

**Themed Report:**

**STUDENT 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**

The concept of student support can be interpreted in a number of different ways. For the purposes of this report it will be taken to include the following areas, each of which will be considered under a separate heading below:

- Provision of information in advance of participation in the WBQ
- Induction at beginning of WBQ programme
- The personal tutorial
- Mapping and tracking
- Forms of external support

**2. PROVISION OF INFORMATION IN ADVANCE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE WBQ**

*[see also themed report on Marketing and Promotion]*

- 2.1 In the early stages of the pilot, there was some indication of a lack of clarity in the information being provided to students in advance of their embarking upon the WBQ programme. A number of students complained of conflicting messages being given with respect to what would be involved, how much work would be required and how the WBQ would be recognised externally. In the first year of student participation in particular, some tutors admitted to not being clear what they should tell students since the centre's detailed programme was developed only as the year progressed.
- 2.2 Students at Cohorts 2 and 3 centres, and in the second 'wave' at Cohort 1 centres, have generally been better informed as their tutors have either become more experienced themselves (in the case of Cohort 1 centres) or have learned from the experience of other centres (in the case of Cohorts 2 and 3 centres). The decision by UCAS to allocate 120 tariff points to the WBQ core (when part of the award of the WBQ Diploma) also helped to clarify issues relating to university recognition.
- 2.3 The extent to which students could actually receive advance notification about the WBQ has varied between centres. Schools have generally been able to provide information during Year 11 for those students who are considering staying on to Year 12; colleges, meanwhile, have often found it difficult to access their potential students in advance (sometimes as a result of a lack of cooperation from local schools) and have thus been limited to providing information only at the very beginning of the academic year to those students who have applied to attend the college. The provision of information to Year 11 students has generally improved in schools as Years 12 and 13 students have experienced the WBQ and been able to participate in the information-giving process.

### **3. INDUCTION AT BEGINNING OF WBQ PROGRAMME**

- 3.1 Similar points apply to induction as to the provision of information in advance (as above). The first group of students in Cohort 1 centres felt in some cases that their induction had not necessarily indicated accurately what they should expect in the rest of the course: a point supported by some teachers and tutors who acknowledged their own uncertainty at the outset about how the year's programme would develop. In particular, some students felt they had been misled with respect to the amount of work that would be involved in WBQ participation.
- 3.2 Again, students at Cohorts 2 and 3 centres, and in the second group of students at Cohort 1 centres, were generally better informed as a result of the induction process about what should be expected than had been the first Cohort 1 groups.
- 3.3 Clearly the actual concept of induction is open to interpretation, in terms of whether it relates to a period of a few days at the beginning of the programme, or a more on-going process throughout.
- 3.4 Both in relation to induction, and to information provided in advance of the beginning of the course, issues arose with respect to whether or not participation in the WBQ would be optional. In the majority of cases it was not, and participation was a condition of either staying on into the sixth form at school or of choosing a particular course at college. In some cases students claimed not even to have been aware at the outset that they would be participating in the WBQ, since it was 'wrapped up' in their overall programme and not identified by their teachers (who, in at least one case, felt that it would be preferable to 'play down' the fact that students were taking on something extra). Where there was an element of choice, some students felt their decision had not been well-informed due to a lack of accurate information about what would be involved in WBQ participation.
- 3.5 At least one centre highlighted the challenge in induction not only of providing students with factual information about the forthcoming programme, but also of inducting them into the 'independent learning environment' ethos of the WBQ.

### **4. THE PERSONAL TUTORIAL**

- 4.1 It is clear that, from the outset, the personal tutorial did not work in a number of centres as envisaged in the WBQ model (ie 1:1 tutorials at least once each half term). Although most centres claimed to be delivering the personal tutorial, in reality there appeared to be some confusion between personal and group tutorials, with students in a number of cases only meeting their tutor in a group situation. In one case the 1:1 tutorials claimed were organised by the tutor talking to students individually at the front of the class while other students were working in the same room.
- 4.2 Linked to this point is the fact that in a number of cases staff were not actually given time to implement tutorials on a 1:1 basis, making it impossible for them to take place other than during staff and student free time. In some cases there is evidence that the timetable was re-organised after the first year of participation in order to allow tutors more time with their tutees (in both group and personal situations).
- 4.3 The issue of who should actually be a personal tutor was also handled differently in different centres. In some cases the WBQ Coordinator and SMT 'cherry picked' those perceived to be likely to be most effective personal tutors (usually on the basis of previous pastoral experience with this age group), and formed a team of personal

tutors on this basis; in others, existing experienced sixth form teachers took on that role. In at least one Cohort 1 centre a very effective personal tutorial system was already in place prior to adoption of the WBQ. In some other centres it was not necessarily the case that personal tutors were identified on the basis of having a particular set of relevant skills. In another Cohort 1 centre the first group of students had as personal tutors individuals external to the school (though one was Chair of Governors); this model did not work as well as had been anticipated and was subsequently modified to return the Personal Tutor responsibility to members of staff. Clearly the role of Personal Tutor, in involving not only a pastoral dimension but also familiarity with the curriculum dimension of the student's experience, is one that requires a broad range of skills. Tutors also involved in teaching their personal tutees in some part of the WBQ programme had an advantage in that respect.

- 4.4 Participation in Project Team-organised tutor training workshops was taken up by some centres; some also commented on Careers Wales tutor training workshops having been valuable as preparation for the WBQ personal tutor role.
- 4.4 Understandably perhaps, some Cohort 1 centres in particular found it difficult to judge how much independence students should be allowed in making choices and decisions relating to WBQ participation, with the result that some students were perhaps left to their own devices more than turned out to have been desirable. In some cases centres went on to become more prescriptive (by, eg, restricting the topics on which students could base their Individual Investigation).
- 4.5 The Improvement of Own Learning and Performance (IOLP) dimension has been handled differently in different centres, but generally has focused on setting personal targets, taking responsibility for own learning, time management and self preparation for examinations. Identifying and capitalising on preferred learning styles was also noted as beneficial in some centres.

## **5. MAPPING AND TRACKING**

- 5.1 Mapping and Tracking issues are also considered in the Teaching & Learning themed report. Here the report focuses on the monitoring dimension of Mapping and Tracking in terms of the support it provides for students in the context of providing a system for recording intention and achievement.
- 5.2 There has been some variety in the systems set up by various centres for mapping and tracking. Some began with software which turned out to be either too complex or in some other way inappropriate for the task, and reverted to a manual approach to record keeping (in at least one case this was because using a computer for recording information during personal tutorials was found to be taking up most of the time). Others already had fairly sophisticated systems in place which could be adapted to the WBQ without too much difficulty. A number of centres have struggled with this dimension of the pilot. Successful systems have allowed all data to be available to both students and tutors for use in, eg, target-setting, and have had sufficient support to ensure that whatever system is in place (paper-based or electronic) is regularly updated and easily accessible.
- 5.3 An apparently important factor in ensuring success of the WBQ has been the support provided for students by teachers and tutors not directly involved in delivering components of the core. A critical factor when options have been relied upon as a source of key skills evidence, and less of an issue in the delivery of vocational programmes in colleges where a small number of tutors are majorly responsible for much of the students' WBQ experience, this has been an issue in some schools with

respect to those involved in teaching the options of a student's WBQ experience. Some teachers of options have been helpful in supporting students in, eg, identifying Key Skills opportunities in those options; in other cases students have been demotivated by the lack of encouragement (and in some cases overt hostility) shown by such teachers.

- 5.4 Support for students in the form of careers guidance and university application guidance has been a crucial dimension of the success of the WBQ. Advice with respect to, eg, writing the UCAS personal statement in such a way as to capitalise on WBQ experiences has been important. Support provided has, here as elsewhere, enhanced the quality of advice provided for students through, eg, the IOLP aspect of the WBQ.
- 5.5 In the view of many participating staff, and of a number of first year undergraduates who successfully completed the WBQ Diploma in summer 2005, the WBQ experience has provided support for students progressing to university-level study in the development of, eg, independent study skills and communication skills. Students have also been better prepared for employment, in the view of a number of staff members, through the development of interpersonal skills, communication skills, an increased sense of responsibility, and improved knowledge of Welsh issues and current affairs more broadly.
- 5.6 The appointment at a number of centres of an administrator who provides assistance in the tracking of student achievement, and is easily accessible to students, has been helpful in providing support for students on an ongoing basis.

## **6. FORMS OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT**

- 6.1 A variety of forms of external support have been intrinsic to the WBQ programme to varying extents in different centres with respect to the Young Enterprise scheme, Work-Related Education and so on. Rotary, the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, Glamorgan University have all provided support in different ways with different centres, while Careers Wales have provided support for students with respect to careers advice.
- 6.2 Extensive use of visits (to, eg, the Welsh Assembly), and visiting speakers have provided support for student work in a range of respects.

## **7. SUMMARY**

- Student support is a broad category, and this report has focused on a number of dimensions which seem likely to be important in encouraging student success in the WBQ programme.
- Ensuring students know in advance what they are embarking upon, and are prepared for the WBQ experience as it unfolds, are clearly important aspects of support, though perhaps not so essential as support provided for students by centres in the actual implementation of the WBQ through, crucially, the personal tutorial, and the mapping and tracking of student experience and achievement.
- There is evidence that some centres have struggled with implementing both the personal tutorial and the mapping and tracking dimensions, though in both cases there is also evidence that centres have learned from early experiences in developing more effective systems.

- External support for the WBQ has been important to centres, which have developed and created an interesting range of links with organisations to provide support for various dimensions of the student experience.
- Also crucially important, particularly when options are relied upon to provide key skills opportunities, has been the extent to which staff other than those centrally involved in WBQ delivery are prepared to provide support for WBQ students. In some centres there would appear still to be some work to be done in encouraging all staff to 'buy in' to the WBQ philosophy and to play their part in supporting students across the WBQ curriculum experience.

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