University of Bath

Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Internal Evaluation

**Themed Report:**

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

*[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 Teaching and learning are obviously key elements in the evaluation of any educational programme and, although all themes in this series are interrelated, this aspect is particularly associated with those on Key Skills, Student Support and Student Attainment. This was not, however, an inspectorial exercise and, although judgemental observations of lessons did not feature in the evaluation programme, extensive discussions with staff, students and project team members enabled the factors that determine good practice to be identified. These are classified along with observable indicative factors in 'Criteria for Success', the guidance paper on self evaluation.

1.2 In the most confident of centres it was apparent that the qualification was not considered as an isolated curriculum innovation. In these centres it was demonstrably compatible in intent and practice with the inherent culture of the school or college driving or complementing parallel teaching and learning developments. In the absence of such a sympathetic culture, centres seemed to experience difficulty in the internal expansion or dissemination of the project

## 2. PREPARATION & PLANNING

2.1 The project benefited from the unusually generous allowance of lead-in time afforded pilot centres for preparation and planning. This opportunity was universally appreciated by all the involved schools and colleges, not only for the development of operationally viable schemes of work, but also for attempting to secure the understanding of staff, students and parents. Not all centres, particularly in cohort one, were able to take full advantage of this opportunity partly due, in some cases, to a delay in making key appointments and establishing development and delivery teams sufficiently early in the cycle. For the first cohort there was the added issue of interpreting emerging guidelines and ideas in the development of delivery plans in the absence of limited centre experience in this type of curriculum innovation. Later cohorts were obviously able to draw on this accumulating experience and tested guidelines to improve their pre-delivery planning but still claim that the extended lead-in time is an essential feature of adopting a project with the complex cross centre implications of the Welsh Baccalaureate.

2.2 As the project progressed so did an increasing awareness by centres of the need for a greater structure to the delivery programme. Some early 'open' approaches caused confusion in students not accustomed from their pre-sixteen experiences to this type of responsibility which they found confusing and demotivating. There was also some evidence to suggest that teaching staff also experienced discomfort in working to a looser framework than previously experienced so that fairly early in the first year of implementation centres were planning for a clearer delivery framework. This obviously

demanded more stringent and ongoing planning and preparation. Certainly the centres that appeared more confident in the delivery strategies could also demonstrate more consistent team membership and regular focussed planning meetings both in the lead-in time and ongoing during implementation.

## 3. CURRICULUM ORGANISATION

3.1 No detailed single delivery model of best practice has emerged as each centre has developed the structure to suit its existing culture and expertise. However, certain general patterns of curriculum organisation have become discernable which tend to differentiate between the approaches of colleges and schools. In colleges, where the vast majority of WBQ students are involved in specialist vocational courses, it is usually the delivery teams of these courses that assume a high degree of responsibility in the development of the WBQ, with the opportunity to maximise contextualisation and integrate elements of core and options for the efficient use of time. The actual degree of autonomy of these teams within a college can vary according to local factors such as college culture and geographical spread of constituent campuses. In the most effective cases, however, there is a centrally unifying organisation attempting to share planning, expertise and experience across groups. In schools and A/AS courses in colleges the curriculum organisation tends to be based on a team of teachers selected, in the best cases, for the expertise they can bring to the project, their known ability in working with post 16 students and, most importantly, their positive attitude to the concept of the Welsh Baccalaureate. These team members share the responsibility for developing the curriculum with delegated roles in delivering and coordinating the learning experiences of students. It has been noticeable during the progress of the pilot stage that an increasing number of schools have moved towards smaller WBQ teams with teachers both delivering all or most aspects of the curriculum to the group of students they also mentor or tutor. In fact, it may be that the emerging model will not be so different in practice to that found in colleges.

3.2 A modal figure in excess of four hours per week contact time has been timetabled by pilot centres for the delivery of the WBQ and associated tutorials. Given the time scales of anticipated student involvement with the core this relates closely to the total time allocations recommended in the specifications of the qualification, This has usually been in the form of extended blocks of time to facilitate activities involving visiting speakers, visits and major team events such as those associated with enterprise projects. Not a few centres organised these blocks creatively and flexibly to optimize the time available for different activities and allow students from separate courses to meet collectively for special events. In reality, it has been difficult to quantify the exact amount of time devoted by students to fulfilling the curriculum requirements of the WBQ given the not uncommon expectation of self directed learning on, for example, language modules and the actual time devoted to Work Related and Community activities. For vocational college students the actual time devoted to WBQ elements is obviously difficult to identify due to the integrated nature of much of their work. Of interest is the assertion by a pilot college that their AS students require more planned time on their schedules for the WBQ than the vocational students because of the greater complexity of tracking learning across unconnected academic subjects and the lack of Work Related Activities that are an inclusive feature of most vocational courses.

3.3 Some pilot centres initially planned on completing all WBQ requirements for their level 3 students by the end of the first year of study. This was soon recognised as an over ambitious target and all now take the Advanced students into their second year although most centres still aim to front-load the work into year one to secure closure of WBQ commitments in the first half of year two in the expectation and recognition that

students will focus on their optional studies as the final assessment approaches. There have been, notwithstanding, some successful achievements of the WB diploma in one year but almost exclusively achieved by A level students in their second year, often after earlier completion of some of the requirements such as main Key Skills. Many colleges have had to attempt completion of the Intermediate qualification in the one year as the students are on a one year course with no guarantee of availability in college for completion in a second year. These colleges have found it necessary to provide a very tight framework for their students which, although in one sense restricting the opportunity for students to shape their own learning has proven to be a feasible approach for many students.

3.4 Implementation of the WBQ provides opportunities for students following different optional courses to work and study together. This 'cross fertilisation' between students who would not otherwise have had such opportunities, was mentioned as an advantage by a number of centres.

3.5 Completion of the Intermediate programme in one year in effect means completion in approximately nine months, and is thus an intensive experience. While not originally intended, completion in this period of time has been the experience of a substantial number of students following the WBQ at this level.

## 4. MAPPING AND TRACKING

*[See also Student Support report for further discussion of aspects of Mapping and Tracking]*

4.1 It was identified very early in the piloting of the project that it would be neither desirable nor possible to deliver all WBQ core elements as discrete entities. Not only would the time for such an approach be difficult if not impossible to find, it also risked failing to capture the interest and enthusiasm of the students through a delivery separating the elements of the core and isolating them from the their wider curriculum. Centres were encouraged to identify or signpost where core elements including Key skills occurred, or could occur, in the optional or other core studies of the students. The task was then to map the unique individual route each student could follow in order to encounter the identified targets. The progress of students in mastering their targets could then be tracked for verification and establishing further goals. Many centres expended a great deal of time on the signposting exercise particularly with respect to academic optional studies or were able to update the results of a parallel task when embarking on Curriculum 2000 for AS/A level students a few years previously.

4.2 Unfortunately, the initial attempts at operating this approach were not infrequently limited in their success, especially for level three courses, for a number of reasons, the most commonly encountered being;

- Over reliance on the optional studies to deliver the desired topics. By the nature of an 'à la carte' process of selection of AS levels, it was difficult to ensure students had a reasonable chance of encountering all the desired topics through their particular combinations.
- Expectation that all facets of a target could be delivered through this means. Key Skills, in particular benefited from dedicated lessons or time for acquisition of target techniques with integrated elements mainly providing opportunity to practice and develop the learnt skills.
- Difficulty in securing the cooperation of all optional studies teachers in ensuring a particular aspect was not only included but students helped in identifying and recording the experience.

- The requirement for teachers to recognise a cultural change in accepting that double accreditation for a single activity was not only necessary but also allowable.
- An over-optimistic expectation that the evidence necessary for Key Skills or other WBQ core elements would occur naturally in the body of all syllabuses or pedagogical approaches.
- Too great an expectation that students and their tutors would have the means and skills to recognise and map relevant targets and be able to identify those still required and their point of occurrence.

4.3  As the pilot centres increasingly acknowledged the need to work 'smarter', the mapping of targets through the options was modified as core elements were not infrequently reorganised to ensure two or more targets could be made available through a single activity and thus be accessible to all WBQ students regardless of their optional choices. Core programmes of study were deliberately structured to ensure that desired skills and knowledge would be signposted thus supplementing the existing maps of potential learning experiences. The more successful centres offered students more advice on recognising the necessary elements and providing them with a means of recording that was manageable and not over sophisticated. Personal tutors became more knowledgeable in their awareness of the occurrence of key targets and, consequently, more confident in their mentoring role. Of impressive effectiveness by a minority of centres has been the use of comprehensive tracking and recording software for tutors to monitor the progress and targets of their students. It should be noted that in order to fully utilize such programmes the services of an administrative assistant seems highly desirable to ensure that all data is current and accurate.

4.4  A number of colleges in the first cohort of the pilot reported the difficulty of maintaining the interest of their vocational students when the WBQ core was divorced from optional studies. These students were primarily motivated by achieving their vocational skills and perceived little relevance to 'bolt-on' WBQ requirements. The response of most of these colleges was to 'contextualise' the core elements so that they became an integral part of the vocational studies with an immediately apparent relevance to the interests and ambitions of the students. Whilst the colleges acknowledged that this contextualisation exercise appeared to vary in complexity and difficulty between courses, a major issue in the achievement of this goal has remained the enthusiasm and commitment of the delivering team.

## 5.   DELIVERY

5.1  As indicated in the above sections, a considerable degree of variation between centres has been apparent in the delivery of the qualification. This is presumably not unexpected given that the vast majority of the evidence on patterns of delivery to date has been derived from observation of the development of this highly innovative curriculum project in the earliest years of the first cohort of centres in the project. A common response by centres of all cohorts on being selected to pilot the project was the insistence that the WBQ was, in essence, a means of acknowledging 'what we are doing anyway.' The implication was that the requirements of the qualification could be largely met through minimally supplementing the existing curriculum provision. Admittedly most centres, especially in cohorts two and three, had had prior experience in some, but certainly not all, aspects of the core. In practice, the vast majority of centres acknowledged fairly early in their participation that the qualification demanded a wider and more deliberate approach to deliver it effectively across the whole core curriculum. Centres usually, however, took the existing relevant aspects in which they were experienced as the starting point for developing the curriculum leading in turn to the not surprising variance in delivery structures across the project. As the project has

progressed there is some suggestion of a converging of delivery patterns most notably in the greater prescription to the core curriculum structure.

5.2  An initial problem encountered in many centres derived from the practice of attempting to involve students in assuming a high degree of responsibility for determining the activities and tasks within the elements of the WBQ core. This seemed to stem from some early assumptions that the delivery of the core necessitated greater autonomy for students in order to meet stated objectives such as that relating to empowering 'candidates to take charge of their own learning and development.' This often extended to expecting students to devise and maintain the records of their learning experiences. Most centres adopting this approach soon recognised that students were 'not used to keeping logs independently and taking responsibility for their learning in this respect. The response in the majority of cohort one centres, and adopted by most later cohorts, has been the development of more teacher directed delivery structures. In the most developed of centres this has resulted in both staff and students being fully aware of the intended delivery programmes for the term or even whole year. Considerable thought and time has been invested by a number of centres in devising some impressive 'topic starter packs' to stimulate action and guide tasks. The most effective of these appear to have avoided the danger of being over prescriptive in detailing the work of the students but frame the tasks in a manner that encourages them to engage in a range of learning activities over time and exercise choice in determining the means of achieving a given target. These packs also identify all the core targets that will or might be encountered in the topic, the associated assessment criteria and the means of recording their achievements in the given area.

5.3  Little compelling evidence has been encountered to demonstrate that delivery is differentiated according to the abilities and needs of the students other than that occurring between advanced and intermediate groups. The mix of key skill levels to be offered, for instance, has generally been determined by teachers/tutors rather than by students. Similarly, this differentiation might be found when the core is contextualised to meet the specific interests of a vocational group as in an increasing number of colleges. The claim of centres, however, is that differentiation is evident through outcome and that in providing effective mapping and tracking procedures with efficient individual monitoring and target setting support, the different needs and abilities of students are acknowledged and addressed.

5.4  Regardless of the model of delivery that has been developed in each centre, all of them have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to achieve an objective of the qualification in providing a range of motivating teaching and learning styles. This is an aspect that inevitably met with the approval of the vast majority of interviewed students. They were specifically positive about the personal and learning skills being acquired as a result of participating in the WBQ and being involved in activities such as debating, team projects and public speaking that are rarely encountered in their optional studies. Interest in the core, it was not infrequently claimed, was enhanced through the stimulation of visits and working with knowledgeable and skilled representatives of specialist external agencies. This deployment of the services and support of external individuals and organisations has been a feature of the delivery in all centres on an occasional basis and, for some, through project based partnerships. Whilst these are obviously essential for effective placements for Work Related Education and Community Participation a number of other partnerships have been recorded that have been instrumental in enhancing the delivery of a range of core elements. These include joint projects with Higher Education for Language and Social Education courses, Careers Wales and Education Business Partnerships for Enterprise projects, and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award for links with Key Skills and Social Education. It has been noticeable that from both questionnaire returns and interviews with students that WRE,

Community Partnerships and other elements involving partner deliverers are highly valued. It must also be noted, however, that when visits or visiting presenters are used then their expertise and ability to relate to students must be of the desired quality as not a few examples were quoted by staff and students of instances when such inclusions have been counter productive. An issue raised by some centres, particularly in North Wales, was that of geographical or financial disadvantages in being able to access facilities such as the Welsh Assembly. A not unrelated factor encountered was the increasing demands on the time and commitment of popular or specialist organisations as the pilot has expanded which, it has been suggested, may become even more difficult to manage should the qualification become available to an even greater number of centres in future.

5.5   As indicated above a recurring response of students from interviews or questionnaire returns has been a widespread appreciation of all aspects of Work Related Education and Community Participation. This may be presumed from comments to be due to the perceived relevance of these activities to the immediate interests of students as well as to the involvement of respected community representatives. It is worth noting, however, that appreciation of these aspects of the qualification is not unanimous, which begs the question as to why some students in some centres have found these activities irrelevant to their needs or failing to capture their interest. Conversely WEW and PSE are areas with which a majority of students claim disenchantment in their questionnaire responses. More than one centre has suggested that the topics within these areas are unlikely to be viewed as of immediate interest or relevance to students but again, there are conspicuous variations in response within and between centres. This appears to suggest that an appreciative student response is neither guaranteed due to presumed relevance nor unachievable because of the complexity of the subject. This was summarised in one Student Questionnaire Analysis by noting that a 'number of students commented on how they had enjoyed the Welsh Baccalaureate. The fact that the majority of those commenting were from one pilot centre highlights how differently the WBQ may be perceived within different schools and colleges – linked, perhaps, to different styles of delivery.' This variation in appreciation by students was particularly noticeable in respect to the Language Module, in which positive responses were frequently countered by an almost equal proportion of negative attitudes. In visits to centres this was an area which either engendered enthusiasm or lack of interest on the part of students dependent on its association with a visit to a country where it could be practised, relevance to the optional study as in French for Catering students or the enhancement of a particular project such as through the learning of sign language.

5.6   The mode of working on the WBQ usually necessitates students having the facilities and time to undertake individual and group tasks. Some centres have responded to this need through the provision of work areas containing comprehensive IT facilities with priority, or even sole, use by WBQ students. This availability of IT facilities seems highly desirable for accessing data and information on topics, especially in connection with the Individual Investigation, and also for maintaining the records of targets and progress for students and their tutors. Similarly, the designation in a number of centres of a 'base room' for WBQ delivery has allowed students to produce wall displays related to their WBQ experience.

5.7   There is some evidence that students have developed 'wider horizons' through WBQ participation as a result of involvement in the extensive range of visits, access to visiting speakers and so on that have been part of the student experience.

## 6.   CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Successful development of the WBQ is related to its compatibility in intent and practice with the inherent curriculum culture of the school or college.

6.2 An extended period of gainfully used 'lead-in' time has been of benefit to pilot centres.

6.3 No detailed single delivery model has been identified although delivery teams in colleges and schools have, with notable exceptions, tended to become smaller with individual staff assuming greater responsibility for delivery across the core often coupled with acting as personal tutors to their group members.

6.4 Most centres schedule contact time for students with staff to between 4 and 5 hours per week over a delivery period of four to five terms. Notable variation occurs when WBQ activities are included in options time or the intended completion time scale varies significantly from the norm.

6.5 An effective mapping and tracking programme necessitates the deliberate inclusion of determined elements in the core and options as appropriate with the assurance that they will be delivered as planned and students supported in their recognition and recording.

6.6 The curriculum organisation of the qualification should provide a coherent and comprehensive programme of study which, avoiding over-prescription, identifies the sequence of topics and frames tasks to ensure students encounter a range of learning styles with an appropriate degree of student choice and responsibility.

6.7 Effective partnerships with external agencies have enhanced delivery of the WBQ and been valued by students. A query concerns the possible limitations to these opportunities for some centres and the sustainability of such links given a possible roll-out of the project.

6.8 Whilst students' attitudes to their experience of the WBQ are not, as yet, unanimously favourable, a number, through questionnaire or interview, express positive responses to all or identified elements of their WBQ studies. Variations in the range of responses suggest that no element of the core is inherently unachievable or incapable of interesting students given an appropriate delivery structure and process.

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