

CYPE(5)-31-18 – Paper 2

Statws y Cymhwyster Bagloriaeth Cymru | The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification

WB 22

Ymateb gan: National Education Union Cymru

Response from: National Education Union Cymru

About the National Education Union Cymru:

- The National Education Union Cymru stands up for the future of education. It brings together the voices of teachers, lecturers, support staff and leaders working in maintained and independent schools and colleges to form the largest education union in Wales.
- The National Education Union is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). It is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.
- Together, we'll shape the future of education.

NEU Cymru response

NEU Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the CYPE Committee Inquiry into the Welsh Baccalaureate (the Welsh Bacc). The Welsh Bacc is something our members feel very strongly about.

Introduction

We are broadly supportive of the Welsh Bacc, but our members have seen some challenges with the Qualification at both KS4 and Post-16, which mean it is less valuable than originally intended. The Welsh Bacc has the opportunity to enable students to undertake better critical thinking, for example, and therefore supports WG aims around engaged citizens.

However, it is currently viewed by education professionals, learners and parents as inhibitive, and has been poorly supported by training and resources – critical to making the qualification match the WG's aspirations.

Despite concerns being voiced ever since the WB was introduced, it seems to us that little real attempt has been made by the WG to fully promote and extol the virtues of the WB to the profession, parents,

learners, employers, schools, colleges or universities, which has had a detrimental effect upon its currency.

The Welsh Bacc has been included as a performance measure, which we believe the current Cabinet Secretary should move away from.

We have outlined some of the issues below and also answered your questions:

Timetabling and incentives

For post-16 and A level students who want to sit a fourth A level or alternative vocational course to support their entrance into further study or employment, members tell us that the extra work, and study time required by the Welsh Bacc means that learners are unable to sit the extra A level. Whilst we accept that the Welsh Bacc can contain elements which helpfully prepare the learner for work or further study, it can be prohibitive in getting there.

Consideration needs to be given to individual learners and their chosen path. If they want and need to undertake 4 A levels, for example, they should not be prohibited from doing that.

In the same way that the Welsh Bacc can cause issues at A level, members in secondary schools in particular highlight how the Welsh Bacc prohibits learners from undertaking as many options at GCSE as they would wish to pursue. Taken together with the introduction of Maths Numeracy, secondary timetables are facing great pressure. And learners may be unable to take as many options at GCSE, which means their options are narrowed at an age when they are still trying out a range of subjects to find out where their strengths are.

Therefore, WG needs to fund and support students who take a different course from the Welsh Bacc in the same way as those who do. This will enable real student choice.

Similarly, learners with ALN may be encouraged to undertake the Welsh Bacc when their route to further study or alternatives would be best met by other routes.

Funding

Funding across the education sector is critical to support any policy implementation. The WG's move to encourage take up of the Welsh Bacc is unfair on schools and FEIs, as it uses performance indicators, therefore 'intended consequences'. Thus, whilst the WG says that it is down to learner choice, this is undermined by the policy.

Content

The content of the Welsh Bacc has made many headlines. Members have been repeatedly concerned about the lack of guidance around the syllabus for the Welsh Bacc. Our Committee believe that the Welsh Bacc should be about critical thinking, and preparing learners to meet future challenges which are not met within other subjects.

Marking

The Welsh Bacc has been introduced without clear parameters in terms of expectations, which has left our members creating their own marking schemes. This has undermined the qualifications comparability. Whilst we understand this has improved there is some way to travel on this.

1. The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is understood and valued by learners, parents, education professionals in schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers;

NEU Cymru is supportive of the Welsh Bacc in principle. If it is an opportunity to expand the horizons of learners at KS4 and PCET, engage in critical thinking and be more engaged as citizens then that is something to welcome.

However, the Welsh Bacc is unpopular with parents, and our members, when it limits the choices for learners, who would otherwise, for example, be able to have more in depth knowledge of maths (in further maths) or music.

2. The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate is considered by learners, education professionals in schools and colleges, employers and higher education to be an equivalent, rigorous qualification;

Universities which accept the Welsh Bacc as the 'forth A level' is not helpful. Either it is an A level equivalent or it isn't. much was made of Cambridge seeing it as a forth A level – but this is meaningless if they

only require 3 A levels. Indeed, the Welsh Bacc is devalued as our members tell us it is not valued by a number of Russell group admissions tutors, who the Cabinet Secretary says are taking an “increasingly flexible approach”¹.

Vocational qualifications should be considered an equivalent with ‘academic’ routes, where they are an equivalent.

3. The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in schools and colleges, including the Welsh Government’s target for universal adoption and the potential impact of this approach;

We have concerns about this, which are outlined in our introduction above.

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

Please see our introduction. We would also note that our members tell us that there is a challenge in finding teachers who ‘specialise’ in the teaching of the Welsh Bacc. We believe that extra money is needed to recruit people to teach the Welsh Bacc.

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

The Welsh Bacc has the potential to be a great opportunity to engage in critical thinking and be engaged as citizens, undertake independent research and work in a team. Our members cannot support it until the time it takes away from other key activities are fully considered.

Mary van den Heuvel
National Education Union Cymru
Mary.vandenheuvel@neu.org.uk

¹ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s73006/23.01.18%20Correspondence%20-%20Cabinet%20Secretary%20for%20Education%20to%20the%20Chair%20of%20the%20Children%20Young%20People.pdf>