

University of Bath

Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Internal Evaluation

Themed Report:

STAFF TRAINING AND SUPPORT

[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 success of all significant curriculum innovations is dependent on appropriate training and support for staff. The WBQ is no exception to this rule. This report considers the training and support that has been offered to centres in all three cohorts of the pilot scheme. The provision of training and support has been divided into two categories: external support (for example the Project Team or network support groups) and internal support (for example that provided by senior management teams or school / college based INSET).

EXTERNAL SUPPORT:

2 FINANCE

- 2.1 Financial provision for staff training was made from the outset of the pilot. Some centres appeared to have underestimated the amount of time that would be required for this activity. Centres in the first cohort, obviously, had no previous experience to fall back on and this was seen in the way in which some found themselves insufficiently prepared for delivering the WBQ. Those schools and colleges involved in the second and third cohorts were able to benefit from the experience that had been gained in earlier phases. Nevertheless the challenges of introducing the WBQ into a centre required considerable preparation and planning. The cost of training was often greater than anticipated as it had to include the cost of providing cover so that teachers could, eg, attend internal planning meetings.

3 THE PROJECT TEAM

- 3.1 The Project Team provided the main source of support for centres. Their work was greatly appreciated by centres who were very positive overall about the value of the training offered. The content of the courses were seen as relevant and those teachers that attended the courses learnt a great deal. Project team members were perceived as being supportive and helpful. The available support included training events at individual centres as well as telephone advice to deal with specific queries on an ongoing basis
- 3.2 Some of the issues that arose over the training offered by the Project Team included the following:

- Attendance at training courses was variable from the outset, with some centres sending teams of teachers and others sending none at all.
- In some cases (particularly later in the pilot) centres sent staff new to the WBQ for general orientation to training courses actually targeted at those with experience in particular areas; this led to difficulties for Project Team course leaders in knowing how best to cater for the needs of all present.
- Centres felt that they had sometimes been given short notice of the training courses and that earlier notification of the events would have been welcomed. There were concerns that some of the training courses occurred on the same day of the week, which meant that some teachers would regularly miss teaching the same classes. Even when funding for cover was provided, it was not always possible for centres to cope with numbers of staff being absent, particularly if some were involved in teaching, eg, exam classes.
- Some centres found the early training opportunities offered by the Project team rather vague.
- There was a shared concern that materials arrived later than would have been helpful.
- Some centres felt that lack of sufficient advance information about the content and objectives of training meant that it was sometimes difficult to decide who was the right person to attend.

Nevertheless the training offered was crucial, and staff attendance at the Project Team events was seen as a critical factor in the successful launch of the WBQ.

4 SUPPORT FROM OTHER EXTERNAL AGENCIES

- 4.1 Several other external agencies provided support and training. These included
- Dysg
 - Key skills support team
 - Careers Wales

In addition, Consultative Moderators were organised for centres in the earlier stages of the pilot. Uncertainty was noted by a number of centres with respect to the exact role of these moderators with respect to the Link Advisor role of individual Project Team members, and also with respect to what forms of support might be expected of them. Such concerns were addressed in later stages of the pilot.

5 NETWORK SUPPORT GROUPS'

- 5.1 Understandably, support from other centres was seen as being particularly valuable, and the establishment of clusters of schools and colleges was important. Early Project Team suggestions of creating clusters among participating centres proved difficult to implement, and gave way to many centres taking the initiative for establishing such clusters themselves on a 'self help' basis.

- 5.2 Cohort 1 centres felt it would be important to meet as a group on a regular basis. Meeting other WBQ coordinators and sharing good practice was a welcome form of support. This stemmed from an understandable lack of confidence in the early days, when centres were particularly concerned about whether or not they were “doing the right thing”. An issue relating to “ad-hoc” support groups and clusters, however, (more so in the early stages and less so as centres became more experienced in WBQ delivery) is how to ensure that messages being disseminated are well-informed if there is no involvement or monitoring from the Project Team.
- 5.3 Schools and colleges in cohorts 2 and 3 visited more established centres to gain first hand experience of how to deliver the WBQ. They thought that this was particularly useful. Some cohort 1 centres organised open days as a way of responding to such requests, which were seen as successful. Each successive cohort seems to have benefitted from the experience of previous cohorts.

6 CONFERENCES

- 6.1 Conferences played an essential part in the overall provision of training and support. It was noted that these events had a wider value that went beyond their stated aims and objectives. These events created the opportunities for WBQ co-ordinators and other staff to share good practice and to pass on their experiences to date. Furthermore these events enabled the Project Team and the WJEC to receive feedback about the progress of the WBQ. These events included:
- the WBQ co-coordinators conference held in November 2003
 - the internal evaluation one day conferences held annually since 2003
- 6.2 The conferences were valued by those that attended them but there was concern that some centres did not send delegates to these events (as there was with respect to training courses, as noted earlier) and have thus been less well informed than others about WBQ developments and issues.

7 OTHER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- 7.1 The internal verification meetings to moderate work were seen as valuable training opportunities. Issues of delivery, approaches to teaching and learning and quality of work were discussed and shared through this process.

INTERNAL SUPPORT:

8 STAFF TRAINING

- 8.1 The internal training that staff received in the first cohort was variable in quality and quantity. Many centres held whole staff training days on the WBQ to ensure that everybody understood what its aims were, other centres focussed only on the staff involved in delivering the WBQ. There was a wide range in both approaches to internal training and the speed with which it was undertaken, with some centres not using planning time to the full from the outset. The externally organised training days highlighted the lack of basic preparation in some centres.

- 8.2 A surprisingly high number of centres in the first cohort of the WBQ experienced personnel problems. Whilst this is coincidental it highlighted the need for the training and development of sufficient staff in order to ensure that there was adequate backup in the event of unexpected staff change. Centres anticipated that further training would be required for year 2 when they would have two groups of students participating in the programme.
- 8.3 Disseminating information gained from the externally provided courses was a key issue for many centres. The “cascade” model was judged to be ineffective: although it had been assumed that internal cascading would follow from externally-provided courses, in many cases the mechanisms were not in place within centres to cause this to happen. One consequence of this was that in a number of cohort 1 centres, in particular, some personnel were not clear ahead of time what they were meant to be doing.
- 8.4 Arguably there have been three stages of training, which centres have implemented with different levels of effectiveness. The preparatory stage, including planning from the outset of who would be involved in which aspects of the WBQ, when and how, varied in its implementation with some centres making good use of the planning year but others not really ‘up and running’ at the beginning of the first implementation year. In some cases planning was still being done in the this first year of implementation, with some centres apparently still not having a clear understanding of the WBQ philosophy and purpose. There has similarly been varied implementation of training in the third, on-going, stage of WBQ implementation, with regular meetings being an integral part of delivery for some centres.

9 SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAMS

- 9.1 The support given to staff working on the WBQ by their respective senior management teams was seen as being crucial. Their leadership of the project was a vital factor in the subsequent success of the WBQ in both schools and colleges: although support of Senior Management has been claimed by all centres, in practice the extent to which this materialised has varied. Consistent SMT support was seen as important in actively promoting the WBQ.

10 USE OF MEETINGS

- 10.1 Many centres recognised that regular meetings to coordinate the WBQ provided valuable opportunities for training staff. The continued involvement of experienced teachers provided a wealth of experience and expertise that could be shared with those that had only recently been involved with the WBQ. Many centres recognised the need for new staff to have access to experienced WBQ practitioners.
- 10.2 The practice of training staff to teach the WBQ varied greatly. Some centres provided training for interested staff whilst others took the opportunity to inform the whole staff about the initiative. The length of the process of training staff to be ready to deliver the WBQ was underestimated in many centres. One WBQ coordinator noted that the task of bringing her to the required level of understanding “had been more time consuming than initially anticipated”. Cohort 2 centres were able to learn from this realisation and recognised that the planning and training process cannot be started in the summer term prior to introducing the qualification. Training opportunities had to be planned throughout the year before delivery began.

10.3 Schools and colleges recognised that working parties and regular team meetings provided training opportunities in their own right. All the cohort 2 centres recognised the need for more training as the year progressed. These training sessions were not only about gaining new skills but also about re-contextualising existing skills / practice in the context of the WBQ. Good practice derived from the pilot scheme suggests that training and planning need to be seen as concurrent activities.

10.4 Cohort 3 centres seemed to have allocated an even more realistic amount of time for planning training of the WBQ team. There appears to be a pattern that each successive cohort demonstrates an advance in planning and training in the preparatory stages compared with previous cohorts.

11 ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

11.1 The complexity of managing the WBQ led some centres to employ a full time administrative assistant; this support was extremely valuable especially in relation to the role of the WBQ coordinator. The provision of administrative support meant that they could spend more time developing new approaches to teaching and learning and less time on having to manage the task of monitoring progress of the students.

12 IMPACT ON MARKETING AND PROMOTION

12.1 The lack of training in the early stages of the WBQ meant that staff were often unclear of the requirements of the qualification and this impacted on the way that the WBQ could be promoted to potential students and their parents. In particular the lack of clarity regarding how many UCAS points the WBQ was worth made it difficult for some centres to persuade students and parents of the credibility of the WBQ.

13 AREAS WHERE TRAINING IS SEEN AS BEING VITAL

13.1 Centres involved in the pilot scheme identified the need for training in the following areas:

- Internal verification
- Assessment
- Key skills
- Training for tutors
- Familiarisation of teaching styles appropriate to the WBQ
- Working 'smarter'

14 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Considerable training and support is required by any centre embarking on offering the WBQ
- Participation in training events and conferences provides two-way communication about the progress of the WBQ.
- Lack of attendance at these events means that there are inconsistencies in the way that different centres are offering the WBQ. Whilst it is desirable for centres to create their own approach to the WBQ it is possible that undesirable differences in approach could emerge

- The level of training that will be offered to new centres if the WBQ is “rolled out” across Wales needs to be given careful consideration. Centres in the pilot scheme could have a significant role to play in the sharing of good practice.
- There is a clear need for training that develops classroom practices that are appropriate for the WBQ

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