



Eich cyf/Your ref  
Ein cyf/Our ref

Lynne Neagle AM  
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

7 January 2019

Dear Lynne

**The Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification**

Following my attendance at the Committee on 12 December to provide evidence on the Welsh Baccalaureate, I'm writing with information that I agreed to provide to members.

During the session, we discussed entry into university and how different universities include the Skills Challenge Certificate in their offers. It was also suggested that some schools and colleges are exempting learners from the Skills Challenge Certificate to allow more time to study four or five A levels. I explained that a number of Russell Group universities, in particular, want learners with three good A levels and that there is no need for schools and colleges to be pushing learners to undertake four or five A levels.

The research that I was referring to during committee was by Cambridge University<sup>1</sup>, which notes that the three highest A Level grades in all subjects, excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking, are used for scoring purposes. The report also shows that for Welsh students there were 297 applications, 76 offers and 60 acceptances to Cambridge in 2017.

Cambridge University admissions have further confirmed that:

- there has been a 21% increase in Welsh state school applicants since the Seren Network began;
- the offer rate for Welsh state schools was 26.51%. The UK average was 26% and the average for Wales as a whole was 25.5%.

As I explained during the session, universities across the UK, including Russell Group universities, are generally very positive with many accepting the Skills Challenge Certificate

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[https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/files/publications/ug\\_admissions\\_statistics\\_2017\\_cycle\\_4.pdf](https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/files/publications/ug_admissions_statistics_2017_cycle_4.pdf)

for entry requirement purposes. Those universities that don't accept the Skills Challenge Certificate as a specific entry requirement still value it for the broader skills and experiences that it gives the young person, and it can enhance applications.

When I visited Cambridge and Oxford earlier this year they both confirmed that they recognise the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate, they recognised that it provides our Welsh students with the opportunity to develop their research and academic skills, particularly through their independent research project. Members may have seen the recent story in The Times newspaper on the trend in England for more and more schools to offer the 'Extended Project Qualification' so that students can demonstrate research and critical thinking skills in their applications to university. We in Wales are ahead of the game on this through our established approach in supporting the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate which affords many similar skills, and much more besides.

The WJEC website includes the most recent information about universities that accept the Skills Challenge Certificate<sup>2</sup> and the case studies published in the WJEC newsletters<sup>3</sup> provide some examples of how the Skills Challenge Certificate, and particularly the skills that it develops has helped learners gain entry into university.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Kirsty Williams'.

**Kirsty Williams AC/AM**  
Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/welsh-baccalaureate/higher-education/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/welsh-baccalaureate/welsh-bacc-from-2015/>