

# Review of the Skills Challenge Certificate: overview and next steps



**Last year Qualifications Wales (we) asked Wavehill Ltd in partnership with University College London's Institute of Education to conduct a review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc).**

**The review concludes that the Welsh Bacc and the SCC serve a valuable purpose in helping learners to develop skills that are beneficial to their future. It strongly supports retaining the SCC and developing it further by building on its strengths and reducing its complexity.**

**We have published the [full research report](#) and the [executive summary](#) on our website.**

**Below, we give a brief overview of why we commissioned the research, its findings and how we will consider and respond to its recommendations.**

## 1. Background to the review

The Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) was first introduced in 2007, following a piloting phase. In 2012, the Welsh Government's *Review of Qualifications for 14-19-year-olds*<sup>1</sup> recommended changes to its design, which led to a new Welsh Bacc framework being introduced in September 2015.

Previously, the Welsh Bacc was only offered by some schools and colleges. When the new Welsh Bacc was launched, the Welsh Government said it expected all schools and colleges to offer it.

The new Welsh Bacc is designed around a brand-new qualification called the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC). To get the Welsh Bacc, students must achieve the SCC qualification alongside other supporting qualifications. The SCC focuses on the core skills<sup>2</sup> that students need to succeed in their future studies and careers. Teaching the SCC requires a different set of skills from those needed to teach other, more traditional subjects. As a result, introducing the SCC has meant a significant change in practice for some schools and colleges.

In March 2016, shortly after Qualifications Wales was established, we published a report on how the SCC was introduced, focussing on the arrangements in place to support its delivery<sup>3</sup>. We found that, while the introduction of the SCC could have been better, the support and resources required for its delivery were in place. In the longer term, we recommended taking a closer look at the design of the SCC and how it was working in practice. In February 2017, we commissioned research to review the design and assessment model of the SCC and how it fits in the Welsh Bacc framework. Following a competitive process, we chose Wavehill Ltd in partnership with the University College London's Institute of Education to carry out the review.

<sup>1</sup><http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/121127reviewofqualificationsen.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>The SCC develops and assesses the following skills: literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving, planning and organisation, creativity and innovation, and personal effectiveness

<sup>3</sup><http://qualificationswales.org/media/1631/qw-review-of-new-welsh-bacc-230316.pdf>

## 2. What the review looked at

The overall aim was to get a clear view of the intended design of the SCC as well as how it's working in practice. To achieve this, the research was structured in two parts. The first part was a critical analysis of the design of the SCC. This was a desk-based review of the main documents supporting the delivery of the SCC<sup>4</sup>, which looked in detail at the aims, structure, content, assessment and grading of the SCC. The second part was a series of discussions with a broad sample of students and teaching staff from across Wales asking about their experience of the new SCC and Welsh Bacc.

The review provides a useful evidence base about the design and delivery of the SCC. As with any research, there are some important points to bear in mind when looking at the findings. For this review, we have been mindful from the outset of the following limitations.

- The desk-based review only looked at published documents to support the design and delivery of the SCC.
- The review sought views from a representative sample of students and teachers studying or delivering the SCC, not from all students and teachers.
- Views from employers or higher education institutions were not sought as part of the review.
- Students and teachers were only asked about their experience of the Welsh Bacc and the SCC. Other qualifications were not discussed. It is not possible to say whether the views discussed are unique to the SCC, whether they are typical of other commonly taken qualifications, or how they compare to experiences of other recently redesigned qualifications.
- The research was conducted very early on in the existence of the SCC and new Welsh Bacc. The post-16 SCC qualifications<sup>5</sup> were awarded for the first time in 2016. The KS4<sup>6</sup> and Advanced<sup>7</sup> SCC qualifications were first awarded in summer 2017.

<sup>4</sup>programme specifications, delivery handbooks, the design principles, the administration handbook and the code of practice.

<sup>5</sup>Taken by post-16 students alongside other qualifications at Levels 1 and 2, delivered in a single academic year.

<sup>6</sup>Taken at the end of Key Stage 4 alongside GCSEs and other similar qualifications, delivered over two academic years.

<sup>7</sup>Taken alongside A levels and other Level 3 qualifications, delivered over two academic years.

### 3. Main findings of the review

While noting some aspects of the SCC that could benefit from further development, the review concludes that there are clear strengths and benefits to the SCC and the Welsh Bacc as a whole.

The Welsh Bacc aims to provide students with a broad and well-rounded curriculum and to equip them with the qualifications, experiences and skills they need for future study and careers. The skills and attributes developed through the SCC are those that employers consistently say young people need to succeed in the workplace. The review finds that this clearly defined purpose is a real strength of the Welsh Bacc design. It describes the SCC as an innovative qualification, underpinned by highly relevant principles. Principles that give students the chance to gain a wide range of real-life skills within authentic contexts and to develop their interests by choosing study topics that are relevant to their future study and career plans.

Discussions with practitioners confirmed that there is widespread and strong support from the teaching profession for the purpose and aims of the Welsh Bacc and the SCC. The SCC is becoming more established, with schools and colleges adapting, embedding and refining their approach to delivering it. The review goes on to say that there are inconsistent levels of understanding about the SCC and its relationship with the Welsh Bacc, among students and teachers alike. Some teachers also reported finding it a challenge to explain the SCC and the Welsh Bacc to students, other teachers and parents.

As the review itself acknowledges, a detailed and critical appraisal of any qualification's design will almost always find some areas for improvement, especially when a qualification is as innovative and as new as the SCC.

While noting the strength of the SCC's purpose and principles, the review finds that its design is more complex than it needs to be. There is repetition and overlap between the four components of each SCC, which reduces the benefit of studying all of them together. There is also some overlap between the different SCC qualifications at KS4, post-16 and Advanced level.

The review identifies certain aspects of the SCC assessment model that could be simplified. The intricate nature of the current model means that assessment of skills can take a disproportionate amount of time, relative to the time spent on developing and applying those skills. The extent to which different skills<sup>8</sup> are assessed also varies, with some being over assessed.

<sup>8</sup>Literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving, planning and organisation, creativity and innovation, and personal effectiveness.

## 4. Our response to the recommendations

The report asks us to consider eight specific recommendations for further improving the design of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc. Broadly, the recommendations can be grouped into those that deal with:

- How to ensure that the recommendations are considered in the round and implemented through careful planning and engagement;
- Improving awareness and understanding of the SCC and Welsh Bacc, and making sure that information about them is accurate, up to date, clear and easy to find;
- The need for continued training to support the successful delivery of the SCC;
- Possible changes to refine the design, assessment and award of the SCC and Welsh Bacc.

### Recommendation 1: taking forward the recommendations

Reflecting calls from teachers and students, the first recommendation stresses the importance of making sure any proposed changes are carefully thought through and clearly communicated from the outset.

We agree that any future changes to the design and delivery of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc should be considered in the round. We will explain and test any proposals with stakeholders, including when and how to make changes and what support they will need.

We will establish a working group to help develop and consider proposals for change, based on the report's recommendations. The group will include representatives from Welsh Government, WJEC, Estyn and the regional education consortia, as well as independent qualifications and assessment experts.

Alongside the working group, we will invite a panel of stakeholders to help test and refine the working group's proposals. The panel will include representatives from schools, colleges, employers, universities, teachers and students.

### **Recommendations 2 and 3: improving information and raising awareness**

Recommendation 2 focuses on the need for clear, consistent and accessible information about the Welsh Bacc and the SCC, tailored to specific audiences, including students and their families. While recommendation 3 asks us to help increase awareness and understanding of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc, particularly within schools and colleges.

We agree with these recommendations. We also want to improve awareness of the SCC and Welsh Bacc among universities and employers. We are already engaging with universities about qualifications taken by learners in Wales and WJEC has taken steps to clarify and update information available online about the Welsh Bacc.

Through the working group, we will review and update the information that is already available and ensure that any future changes are clearly communicated. We will also look at how we can help students and teachers to explain and promote the Welsh Bacc to others.

### **Recommendations 4 and 5: training and support**

Given the distinctive nature of the SCC qualification, it is natural that teachers will take time to get to grips with a new and different way of teaching and assessing. Unlike traditional subjects such as mathematics, history or music, teachers do not train from the outset to become SCC teachers. The report recommends investing in continuing professional development (CPD) and developing a programme of ongoing training and support for all staff involved with delivering the SCC. It also asks whether initial teacher training (ITT) could help prepare future teachers for developing and assessing the skills included in the SCC.

There is already training and support available for those involved in delivering the SCC, through WJEC and the regional education consortia. It appears from the research, however, that many teaching staff are either not aware of, or not always able to access the support that they need. We will work with WJEC, Welsh Government and others to help improve the availability of training and to consider how it can be accessed by staff across all schools and colleges.

## Recommendations 6, 7 and 8: consider possible changes to improve the design, assessment and award of the qualification.

Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 ask us to consider possible ways in which the design and assessment of the SCC could be reviewed. Some detailed suggestions are made, including:

- simplifying the complexity of the current design;
- removing the repetitive elements to improve manageability;
- reducing content, where appropriate;
- increasing opportunities to assess digital literacy skills;
- making more of the strengths of the individual project.

Again, the authors advise that any changes and their implications should be considered thoroughly, and supported with timely and effective communication and training.

We will task the working group with considering the recommendations, the opportunities for improvements, and when they could be introduced. When considering any changes, we will be mindful of the wider education context.

One important point for the working group to consider will be the potential for any changes to help support the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales. It is already the case that the SCC aligns with the four fundamental purposes<sup>9</sup> around which the new curriculum is being developed.

Although outside the scope of the research, the Welsh Government's policy for the universal adoption of the Welsh Bacc came up in many of the researchers' discussions with teachers and students. It appears that teachers and students would welcome greater clarity about what the Welsh Government's expectations are for those offering and studying the Welsh Bacc and the SCC. This would also be helpful to us, as we consider how best to take forward the recommendations of the research.

<sup>9</sup>The four purposes are that all children and young people will be: (1) Ambitious, capable learners, (2) Enterprising, creative contributors, (3) Ethical, informed citizens and (4) Healthy, confident individuals.

## 5. Next steps

Our main action will be to convene the working group and to get it started on developing ideas for proposals based on the recommendations from the research. In the meantime, we will discuss with Welsh Government and WJEC whether there are any immediate steps that can be taken to support recommendations 2, 3, 4 and 5 for improving information, raising awareness and increasing the availability of training.

In November 2018, we will report on the progress we have made. By then we expect the working group to be up and running and to have agreed a timescale for bringing forward proposals. Thereafter, we will report regularly on the working group's progress.

The SCC is a new and innovative approach to developing and assessing important life skills. It was always envisaged that it would require further development over time. This early piece of research helps to set the direction for a considered process of review and refinement. Its findings and recommendations will allow us gradually to evolve the qualification so that it secures the best possible benefit to our young people.