University of Bath

Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Internal Evaluation

Themed Report:

MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION WITHIN CENTRES

[This is one of eight themed reports which draw on issues relating to particular themes that have arisen in different dimensions of the work of the WBQ Internal Evaluation team: further details appear in the various reports already generated on different dimensions of the WBQ pilot project]

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The role of Management and Organisation of pilot centres in relation to piloting of the WBQ has been continuously monitored through the internal evaluation visits and specifically commented upon in all composite reports. Although the major issues identified by centres have occurred across all cohorts, the majority of centres joining the project after the initial group undoubtedly benefited from the experiences of that first cohort. In many cases this was gained through visits to previous cohort centres early in the planning year. It is also apparent that cohort 2 and 3 centres benefited from the enhanced experience of the Project Team members and their adapted mode of working in link advisory roles. Additionally, of course, later cohorts benefited from the availability of the guidance material and instructions developed with cohort one centres.

2. INFLUENCE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT

2.1 Not surprisingly, the overt support of the senior management team of the pilot centres was crucial in securing the successful adoption of the WBQ. Although unqualified support was the inevitable claim of all SMT, the actual evidence did not always substantiate this claim in some centres which appeared to be experiencing difficulty in progressing the development of the WBQ. Indicative of SMT support for staff developing the WBQ were; firm growth strategies in developmental planning rather than statements of vague intentions; SMT, as a whole, or through a delegated member, actively involved in a formal strategic planning group; a delivery team which included SMT members; and clear evidence of the WBQ influencing the culture of the pilot centre beyond the immediate target group.

2.2 In the majority of pilot centres the early strategic planning was confined to a senior management team or sub-group. It was noticeable that cohort 2 and 3 centres were significantly more advanced in their strategic planning during the pre-delivery stages than had been the case for the initial group Again, this was almost certainly due to the increased experience of the Project Team in providing support and the informal networking that was established across cohorts.

2.3 The establishment of WBQ development groups in centres with the time and resources to undertake the given task was considered essential by all centres, although again those in cohorts 2 and 3 were generally more effective in making this provision at an early stage of the preparatory year.

2.4 Effective and comprehensive communication of information about the WBQ to all staff, whether or not directly involved in the pilot, was considered essential by a

majority of centres. For centres where the culture of the 'Bac' was intended to influence developments elsewhere in the college or school, it was obviously deemed important for all staff to have a working knowledge of its concept and structure. Another reason was to ensure that the WBQ was known to be a centre priority and 'staff have got to have a clear understanding of the importance of it because all of them will be in touch with students or parents at some stage who will have a question about the Welsh Bac.' Other centres considered potential expansion of the Bac required knowledge amongst all staff for future recruitment to delivery teams. This also included ensuring that non-teaching staff involved in recruitment and enrolment were well acquainted with the WBQ.

2.5 Communication to Governors has been a standard procedure at all centres with progress briefings a frequent occurrence. Little evidence of the views of Governors other than the reported favourable responses has been available, although in Cohort 3 there has been the suggestion of greater monitoring of students' reactions being required as Governors in a few centres expressed some disquiet at the obligatory nature of the qualification.

3.   COORDINATION

3.1   The crucial role of the WBQ Coordinator in the pilot centres has been stressed from the outset by the Project Team, and all the evidence from the internal evaluation validates this viewpoint. The vast majority of centres started with a senior manager assuming the strategic coordination role, with a specific appointment at an operational level following at a later stage for curriculum development and deliver. In general it appeared advantageous for this operational coordinator to be appointed or identified reasonably early in the planning stage to ensure continuity of progress.

3.2   There has been a wide range of backgrounds in the coordinators selected. In colleges they tend to be established middle managers with a history of involvement in cross-college initiatives such as Key Skills. In schools they vary, from being members of the senior management teams themselves through pastoral heads to newly appointed middle managers. Coordination is rarely a specifically paid post in colleges often being combined with other managerial or administrative responsibilities. For coordinators in schools there is often a paid allowance or the post has become an added responsibility for an existing senior post holder. The majority of coordinators have a time allowance although this is rarely claimed as adequate by the incumbents. In all centres it has been essential that coordinators have acknowledged curriculum credibility with colleagues and carry the status and authority to achieve tasks. Clear and widely understood links with the senior management teams of centres has been an essential characteristic of successful coordination.

3.3   It would appear that two main models of the coordination role have emerged in the pilot centres across all cohorts. In schools and a very few colleges, the favoured structure is based on a single WBQ coordinator directing and monitoring the development of the project but also being actively involved in some aspect of delivery with close senior management support. In colleges the WBQ coordinator tends to be a senior manager or faculty leader who does not necessarily have an active involvement in delivery, but does have a major role in facilitating and monitoring the activities of often marginally or even completely unrelated delivery groups within the centre. Within these, usually vocationally orientated groups, the course leader or designated staff team member is effectively a WBQ coordinator; directing, monitoring and involved in the delivery of the WBQ by their course team.

3.4 An increasing number of centres, particularly schools, have appointed WBQ administrative assistants to work with and for coordinators especially where student numbers justify this course of action. Many centres have developed sophisticated monitoring programmes to track students' progress and achievements. Given the complexity of these programmes and the considerable administrative workload associated with the project as a whole the appointment of the administrator appears to have been essential in effective monitoring and tracking of students, and allowing the coordinator the time to fulfil a leadership rather than administrative role.

3.5 A major issue faced by a surprising number of pilot centres was the change or early loss of the WBQ coordinator. This occurred mainly, but not exclusively, in cohort 1 centres where the sudden absence of the coordinator almost inevitably resulted in the project undergoing a hiatus, during which the development of the project faltered and progress was seriously hampered, as well as a lack of continuity. This negative experience by a disproportionate number of pilot centres highlights the need for contingency short and long term cover to be built into WBQ team strategies; it also suggests that undertaking a risk assessment might be a wise strategy for centres to consider before embarking upon the WBQ programme. It has been noted that a relatively small number of coordinators still claim to feel isolated and to be operating as 'one man bands' with too much reliance on this one person and insufficient team building for long term benefits to the project.

4. ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANISATION

4.1 The importance of the establishment of teams of committed staff early in the planning stage has been repeatedly highlighted Equally, the constancy of membership of these teams has been stressed as has the need for sufficient time for well organised meetings which all can attend. Some cohort 1 centres, in particular, suffered from the late formation of delivery planning teams, with changing personnel and insufficient or inappropriate time allocation In many centres, team members tended to have responsibilities for specifically identified aspects of the WBQ such as key skills. The components might therefore be identified or developed discretely, even though the intended mode of delivery might be an integrated one. It is worth noting that a few centres found staff who were already implementing an aspect such as key skills experienced difficulty in adapting their element to the overall needs of the WBQ. In colleges, where existing vocational courses were integrating the WBQ, the vocational team became the delivery planning team with the course leader as effective WBQ coordinator. This assumed, however, that members of the team have signed up to the project and are not involved through the enthusiasm of the leader alone. In all cases, however, it has been evident that team members should be selected 'for reasons of appropriate expertise, credibility and a willingness to be involved and not simply because of the contingencies of the timetable or contract.

4.2 An issue for some colleges has been coordination across sites, in many cases separated by many miles. All attempt to maintain a central coordination and, as the project has developed, there are signs of greater coherence between campuses. Teams on separate campuses, however, mainly operate with a high degree of independence in the development and delivery of the WBQ, often with little evidence of sharing good practice across sites.

4.3 All centres claimed to have benefited from external support, most notably appreciating that of the WJEC Project Team in particular; their courses, and easy access to the project office for advice and the link 'adviser' visits, were favourably commented upon by the vast majority of centres. It is notable that some cohort 3 centres would have appreciated being brought together as a group by the Project

Team at an earlier stage in their planning, when the team members were necessarily fully committed to working with cohort 1 and 2 centres. Whilst this was remediated by the team, it does indicate the degree of support required by new centres and questions the source of such expert advice when the pilot stage has ended. The other major source of valued advice for cohort 2 and 3 centres was the experience of previous cohort centres with at least one centre organising an 'open day' for new or potential WBQ centres. More usually, new centres arranged their own network of visits to experienced centres which, in some cases, have become more permanent liaisons. The support and interest of LEA's has been very infrequently encountered in the accounts of schools, although there have been a few notable exceptions.

4.4   A remarkable achievement of the project has been the publication of results to time, given that the award of the Diploma requires the aggregation of constituent results often from Awarding Bodies other than the WJEC. Timing is particularly crucial in the summer award of the Advanced Diploma if WBQ students are not to be disadvantaged by UCAS and universities receiving their results other than at exactly the same time as those of all other students. The award of the WBQ Diploma is a unique process in the UK examination scene and been accomplished with the development of procedures that should be applicable to a larger cohort of students in future. The centres were appreciative of the administrative support of the WJEC and the immediate access to advice when required. Also commended by centres was the willingness of the WJEC to consult and respond to problems encountered by centres in meeting the administrative requirements of the qualification. Centres are generally improving their internal moderation procedures, but will need to ensure that their internal tracking records are compatible with the requirements of the WJEC throughout the involvement of a student cohort so that prior learning, achievement of targets and proxy claims are correctly monitored and recorded. As numbers become larger in centres, attention will need to be paid to the use of these tracking devices by staff working with a manageable number of students, probably through an extension to existing tutorial systems. A related issue is the timing of constituent awards for Key Skills being compatible with final entry dates for WBQ Diploma students; in the first year a significant number of students were entered for the Diploma only to effectively drop out when learning of their failure to gain the necessary key skills awards for the WBQ.

5.   FINANCE AND RESOURCES

5.1   A recurring anxiety expressed by centres of all cohorts has been related to the considerable additional cost of implementing the WBQ. The project is essentially an addition to existing provision and entails extra staff teaching time for delivery and, in particular, tutorials. Added to the obvious need for teaching resources are the costs of the visits and external agencies which are a prominent feature of the programme. Students need easy and frequent access to ICT facilities and other learning resources, and the electronic mapping and tracking programmes referred to above also necessitate staff access and administrative support. Finally, the qualification itself is an additional cost to centres, not only in terms of the entrance fee but also the associated tracking that is a necessary component of this project.

5.2   Apart from some comments about the apparently delayed arrival of pilot funding there has been relatively little negative comment about the financial support received by the pilot centres, although some disquiet has been expressed, by colleges in particular, about the level of funding available. A more consistently mentioned concern has been the longer term financial implications when pilot funding is ended. There is considerable anxiety in both colleges and schools as to the reality of a funding formula adequately resourcing the WBQ.

5.3   The progress of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) is an issue in terms of longer term implementation of the WBQ, should it 'roll out' after the end of the pilot phase.

6.   EVALUATION

6.1   In general, it appears that evaluation in centres was based largely on action models to overcome specific problems and identify strategies to improve delivery. Regular written reports summarising progress in the delivery of the WBQ for senior managers and governors were a not uncommon feature in schools. Colleges, mainly because of their funding contracts, tended to have more formal annual quality assurance systems in place and the evaluation of the WBQ was inevitably incorporated into this programme.

6.2   Pilot centres have been, as expected, operating under intense evaluative scrutiny by external agencies throughout their involvement in the project. As well as responding to the demands of the University of Bath evaluation team and, more recently, to those of the external evaluators from the University of Nottingham, they have needed to respond to the enquiries and investigations of the WJEC project team as well as, in many cases, having to manage frequent media interest and pressure. In addition, Estyn has shown considerable interest in schools and colleges developing the WBQ, with a large number of classes inspected over the past two years.

7.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1   There has been an observable advancement in the confidence and effectiveness of approach to the project displayed by successive cohort centres drawing on the accumulating expertise of involved pilots and the project team.

7.2   The demonstrable support the Central Management Team of pilot centres has been crucial to the successful adoption of the project.

7.3   Effective and continuing communication about the WBQ to all staff, whether or not directly involved in the project, is necessary for it to become embedded in the curriculum culture of the centre.

7.4   An effective coordinator with a clearly defined and commonly understood role is essential for effective planning and delivery of the project.

7.5   The appointment of a WBQ administration Assistant has become increasingly common as a necessary support for staff and students enabling the coordinator to assume a true managerial role in leading the development of the project.

7.6   WBQ development teams in pilot schools and colleges have undoubtedly benefited from well structured and protected time both prior to and during implementation.

7.7   The value of the contribution of the project team in advising, training and brokering support has been inestimable and raises the issue as to how such support could be made available to centres adopting the WBQ on 'roll-out.'

7.8   The development of a sustainable process to ensure the timely publication of WBQ results (particularly in the case of the Advanced Diploma and those students who have applied to universities) has been an immense achievement of the project.

7.9   There remains considerable anxiety in both schools and colleges with respect to the feasibility of future funding formulae adequately resourcing the WBQ.

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