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A successful future for the Welsh Baccalaureate

The qualification at the heart of the Welsh Baccalaureate offers pupils a valuable learning experience. That's the conclusion of the review we commissioned last year of the Skills Challenge Certificate – a new qualification at the centre of the newly reformed Welsh Baccalaureate.

The Skills Challenge Certificate is a qualification that develops and assesses the essential skills that students need for further study and employment. Students take different versions of the qualification depending on whether they are studying it alongside their GCSEs, A levels or other post-16 qualifications. All these versions follow the same basic structure, which requires students to complete an independent research project on a topic of their choosing, and three challenges on themes related to community, global citizenship, and employment.

Last year, we asked independent researchers to look in detail at the design of the Skills Challenge Certificate and to interview students, teachers and lecturers about how it's working in practice. The review was carried out by Wavehill Ltd, a social and economic research firm based in mid-Wales, and by the Institute of Education from University College London.

They found that the Skills Challenge Certificate is an innovative and valuable qualification which is underpinned by highly relevant principles. They concluded that it helps students to develop crucial skills that are beneficial for their future - the skills that employers consistently say young people need to succeed in the workplace.

The researchers also asked students, teachers and lecturers about their experiences of the new Skills Challenge Certificate and the Welsh Baccalaureate. Teaching staff expressed considerable support for it and students said they enjoy gaining new skills and the chance to focus on what they're interested in, something that they don't always get to do in other subjects.



Whilst noting the clear strengths and benefits of the Skills Challenge Certificate, the review also highlighted aspects of how it's designed and assessed that could be simplified in future.

The review also noted inconsistent levels of understanding amongst teachers and students about the Skills Challenge Certificate and how it links to the Welsh Baccalaureate. Some said that they find it difficult to describe the Skills Challenge Certificate and the Welsh Baccalaureate to others.

The review makes eight recommendations for us to consider. Some of these focus on how to support the way in which the Skills Challenge Certificate is delivered at the moment. For example, it recommends investing in a programme of ongoing training and support for all staff involved with teaching it. The review also says that more could be done to explain what the Skills Challenge Certificate is, what learners gain from doing it and what universities and employers think of it.

Some of the recommendations are more forward looking and suggest ways that the design of the qualification could be simplified in future. In making these recommendations, the report's authors emphasise the need to build on the strengths of the current design. They ask us not to rush to make changes without first consulting on whether, when and how they should be introduced.

We are setting up a working group to look in detail at how to put the recommendations into practice. We will also establish a panel of students, teaching staff, employers and universities to test and refine any proposals for change.

The Skills Challenge Certificate is a new and exciting way of developing and assessing important life skills. This early piece of research helps to set the direction for an ongoing process of review and refinement. The evidence from it will allow us gradually to evolve the qualification so that it continues to secure the best possible benefit to the young people taking it.