacc has clearly had a negative impact on perceptions of the Welsh Bacc, and the learners and teachers tasked with its study. If perceptions of the Welsh Bacc’s value, equivalence and rigour are to improve, we believe that establishing a clear picture of higher education’s acceptance or otherwise of the qualification is a crucial part of the jigsaw. While we note the Minister’s emphasis that Welsh students are not disadvantaged by their study of the Welsh Bacc, it is a matter of grave concern to us that many of them, their parents, and their teachers, perceive this to be the case. If it is a myth, more needs to be done to evidence that to those most affected by it.

¹²¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 94], 12 December 2018

¹²² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 117], 12 December 2018

108. Our attempts to gather information about universities' policies were relatively unsuccessful. Given the emphasis placed on the equivalence of the qualification, particularly for entry to higher education, we urge the Welsh Government to work as a matter of priority – and with Qualifications Wales where relevant – to establish and communicate clearly to pupils, parents and education professionals what elements of the Welsh Bacc are accepted in what way, and where.

Recommendation 3. That the Welsh Government undertake work to provide a comprehensive list of those universities that accept the Welsh Bacc in their offers. This list should include details of exactly how each university treats the Welsh Bacc, and whether:

- it is accepted as an equivalent A-level;
- it is used to enable an alternative offer to be made by lowering the grade requirements in other subjects;
- it is considered only as part of a candidate's personal statement.

109. We welcome the work being undertaken by Qualifications Wales to help raise awareness and understanding of the Welsh Bacc, including the appointment of the higher education liaison officer to engage with sixth form colleges and universities within and outside Wales. We are, however, doubtful that one person will be able to undertake this work at the speed and level necessary, and call on Qualifications Wales to consider making additional appointment(s) to take this work forward at a more urgent pace.

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.

5. Universal adoption

The Welsh Government expects the Welsh Bacc to be offered in the programmes of learning for all 16-19 year old learners, with a view to achieving full adoption for enrolment in the 2019/20 academic year. There are concerns that confusion exists about whether the Welsh Bacc is compulsory and that learners' choices are narrowed as a consequence, potentially impacting their wellbeing.

Welsh Government policy

110. In her written evidence the Minister for Education explained:

- the Welsh Government expects the Welsh Bacc to be offered for all 16-19 year old learners “with a view to achieving full adoption for enrolment in 2019/20”;
- headteachers and principles are expected to use their professional judgement in determining the right approach for their learners, which will include consideration of the young person’s wellbeing and their ability to reach their potential;
- while guidance on the Welsh Bacc specifies exemptions from universal adoption in the case of learners following particular courses, “there are no criteria that can accurately determine” decisions about who else can be excused – this is best decided by school and college leaders;
- the new suite of post-16 performance measures will include measures for Welsh Bacc, although no final decision has yet been made on when these will be published for individual schools and colleges.¹²³

111. A number of witnesses raised concerns about inconsistencies in implementing universal adoption. UCAC stated that while the Welsh Government expects universal adoption, it does not itself promote it. The Association of College and School Leaders Cymru said:

¹²³ Written evidence, WB23 – Welsh Government

“We have come across cases of parents who have contacted the Welsh Government and demanded to know why the Welsh Bacc was compulsory, to be told by Welsh Government officials, ‘It’s not. [...] And that really cuts the ground under the feet of heads who are trying to do something they think is a really important part of the Welsh education scene.”¹²⁴

112. There were diverging opinions about the merits of universal adoption. Jane Harries of Haverfordwest VC High School explained that while headteachers felt compelled on the one hand to make the Welsh Bacc compulsory, they also had concerns about restricting learners’ right to exercising choice. She also said that some headteachers are reluctant to have “difficult conversations” with parents – particularly those of more able and talented pupils – and that the only way that can be supported is to try to increase universal adoption across Wales.¹²⁵

113. On the issue of children’s rights, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales stated:

“...the implementation of the target of universal adoption in its current form is not in the best interests of all young people, and as such contravenes an important Guiding Principle of the UNCRC.”¹²⁶

114. Teaching unions, ColegauCymru, and Estyn referred to cases of learners in border areas choosing to study in England in order to avoid the Welsh Bacc.¹²⁷ Qualifications Wales stated that this was anecdotal evidence only, and that further research was needed to establish whether this was happening and if so, whether it was down to understanding of the Welsh Bacc or just perception.¹²⁸

115. Estyn and Qualifications Wales pointed to a competitive situation growing between colleges and sixth forms, using flexibility in relation to the Welsh Bacc to market attractiveness to learners.¹²⁹ Further education representatives stated “it is absolutely not used as a recruitment tool” by colleges.¹³⁰ Our visits to speak with young people about the Welsh Bacc provided examples of young people who left one school for another, or a college, to avoid studying the qualification. This

¹²⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 216 and 219], 14 November 2018

¹²⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 291], 14 November 2018

¹²⁶ Written evidence, WB10 – Children’s Commissioner for Wales

¹²⁷ Written evidence, WB11 – NASUWT, WB13 – ColegauCymru, WB 14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru, and WB19 – Estyn and CYPE Committee, RoP [para 20], 14 November 2018

¹²⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 334-335], 22 November 2018

¹²⁹ Written evidence, WB19 – Estyn and CYPE Committee, RoP [para 337], 22 November 2018

¹³⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 95], 28 November 2018

experience was reiterated by education professionals in our roundtable discussions.¹³¹

116. UCAC believed the inconsistency across Wales in the adoption of the Welsh Bacc means that it is used as “weapon in the battle” to attract post-16 learners and the funding that accompanies them.¹³² Its representative stated that because the majority of Welsh-medium secondary schools have promoted universal adoption of the Welsh Bacc, Welsh-medium pupils were being lost either to colleges or English-medium schools who were not requiring students to study it.¹³³ UCAC stated:

“If the Government says that they want this to be universally adopted, well, they have to do something about that, and not just let every institution make that choice without any kind of sanction or incentive.”¹³⁴

117. While UCAC advocated for universal adoption, the NASUWT argued for the Welsh Bacc to be optional.¹³⁵ They did so based on their understanding that not all universities accept the Welsh Bacc, the anecdotal evidence of learners close to the border choosing to study in England to avoid having to study the SCC, and the qualification’s alleged impact on other subject areas (see chapter 6).

118. ColegauCymru stated that there is significant concern among the further education sector about universal adoption and whether the functioning of the qualification and its delivery is sufficiently robust. It argued that until more of the problems are resolved, universal adoption is not a sensible approach, particularly at Foundation and National levels.¹³⁶

119. Qualifications Wales would not be drawn on the merits of universal adoption, stating it was a policy matter for the Welsh Government. However, the Chair of Qualifications Wales, Ann Evans, said that more clarity about what is meant by universal adoption at key stage 4, what is meant for colleges, and what is meant for sixth forms would be helpful:

¹³¹ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group and Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019

¹³² CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 112], 14 November 2018

¹³³ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 114 and 115], 14 November 2018

¹³⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 118], 14 November 2018

¹³⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 108], 14 November 2018

¹³⁶ Written evidence, WB13 – ColegauCymru

“...we think it could actually come down to being very specific. We think that that clarity would be incredibly useful—it would be useful for schools and colleges, and it would make life more straightforward for schools and colleges if they knew what the expectations were.”¹³⁷

120. Philip Blaker, Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, added:

“We think that the Welsh Government making a clear statement of what is meant by universal adoption, and some clear examples of whether there are exemptions for any reasons—. So, if it’s around it being almost mandatory but not entirely mandatory, then what are the exceptions around that? Making a very clear statement about it maybe being mandatory at this level but not at this level. So, there are lots of different variants, and I think that one of the problems is that there are lots of different interpretations.”¹³⁸

121. When asked to clarify the position on universal adoption, the Minister said:

- she expected all institutions to be in a position to deliver the Welsh Bacc as it should be an entitlement to all Welsh students and be “the norm” to take it;¹³⁹
- she recognised that there may be individual cases where taking the Welsh Bacc is not “aligned to the wellbeing of that particular student”;¹⁴⁰
- while she recognised the need for flexibility in the system, there should be evidence as to why any learner is not studying the Welsh Bacc;¹⁴¹
- there are a wide variety of reasons why learners choose to leave school for further education college,¹⁴² and there is no “hard-and-fast” evidence that avoidance of the Welsh Bacc is the sole driver¹⁴³;
- she would be “very happy” to strengthen the guidance about universal adoption.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 311], 22 November 2018

¹³⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 319], 22 November 2018

¹³⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 125], 12 December 2018

¹⁴⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 125], 12 December 2018

¹⁴¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 127], 12 December 2018

¹⁴² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 163], 12 December 2018

¹⁴³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 159], 12 December 2018

¹⁴⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 145], 12 December 2018

122. The Minister went on to explain that she would not pause the policy of universal adoption to wait for schools to reach a position to deliver the Welsh Bacc in the way in which she would want it delivered:

“...some schools struggle to deliver existing qualifications. I don’t know why we turn around and say that this qualification needs to be stopped when we wouldn’t stop other qualifications [...] there is a responsibility on us, on individual schools and on our regional consortia to ensure that there is professional learning in place so that all schools are in a position to deliver the qualification well.”¹⁴⁵

Impact on learners

123. We received a range of evidence, including from teaching unions, the Children’s Commissioner, education professionals and learners themselves, that raised concerns about the well-being of post-16 students. Furthermore, Estyn’s November 2018 report on A-levels stated that the workload generated by the requirement to study four or five subjects, inclusive Welsh Bacc, was “a significant factor in causing stress amongst A level learners”.¹⁴⁶

124. The Children’s Commissioner for Wales told us:

“My office has received cases [...] in which this requirement has been perceived as compromising young people’s future options, has led to conflict between the young person and their teachers, and has increased time-pressures and exam stress for young people.”¹⁴⁷

125. Pembrokeshire College warned of “overload” for learners while other further education representatives described the qualification as too much pressure for some students to cope with, particularly if resitting GCSEs or trying to secure good grades at A-level.¹⁴⁸ The Children’s Commissioner for Wales warned that pressure across qualifications was also restricting young people’s ability to engage in extra-curricular activities.¹⁴⁹

126. Evidence received directly from young people via our survey and visits painted a mixed picture. On the one hand, examples of excessively onerous and

¹⁴⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 183] 12 December 2018

¹⁴⁶ Estyn, [A-levels in sixth forms and further education colleges](#), November 2018

¹⁴⁷ Written evidence, WB10 – Children’s Commissioner for Wales

¹⁴⁸ Written evidence, WB12 – Pembrokeshire College, WB13 – ColegauCymru and CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 39, 54, 62], 28 November 2018

¹⁴⁹ Written evidence, WB10 – Children’s Commissioner for Wales

burdensome Welsh Bacc workloads were given.¹⁵⁰ Project work was described as very time consuming and there was a strong sense that the different levels of the Welsh Bacc created duplication of effort, leaving learners unclear of the “effort to value” ratio. We also heard of workload affecting grades and leading to learners dropping out altogether.¹⁵¹

127. In contrast, some young people described the qualification as an opportunity to extend their skills, participate in more independent research and learning, and better prepare them for life in work or further study. Some also referred to the fact that having the Welsh Bacc had released pressure to achieve higher A-level results because universities had adjusted offers downwards in light of their SCC.¹⁵²

128. Qualifications Wales stated that the SCC meant more work for learners, but that it was of value in studying for their other qualifications. Its representatives stated “some of the nature of it being onerous for individuals is maybe producing too much stuff that isn’t necessarily of the right quality” but that one aim of the Design Group is to make it more manageable for everyone involved.¹⁵³

129. While the Minister emphasised the benefits for young people of the skills developed via the Welsh Bacc, she acknowledged the concerns about striking a balance in workload. She recognised that for some students, the Welsh Bacc could cause concerns about wellbeing or compromise chances to study further A-levels. She stated:

“...we would not want to jeopardise the well-being of a student by forcing them to do a qualification that wasn’t in their best interests, and we need to have the flexibility in the system to allow school leaders to make that decision, but they should also then be accountable for that decision.”¹⁵⁴

OUR VIEW ON UNIVERSAL ADOPTION AND ITS IMPACT

130. There is a lack of clarity about the meaning and implementation of the Welsh Government’s universal adoption policy. While some centres of learning

¹⁵⁰ CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019 and Summary of survey results, published October 2018

¹⁵¹ Written evidence, WB16 – Gower College Swansea

¹⁵² CYPE Committee, Note of visits across Wales to speak with young people, published March 2019 and Summary of survey results, published October 2018

¹⁵³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 307], 22 November 2018

¹⁵⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 143], 12 December 2018

adopt a mandatory approach to its study, others do not. In many cases this variability has led to a sense of unfairness, and to learners moving from one institution to another simply to avoid the Welsh Bacc. This, in turn, can affect the funding and capacity of centres of learning.

131. We recognise the benefits of the skills-based qualification engendered in the Welsh Bacc, and that centres of learning that are seeking to deliver this vision by achieving universal adoption are facing challenges from learners and parents. We are concerned that, in some cases, centres appear to be losing pupils to other institutions as a result. It seems unjust that those who have followed the Welsh Government's lead find themselves affected in this way. Nevertheless, we also recognise that more needs to be done to be clear about what is meant by "universal adoption" and to address concerns about the limitations on pupil choice that can occur if a school or college opts (or feels compelled) to mandate the study of the Welsh Bacc.

132. To overcome this tension, narrow the variability in approach, and reduce the reliance on individual interpretations of the policy, clear and detailed guidance about what is expected in relation to universal adoption is needed from the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 5. That the Welsh Government issue as a matter of priority strengthened and more detailed guidance on the policy of universal adoption. This guidance should set out clearly the circumstances in which learners may be exempt from studying the SCC, and be subject to a rigorous and comprehensive children's rights impact assessment.

133. We note the anecdotal evidence presented that learners in border areas may be choosing to study in England in order to avoid the Welsh Bacc. We further note the concerns raised about pupils leaving school for college in order to avoid studying the qualification.

Recommendation 6. That the Welsh Government engage with schools and Further Education institutions to establish whether:

- learners in border areas are choosing to study in England in order to avoid the Welsh Bacc; and
- colleges and sixth forms are using flexibility in relation to the Welsh Bacc to market attractiveness to learners,

and report back to the Committee within six months on its findings.

AS PART OF OUR SURVEY ON THE WELSH BACC WE ASKED LEARNERS AND PARENTS / GUARDIANS TO TELL US ABOUT THE QUALIFICATION'S IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE.

57% of those who responded to the question mentioned the time they spent on the Welsh Bacc

Comments included:



"it was extremely time consuming"

"it leaves less time to focus on other subjects"

"it reduces the number of subject options available"

17% of those who responded to the question mentioned skills

Comments included:



"It develops many skills not found in other subjects"

"The projects gave me skills I am using at university"

"My son has gained or developed many transferable skills [...] he's gained confidence, communication and teamwork skills which are invaluable [...] and will certainly prepare him for life in the future"

"My child already learns the skills within humanities A-levels"

"It added nothing to my personal skills"

"I don't think the knowledge and skills gained from the Bacc are necessarily transferrable to other subjects"

8% of those who responded to the question mentioned stress

Comments included:



"It causes students too much stress"

"It has made my time at school extremely stressful as it is very time consuming"

"It adds a lot of pressure as it is important to do well in it but sometimes it can take the focus off other subjects"

134. We are concerned by the evidence we received that some learners are struggling to cope with the pressure caused by the workload involved in the Welsh Bacc. The emotional and mental health of children and young people is of paramount importance to us. As noted in our 2018 Mind over Matter report, we believe much more work needs to be done to ensure that a young person's wellbeing is at the forefront of all aspects of their education. The Welsh Bacc is no exception.

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.

6. Impact on curriculum and wider education

The introduction of the Welsh Bacc along with wider education reforms in recent years has led to timetables being stretched. As a consequence, options and choices for learners are perceived to have narrowed. Many are concerned that recent reforms have not been accompanied by the necessary training, development and resources for those charged with delivery.

Impact on the curriculum

135. The impact of the Welsh Bacc on local curriculum offers was a key theme in our inquiry.

136. The NASUWT stated that, at Key Stage 4, the Welsh Bacc had displaced option choices, resulting in an “unacceptable narrowing” of the curriculum.¹⁵⁵ This view was echoed by the Regional Consortia for Wales, who said that the introduction of the SCC and Welsh Bacc at Key Stage 4 had “led some schools to reduce GCSE option choices”.¹⁵⁶

137. UCAC explained, however, that evidence of a reduction in the number of subjects being taken at Key Stage 4 could be attributed to factors beyond the Welsh Bacc.¹⁵⁷ Gavin Jones of Caerleon Comprehensive School explained that such factors could include the emphasis on core literacy and numeracy provision, or a desire on the part of parents and learners to see diversity in the subject areas on offer.¹⁵⁸ Estyn’s evidence and comments made by education professionals in our roundtable discussion pointed to a similar range of pressures on the curriculum offer.¹⁵⁹

138. When asked whether schools had reduced their subject choices, Qualifications Wales said:

¹⁵⁵ Written evidence, WB11 – NASUWT

¹⁵⁶ Written evidence, WB18 – Regional Consortia for Wales

¹⁵⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 170], 14 November 2018

¹⁵⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 314], 14 November 2018

¹⁵⁹ Written evidence, WB19 – Estyn and CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

“I think it’s inevitable. There’s only so much time available within the curriculum. So, whenever a choice is made that consumes some of that time, it inevitably means that something else has to give. So, I think there’s an inevitability in that. I think it then comes down to what, from a policy perspective, Government considers to be most important in young people’s education and some sense of prioritisation around that [..]

you have to make some value choices about what’s taught and what’s not taught, and it comes back to this notion of universal adoption and what Government’s expectations are in terms of education.”¹⁶⁰

139. Nick Brazil, Deputy Principal at Gower College Swansea referred specifically to the “dramatic” decline in modern foreign languages. He stated he was aware that a number of schools had focused on achieving the Welsh Bacc rather than giving the opportunity to study a modern foreign language.¹⁶¹

140. This was corroborated by recent research undertaken by the BBC on language teaching. More than half of all secondary schools and colleges in Wales responded to the BBC’s survey, with 71 percent of those respondents attributing the decline in modern foreign languages to priority subjects in the timetable such as maths, science and the Welsh Bacc.¹⁶² In the last five years, Statistics Wales data shows there has been a 31 per cent fall in language GCSE entries in Wales, from 8232 in 2013/14 to 5673 in 2017/18.¹⁶³

141. The Association of School and College Leaders Cymru stated that while the SCC had “inevitably” narrowed choice, that does not equate to narrowing the curriculum. The ASCL emphasised the importance of balancing any reduction in choice against the benefits and gains of studying the Welsh Bacc.¹⁶⁴ Its evidence stated:

“We do not believe that studying the WBQ impacts in any negative way on the study of other curriculum subjects. Indeed, we find to the contrary that the skills set developed as part of the SCC can make a very valuable contribution towards more effective study across the board.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 327-328], 22 November 2018

¹⁶¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 120], 28 November 2018

¹⁶² BBC News, [Foreign languages “squeezed out” of schools in Wales](#), 27 February 2019

¹⁶³ StatsWales, [GCSE entries and results \(pupils in Year 11/pupils aged 15\) by subject group](#)

¹⁶⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 313], 14 November 2018

¹⁶⁵ Written evidence, WB14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru

142. Some witnesses drew links between the Welsh Bacc and the new curriculum. UCAC suggested that the SCC was “better matched” than traditional subjects with the new curriculum, and that lessons from it could help facilitate “that process of bridging from where we are now in terms of the curriculum and qualifications to where we want to be within five years”.¹⁶⁶ The NASUWT agreed, stating:

“The terms of the Welsh Bacc seem [...] to certainly be closer to the philosophy that governs the curriculum reform than the present qualifications are. Indeed, there’s going to have to be a wholesale change in Welsh qualifications so that they dovetail into the curriculum reform.”¹⁶⁷

143. When asked about the Welsh Bacc’s impact on the curriculum, the Minister stated that schools are responsible for planning their local curriculum offer and that they need to meet the needs of their learners and the Learning and Skills Measure.¹⁶⁸ She said:

“I believe that the skills challenge certificate actually does ensure that there is a broad curriculum and that children are exposed to different learning opportunities. And so, rather than narrowing it, I believe the Welsh Bacc helps us to make sure that there is an expansive curriculum, and that lots of different issues are explored in the skills challenge certificate that ensure not just academic skills are developed, but, actually, knowledge and skills of a wider range of subjects about you and your place in the world is available via this qualification.”¹⁶⁹

144. The Minister elaborated, stating that the Welsh Bacc should not be at the expense of other subjects, but part of a wide range of opportunities. She added:

“I don’t think it [the Welsh Bacc] is more important or less important than other aspects of what we already ask schools to deliver.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 93], 14 November 2018

¹⁶⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 98], 14 November 2018

¹⁶⁸ To facilitate a broad and balanced curriculum for all learners, the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 requires schools, in their local curriculum offers, to provide: at Key Stage 4, a minimum of 25 courses with at three vocational qualifications; at post-16, a choice of 30 courses, of which five must be vocational.

¹⁶⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 151], 12 December 2018

¹⁷⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 153], 12 December 2018

Vocational qualifications and adult learning

145. Evidence from ColegauCymru emphasised the need to take account of the Welsh Bacc’s impact on vocational as well as academic qualifications. It listed the following challenges posed by the Welsh Bacc:

- the Welsh Bacc is “not as relevant” to learners on very practical skills-based qualifications that lead into work-based learning pathways;
- the academic outputs and assessments can “disengage” students from learning;
- it is difficult to implement the Welsh Bacc where there are classes of adult learners and 16-19 year old learners undertaking the same programme of study; and
- the National and Foundation levels are “impractical” to implement in one year and create a “huge burden of assessment” as learners often have to complete Welsh Bacc work and resit GCSEs alongside their main programme of work.¹⁷¹

146. For those learners pursuing vocational paths, other skills-based training was cited as potentially preferable to the Welsh Bacc. Kay Martin of Cardiff and Vale College referred to programmes such as WorldSkills and Career Ready, suggesting that they could be more valuable to both vocational learners and employers.¹⁷² Dafydd Evans, Chair of ColegauCymru and Chief Executive Officer of Group Llandrillo Menai, added:

“...although we always try and put the learner first, funding does drive behaviours, and the Welsh Bacc is fundable; Career Ready isn’t. So, yes, there are options out there, but because we’re so focused on qualifications and we will only fund qualifications, that drives certain behaviours.”¹⁷³

147. When asked about the impact of the Welsh Bacc on those following a vocational path, Qualifications Wales stated that it was a qualification suitable for all learners:

¹⁷¹ Written evidence, WB13 – ColegauCymru

¹⁷² CYPE Committee, RoP [para 74], 28 November 2018

¹⁷³ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 32], 28 November 2018

“The skills are skills that all pupils and students need to take them forward into higher education or into employment. If you talk to HE or to employers, these are the skills they talk about, and so why wouldn’t you want people to be doing these skills?”¹⁷⁴

Impact on teachers

148. The impact of the Welsh Bacc on teachers’ workloads and the lack of continuity in the teaching of the qualification were key themes in our inquiry.

149. Estyn told us that the majority of schools place insufficient emphasis on providing the time, resources and training to support effective teaching of the Welsh Bacc, which has a negative impact on teachers’ attitudes towards it.¹⁷⁵ The onerous nature of the administration surrounding the qualification was also cited as a contributor to negative perceptions and pressure.¹⁷⁶

150. Education unions reported difficulties finding teachers who specialise in teaching the Welsh Bacc and that training for teachers had been inadequate.¹⁷⁷ UCAC emphasised the importance of initial teacher education in this regard.¹⁷⁸ Education professionals who attended our roundtable discussions explained that the nature of the SCC was so different to other qualifications that teachers lacked confidence delivering it.¹⁷⁹ Qualifications Wales added that the longer teachers had taught it, the more confident they became.¹⁸⁰

151. The need to share best practice among and between centres of learning was raised by education professionals. While they acknowledged that good networks existed in some places in Wales, they believed more work was needed.¹⁸¹

152. The lack of materials supporting the Welsh Bacc was raised by education professionals in our roundtable discussion, and by UCAC, who commented about a lack of Welsh language resources in particular.¹⁸² The education professionals we

¹⁷⁴ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 322], 22 November 2018

¹⁷⁵ Written evidence, WB19 – Estyn

¹⁷⁶ Written evidence, WB14 – Association of School and College Leaders Cymru

¹⁷⁷ Written evidence, WB11 – NASUWT and WB22 – National Education Union Cymru

¹⁷⁸ Written evidence, WB06 – Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru

¹⁷⁹ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March

¹⁸⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 240], 22 November 2018

¹⁸¹ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

¹⁸² Written evidence, WB06 – Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru and CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

spoke with told us that the lack of textbooks and resources makes the teaching and understanding of the Welsh Bacc more challenging.¹⁸³

153. The importance of the role of Welsh Bacc Co-ordinators and/or a department dedicated to SCC was highlighted in our roundtable discussion.¹⁸⁴ It was emphasised that the resource, time and coordination they can give to the qualification is crucial to its success and to the ability of other staff to support it. Hannah O'Brien of the National Education Union Cymru reiterated these points in oral evidence, adding:

“...it’s down to the quality of the co-ordinator as well, not just the leadership, but the Welsh Bacc co-ordinator, how much time they’ve got for planning, preparing, delivering and supporting their members who are doing the qualification with pupils, and whether they’re the right person as well doing it, and whether they’ve been supported enough as well to get everything done. It is a very robust qualification and a lot of time needs to go into that, and if that co-ordinator doesn’t have enough time, then certainly the members of staff are not going to have the time either.”¹⁸⁵

154. Further education representatives suggested that those teachers best placed to take the lead on the Welsh Bacc were vocational specialists, given the overlap in skills.¹⁸⁶

155. Qualifications Wales acknowledged that the balance between teaching, learning and assessment was “probably not in the right place”.¹⁸⁷ Its representatives stated that evidence suggested teachers were being asked to deliver it due to space in their timetables rather than their level of training or expertise.¹⁸⁸ This, they argued, must be addressed through initial teacher education, continuous professional development, school leadership and professional training provided by the WJEC as the awarding body.¹⁸⁹ They added that existing CPD sessions are “good and of high quality”.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸³ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

¹⁸⁴ CYPE Committee, Notes of roundtable stakeholder group, published March 2019

¹⁸⁵ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 86], 14 November 2018

¹⁸⁶ CYPE Committee, RoP [paras 132-133], 28 November 2018

¹⁸⁷ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 306], 22 November 2018

¹⁸⁸ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 343], 22 November 2018

¹⁸⁹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 345], 22 November 2018

¹⁹⁰ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 345], 22 November 2018

156. The Minister for Education acknowledged the onerous nature of the qualification and the consequences on the workload for teachers, pointing to similar conclusions in the Wavehill Report. She pointed to the fact that these issues are now being addressed in response to the Report's recommendations.

157. In relation to the calls for improved initial teacher education and continuous professional development, the Minister highlighted:

- existing opportunities via the regional consortia for support for teaching of the qualification;
- existing WJEC resources and support;
- as the national approach to professional learning is rolled out, addressing the professional learning needs of those already in the system will be considered;
- while accreditation for new initial teacher education is predominantly addressed at being able to deliver that new curriculum, the skills, knowledge and pedagogy associated with that are closely aligned with the SCC.¹⁹¹

OUR VIEW ON IMPACT ON CURRICULUM AND WIDER EDUCATION

158. We support wholeheartedly a broad and varied curriculum for learners in Wales. We are following closely the once-in-a-generation curriculum reform underway as a consequence of Professor Graham Donaldson's Successful Futures report.

159. While it cannot be denied that the introduction of the SCC and wider education reforms leaves less capacity in the timetable for other learning, we are concerned by reports that this had led to a perception of a narrowing in the curriculum, with the impact modern foreign languages cited as a particular example by some witnesses. If designed and implemented effectively, the Welsh Bacc should widen learners' skills and experiences. Nevertheless, as acknowledged elsewhere in this report, implementation of the Welsh Bacc is far from perfect and perceptions and understanding of the qualification are in equal need of improvement.

¹⁹¹ CYPE Committee, RoP [para 19], 12 December 2018

Recommendation 8. That the Welsh Government undertake work to monitor on an ongoing basis the impact of the Welsh Bacc and other education reforms on the wider curriculum.

160. We are concerned to learn of the impact on teachers of weaknesses in relation to the Welsh Bacc, not least the onerous nature of its assessment and an alleged lack of resources. We are further concerned to learn of the variability in the skills and training of those who deliver it. As noted in our 2017 report on teachers' professional learning and education, without adequate training and education for our teaching workforce, ambitious reforms will not be achieved.

Recommendation 9. That the Welsh Government improve the delivery of the Welsh Bacc by:

- ensuring that both initial teacher education and continuous professional development are fit for purpose for its delivery;
- ensuring a system for the sharing of best practice is established across schools and colleges in Wales;
- issuing guidance outlining the expectation that all schools follow best practice by having a designated, specialist Welsh Bacc Coordinator;
- exploring whether better Welsh Bacc materials/resources are needed, and delivering them if so.

161. Lessons must be learned from the period since the introduction of the new Welsh Bacc in 2015 if similar workforce issues, misperceptions, and lack of understanding are to be avoided in relation to the new curriculum in Wales. While we believe that both the Welsh Bacc and the new curriculum have the potential to deliver wide-ranging and innovative improvements for learners, parents, teachers, schools, colleges, universities and employers alike, if they are not communicated, understood and resourced well, at best we will progress slowly, and at worst we will regress.

Recommendation 10. That the Welsh Government ensure that lessons learned since the new Welsh Bacc's introduction in 2015 are reviewed systematically and used alongside the conclusions of the Wavehill Report and the forthcoming results of the Qualifications Wales Design Group's work to inform the design, implementation, resourcing and communication of the new curriculum in Wales.

Annex A: List of oral evidence sessions

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. [Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions](#) can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Date	Name and Organisation
14 November 2018	<p>Hannah O'Neill, National Education Union Cymru (NEU)</p> <p>Neil Butler, NASUWT</p> <p>Rebecca Williams, Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)</p> <p>Roger Vaughan, Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)</p> <p>Tim Pratt, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)</p> <p>Gavin Jones, Caerleon Comprehensive School</p> <p>Jane Harries, Haverfordwest High VC School</p>
22 November 2018	<p>Philip Blaker, Qualifications Wales</p> <p>Ann Evans, Qualifications Wales</p> <p>Emyr George, Qualifications Wales</p>
28 November 2018	<p>Dafydd Evans, ColegauCymru and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai</p> <p>Kay Martin, ColegauCymru and Cardiff and Vale College</p> <p>Nick Brazil, ColegauCymru and Gower College Swansea</p> <p>Dr Rachel Bowen, ColegauCymru</p> <p>Ed Evans, Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) Wales</p>
12 December 2018	<p>Kirsty Williams AM, Minister for Education</p> <p>Kevin Palmer, Welsh Government</p> <p>Andrew Clark, Welsh Government</p>

Annex B: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All [consultation responses and additional written information](#) can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Organisation	Reference
Individual	WB 01
Individual	WB 02
Individual	WB 03
Conwy Youth Council	WB 04
Individual	WB 05
Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru	WB 06
Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA)	WB 07
Individual	WB 08
University and College Union	WB 09
Children's Commissioner for Wales	WB 10
NASUWT	WB 11
Pembrokeshire College	WB 12
CollegesWales	WB 13
Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)	WB 14
Wales Alliance for Global Learning	WB 15
Gower College Swansea	WB 16
Welsh Language Commissioner	WB 17
Regional Consortia for Wales	WB 18
Estyn	WB 19
UCAS	WB 20
CITB	WB 21
National Education Union Cymru	WB 22
Welsh Government	WB 23