

A review of the design and
assessment model of the
Skills Challenge Certificate,
and its place within the
Welsh Baccalaureate

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of Qualifications Wales.

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List of abbreviations

CSC	Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAS	Education Achievement Service – South East Wales Consortium
ERW	Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith / Education through Regional Working – South West and Mid Wales Consortium
FE college	Further education college
GLH	Guided learning hours
GwE	Gwasanaeth Effeithiolrwydd a Gwella Ysgolion Gogledd Cymru / North Wales School Effectiveness and Improvement Service
IOE	Institute of Education
KS3	Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9 in schools)
KS4	Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11 in schools)
Post-16	Post-16 (Years 12-13 in schools and all FE college learners)
SCC	Skills Challenge Certificate
UCL	University College London
Welsh Bacc	Welsh Baccalaureate
WG	Welsh Government
WJEC	WJEC CBAC Limited (Awarding body)

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1 Introduction

In January 2017, Wavehill, in collaboration with the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education (IOE), was commissioned by Qualifications Wales to undertake a review of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) qualification and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc).

Dr Caroline Daly (Reader in Education, IOE and Honorary Visiting Professor Cardiff University) undertook a detailed analysis of the SCC design by reviewing programme specifications, delivery handbooks, design principles, the administration handbook, the code of practice and Qualifications Wales' (2016) *Review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate from September 2015*. Dr Caroline Daly is the lead author on the desk-based review of the SCC.

The review of documents was supplemented by interviews with key stakeholders, including the authors of the Qualifications Wales' initial review (2016) of the Welsh Bacc and senior managers at the awarding body, WJEC. These interviews were used for reference to seek clarification about the SCC design and assessment model to inform the ongoing review of the documentation and refine questions for the focus groups.

To enrich the evidence base, a programme of fieldwork was developed to sample a number of schools and Further Education (FE) colleges across Wales. The fieldwork engaged with learners and teachers through focus groups (learners) and interviews (teachers). The sample was constructed in discussion with Qualifications Wales and was designed to include the voices of learners and teachers from a variety of centres across Wales that deliver the Welsh Bacc (the methodology is discussed in section 3).

The findings from the desk-based review, the learner focus groups and the teacher interviews are brought together in the Conclusions and Recommendations at the end of the report.

2 Background

The Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) was first introduced in September 2003 as a pilot for Post-16 learners with the intention of providing a broader curriculum. A pilot for Key Stage 4 (KS4) was then introduced in September 2006. Following a gradual roll-out to schools and FE Colleges, it was available to all centres in Wales from September 2007. However until 2011, centres had to apply to the Welsh Government (WG) for approval to offer it.

In 2011, the WG commissioned a 'Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year olds in Wales', (Evans, 2012), which included a review of the Welsh Bacc. This review made a series of recommendations for a 'revised and more rigorous' Welsh Bacc that could prepare learners in Wales for employability, further study and responsible citizenship. As a result, a new Welsh Bacc was introduced for first teaching in September 2015 which was available to all schools and FE colleges in Wales to offer.

The WG led on the new design, whilst the development, delivery and support of the Welsh Bacc resided with WJEC. It is this current version of the Welsh Bacc that is the subject of our review.

When the WG introduced the Welsh Bacc, it announced a policy of universal adoption. The policy also set targets for schools and FE colleges to gradually increase the proportion of learners taking the Welsh Bacc, with the aim that by 2019/20 all eligible learners would take it as part of their programme of study. In 2018, the Welsh Bacc will also become a school performance measure at KS4.

2.1 The Welsh Baccalaureate

The Welsh Bacc is a framework which is comprised of a combination of qualifications including:

1. The Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) – a new skills-based qualification that enables learners to develop skills for education, employment and life;
2. GCSEs in English or Welsh Language, and Mathematics or Mathematics-Numeracy (or the Essential Communication Skills and/or Essential Application of Number Skills from the Essential Skills Wales qualification, where appropriate);
3. A choice of supporting qualifications of a specified size and level.

The diagram below illustrates how these qualifications form the Welsh Bacc framework.

Figure 2.1: Overview of the composition of the Welsh Bacc



There are four forms of the Welsh Bacc which are available at levels 1, 2 and 3¹. At KS4, all learners follow the National/Foundation Welsh Bacc studied over the course of two years. Learners receive either a Foundation (level 1) or National (level 2) award based on the grades they achieve for each component of the Welsh Bacc (i.e. the SCC, GCSEs in English Language/Welsh Language and Maths/Maths-Numeracy, and further supporting qualifications).

Post-16 learners are entered for either the Foundation, National or Advanced Welsh Bacc depending on the level of their main learning programme (i.e. level 1, 2 or 3). At Post-16, the Foundation and National are typically studied over a period of one year, whilst Advanced is studied over two years. Table 1 provides an overview of each form of the Welsh Bacc.

Table 2.1: An overview of each form of the Welsh Bacc

Title of Welsh Bacc	Level	Course of study	Taken by learners in:	Referred to in this report as: ¹
National/Foundation (Key Stage 4)	Level 1 (Foundation) and Level 2 (National)	2 years	School alongside GCSEs and/or vocational qualifications	KS4
Foundation (Post-16)	Level 1	1 year	FE college alongside other level 1 qualifications	Post-16 Foundation
National (Post-16)	Level 2	1 year	FE college alongside other level 2 qualifications	Post-16 National
Advanced	Level 3	2 years	Sixth-form or FE college alongside other level 3 qualifications	Advanced

2.2 The Skills Challenge Certificate

The Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) is a new skills-based qualification. There are four SCC qualifications, one for each form of the Welsh Bacc. Each SCC qualification has the same structure which includes four components:

1. Individual Project
2. Enterprise and Employability Challenge
3. Global Citizenship Challenge
4. Community Challenge

Collectively, the four components aim to enable learners to develop seven skills needed for education, employment and life. Table 2.2 provides an overview of the SCC.

¹ Level 1 equates to GCSE grades D-G, Level 2 equates to GCSE grades A*-C and Level 3 equates to A levels or equivalent qualifications

Table 2.2: Overview of the structure of the SCC and its components

Skills Challenge Certificate component	Weighting	Purpose	Skills developed and assessed
Individual project	50%	To develop learners' independent study and research skills	Literacy Numeracy Digital literacy
Enterprise and Employability Challenge	20%	To develop enterprising skills and attributes to enhance employability	Critical thinking and problem solving Planning and organisation
Global Citizenship Challenge	15%	To develop knowledge and understanding of a global issues and appropriate ways to respond	Creativity and innovation Personal effectiveness
Community Challenge	15%	To identify and participate in community-based opportunities	These are referred to as the seven essential and employability skills

2.2.1 Assessing the Skills Challenge Certificate

Learners' work for each component of the SCC is marked by teachers in schools and FE colleges. After internal standardisation (a process within centres to check that all learners are assessed accurately, fairly and consistently to the required standard), a sample of the work is then moderated by WJEC.

Each component (i.e. the Individual Project and the Challenges) is graded individually as follows:

- National and Foundation levels – Foundation Pass, Pass, Merit, Distinction
- Advanced – Pass, Merit, Distinction

2.2.2 Awarding the Skills Challenge Certificate

The SCC is equivalent in size to a GCSE (at levels 1 and 2) or an A level (at level 3). To be awarded the SCC, learners must achieve all four components. The qualification grade is calculated based on the aggregation of the component scores and is graded as follows:

- Foundation (level 1) – Pass* and Pass
- National (level 2) – A* to C
- Advanced (level 3) – A* to E

Table 2.3 provides an overview of the grading structure for the SCC.

Table 2.3: Overview of the SCC's grading structure

Title of Skills Challenge Certificate	Level	Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	Grading scale	Referred to in this report as
National/Foundation Skills Challenge Certificate	Level 1 (Foundation) and Level 2 (National)	120	Pass* or Pass (Foundation) A* to C (National)	KS4 SCC
Foundation (Post-16) Skills Challenge Certificate	Level 1	120	Pass* or Pass	Post-16 Foundation SCC
National (Post-16) Skills Challenge Certificate	Level 2	120	A* to C	Post-16 National SCC
Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate	Level 3	360	A* to E	Advanced SCC

2.2.3 Awarding the Welsh Baccalaureate

A learner is awarded the Welsh Bacc by successfully achieving the required combination of qualifications, as illustrated in table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Combination of qualifications required to be awarded the Welsh Bacc

Welsh Bacc	Awarded at	Language qualifications	Mathematics qualifications	Other qualifications
Foundation Level 1	KS4 or Post-16	GCSE English Language (A* - G) or GCSE Welsh Language (A* - G) or ESW Comms ² – at Post-16 only (Pass)	GCSE Mathematics (A* - G) or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy (A* - G) or ESW AON ³ – at Post-16 only (Pass)	Three further GCSEs (At KS4 up to two of these may be equivalent qualifications. At Post-16, these may be equivalent qualifications)

² ESW Comms – Essential Communication Skills from the Essential Skills Wales qualification

³ ESW AON – Essential Application of Number from the Essential Skills Wales qualification

Welsh Bacc	Awarded at	Language qualifications	Mathematics qualifications	Other qualifications
National Level 2	KS4 or Post-16	GCSE English Language (A* - C) or GCSE Welsh Language (A* - C) or ESW Comms - at Post-16 only (Pass)	GCSE Mathematics (A* - C) or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy (A* - C) or ESW AON at Post-16 only (Pass)	Three further GCSEs (At KS4 up to two of these may be equivalent qualifications. At Post-16, these may be equivalent qualifications)
Advanced Level 3	Post-16	GCSE English Language (A* - C) or GCSE Welsh Language (A* - C)	GCSE Mathematics (A* - C) or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy (A* - C)	Two A levels or equivalent (This requirement must be met through achievement of no more than three separate qualifications)

The Welsh Bacc is graded as a pass or fail and is awarded at three levels:

1. Foundation Welsh Baccaulaureate (level 1), awarded at KS4 or Post-16
2. National Welsh Baccaulaureate (level 2), awarded at KS4 or Post-16
3. Advanced Welsh Baccaulaureate (level 3), awarded at Post-16 only.

If a learner does not achieve all the required qualifications to be awarded the Welsh Bacc but has achieved the SCC, then the SCC can still be awarded.

The Post-16 Foundation and Post-16 National SCC and the Welsh Bacc were awarded for the first time in summer 2016. The KS4 and Advanced SCC and the Welsh Bacc were first awarded in summer 2017.

2.3 Review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate from September 2015

In March 2016, Qualifications Wales published a report on its *Review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate from September 2015*, which set out to investigate some issues raised in the initial stages of implementation. This prompted questions about:

- The size and manageability of the SCC;
- The potential duplication of learning across levels of the Welsh Bacc;
- Whether the Welsh Bacc should focus solely on the SCC, rather than on a wider set of supporting qualifications;
- The requirement for all components of the Welsh Bacc to be taken at the same level.

From its initial review, Qualifications Wales concluded that a review of the assessment and structure of the SCC, and its place within the Welsh Bacc, should be conducted. This review will be referred to as the 'initial review' in this report.

In their initial review, Qualifications Wales also examined a range of issues associated with the initial implementation of the new specifications for the Welsh Bacc. These included staff training, availability of supporting resources and exemplar material and e-portfolio management.

The research and analysis in this review are not concerned with these issues, being that they are associated with initial organisational matters and the management of change. The focus in this review is on the design and assessment model of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc.

3 Methodology

This section outlines the project methodology, fieldwork design and data gathering protocols for the review. More technical information is provided in Annex 5 to this report. The evidence and data collected for this review came from two discrete but interrelated sources. These sources were:

- A desk-based review of evidence relating to the design and assessment of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC), including its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) framework, and
- Fieldwork comprising focus groups with learners, and interviews with teachers and others involved in delivering the SCC.

3.1 The desk-based review

Section 4 of this report contains analysis of the documents that specify the aims and requirements of the Welsh Bacc and the SCC introduced in September 2015. It examines the design of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc, as well as the design and assessment model of the SCC. The analysis included all core materials that support delivery of the SCC, including: programme specifications, delivery handbooks, the design principles, the administration handbook and the code of practice. It did not include materials produced locally by schools, regional education consortia or other independent organisations. A list of all documents that were consulted is included in Annex 1.

The review of documents was supplemented by interviews with key stakeholders, including the authors of Qualifications Wales' (2016) initial review of the implementation of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc, and senior managers at WJEC. These interviews do not, in and of themselves, form part of the evidence base in this report (and are thus not reported upon directly), but have served to provide a perspective upon and contextualise the initial findings of the desk-based review. The views expressed in section four are those of the author based upon this in-depth review of documentation and her expertise within the field of qualifications and assessment.

In reviewing the design and assessment model of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc, the document analysis addressed high-level research questions in five areas set out by Qualifications Wales. The five areas used to structure the analysis are:

- Purpose
- Design/structure
- Content
- Assessment
- Grading and awarding

The analysis was based on the principles of ‘constructive alignment’ in the design of effective curriculum models. Constructive alignment is concerned with how far the three pillars of any learning design - the curriculum, the pedagogy and the assessment - have a coherent relationship with each other (Biggs, 2003). The alignment between the different components helps to ensure that learner outcomes are valid in terms of the overall purposes of a programme of study. Such an alignment places the purposes of the programme at the centre of evaluation and then explores the effectiveness of the programme components in achieving those purposes. The evaluation of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc therefore examines the relationship between the intended learning aims and the design of the curriculum and assessment model that has been developed.

3.2 Learner and teacher engagement

The methodology adopted for the learner and teacher engagement aspect of the review was designed to capture the views of learners and teachers about their experiences of the SCC. Small focus groups of between six and ten learners were selected as the appropriate platform for learner engagement to allow for interaction and reflection in a non-intimidating setting. Focus groups also enabled learners to build on comments made by others. More information on the focus groups can be found in the technical annex to this report, including details of the data collection, fieldwork protocols, coding and analysis.

The fieldwork engaged with teachers in one-to-one semi-structured peer interviews (i.e. the interviewer has detailed knowledge and experience education in Wales). This approach maximised the potential for reflection and considered experience of SCC delivery in a confidential and trusted setting. This method also ensured that the interpretation of responses could be clarified for accuracy both by questioning during the interview and the verification of follow-up field notes. Whilst the interviewees were aware that the review had been commissioned by Qualifications Wales and may therefore have tempered their responses, the potential impact of this was minimised by employing an independent researcher to conduct the interviews.

3.2.1 Sampling frame

To provide a balanced sample of schools within the resource capacity of the review, 25 centres were selected across Wales. The sampling frame included the following parameters:

- Regional education consortia
- Language medium
- Urban/rural⁴
- Eligibility for provision of free school meals (used as a proxy measure for deprivation)
- Size of school
- Age range of learners
- Categorisation of school

⁴ For the purposes of sampling, we used the definitions of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ employed by the Department of Communities and Local Government, based on the classification of Output Areas by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

At least four schools within each of the four Regional Education Consortia were selected, of which at least one was located in a rural area. In addition to those sixteen schools, an additional five Welsh medium schools were sampled, with at least one from each of the four regional education consortia. Four FE colleges were also included in the research. No formal stratification was applied to the FE college sample, although it does attempt to ensure geographical and regional diversity. The research sites were distributed across the geographical areas covered by the four Regional Education Consortia: 12 in CSC, 9 in EAS, 15 in ERW and 11 in GwE⁵. In total, 47 focus groups were organised across the 25 research sites.

The focus groups were conducted with learners studying a SCC qualification in the sample of schools and FE colleges described above. Here learners were represented across all forms of the SCC. Focus groups comprising of learners studying either the KS4 or Advanced SCC were composed solely of learners studying the same form of the qualification. However, due to logistics, learners studying either the Post-16 Foundation or Post-16 National SCC were often combined in the focus groups. In total, 19 focus groups were held with learners taking the KS4 SCC, 6 with learners taking the Post-16 National and Post-16 Foundation SCC, and 22 with learners studying the Advanced SCC.

Interviews with teachers, lecturers and Welsh Bacc co-ordinators were conducted in the same research sites as the focus groups to afford the possibility of 'heuristic alignment'⁶ of responses from learners and teachers. A total of 26 interviews were conducted with delivery staff. Some of those interviewed were Welsh Bacc Coordinators, while others were relatively new to the delivery of the SCC. Four interviews were conducted in Welsh, one bilingually and the other 21 in English.

3.3 Reporting conventions

The reporting of the qualitative data gathered from the learner focus groups and teacher interviews attempts to maximise the voice of the participants and to minimise subjective editorial comment.

Throughout the reporting, three standard research terms are used to illustrate how often a topic or theme was discussed and whether that discussion was positive or negative. The participants in the focus groups and interviews represent a sample of learners and teachers across a range of diverse and varied settings. As a result, the reporting is cautious about generalising the findings to a wider cohort, and therefore, avoid using numerical values to illustrate the strength of a theme. Instead, relative terminology such as *low*, *medium*, and *high* or *none*, *few*, *some*, and *many*, is used. These are heuristics ('rules of thumb') and not numerically defined categories. These terms and heuristics were used consistently across the report, as defined in table 3.1.

⁵ For an explanation of where these consortia are located, see the list of abbreviations on page 3.

⁶ By this, we mean that we have comparability for the learning centre, but it does not necessarily indicate that any learners who participated in focus groups were learners of the particular staff person interviewed, nor should it be read as such nor any causal connection made.

Table 3.1: Key terms used in reporting

Term	Meaning	Example
Frequency (low, medium, high)	Number of times a specific theme, item, or phrase was mentioned within each focus group.	“the frequency of discussion about the SCC with family was low”
Intensity (low, medium, high)	Number of times a specific theme, item, or phrase was mentioned by one participant within each focus group.	“the intensity of discussion with family was low”
Directionality (positive/negative)	Whether the balance of mentions (frequency and intensity) was positive or negative	“the directionality of discussion with family was quite positive”

In addition, a distinction is made in the analysis of the transcripts from focus groups between *excerpts*, *direct quotes* and *paraphrases*. As discussed above, *excerpts* are the sections of text from the focus group transcripts to which codes have been applied in alignment with our coding scheme. *Direct quotes* can be attributed to single individuals and are indicated by quotation marks (”) in the report. Given that the focus groups involved between six and ten learners, and that in many instances there was general discussion or multiple individuals speaking at once, there was a need to sometimes paraphrase that discussion in the transcription and thus in the coding and reporting. Paraphrased items will appear in italics in the text but will not be encapsulated by quotations marks. (The format for direct quotes and paraphrasing also holds for the teacher interviews).

Finally, it is recognised that the focus group and interview data represent the cumulative subjective experiences and perceptions of those who participated in the research. In certain instances, it was felt that it was useful to include statements that may incorporate *perceived* causal attribution⁷, while recognising that there are no means to validate the *actual* causality, nor trace the link between the causal components. In these cases, they have been noted explicitly as statements of perception and the report refrains from commenting on the veracity of those causal links.

⁷ For example, “it is hard to have team stability because of funding pressures”

4 Desk-based review

4.1 Overview

This section of the report contains analysis of the documents that specify the aims and requirements of the Welsh Baccalaureate framework (Welsh Bacc) and the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC).

The analysis examined the ‘master design’⁸ for the Welsh Bacc framework, as well as the detailed arrangements for delivering the SCC. Laudable principles underpin the overall purpose of the Welsh Bacc framework and the SCC that sits within it. These build on the recommendations set out in the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales* (Evans, 2012). The Welsh Bacc aims to ensure access for all learners at KS4 and Post-16 to a curriculum that can equip them with skills, relevant experiences and qualifications that prepare them to be engaged citizens, capable of independent study and with readiness for the workplace.

Many of the design features of the SCC support these principles. The Challenges and Individual Project provide opportunities for learners to develop highly relevant skills within authentic contexts that are relevant to their future study and employment needs. This encourages learners to engage with community and employer stakeholders and there is a consistent focus on independent learning. These are important positive features of the SCC.

There is, however, a flaw in the current design. It is over-complex. Occasional inconsistencies and anomalies appear in what is demanded by the different forms of the SCC. Many of these result from the need to offer four very similar versions of the SCC (KS4, Post-16 Foundation, Post-16 National and Advanced), which has led to a component of repetition with the potential for confusion. There is some lack of alignment between the learning outcomes, methods of assessment and assessment criteria within each individual SCC, as well as across them. The result is that the content and assessment arrangements are not straightforward to understand.

The analysis identified two underlying challenges that impact on the overall coherence of the SCC. Both issues reflect the considerable challenge of designing assessments of skills to be conducted on a national scale and through a curriculum that is based on authentic, real world-learning experiences. These underlying challenges are outlined below to explain the reasons for many of the points identified in our analysis.

⁸ By which is meant the relationship between the individual components of a system, in this case the Welsh Bacc framework, encompassing the four forms of the Welsh Bacc and the qualifications that contribute to each of them.

4.1.1 Designing to develop and assess skills through 'real world learning' experiences

The SCC addresses an important and challenging goal - to develop and assess 'real world' learning. The SCC was designed to be delivered alongside a broader curriculum with the intention that learners would develop the seven essential and employability skills across all areas of their studies. These skills were then to be assessed through the components of the SCC. Such an assessment is complex to manage and requires extensive curriculum coordination within centres, which may have been under-estimated. There is no detailed information about this in the documentation reviewed.

All forms of the SCC provide a common outline of both indicative content and assessment criteria for the three Challenges and Individual Project. These contain many overlapping areas of skill development. Speaking positively, this reflects the complexity of real world experience in which, for example, the skills of problem solving, digital literacy and numeracy may frequently inter-relate. Each of these skills can be applied to a vast range of real world contexts. Hence, each SCC component is intended to assess a prescribed sub-set of the seven essential and employability skills (see table 3.1).

However, the specifications for the SCC qualifications and other supporting documents do not provide a rationale for the relationship between the skills likely to be developed in each component, nor the skills that are assessed within it. The allocation of skills to these SCC components does not fully reflect the opportunities to recognise the skills being developed. Not all the skills that are most obviously developed within some Challenges are assessed. For example, planning and organisation is not included in the Enterprise and Employability Challenge at any level.

Yet the Challenge requires learners to develop and present a business proposal and to make a pitch. This is a demanding task which offers extensive opportunities for learners to demonstrate planning and organisational skills that would be essential in a real-world context. Problem-solving skills will almost certainly be demonstrated in completing the Enterprise and Employability Challenge and Community Challenge but are only allocated to the Global Citizenship Challenge for assessment.

The skills that have been selected for assessment in the Challenges are therefore only partially in constructive alignment with the content. The intent behind the design has merit - to secure a breadth of curriculum experiences and to make it possible to manage assessment by focusing on a few specific skills in each component. However, there are difficulties with such an approach. It does not secure constructive alignment which, in turn, creates inefficiency in the development and assessment of the seven essential and employability skills. In other words, learners must deploy more skills to complete the tasks for each component than are assessed or rewarded.

Within a single form of the SCC, there is a risk of duplication occurring without any progression in skills. Constructive alignment would identify the desired learning outcomes (skills) to be assessed and then design the Challenges to ensure maximum deep and authentic learning opportunities to develop those skills. Certainly, the Challenges offer opportunities for a wide range of skills to be developed.

For example, one of the learning outcomes in the Global Citizenship Challenge (Post-16 National level) is 'Understand issues involved in a Global Citizenship Challenge'. This requires learners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a global issue, which is indicated in the demanding assessment criterion: 'Detailed and effective coverage of relevant political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors'. Hence, 'coverage' of such sophisticated factors would require a range of skills drawing upon sources and show critical thinking. This approach is desirable in achieving a balanced understanding of the 'issues involved' based on identifying the credibility and viability of sources in providing trustworthy information in this context. Yet there is no explicit requirement to assess any of the seven essential and employability skills as part of this criterion.

However, one relevant criterion can be found allocated to a different learning outcome, 'critical thinking and problem solving'. The criterion is 'Detailed and effective consideration of the credibility of sources'. It is no surprise that there are overlaps in the skills and criteria that might support a range of learning outcomes for the same Challenge. The problem lies in the tension between real-world integrated development of the skills and the constraints of assessing them under separate learning outcomes. A 'best fit' is not always apparent. These problems reflect the difficulty of designing for the assessment of highly complex skills within the same Challenge, as well as across the four separate components of the SCC that all seek to achieve the same overall aims.

An alternative approach could design for the harvesting of rich opportunities for learners to develop skills as part of authentic tasks. It is possible to envisage complex multi-faceted project-based learning in which participants draw upon several skill sets for real purposes. Skills can be demonstrated in a portfolio approach for assessment. A portfolio approach, a feature that was discontinued when the previous Welsh Bacc was revised, might be worth further consideration. However, it would need strengthening and a robust quality assurance process would be required to secure reliability in the context of a national qualification while remaining valid and manageable. Such approaches are sophisticated and involve staff development to provide appropriate learning opportunities and assessment training.

4.1.4 Specialist versus generic knowledge

The SCC appears to be designed for a wide range of teachers seeking to teach and assess without specialism in discrete skills development. This is the case by necessity since it is not a curriculum area that exists in initial teacher education. Instead, it can be taught by those with considerable commitment and adaptability in transferring their specialist knowledge and experience to the demands of the SCC.

There is a lack of in-depth curriculum guidance in the documentation that has been reviewed about the features of learning and progression in the seven essential and employability skills. This is not unusual in programme specifications; however, given that the SCC is a new and innovative qualification that requires teachers to teach and assess skills, rather than knowledge, more guidance would be beneficial to support them. Additional resources are

available from other sources, but it is beyond the scope of this review to examine the range of such resources⁹.

The skills include highly demanding components but appear with a 'common sense' approach to assessment. There is an atomistic assessment approach that lends itself to 'box-ticking' and gives the impression that teachers do not need specialist knowledge to be able to assess these skills. Highly complex learning goals are presented for teaching and assessment without sufficient definition of their various features and applications. Overall, the design of the Challenges lacks rigour in supporting the development of specific skills. These issues are discussed in detail in later sections

One difficulty when designing the assessment of complex skills to be used on a large scale is the need to make them readily assessable using a range of markers drawn from differing subject specialisms. At the same time, assessments need to be applicable to a very diverse range of tasks and activities. The tendency is towards generic assessment criteria. This is particularly the case with assessment criteria for the KS4 SCC. Here, the tendency is to differentiate performance in the four components in terms of 'Limited', 'Basic', 'Detailed' or 'Detailed and effective' mastery of the requisite skills.

However, there is relatively little detail that indicates how these terms apply to the specifics of 'problem solving', 'digital literacy' etc. There is a lack of alignment between the complexity of the skills being assessed and the criteria used to guide assessors. As distinguishing criteria, the terms 'Basic' or 'Detailed' are not illuminating in the context of actual skill-specific development. The terms instead suggest a reasonable ease of assessment on first impressions, but this is likely to require considerable refinement when it comes to making judgements.

The impression given by generic descriptors such as 'Basic' or 'Detailed' is that the criteria can be assessed without specialist knowledge of development in digital literacy or creativity, for example. The upshot is that the SCC could be viewed as a non-specialist curriculum area which can be sustained because the skills are perceived as undemanding to teach or assess - which is far from the case.

The absence of specialist SCC teachers by training, combined with the presentation of the skills as easy to develop and assess, may undermine the perceived importance of the SCC when compared to well-established qualifications in familiar subject disciplines that assess knowledge-based and prescribed content. The desk-based review has thus identified aspects of the Welsh Bacc and the SCC that could usefully be looked at when considering future design changes. Design issues could be addressed to increase alignment and overall consistency and are examined in this review. It should be noted that, on balance, the view expressed through the stakeholder engagement was that any changes to the design of the SCC or the Welsh Bacc should be carefully considered, planned and communicated.

⁹ WG-funded bodies such as Colegau Cymru and Regional Consortia to produce resources. Private providers have also produced materials.

4.2 Purpose

4.2.1 Is there a clearly defined purpose of the Welsh Baccalaureate?

The Welsh Bacc has a clearly defined purpose. The overall aims are clear and consistent within the documentation reviewed. They relate to an over-arching objective to prepare learners with the skills required to participate as fully-rounded citizens, capable of participating in both local and global communities, and able to contribute to economic and community dimensions in socially responsible and informed ways.

It is also clear that the Welsh Bacc is intended to incorporate both supporting qualifications and the SCC as equally important in achieving these aims within one overarching framework. Learners from 14-19 years are supposed to access a curriculum that enables them to develop the requisite essential and employability skills. It is further clear that the Welsh Bacc is intended to provide opportunities for learners to engage with this curriculum in a continuum that bridges school and further education contexts, with pathways available for progression in levels of challenge and attainment.

The design of the Welsh Bacc aims to support this purpose by requiring both widely established supporting qualifications universally recognised by employers and universities, combined with the innovative SCC qualifications that develop essential and employability skills.

In terms of overall intentions then, the Welsh Bacc has a clearly defined purpose of reflecting the recommendations of the 2012 Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales (Evans, 2012).

4.2.2 Is there a clearly defined purpose to the Skills Challenge Certificate?

The SCC has a clearly defined purpose within the Welsh Bacc framework, as presented in the Design Principles for the Welsh Baccalaureate (WG, 2014). It is a key part of the Welsh Bacc, consisting of three Challenges and an Individual Project. Each Challenge has a different focus (Enterprise and Employability, Global Citizenship, and Community) and is based on a range of real-world contexts. The Individual Project focuses on the development of an independent and self-directed investigation of a topic that is relevant to a learner's programme of study, personal interest or career aspirations.

Central to the purpose of the SCC is to develop seven essential and employability skills outlined in each specification. The opportunity for learners to have a teacher in the role of personal tutor/mentor, with whom regular meetings are held, is a positive feature. The role is designed to ensure support which can provide consistency and personalised advice for independent study and help learners to navigate the requirements. This offers support for the transition to independent learning as preparation for further study and employment.

4.2.3 Is there a clearly defined purpose of the Individual Project and each of the three Challenges?

The Individual Project and each of the three Challenges has a clear purpose as a discrete component. Each of them is intended to provide opportunities for learners to develop the skills needed for further education, employment and life. The Challenges do this by setting purposeful tasks within authentic contexts or ones that reflect ‘real life’, preferably involving stakeholders from the community or employment. Examples include helping to restore an area of natural beauty and contributing a creative input via a film or poster to an exhibition about an important world issue, such as migration.

The Individual Project does this by offering an extended opportunity for learners to pursue a topic that is highly relevant to them. At KS4, learners must select a topic that is of ‘personal interest’ or relevant to their ‘future educational or career aspirations’. At Post-16 Foundation or National, learners select a topic that is related to their ‘Learning Programme’ or ‘future employment aspirations’. Meanwhile, learners at Advanced level select a topic that relates to their ‘future educational or career aspirations’. The purpose of the Individual Project is then to develop independent study and research skills that can support learners in pursuing further and higher education and may also help them to deepen their knowledge and understanding of a substantive topic that is relevant to their needs and aspirations.

Between them, the components of the SCC aim to develop a capacity to learn both independently and collaboratively by requiring individual and group engagement across the range of tasks. The four components are identified in Table 4.1 in terms of purpose, emphasis and skills to be developed.

Table 4.1: Skills Challenge Certificate Components

Skills Challenge Certificate Components				
	Challenges			
	Individual Project	Enterprise and Employability	Global Citizenship	Community
Purpose	To develop learners’ research skills	To develop enterprising skills and attributes and enhance employability	To develop knowledge and understanding of world issues	To identify and participate in community based opportunities
Emphasis	Future educational or career aspirations	Skills and attributes required for work and higher education	Understanding and responding appropriately to global issues	Encouraging learners to identify, develop and participate in opportunities that will benefit a community

Skills Challenge Certificate Components				
Skills demonstrated		Challenges		
		Research skills and knowledge	<i>numeracy*</i>	<i>literacy*</i>
High level of Independent study		digital literacy	critical thinking	personal effectiveness
		creativity and innovation	problem solving	
		personal effectiveness	creativity and innovation	

Source: Qualifications Wales, 2016, pp. 10-11

* Numeracy and literacy are demonstrated but not assessed at KS4.

Whilst each component has a clear purpose in itself, together there is potential for repetition and overlap. All three Challenges involve the development of essential and employability skills, regardless of whether discrete skills are a specific assessment focus. Whilst this approach reflects the complexity of real-world learning, it diminishes the clarity of purpose as each Challenge is completed. The benefits of pursuing all three Challenges as separate tasks, as opposed to fewer in a more focused and consolidated way, are not clear. This is compounded for those who follow the SCC at Post-16 Foundation, National or Advanced levels after completing the SCC at KS4. They therefore complete a further three Challenges of a very similar type, albeit at a potentially different level with a new brief deemed appropriate for Post-16 learners.

The purpose of the components should be seen in this context of the whole experience of the SCC, as opposed to solely being in terms of the separate value of each individual component at each discrete level. The question is therefore concerned with the relative purpose of each Challenge as one of three (and potentially one of six or nine across levels) within the SCC. This means that no matter how clear and relevant the purpose of each individual Challenge might be, they are offered in a way that reduces the purpose of each when they are combined.

It should be acknowledged that it is important to develop skills by re-applying them in a range of new contexts and this may be seen as a strength of the design intention. There is not a clear focus, however, on deepening mastery of particular skills as a learner progresses from one Challenge to the next. This may result in repetition that is not adding to the learner's skills base.

Although skills are allocated to separate components for assessment (Table 3.1), they may be potentially developed across each of these components. For example, learners will inevitably apply extensive 'planning and organisation' skills in all four components, but this skill is only assessed and rewarded in the Community Challenge. The purpose of the SCC components should be seen within the overall architecture that includes the potential for duplication and may lose opportunities to support and assess progression in skills development.

4.3 Structure: Is the structure of the Skills Challenge Certificate fit for purpose?

There are four SCC qualifications, one for each form of the Welsh Bacc. Each SCC consists of four components: the three Challenges and an Individual Project. Although there are some differences in the detail of the Challenges set in the different SCCs, the structure is common to all of them and appears consistently in all the specifications and other core documentation.

Guided learning hours (GLH) indicate the time that learners will typically need to spend on various activities to achieve the qualification. GLH therefore indicates the overall 'size' of the qualification but not the demand. The GLH for each component remains the same whether studied at Foundation or National level. The SCC National/Foundation has an overall GLH of 120 - the same total size as a GCSE. The GLH for all Advanced level components is greater, with an overall GLH of 360 to reflect its equivalent in size to an A level.

Table 4.2: The structure of the SCC

Component	Purpose	Weighting	GLH KS4/Post-16 National/Foundation	GLH Advanced
Individual Project	To develop learners' independent study and research skills	50%	40 hrs	120 hrs
Enterprise and Employability Challenge	Develop enterprising skills and attributes and enhance employability.	20%	30 hrs	120 hrs
Global Citizenship Challenge	Understand and respond appropriately to a global issue.	15%	25 hrs	70 hrs
Community Challenge	Identify, develop and participate in opportunities that will benefit the local community.	15%	25 hrs	50 hrs
Total GLH			120 GLH	360 GLH

Compiled from Welsh Bacc specifications KS4, National (Post-16), Foundation (Post-16) and Advanced.

The requirements of the SCC are presented in a consistent format in the four specification documents for KS4 and Post-16 (Foundation/National/Advanced). The information outlines

the structure for the Welsh Bacc and the SCC, and the component structure for the Individual Project and the three Challenges. Despite the consistent approach, the information is complex to communicate. All the specifications repeat the same information across several sections. Technical terms are used throughout, but they are often not explained until later in the documents, making the information difficult to understand for readers who are new to the Welsh Bacc and the SCC. The effect is rather confusing.

The complex presentation of the information is indicative of the challenge to describe the SCC structure and how it relates to the overall Welsh Bacc. The fact that there are four forms of the Welsh Bacc, each with common structures and very similar titles compounds the difficulty of describing it.

The structure of the SCC raises several issues which are identified below.

- The potential for duplication of aims across the Challenges because they are designed to develop and assess some of the same skills.
- The skills allocated to the Challenges do not align completely with the assessment opportunities represented by the activities.
- The absence of detailed definition of the fine-grained features of the skills and how they might be developed in discrete ways in different Challenges.

One example of this relates to the assessment of digital literacy in the Enterprise and Employability Challenge at Post-16 National level. The assessment criteria do not refer explicitly to digital literacy, but the concept is implicit in the criteria inasmuch as it refers to presenting a 'Visual Display' of a business proposal (although the visual display can also be achieved through non-digital means). The criteria distinguish between a display that is either 'clear and appropriately developed' (Band 1), 'structured and effectively developed' (Band 2), or 'well-structured and creatively developed' (Band 3). It is difficult to tell from the rest of the specification document what features of digital literacy will distinguish these bands of attainment.

The specification lists seven generic components of digital literacy. The one most relevant to the requirement for a visual display is 'Use, manipulate or create data and information and present it digitally for different audiences'. This is helpful as a general indicator of what might be expected. However, there is no detailed information about development within the skill area and what features of a visual display might demonstrate increased competence in digital literacy.

- Each of the seven essential and employability skills are assessed to differing degrees. The frequency with which these skills are assessed varies across the SCC qualifications and their components. It is hard to say whether these differences are intentional, but they appear to be an unintended consequence of the way the Challenges were designed without sufficient alignment with target skills.
- There is no clearly stated rationale in the published documentation that has been reviewed for the various size and weightings of each of the three Challenges, given that they have

very similar designs. The weighting is 15% for both the Global Citizenship Challenge and Community Challenge compared with 20% for the Enterprise and Employability Challenge.

- There is no clearly stated rationale in the published documentation that has been reviewed for the relationship between the GLH and the weighting allocated to the Individual Project and the Enterprise and Employability Challenge at Advanced level. The balance is markedly different to that at KS4 and Post-16 Foundation and National levels (see table 3.2). It seems incongruous that a Challenge with 20% weighting is awarded the same GLH as the Individual Project with 50% weighting. Similarly, there are inconsistencies in GLH at Advanced level between the Global Citizenship Challenge and Community Challenge. Both have an equal 15% weighting, but the Global Citizenship Challenge includes an additional learning outcome to be assessed with a further 20 hours of GLH. There is an inconsistent alignment between the demands of these Challenges in terms of learning hours required and the corresponding assessment outcomes.

Whilst there are clear merits in learners completing each component in its own right, it is the overall structure that raises queries about repetition and assessment of skills. There is potential for overlap between some of the activities conducted as part of the Challenges. The requirement for individual and group challenge is relevant as this develops contrasting skills. In the future, it may therefore be worth considering consolidating some of the challenges to give learners a richer learning experience. In addition, potential remains to contextualise skill development further within the Individual Project and to address the potential overlap between the skills it assesses and those assessed in the Challenges. In the recommendations, possible changes are proposed that may help to streamline and consolidate the structure of the SCC.

4.4 Content: Is the content of the Individual Project and each of the three Challenges fit for purpose?

4.4.1 The Individual Project

The Individual Project offers an opportunity for learners to develop independent thinking and self-directed study in a topic area of choice. The emphasis on research and thinking skills provides an opportunity for individuals to develop as inquisitive and independent learners, and to be inspired and enthused by new areas and methods of study. It is appropriate that the sustained effort required to produce the Individual Project is reflected in the fact that it counts for 50% of the marks for the SCC.

At the Advanced level, the requirements in the essential and employability skills are challenging and focus on the development of independent study and research skills. They complement the demands of studying for A-levels and help to prepare learners for future education or employment. For example, the planning and organisation skill includes an example of content; namely, 'Project management – check, measure, monitor, review progress, adapt to change, manage risks, use of project management software, Gantt charts, Critical Path Analysis'. This kind of skill development is highly relevant to the world of work and prepares for independent research management in higher education.

At National and Foundation levels, there is an inconsistency in the requirements for literacy and numeracy in the Individual Project between the KS4 SCC and the Post-16 qualifications. The requirement to teach literacy and numeracy features in all three forms. However, in the Post-16 National and Foundation specifications, these skills are assessed, whereas in the KS4 specification they are not. There is no clearly stated rationale in the published documentation that has been reviewed for this difference in approach.

It appears that there are different expectations of learners at different ages, who are being assessed at the same levels for the Individual Project. For example, there are differences in the detailed content requirements related to critical thinking and problem-solving skills. At KS4, this skill includes 'critical assessment and construction of arguments', but this does not appear in the Post-16 Foundation or National levels. Learners at KS4 are expected to develop a wider repertoire of critical thinking skills than those attaining the same level at Post-16. It is an anomaly that such a crucial skill is not a requirement of all the Individual Projects.

The Individual Project therefore appears to be fit for purpose in terms of providing a stimulating and challenging opportunity to extend independent study and related skills. At a more detailed level, however, there are anomalies that introduce contradictions according to which level the learners are studying.

4.4.2 The three Challenges

The Design Principles set twelve requirements for how the Challenges should be designed. These principles are demanding and represent a strength of the SCC. They are reproduced here to illustrate the high expectations for the content. The awarding body ensures the following Challenges:

- Are primarily aimed at developing a wide range of skills for work and further learning, including those skills areas to be assessed within the specific type of challenge
- Are supported by suitable teaching and learning resources, support, guidance and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Include and specify content, knowledge and understanding in relation to the skills (as well as any relevant context for the specific Challenge)
- Provide purposeful, meaningful and engaging learning experiences
- Are set in real-life contexts for real-life purposes
- Are active, creative, open-ended and learner-led
- Encourage learners to be curious, enquiring and thinking for themselves, planning, making choices and decisions, solving problems and reflecting on and evaluating these

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- Are stretching and ambitious but allow space for learners to practise, making mistakes and learn from them
- Encourage initiatives, independence and resilience
- Build on and align with the curriculum and frameworks set out in the 'Aims, Learning Outcomes and Content'
- Are of consistent level of demand and quality
- Broaden learners' experience through engagement with external organisations or through new types of activities and locations.

There is appropriate demand within the Advanced level content to distinguish it from Post-16 Foundation, Post-16 National and from KS4. The Challenges for Post-16 learners also provide for different experiences to those required at KS4. Overall, the content for each Challenge is appropriate to the learning aims and offers opportunities for learners to have worthwhile and contextualised experiences in which to develop and demonstrate the seven skills.

As is the case for the Individual Project, literacy and numeracy is assessed as part of the Challenges at Post-16 Foundation and National, but not at KS4. This is an anomaly in terms of alignment between learning aims, content and assessment, as learners will have to use literacy and numeracy skills to complete all the Challenges, irrespective of whether or not they are assessed.

While it is not desirable that the measure of importance of individual activities and learning opportunities should be whether they are assessed or not, it *is* desirable that the rationale be made explicit of whether a component of the SCC is assessed or not.

A real strength of the SCC design is that it gives opportunities to shape the content of the curriculum to learners' needs and interests linked to their other studies. The Challenge Briefs provide an innovative and stimulating means of structuring and tailoring the three Challenges to the immediate contexts and priorities of learners. The arrangements for the awarding body to approve Challenge Briefs designed by centres or by other organisations appear appropriate, allowing for a balance between flexibility and quality control.

The involvement of employers and community members at all levels of the Challenges is a further strength of the design of the SCC, although there is little detail in the documentation about how this happens in practice. It is possible that this presents difficulties if their involvement is to be extensive and engage with large numbers of learners. Most responsibility for aligning the involvement of stakeholders with the learning aims of the locally designed Challenges rests with teachers.

Therefore, at a general level, the content of the Challenges is highly relevant to developing the required skills. Each Challenge is designed to meet real world needs and to take place within authentic work, community and global contexts, and so has the potential to develop meaningful learning activities. A closer examination of the components and their related skills (as presented in Table 3.2), however, raises questions about how specific skills are aligned with each Challenge.

The content requirements of the Challenges and the Individual Project appear sound when viewed individually in terms of high-level purpose, but there are anomalies when they are examined in detail.

4.4.3 Progression in literacy and numeracy

There is a lack of coherence regarding progression in literacy and numeracy assessed via GCSEs and the assessment of broader progression through the Challenges and Individual Project. The status of literacy and numeracy within the Challenges and Individual Project at KS4 seems problematic. No contribution has been made by the Challenges and Individual Project to the assessment of literacy and numeracy at KS4 - this remains exclusively the role of GCSEs. However, at Post-16 National and Foundation levels, in addition to assessment conducted via GCSEs or Essential Skills Wales qualifications (either already attained at KS4 or being studied at Post-16), the Challenges and the Individual Project are vehicles for assessing learners' 'application of literacy and numeracy'. It is not clear to what extent learners are expected to develop and extend their literacy and numeracy attainment in these cases. Only the Global Citizenship Challenge has literacy as an explicit learning outcome that is restricted in comparison with GCSE - 'Be able to apply literacy'.

Extensive literacy skills are required to produce an Individual Project of 1000 - 2000 words, although these are embedded in other learning outcomes e.g. the need to 'synthesise, analyse and use information and viewpoints'. A lack of clarity therefore remains about the role of literacy and numeracy for real-world learning at Post-16, with no assessment requirement for these core skills in an applied context at KS4. This does not seem well-aligned with the overall purpose of the Welsh Bacc.

4.4.4 Progression from KS4 to Post-16

Expectations for how learners are expected to progress from the KS4 Welsh Bacc to the other forms of the Welsh Bacc (the Post-16 National, Post-16 Foundation or Advanced) is unclear. The question of which a learner is likely to move on to will depend partly on the outcome they achieve at KS4 and partly on the qualifications they choose to study at 16. According to the documentation reviewed, a learner who achieves KS4 at Foundation can progress to either Post-16 Foundation or National levels. Learners achieving KS4 at National level can progress to either Post-16 National or Advanced levels. Finally, a learner can also progress from KS4 Foundation straight to Advanced level SCC if they move onto a level 3 learning programme.

The difficulty in knowing what the specific progression route should be for an individual going from Foundation to National level is represented in the statement:

Learners who have followed Welsh Baccalaureate at Key Stage 4 and progress to further education or training may progress to Foundation (Post-16) Welsh Baccalaureate if they are following a level 1 Learning Programme. On completion, they may progress to a level 2 Learning Programme and follow National (Post-16) Welsh Baccalaureate or they may progress to employment (Specification Foundation Post-16, p. 8).

It is therefore possible in theory for a learner to study the KS4 SCC at school and then go on to study the Post-16 Foundation SCC, possibly followed by the Post-16 National. Such a route would entail studying qualifications with very similar content more than once at the same level. It is not clear what the value to a learner would be of 'progressing' in this way. While it is sometimes normal for transition to further education to involve studying on the same level as KS4, the different context and focus of the learning provides meaningful progression. It is not clear how far the design of the SCC provides further progression opportunities for those learners who have engaged with the Challenges and Individual Project previously at the same level.

In conclusion, the high-level content outlines of the Individual Project and each Challenge provided in the specification documents are appropriate to the aims of the Welsh Bacc. Each component has merit in terms of learning objectives and the potential for learners to access highly relevant and worthwhile learning experiences. However, the detailed organisation of the content is problematic. In the Challenges, there is unclear and inconsistent alignment between the skills and how they are to feature in the Evidence for Assessment and correspond with some of the assessment criteria. Hence, the reasons are not given for assessing literacy and numeracy skills at Post-16 but not in KS4.

When looking at how learners are expected to progress across the Welsh Bacc framework, the similarity in the content of the components between the KS4 and the Post-16 Foundation and Post-16 National qualifications raises questions about the value to learners of progressing from one to the other.

At Advanced level, the content of the SCC components appears to be challenging and fit for purpose. The only concerns at this level are to do with a repetition of format for learners who have previously completed the KS4 and possibly Post-16 versions of the SCC. This is a consequence of the ambition to have one continuous and repeated curriculum model with four overlapping content components that span learning from ages 14-19. The model is not sufficiently differentiated across the levels. This is not an issue unique to the Welsh Bacc, as there are often degrees of overlap and repetition between qualifications taken at KS4 and Post-16. It is worth noting, however, given that the Welsh Bacc has been developed to support progression across levels.

4.5 Assessment: Is the Assessment model for the Skills Challenge Certificate fit for purpose?

4.5.1 The dual assessment framework

There are two different assessment frameworks that operate within the SCC at Foundation and National level. These were introduced in section 2.2.2. The KS4 SCC spans both levels which learners can correspondingly achieve depending on the outcome of their assessment. There are two separate qualifications at Post-16, one at Foundation level and the other at National level, which means that the level at which a learner achieves the Post-16 SCC is determined at the point of starting work for the qualifications, rather than at the point where it is awarded.

There are anomalies associated with this dual assessment framework. A learner who attains National or Foundation level at KS4 has done so via a single assessment model based on common criteria. However, a learner at Post-16 will attain National or Foundation level on the basis of criteria that are bespoke to either Foundation or National level.

It is unclear why learners at Post-16 should not be treated in the same way as learners at KS4 and have access to one set of criteria that can apply across Foundation and National levels. It is acknowledged that there are obvious risks to such an approach. For example, a Post-16 learner achieving a Foundation level having already achieved the KS4 SCC at the same level. This indicates an underlying problem with coherence at master design level of the Welsh Bacc framework that results from learners following very similar programmes in consecutive years. The need to assess the same skills at varying levels within a framework based on progression by age, as well as attainment, has resulted in a design challenge in arriving at appropriate assessment criteria.

This means that the assessment model has included intentionally designed differences in the ways learners can achieve the SCC.

4.5.2 The demands made on the assessment model

Many demands are made of the assessment model. The specifications are overloaded with a breadth of requirements to satisfy a range of related attainment agendas that are summarised in the Design Principles document¹⁰.

“The specification(s) for the Welsh Bacc must specify the content of the above [essential and employability] skills areas in a way that is consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, the National Curriculum Key Stage 4 Programmes of Study for Wales, the statutory curriculum frameworks, the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), and, when available, the wider skills and digital literacy framework(s). They should also correspond with the skills accredited through the stand-alone Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications and the new GCSEs in English Language, Welsh Language and Mathematics – Numeracy” (Welsh Government, 2014, p. 7).¹¹

The seven essential and employability skill areas to be assessed are then outlined as literacy, numeracy and a set of seven digital literacy skills, eight critical thinking and problem-solving skills, nine planning and organisation skills, six creativity and innovation skills and eight skills in personal effectiveness.

¹⁰ The Design Principles set out the requirements for each Welsh Bacc specification. They were developed by Welsh Government in response to the recommendations of the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales* (Evans, 2012).

¹¹ GCSE Mathematics has been added by an addendum (Qualifications Wales, November 2014).

An overwhelming expectation is displayed when expressed in these terms. The summary of the demands made on the skills assessments illustrates a lack of clear focus on the complexity of the skills themselves and their inter-relationships in the real world of study, citizenship and work. The challenge of assessing highly complex skills is evident in over-complex assessment structures. They, in turn, are based on assessment criteria that are sometimes over-simplified which has the effect of introducing a 'box-ticking' approach to assessment, making it more difficult to understand exactly what is required. This creates the potential for assessment to take a disproportionate amount of time relative to that period spent developing and applying the skills to be assessed. This concern was identified by Qualifications Wales in their initial review (2016) in terms of assessment related to learning hours:

'We found that the time required for assessment, relative to the overall suggested guided learning hours for the qualification is high. We also found that assessment of the same skills is duplicated across the different Challenges included in the Skills Challenge Certificate, which adds to the burden of assessment and increases the time required to deliver and assess the qualification overall'. (Qualifications Wales, 2016, p. 19).

The analysis in the following sections looks in particular at the content of the assessment criteria for the SCC and identifies some problematic characteristics. The analysis also considers how the assessment criteria compare across the different SCC specifications.

The requirements to assess a range of skills within the context of three Challenges that, in terms of the skills required to complete them, have much in common has resulted in some repetition. A considerable amount of material has been produced by learners for assessment that could be streamlined and result in fewer, deeper and more coherent opportunities to assess the desired learning outcomes. It is reasonable to suggest that fewer Challenges could provide ample opportunities for the same skills to be assessed.

In addition, the Individual Project has not been fully exploited as a flexible vehicle with opportunities for assessing more skills. Digital literacy is currently assessed in the Individual Project but in a limited way, focusing only on displaying numerical data. There is hence scope to consider the creative and innovative potentials of technologies for learners to create the artefacts that are mentioned as part of the assessment.

These issues are explored in detail in the sections below.

4.5.3 The assessment criteria - the matrix model

The assessment criteria generally reflect the learning aims of the SCC and Welsh Bacc and refer to the essential and employability skills, although criteria vary in detail across differing levels and components.

The assessment criteria used at all levels for all components of the SCC are presented in a common format based on a matrix model. For each component, the matrix lists the stated learning outcomes. For each learning outcome, assessment criteria are used to describe performance bands. Within each performance band, a range of marks are available. This type of design is sometime referred to as a ‘banded’ mark scheme, or a ‘levels-based’ mark scheme. The matrix is intended to help a marker to determine which performance band best reflects a learner’s work in relation to each learning outcome. It will then use the assessment criteria within that band to decide the specific mark given.

The assessment criteria matrices for the Post-16 Foundation and Post-16 National specifications are presented consistently, with three marking bands of three marks each. At KS4 a wider range of criteria is included for each component through the addition of a fourth performance band, containing a further three marks. This accommodates a broader attainment range to assess both Foundation and National level outcomes within one KS4 programme of study. Whilst the addition of a further band of marks is logical, it also introduces a complication. It means that the same learning outcomes are assessed using two different mark ranges (1-9 at Post-16 and 1-12 at KS4), as illustrated in the tables below:

KS4 National/Foundation - Individual Project

Learning outcomes	Performance Bands			
	Band 1 1-3	Band 2 4-6	Band 3 7-9	Band 4 10-12
LO1 Understand how to identify the focus and scope of an individual project	Limited introduction to research subject including basic aims and/or objectives.	Basic introduction to research subject including relevant aims and objectives.	Detailed introduction to research subject including appropriate aims and objectives.	Detailed and effective introduction to research subject including appropriate and realistic aims and objectives.
LO2 Be able to select and plan research methods, resources and materials	Limited rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Basic research methods, resources and materials selected.	Basic rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Relevant research methods, resources and materials selected.	Detailed rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Appropriate research methods, resources and materials selected.	Detailed and effective rationale, describing the planning decisions to be made when addressing aims and objectives. Appropriate and effective research methods, resources and materials selected.

National Post 16 - Individual Project

Learning outcomes	Performance Bands		
	Band 1 1-3	Band 2 4-6	Band 3 7-9
LO1 Understand how to identify the focus and scope of an individual project	Clear and straightforward introduction to research subject including appropriate aims and objectives.	Detailed introduction to research subject including appropriate aims and objectives.	Detailed and effective introduction to research subject including appropriate and realistic aims and objectives.
LO2 Be able to select and plan research methods, resources and materials	Clear and straightforward rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Relevant research methods, resources and materials selected.	Detailed rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Appropriate research methods, resources and materials selected.	Detailed and effective rationale, describing the planning decisions to be made when addressing aims and objectives. Appropriate and effective research methods, resources and materials selected.

A matrix approach to working with assessment criteria across all specifications constitutes a strength in terms of achieving consistency across the Welsh Bacc framework. At the same time, the matrix invites comparisons of the assessment criteria that are applied to the same components at varying levels and exposes some inconsistencies or issues with the quality of some criteria. There are varying degrees of difference between the assessment criteria related to learning outcomes at different levels. This necessitates considerable navigation between similar, yet slightly differing criteria linked to differing banding systems across KS4 and Post-16 National/Foundation levels.

The analysis found examples of:

- Lack of specificity in some of the criteria, e.g. 'Basic understanding of factors involved in developing a business proposal';
- Restricted language used to indicate progression in some of the criteria, e.g. 'Limited success', 'Mostly successful' and 'Successful';
- Repetition and overlap in some of the criteria, e.g. 'clear and appropriately developed' in one performance band to 'structured and effectively developed' in the next performance band;
- Internal inconsistencies within performance bands, e.g. the criteria relating to literacy in the Global Citizenship Challenge at Foundation (Post-16) level (see Table 3.9); and
- Lack of coherence in the way criteria are applied within components at different levels, e.g. the criteria applied to the Individual Project (see Table 3.5).

There is insufficient use of fine-grained descriptors to differentiate performance within levels and between levels, while more of these would provide clearer indicators of degrees of progression. The Qualifications Wales initial review (2016) further identified that some of the learning outcomes ‘lack focus and specificity’ and:

“...are often based on general terms, without a clear underpinning of an expected skill, such as ‘Be able to participate in a Community Challenge,’ ‘Understand issues involved in a Global Citizenship Challenge’ or ‘Understand factors involved in an Enterprise and Employability Challenge.’, (Qualifications Wales, 2016, p. 18)

Problems with over-generalised assessment criteria partly result from insufficient focus on outlining the skills being assessed. This is particularly the case for literacy and numeracy in the Post-16 Foundation/National specifications.

4.5.4 Alignment of the essential and employability skills with the Skills Challenge Certificate components

The seven essential and employability skills are assessed through the four SCC components where it is acknowledged that all skills are likely to be relevant to all the Challenges and the Individual project. The potential for overlap is built into the requirement in the specifications:

“The development of the skills of learners must be central to the design, delivery and completion of all Challenges. Through the Challenges and the Individual Project, learners should be encouraged and enabled to develop all seven essential and employability skills, with a particular emphasis on those identified as the focus skills for assessment.’ (KS4 Specification, 4.1 Skills Development, p. 29).

Unfortunately, there is a tendency in this requirement to confuse what degree of attention should be given to the skills that learners are ‘encouraged and enabled to develop’ without an assessment focus, as opposed to the ‘particular emphasis’ on the ones which are to be assessed. This tendency is in line with the aims of the Welsh Bacc to incorporate real world learning yet opens up the potential for confusion and overlap. Some degree of repetition might therefore be expected when ensuring the coverage of skills, rather than deep learning.

The overall conclusion is that the SCC is trying to assess too much and is doing so in an atomistic way, which may reflect the difficulties of finding a way to assess something so complex. Learning that is intended to develop real world skills in authentic ways may benefit from assessment models that are more aligned with what is being learnt. All components rely on the same controlled assessment model that is somewhat removed from applying skills in real world contexts. Of course, there is a resource implication which limits the aspirations for assessment design of any large-scale qualification. A balance is thus needed between expediency (what is easy to assess and possible to assess at a large scale by a wide range of teachers) and what is appropriate to the overall purposes of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc.

4.5.5 Assessment of the Individual Project

The Individual Project supports the development of independent study and provides clear preparation for progressing to further or higher education or to the demands of the workplace. It provides open-ended opportunities for self-directed learning and the development of research skills.

The Individual Project includes an opportunity for learners to submit an artefact as an outcome of the project along with written evidence. The inclusion of an artefact for submission as part of the project is an innovative and appropriate feature of the assessment model, well-matched to the purposes of the SCC and Welsh Bacc to meet the needs of real world learning contexts. It is a good example of constructive alignment between the learning aims of the SCC and the assessment design.

An artefact extends the potential to contribute to the assessment skills e.g. digital literacy and incorporate others not currently assessed, e.g. creativity and innovation. The specifications do not give examples of artefacts, but the criteria suggest that a digital film, marketing pack, or prototype of a product could be appropriate. Such artefacts lend themselves to sharing with varied audiences, obtaining feedback and gauging impact. This feature of the assessment design is currently optional.

The requirements of the Individual Project are:

- Advanced – 3,000 to 5,000 words (1,500 to 3,000 if main focus is production of artefact/product)
- National/Foundation – 1,000 to 2,000 words with or without product/artefact. (Design Principles for the Welsh Baccalaureate, 2014, p. 9).

It is not clear why the decision to produce an artefact as part of the Individual Project at Advanced level leads to a reduction in the required length of the accompanying narrative, whereas at National and Foundation level it does not. It is possible that the relatively low word count at Foundation/National levels prohibits the inclusion of an artefact. If this is the case, then there is a flaw at the design level and should be reconsidered to enable the most appropriate methods of assessment to be included. The artefact has less status as an assessment component if it is optional and is less likely to be chosen by learners as a means to develop their learning and demonstrate their skills. The fact that the time taken to develop a product/ artefact does not reduce the word count for the written submission at National/Foundation level may limit the appeal of this optional contribution to the assessment.

4.5.6 Individual Project assessment criteria

At the Post-16 National and Foundation levels, there is a clear relationship between the assessment criteria for the Individual Project at the lower end (Band 1) of the National level and higher end (Band 3) of the Foundation level i.e. they appear to be almost identical. This approach has the positive effect of enabling learners at the higher end of Foundation level to demonstrate equivalent progress with those at the lower end of the National level, leading to a National award. These assessment criteria correspond, in turn, to Band 3 criteria at KS4, as illustrated in the examples in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Examples of relationship of Individual Project assessment criteria across the range of SCC specifications

	KS4 National/ Foundation	Foundation Post-16	National Post-16
	Band 3 Marks 7-9	Band 3 Marks 7-9	Band 1 Marks 1-3
LO1 Understand how to identify the focus and scope of an individual project	Detailed introduction to research subject including appropriate aims and objectives.	Clear and realistic introduction to research subject including appropriate aims and objectives.	Clear and straightforward introduction to research subject including appropriate aims and objectives.
LO2 Be able to select and plan Research methods, resources and materials	Detailed rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Appropriate research methods, resources and materials selected.	Clear and realistic rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Relevant research methods, resources and materials selected.	Clear and straightforward rationale including plans to achieve aims and objectives. Relevant research methods, resources and materials selected.
LO8 Be able to reflect on strengths and weaknesses of own performance	Detailed reflection of own performance including planning, problem solving and completion processes.	Clear and realistic reflection of own performance including planning, problem solving and completion processes.	Clear and straightforward reflection of own performance, including planning, problem solving and completion processes.

Compiled from Welsh Bacc specifications for KS4 National/Foundation, Post-16 National and Post-16 Foundation.

The assessment criteria at KS4 in Band 3 (of 4) are almost, but not quite, identical to those used at the lower end of Post-16 National and the higher end of Post-16 Foundation. Although this approach enables progression for learners from Foundation level to National level for Post-16 learners, it also creates confusion. The terms ‘clear and straightforward’ (Post-16 National) and ‘clear and realistic’ (Post-16 Foundation) are substituted for ‘detailed’ at KS4. The differences between a ‘straightforward’ introduction, and then a ‘realistic’ and a ‘detailed’ one, are very nuanced. It is difficult to ascertain from the documentation what, if any kind of difference, might be intended in terms of teachers’ preparation of learners for different specifications. All these characteristics might be considered desirable in writing an effective introduction to an Individual Project, which calls into question the purpose of having specifications at various levels with separate, though similarly worded criteria.

There are questions therefore about the use of assessment criteria which are almost, but not quite, the same across varying levels. The impact of maintaining a dual assessment framework has made it difficult to design criteria that are coherent when viewed synoptically. This is the case even where, in the context of each separate SCC, the assessment criteria provide appropriate indicators of performance against the desired learning outcomes.

At Advanced level there is cross-over with the assessment criteria in some of the higher two bands at KS4, but not for all of them. Some KS4 attainment bands appear to be more advanced than the lower end of the Advanced bands, but KS4 does not allow for an outcome at Advanced level. For example, in the Individual Project for the Advanced SCC the lowest (Band 1) assessment criterion for learning outcome 2 requires a ‘credible’ rationale, whereas the highest criterion (Band 4) at KS4 requires a ‘detailed and effective’ rationale. This seems more in line with the Band 2 criterion at the Advanced level, which requires a ‘detailed, reasoned and effective’ rationale. While allowance needs to be made for excellence at KS4 as well as for lower attainment at Advanced level, a greater distinction between assessment criteria at National and Advanced levels ought to be possible and would be desirable.

Table 4.4: Correlating Individual Project criteria for LO2 at KS4 and Advanced levels

	KS4	Advanced	Advanced
	Band 4 Marks 10-12	Band 1 Marks 1-3	Band 2 Marks 4-6
LO2 Be able to select and plan research methods, resources and materials	Detailed and effective rationale, describing the planning decisions to be made when addressing aims and objectives. Appropriate and effective research methods, resources and materials selected.	A credible rationale describing relevant research methods, resources and materials to achieve the aims and objectives.	A detailed, reasoned and effective rationale describing appropriate research methods, resources and materials to achieve the aims and objectives.

Compiled from Welsh Bacc specifications for KS4 National/Foundation and Advanced levels.

This reflects a problem in how progression across the SCC qualifications has been designed in the assessment criteria. This is a feature of criteria used to assess learning outcomes for the Individual Project at every level, but the overlaps are less consistent in the Challenges. It is not possible to ascertain any intended consistent correlation of criteria at the design stage.

4.5.7 Quality and consistency of criteria used to assess the Challenges

The quality and consistency of the assessment criteria are uneven for the Challenges across their various levels. One example is the Enterprise and Employability Challenge. There is correlation between some, but not all, of the criteria in the highest Band 3 at Post-16 Foundation and the middle to upper Bands (that correspond with the National level outcome) at KS4. For the same learning outcome, one criterion requires ‘detailed understanding’ and the other ‘clear and appropriate understanding’ (see Table 4.5). There is not a consistent description of the standard required.

Table 4.5: Enterprise and Employability Challenge assessment criteria at KS4 and Post-16 Foundation

	KS4	Foundation Post-16
	Band 3 Marks 7-9	Band 3 Marks 7-9
Learning outcome 3 (KS4) & learning outcome 4 (Foundation Post-16) Understand factors involved in an Enterprise and Employability Challenge	Detailed understanding of the factors involved in developing a business proposal. Structured and effectively developed Visual Display. Pitch demonstrates effective communication skills.	Clear and appropriate understanding of the factors involved in developing a business proposal. Visual Display presented clearly and appropriately. Pitch demonstrates appropriate communication skills.

Compiled from specifications for KS4 National/Foundation and Foundation (Post-16)

Questions remain about the quality of the assessment criteria in relation to literacy and numeracy skills. Learning outcome 3 in the Post-16 Foundation Enterprise and Employability Challenge is ‘Be able to apply Numeracy’. The assessment criteria refer to ‘basic numeracy’ without any further explanation of what this means in terms of meaningfully assessing the application of particular numeracy skills.

Table 4.6: Learning outcome 3. Criteria, Enterprise and Employability Challenge, Foundation (Post-16)

	Band 1 1-3 marks	Band 2 4-6 marks	Band 3 7-9 marks
Be able to apply Numeracy	Limited success in the use of basic numeracy to solve problems. Limited success in the interpretation of basic numerical results.	Mostly successful use of basic numeracy to solve problems. Mostly successful interpretation of basic numerical results.	Successful use of basic numeracy to solve problems. Successful interpretation of basic numerical results.

Welsh Bacc Specification Foundation (Post-16), p. 20

The assessment criteria for literacy at Foundation (Post-16) level is also problematic. Literacy is assessed explicitly in the Global Citizenship Challenge through learning outcome 3, 'Be able to apply Literacy'. There is internal inconsistency with assessment criteria for other learning outcomes in the highest Band 3. Table 4.7 demonstrates the inconsistencies in levels of demand between this criterion and others in this highest band.

Table 4.7. Assessment Criteria for the Global Citizenship Challenge, Post-16 Foundation

	Band 3 7-9
LO1 Be able to apply Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Successful use of own and alternative opinions, views and arguments. Clear and valid consideration of the credibility of sources. Successful use of basic problem solving and decision-making techniques. Clear and realistic reflection on the critical thinking and problem-solving process.
LO2 Be able to apply Creativity and Innovation	Clear and realistic ideas generated for a new concept including consideration of strengths and weaknesses. Successfully develops and implements the selected idea. Clear and realistic reflection of the process involved in developing a new concept.
LO3 Be able to apply Literacy	Mostly accurate use of straightforward grammar, punctuation and spelling. Basic information and ideas, expressed with clear meaning and purpose.
LO4 Understand issues involved in a Global Citizenship Challenge	Appropriate understanding of the global issue. Clear and appropriate coverage of relevant political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors. Effective and appropriate raising awareness outcomes.

Welsh Bacc Specification, Foundation (Post-16), p. 24.

There is limited compatibility between the demands of literacy in learning outcome 3, centred on the expression of ‘basic information and ideas’ with that required by the other learning outcomes at this level. For example, learners who can provide ‘clear and appropriate coverage of relevant political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors’ (learning outcome 4) are likely to demonstrate a level of literacy that goes considerably beyond the clear and purposeful expression of ‘basic information and ideas’. This suggests that it has been a struggle to find ways to insert the assessment of literacy into the complexity of the Challenge. The Challenge requires extensive development of literacy, while the criterion for expressing ‘basic ideas’ cannot capture the skill development that will have occurred for those able to score marks in the higher bands for the other learning outcomes.

There is evidence that the assessment design would benefit from development and revision. It is suggested that the process of doing so should be inclusive of a range of stakeholders and teachers, with care taken to consider carefully how any changes relate to the overall design of the Welsh Bacc framework, as well as to each component of the SCC and related specification.

4.6 Is the grading model of the Skills Challenge Certificate fit for purpose?

4.6.1 Grading of the three Challenges and the Individual Project

The grading model for the SCC qualifications and their components is complex. At component level, achievement is meant to be based on the learner’s ability to meet the learning outcomes described in the relevant specification. For each component, a summative grade is awarded, based on the combined total marks awarded for all the assessed learning outcomes.

For example, a learner taking the Post-16 Foundation SCC can attain either a Level 1 Pass or Level 1 Merit for each of the four components (or fail one or more of them). The value of grading each component as either Pass or Merit, rather than simply Pass or Fail, is to provide incentive and recognition for the learners at each stage of the SCC. It requires the views of the learners to understand the extent to which the award of Pass/Merit levels, in addition to marks for the components, is satisfying and incentivising. In design terms, it appears to introduce an unnecessary complexity and further level of calculation that has no bearing on the grade achieved for the SCC qualification as a whole. It is the marks awarded for each component that determine the summative grade for achieving the SCC. Although learners must achieve at least a Level 1 Pass in each component, this means the same as having to achieve the minimum marks for each component.

Table 4.8 provides an overview of the different summative grades that are available for each SCC component.

Table 4.8: Grades available for each SCC component

Summative grades available for each SCC component			
KS4	Foundation Post-16	National Post-16	Advanced
Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Level 1 Pass	Level 1 Pass	Level 1 Pass	Level 3 Pass
Level 2 Pass	Level 1 Merit	Level 2 Pass	Level 3 Merit
Level 2 Merit		Level 2 Merit	Level 3 Distinction
Level 2 Distinction		Level 2 Distinction	

Addendum to the document 'Design Principles for the Welsh Baccalaureate – November 2014. Applicable for courses commencing teaching September 2015'. QW, p. 4.

It is not clear whether the grading of components is intended to be compensatory or not. That is, whether there is an expectation that a Merit or a Distinction grade corresponds to a minimum level of performance in each of the learning outcomes, or whether there could be many routes to achieving a specific grade depending on the combined strengths and weaknesses of a learner's performance across the learning outcomes as a whole. Hence, questions remain about equivalence between a Level 1 Merit and a Level 2 Pass.

Overall, the grading of the three Challenges and the Individual Project is somewhat unwieldy and over-complex. This is likely to cause confusion for assessors and, in some cases, amongst learners about the trajectory of their assessment leading to final awards.

4.6.2 SCC grading

The table below provides an overview of the SCC grades that are available for each level of entry.

Table 4.9: SCC overall grades available for each level of entry

Skills Challenge Certificate overall grades available for each level of entry			
KS4	Foundation Post-16	National Post-16	Advanced
The National SCC is graded A* - C. For a National award, the learner must achieve all components with a minimum of 80% at level 2 and the further 20% at level 1.	Foundation Pass* Foundation Pass	A* - C. The learner must achieve all components with a minimum of 80% at level 2 and a maximum of 20% at level 1.	The Advanced SCC is graded A* - E.

<p>The Foundation SCC is graded Foundation Pass or Foundation Pass*. For a Foundation award, the learner must achieve all of the components with a minimum of all at level 1.</p>			
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Compiled from Welsh Bacc specifications for National (Post-16), Foundation (Post-16), KS4 National/Foundation, and Advanced

The language used in the grading system is confusing.

For the Post-16 Foundation SCC, there is a potential for confusion between the grades awarded at component level and the overall grades available for the SCC. A learner taking the Post-16 Foundation SCC may have obtained 'Level 1 Merits' for some or all of the components but can only achieve a Pass or Pass* overall grade for the SCC. Having been awarded 'Merits' for the components, learners could understandably be confused and disappointed by this outcome.

This confusion in terminology does not apply to learners achieving the SCC at National level (either at KS4 or Post-16), where an A* - C grading system is used. There is, however, a lack of coherence here in working with component awards of Pass, Level and Merit combined with a final grading that uses a different scale corresponding to GCSE awards.

5 Learner and Teacher Engagement

This section of the report explores the key findings from the analysis of the learner focus groups and interviews with teachers, lecturers and Welsh Bacc co-ordinators¹². Four themes have emerged from this data, which are explored in turn:

1. Understanding of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) and the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc),
2. Experience of the SCC, including what went well and the challenges,
3. Skills developed through the SCC,
4. Support from teachers, family and the community.

The section concludes with some additional observations and suggestions from teachers beyond these four themes.

As noted in the methodology section, the views and opinions reflected here are those of the participants in this review, which represent a sample of learners and teachers currently studying or delivering the SCC. Participants were only asked about their experience of the SCC and how it fits within the Welsh Bacc framework. It is therefore impossible to compare their responses with their views on and experiences of other qualifications. The data that we have gathered, while it reports perception and experience, should not be considered as incorporating statements of fact. Where learners and teachers have made attributions of causality, we have chosen to include them where relevant as statements of perception and/or experience, but we refrain from any comment upon their veracity.¹³

5.1 Understanding of the Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Baccalaureate

The first theme that we identified was learners' and teachers' reported understanding of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc. We were keen to investigate the extent to which learners and teachers understand the purpose and structure of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc, as well as the wider Welsh Bacc framework itself.

5.1.1 Learners' understanding of the Skills Challenge Certificate

To explore how well learners understood the SCC, we conducted some high-level analysis using quantitative numerical coding. (The approach to this analysis and detailed findings are outlined in annex 5). Our data indicated that several participants in the focus groups felt that they did not fully understand the qualification. Whilst this finding was consistent across all levels of the SCC, the analysis of centre type (i.e. whether the learner attended a school, sixth form or FE college) did produce a more nuanced picture where learners in FE colleges seemed

¹² Throughout this section of the report, we will typically use 'teachers' when referring to teachers, lecturers and Welsh Bacc co-ordinators.

¹³ For an explanation of some of the technical terms used in this section of the report, see section 3.3; for a list of topics covered and questions asked, see Annexes 2 and 3.

to exhibit higher levels of understanding of the SCC than others. In one focus group featuring learners in an FE college, there was a discussion about who had completed which component of the SCC. Facilitators have also reported that learners in FE colleges required less prompting than learners in other centres to identify the SCC and its components. It is important to note, however, that some of these differences may be accounted for by the smaller sample of learners from FE colleges.

Outside of FE colleges, learners who had some understanding about the SCC were able to outline the purpose of the qualification, such as,

“It’s about learning about the world around you and how to apply those skills to different things and situations.” [KS4]

A small number of groups expressed a high degree of (unprompted) understanding about the SCC, such as this description provided by a learner studying the Advanced SCC,

“[The SCC is] a qualification that is split into four different challenges, the individual project carries more marks. It is accepted at all the Welsh universities and some of the English [sic] so it will be of use to us to get in to university”.

Where we encountered the highest levels of identification of the SCC, learners were able to provide a summary overview of each component. One group of learners studying the Advanced SCC attached the following properties to each component:

- The Individual Project was associated with choice (*“A wider examination of something of our own choosing...”*)
- The Community Challenge was associated with volunteering (*“help to the community and developing skills from that...”*)
- The Enterprise and Employability Challenge was associated with the skills needed for progression (*“To help plan our future and see what skills we need to progress...”*)
- The Global Challenge was associated with expanding knowledge (*“A wider awareness of wider world issues.”*)

Some learners reported that they had been given information sheets about the SCC. In some cases, those sheets were reported to us as helpful and one learner studying the Advanced SCC told us,

“To be fair they did actually give us a sheet which summed up what we had in each component which was very helpful because we did not know.”

However, we also found instances where groups were a little more sceptical of the information sheets provided by their centres, being that they had been given either multiple versions or what they perceived to be conflicting updates.

The feature of the SCC regarding which learners had most questions and demonstrated most confusion about, was the way in which it is assessed. It is noteworthy that even learners who demonstrated a high level of understanding about the SCC had questions and concerns about the assessment model. However, it is not possible to compare their understanding of the assessment model of the SCC with their understanding of the assessment model of other qualifications they are studying. Therefore, we cannot determine whether the level of understanding reported is unique to the SCC.

One common theme we encountered was about how the components of the SCC are assessed. Some learners articulated that they were not aware that each component is assessed separately. Where there was an awareness among learners that each component of the SCC is assessed separately and there was frustration with not knowing how the assessment model works. Some learners thought that the components were graded Pass, Merit and Distinction, whilst others thought that they were graded from A* to G or A*-E, in the same way as GCSEs and A-levels.

Another prominent thread across all centres was not understanding how to achieve a high mark for each component of the SCC. Some learners said they did not understand the assessment criteria or how they were applied to their work. Others were unsure about how marks achieved for individual components contributed to the overall SCC grade.

In the SCC, at least one Challenge is completed in a group, but each learner submits their own work for assessment. For some, this was seen positively, as learners felt this was more reflective of an individual's contribution to a project. However, we found that some learners were not always clear about the distinction between group work and individual assessment, while this seems to have generated an expectation that their marks would be the same.

5.1.2 Learners' understanding of how the Skills Challenge Certificate fits within the Welsh Baccalaureate

The answers to the question "How does it [the SCC] fit into the Welsh Bacc framework?" varied widely across centres and groups. On the low end of the scale, there were a few focus groups in which learners appeared to have no knowledge of the SCC as distinct from the Welsh Bacc at all. Comments such as "*if you tell us something about it, we might recognise it,*" or "*is that where if we fail two subjects we don't get the Welsh Bacc*?" are indicative of the lack of awareness that we encountered in some centres.

Another learner in a group told us,

"We only recently became aware that we are getting a separate certificate from the Welsh Bacc". [Advanced]

In groups that had medium levels of understanding about the SCC, there was an awareness that it is part of the Welsh Bacc, but not necessarily an understanding of how it works or how it fits together. Indeed, one learner told the facilitator that,

“I understand it is part of the Welsh BaccaLaureate qualification and it will marry with another GCSE to give you your full Welsh Bacc qualification [sic]”. [KS4]

5.1.3 Learners’ understanding of the Welsh BaccaLaureate

Regarding the Welsh Bacc as a whole, we encountered groups that collectively showed a reasonably high degree of understanding. We were told, for example, that,

“The Welsh Bacc seems to be a way to get us the kinds of skills that we are going to need when we leave here which are about more than just one subject”. [Advanced]

In another group where participants seemed to display quite a high level of knowledge about the Welsh Bacc, one participant told us,

“We have been told that the Welsh Bacc is about skills and stuff that is across all the classes that we do. It seems a way of getting more out of our studies” [Advanced]

At the lowest end of the scale of understanding, when asked whether they could describe the Welsh Bacc, one group of KS4 learners sat in silence until one of the of group replied, *“Not really”*. After the group moderator issued prompts, another in the group replied, *“Sounds like what we have been doing”*.

There also proved to be some confusion as to what the various forms and levels of the Welsh Bacc are. Again, this confusion was not shared by all groups, but the following from a KS4 group is indicative of some of the perplexed reactions that we encountered when asking learners about which form of the Welsh Bacc that they are pursuing. One learner said she thought they were *“doing national”*. Another said that they were shown a PowerPoint and *“The teachers said if you are working at this level it is a National and if it is not up to standard we will drop you down to a Foundation”*. Another in the group added she did not know that there were various levels.

5.1.4 Teachers’ understanding of the Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh BaccaLaureate

The teachers who lead on and deliver the SCC reported that they understand the purpose, the structure and the content of the SCC, as well as its relationship (as a qualification) with the Welsh Bacc (as the framework). However, they felt that teachers are not directly involved, and in some cases, senior management do not always understand it. Some of the interviewees also reported that although they understand the structure of both the SCC and the Welsh Bacc, they find it a challenge to explain it to learners, other teachers, parents and employers.

Teachers who work as moderators for WJEC reported a growing sense of understanding and confidence in delivering the SCC, which has resulted in improved motivation and engagement from learners. Many teachers in schools also believed that there is more confidence among them and their colleagues in the delivery and the assessment of the SCC in the 2016/17 academic year compared to the previous one.

All the interviewees were positive about many aspects of the SCC and reported that, to some extent, it is meeting its defined purpose.

5.1.5 Summary of observations about the understanding of the Skills Challenge Certificate

Overall, we make the following observations about the understanding of the SCC:

- Several learners in the focus groups felt that they did not fully understand the SCC. Learners who had some understanding could outline the purpose of the SCC, but only a small number of groups were able to outline each component of the qualification.
- Learners demonstrated particular confusion about the way in which the SCC is assessed, including how the assessment criteria are applied to their work, how each component is graded and how the marks for each component of the SCC contribute to their overall grade.
- Some learners reported that they had been given information sheets about the SCC by their centre. Although some learners found these helpful, others reported being unsure about the accuracy of the information as they had received different sheets with inconsistent information.
- Understanding of how the SCC fits within the Welsh Bacc varied widely across the focus groups. Some learners appeared unaware that the SCC is different from the Welsh Bacc, whilst others understood that the SCC is a part of the Welsh Bacc.
- In general, the teachers interviewed felt that they had a good understanding of the design of both the SCC and the Welsh Bacc. However, they reported finding it a challenge to explain to learners, other teachers and parents, and felt that teachers were not directly involved and, in some cases, senior management, did not always understand it.
- All interviewees were positive about the principles of the SCC and reported that, to some extent, it is meeting its defined purpose.

5.2 Experience of the Skills Challenge Certificate

The second theme that we identified explores learners' and teachers' experiences of the SCC, including what went well and what they found challenging.

5.2.1 Learners' experience of the Skills Challenge Certificate

Learners had strong views about the SCC. Although responses and group discussion tended to be animated, most comments did not go beyond noting that they found it 'fun' or 'boring'. Balancing negative comments that were made, such as,

“I didn’t choose Welsh Bacc and would rather spend my time doing Art” [Advanced]

were positive ones such as,

“Really like going to Welsh Bacc lessons it is really exciting and quite different from just sitting in other classes. Sharing and helping in the experience is good” [KS4]

Of the more informative observations, one learner suggested that he would have enjoyed it more if it had been connected more explicitly to learning in other subjects. Another learner suggested that being given clear examples of what to do from the outset would have been helpful.

In some focus groups learners suggested that they did not really see anything particularly different about studying the SCC, with comments such as *“it’s just kind of normal lessons” [KS4]*.

5.2.2 Teachers’ experience of the Skills Challenge Certificate

Many interviewees stated that they enjoy delivering the SCC and found it professionally rewarding. One interviewee commented that, *“It can be relevant, ambitious and engaging. It’s a huge step in the right direction. It’s up to you to make it work”*. Overall, interviewees were more positive about the SCC in centres where they perceived that it is valued and well supported.

All the interviewees were positive about the principles of the SCC, but many felt that it needs refining and streamlining to make it clearer and more manageable. One interviewee commented that,

“With progress in the future and if the Welsh Government and the WJEC hear the messages, there is the opportunity to make it more manageable, clearer and more coherent. The framework is there and the philosophy and principles are admirable. The working parts need to be working more effectively”.

Although it was felt that many aspects of the SCC are giving learners the skills they need for the future that are not necessarily developed in other areas of the curriculum, a number commented that it is not always clear how they are built through each of the Challenges and the Individual Project. Interviewees noted that this should be made more explicit to help learners understand what they can do to improve and develop these skills. One Welsh Bacc co-ordinator in a FE college observed,

“If learners are made aware from the outset of skills on each Challenge that’s half the battle. They can see where their strengths are. We need to be explicit about these skills. Also, the transferability of these skills... where they can use them elsewhere”.

Many commented on the successes of individual learners who have shone in unexpected ways, such as those who dislike the group tasks or are nervous about presenting their work.

They reported that in many instances there is elation and celebration when they succeed, both for learners and teachers. One teacher summed up the feelings of many by stating,

“How rewarding it has been at the end just to share learners’ delight that they have managed to complete the course”.

There was a unanimous feeling from teachers that from the outset it was difficult to communicate the nature of the SCC to colleagues, learners, parents and employers. Many of the interviewees told us that there is a perceived lack of value and status of the SCC compared with GCSEs and A levels. There was disappointment that there was no high-profile launch to outline the value and status of the SCC.

When teachers were asked specifically in interviews about the challenges of delivering the SCC, many felt that it had been quite challenging in comparison to their other teaching duties. Of the teachers interviewed, many commented that the period in which they have worked on the SCC has been the most stressful in their career. Nonetheless, we cannot be certain how much of that stress can be directly apportioned to working on the SCC and how much of it relates to the wider context of the Welsh Bacc and their other roles and responsibilities. One teacher summed up this feeling by stating that,

“We feel we are chasing our tails... overwhelming pressure just to get it done. It’s lots more work than other subjects.”

It was reported to us by teachers that they find the core guidance documents too complex, such as the specifications. A typical comment was,

“Just getting your head around the documents is a nightmare.”

Many interviewees noted that mixed messages and changes to the guidance from the awarding body late in the course made this more difficult.

There were also complaints that there was a lack of exemplar resources linked to assessment, and a lack of resources to support delivery and assessment in Welsh (a unanimous observation in Welsh medium centres). Interviewees raised questions about the lack of quality control of the resources and exemplar materials shared on Regional Education Consortia websites; in particular, within the first year.

The teachers that we interviewed also expressed concerns regarding the resources required to deliver the SCC. They considered it to be more resource intensive than other subjects and expressed concerns that they do not have the IT resources to cope with the demands of the assessments and e-portfolio.

It was considered by the teachers interviewed that there is too much repetition across each SCC. This can result in a real difficulty in motivating learners, particularly those moving from KS4 in schools to Post-16 in FE colleges. Interviewees in FE colleges called for a different qualification for Foundation and National learners, with one interviewee stating that:

“Post 16 is too similar to KS4. There is not enough differentiation and progression. The only change is the supporting qualification. We feel this is wrong... needs to change. It should be about employability skills”.

Another interviewee in a large FE college commented that,

Our role is to ‘turn life around’ for our learners. We’re geared to vocational skills and the core, but we’ve had to reduce the vocational hours. It is a problem as they come to us because they don’t want more school. How many iterations of the SCC do they have to do? It’s repetitive, so demotivating for learners.

Many interviewees reported facing challenges in assessing learners’ work due to the complexity of the assessment model. They felt that there is a lack of clarity and precision in the wording of the assessment criteria, which were also considered to be too generic. Many also commented that the assessment criteria are subjective and that it is difficult for colleagues to come to agreement on marks to be awarded. Teachers who had taught BTEC and other vocational courses, where this type of assessment model is more common, felt more confident.

Although those teachers and lecturers who are moderators for WJEC felt better able to apply the assessment grids and commented that although the glossary helps, they found it a challenge to train other staff. This was a particular concern in larger centres with new teachers or where individuals lack the experience and expertise in the particular Challenge they are teaching. One teacher summarised this concern as:

“Lack of clarity comes across as a lack of integrity at school level. It’s so difficult to be positive when training other staff in assessment.”

Almost everyone interviewed thought that the Individual Project was the most straightforward component to assess. One teacher commented that *“It is more logical and systematic”*. However, another teacher stated that she found it very difficult to be fair to all her learners as the range of topics chosen was so broad.

When asked about the overall volume of assessment, a few of the smaller centres commented that it was manageable. However, the majority interviewed thought that the assessment is overloaded. The main concern was that the volume of assessment and time required by teachers to seek to ensure consistency, accuracy and fairness meant that the delivery and actual teaching and learning are impacted. The majority also felt that the number of hours stipulated for controlled assessments was too onerous and, in several centres, it is a logistical and practical challenge to ensure access to computers for the time required.

All components of the SCC are assessed by the centre that the learner attends. Centres are expected to standardise internal assessment decisions for the Individual Project and the three Challenges. This is the process by which centres ensure that all learners are judged to the same standard across different assessors, teaching groups and from year to year. The awarding body provides centre guidelines for establishing internal standardisation procedures. The majority commented that the guidelines are comprehensive and helpful,

alongside formal meetings between centres. However, some interviewees suggested that the reality of implementing the guidelines can be challenging as a consequence of their complexity and volume, suggesting that there is a balance to be struck between comprehensiveness and clarity.

Centres are required to submit their learners' marks for each component, and to provide a sample of learners' marked work by agreed dates. The awarding body then moderates the sample of marked work to secure consistency and fairness both within and across centres. The teachers that we interviewed expressed concerns about the volume of administration required for recording and uploading marks, particularly within the specified time constraints, and this was of particular concern in large centres. However, we are unable to comment on whether this was also a concern for these teachers when submitting learners' marks for non-examination assessment in other subjects.

5.2.3 Experience of the four Skills Challenge Certificate components

In this section we explore learners' and teachers' experiences of each of the four components that make up the SCC: the Community Challenge, the Global Citizenship Challenge, the Enterprise and Employability Challenge and the Individual Project.

5.2.3.1 Community Challenge

The Community Challenge requires learners to carry out an activity with or in the local community. They can choose their activity from one of three themes (social/welfare, neighbourhood enhancement, or coaching). Working individually or as a team, learners must plan, organise, carry-out and reflect on their chosen activity.

Learners' experience of the Community Challenge

When we asked about the Community Challenge, there were some strong, positive reactions. Learners in the focus groups have been involved in a range of community-based activities, such as volunteering at a sports club, working with the elderly, working in the local library or helping deliver meals.

Learners who had volunteered as of part of their activity were particularly positive; we encountered comments such as,

"It gave a good opportunity to be working outside school and do something that would really be useful to the community." [Advanced]

"It is quite nice to have the practical aspect of it for example with the community challenge where we had to go out and do something." [KS4]

Another learner told us that the volunteering had been very useful and that it had really helped to build up his confidence.

The development of interpersonal skills was another area in which learners felt that the Community Challenge had helped them. Many learners told us that they had developed their communication skills through activities such as volunteering and debating. One learner told us that she felt that the Community Challenge was helping to better prepare her for university, while another one told us that she felt that it would help her in getting a job. In general, there was a perception that the practical component of the Community Challenge is valuable and there was a strong sense that learners felt they had achieved something.

When some concerns were voiced about the Community Challenge, many of them revolved around the follow-up to community-based work. One learner studying the Advanced SCC told us that,

“I did not enjoy having to do the presentation on that. It did not challenge [my] English skills there was more dwelling on reflection and I felt the volunteering was a more valuable aspect”

We also encountered the perception that the Community Challenge was less structured than the other challenges,

“So it [the Global Citizenship Challenge] was all structured whereas with the Community Challenge everyone was doing different things and it was far more difficult for the teachers to keep a track on everyone individually when you are doing different volunteering. I didn’t like that very much” [Advanced].

On balance, there were more positive than negative mentions of the Community Challenge.

Teachers’ experience of the Community Challenge

There was a mixed reaction to the Community Challenge among SCC teachers in both FE colleges and schools. Interviewees noted that those on vocational courses, such as Health and Social Care and Public Services, particularly see the relevance and engage with enthusiasm. We were told about a range of instances where individuals and groups of learners had positively engaged with their community. One interviewee praised the work of two agriculture learners who spent three days with the local vicar preparing the church grounds for the memorial service,

“They were so proud of their work. They loved it and they learned”.

The logistical and practical challenges of the Community Challenge at KS4 were also raised, particularly surrounding safeguarding concerns. As a result, most centres reported that they organise the Community Challenge in house, where learners work with and coach younger learners in sports activities, music, dance and drama. In one centre, learners in Year 12 act as reading buddies for younger learners or support learners studying English as an Additional Language (EAL).

The teacher in this school commented,

“Now with the Community Challenge in Year 12 they appreciate the planning and the accountability... they can see the impact of their input... they can relate to this. Reflection is very strong in some cases.”

There were numerous instances reported of learners having work placements or enrolling on level 2 coaching courses following valuable experiences on the Community Challenge.

5.2.3.2 Global Citizenship Challenge

At Foundation and National levels, the specification requires learners to engage critically with a global issue, which they then choose from a list. The issues cover topics such as famine, consumerism, living sustainably and nutrition. Each learner researches their chosen issue and raises awareness of it to a defined audience in a creative and innovative way.

At Advanced level, learners are expected to engage with a complex and multifaceted global issue related to one of a range of possible broader themes. They research, analyse and discuss the different debates and viewpoints relating to their chosen issue. They then develop their own personal standpoint while recognising other perspectives. Finally, they formulate possible approaches to tackling the issue and communicate these creatively and innovatively in a way that would be appropriate for a global conference.

In our discussions with learners and teachers, we found that delivery models vary. In some centres, all learners study the same topic for the Global Citizenship Challenge such as climate change or renewable energy, while other centres give learners a choice where possible.

Learners’ experience of the Global Citizenship Challenge

When discussing the Global Citizenship Challenge with learners, we received several positive reactions ranging from *“We learned so much about different opinions about the world” [Advanced]* to *“It was the best one [component] and quite fun to do as well” [Post-16 Foundation and National]*.

Several groups mentioned that they felt that the Global Citizenship Challenge was the best component of the SCC. The things that learners cited that they particularly enjoyed, included doing research, collecting data and analysing the information,

“[I] enjoyed the global citizenship because that had research and analysis to it and we also had to create posters. It also had a bit of everything” [KS4].

Many learners pointed to debating as being one of the components that they enjoyed within the Global Citizenship Challenge. In one instance, we were given a specific example of how a class had concentrated on prisons and prison reform in the Global Citizenship Challenge and that it had led to very heated debates.

Another common theme was that the learning from the Global Citizenship Challenge had carried over into other components of the SCC. For example, we were told in one group that,

“[The] source analysis we first used for the global and then which had to do again was very useful in other stuff, we had to carry it across for example in the Individual Project.” [Advanced]

We did encounter a few negative opinions about the Global Citizenship Challenge; for instance, one learner asserted that the Global Citizenship Challenge had not helped him build debating skills and critical thinking. Another learner told us that he felt that nothing he had learned in the Global Citizenship Challenge was useful in any way. These were, however, fairly isolated responses. On balance, there were more positive than negative comments about the Global Citizenship Challenge.

Teachers’ experience of the Global Citizenship Challenge

Among teachers, there was a mixed reaction to the Global Citizenship Challenge. About one third of the interviewees considered it to be the most academically rigorous Challenge (framed as a positive observation), whilst around a quarter expressed comment suggesting that it was the most onerous (framed as a negative reaction). Both these observations were made in two interviews, suggesting that they may not be mutually incompatible. Linking to the perception expressed by some that it is the most rigorous component, it was suggested by a very small minority of interviewees that it should have more weighting than the other Challenges.

Most interviewees observed that the Challenge is relevant to Wales and all have agreed with the statement that the content does manage to raise learners’ awareness of global issues. One school teacher observed,

“The Global [Citizenship] Challenge is developing their language skills as they have to explain their own opinions and standpoints”.

Some mention was also made of the overlap of skills, such as independent research and analysis, between the Global Citizenship Challenge and the Individual Project. Whilst some interviewees felt that this repetition was beneficial in helping learners prepare for the Individual Project, others asserted that it constituted unnecessary duplication.

5.2.3.3 Enterprise and Employability Challenge

At Foundation and National levels, learners work in teams to develop a business idea and proposal, with the final proposals illustrated in a visual display and pitched to a panel. For the Advanced level, learners can work individually or in teams to conduct a skills audit, developing and presenting an innovative idea or concept, and plotting a destination plan for their future education and career goals.

Learners' experience of the Enterprise and Employability Challenge

Learner focus groups across all levels experienced a relatively high level of enjoyment for the Enterprise and Employability Challenge. In general, learners reported fairly high levels of interest in the enterprise aspect of this Challenge, where the emphasis seems to be more upon what businesses need to do to succeed. One learner noted that the Challenge was *"Really fun and interesting [we] had to come up with ideas that could be sold in a gift shop for the enterprise and employability one"* [KS4] and another KS4 learner outlined their project as below,

"Everybody enjoyed what they were doing about a taxi thing. It was about a taxi service to the Winter fair and it was based on, like those tuk tuks services you might get in somewhere like Bangladesh. And it was a wacky idea that we all got into and we didn't know what we were doing at the beginning, but it also worked because it was just something completely different than anyone else we all got into it. Designed a logo, researched it online and we all enjoyed it. But if it had been something we didn't really want to do we would have just got bored with it. Like designing a wristband! Designing a mug! Not great fun! No thank you."

There was a strong sense that the Enterprise and Employability Challenge is connected to skills that will have a real impact in life beyond the classroom,

"It is very good for people who want to go on and start their own business, it gives them a little insight" [Post-16 Foundation and National].

Another said that developing employability skills proved useful to him for finding out about other aspects of life beyond university.

One aspect of the Enterprise and Employability Challenge that had received approval from learners was the fact that many of them worked in teams. For example, one KS4 learner told us that,

"The enterprise and employability [is my favourite] because you have to make a new product and that proved really interesting and the whole working as a team component of it was beneficial."

There were some frustrations expressed with the Enterprise and Employability Challenge, which might be regarded as learners seeing it as a missed opportunity. One focus group of learners studying the Advanced SCC reported that they felt the Enterprise and Employability Challenge did not live up to its promise. The general sense of this group was that they had been introduced to skills, such as budgeting and accounting, but that they had not had the chance to apply them in what they considered to be a meaningful way.

In another focus group, there was a sense expressed that they did not feel it contributed anything because the skills were repeated from other Challenges. On balance, reaction to the Enterprise and Employability Challenge was more positive than negative.

Teachers' experience of the Enterprise and Employability Challenge

Generally, teachers had positive reactions to the Enterprise and Employability Challenge. One of the positives of the Challenge is that it affords learners the opportunities to learn practical things about work and business that are not covered in other subjects. One teacher, who was a former Careers Advisor in the school, told us,

“Again, having been the head of careers at the school, I think it is sometimes really hard to address employability skills in your regular lessons. This is done well in the Welsh Bacc”.

One specific strength mentioned in the interviews was that the Challenge is well adapted to the modern world and has a valuable role to play in preparing every learner for life beyond the classroom. Another advantage noted was that it is particularly valuable for those learners who may not be considering continuing on either to college or university.

As an example of the latter benefit, one teacher specifically commented that when pitching their business idea to a panel (in a setting that resembles that of TV's “Dragons' Den”) *“learners will sell you their product really well”*. In the view of that respondent, this approach helped to build communication skills that they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to practise.

There were some indications across our interviews that teachers rate the Enterprise and Employability Challenge more highly than learners do. One teacher commented that it was *“hard to get beyond the negativity of learners”*, although as we have reported above, this was not necessarily reflected in the group discussions that we facilitated.

5.2.3.4 Individual Project

The purpose of the Individual Project is to develop learners' skills by carrying out a research activity. At KS4, learners can focus their activity on future educational or career aspirations, or an area of personal interest. At Post-16 Foundation and National levels, learners can focus their research on future educational or career aspirations, or an area arising from their main learning programme. Finally, learners studying the Advanced SCC must focus their project on future educational or career aspirations.

Learners' experience of the Individual Project

Responses to our questioning about the Individual Project were more nuanced. On the positive side, many learners told us that they enjoyed having the freedom to choose a project and to research it on their own. It was clear that learners who were less positive about the benefits of working in a group in the other Challenges were more enthusiastic about being able to conduct an individual piece of research. We also found that positive mentions of the Individual Project were higher among Post-16 and learners studying the Advanced SCC than at KS4.

Among learners studying the KS4 or Advanced SCC, there seemed to be a strong relationship between enjoyment of the Individual Project and the aspiration to go to university. In general, learners who told us that they intended to go on to university were more supportive of the Individual Project and more likely to connect the positives in it to their academic future. One learner told us that she had decided upon what subject she wishes to do at university through the Individual Project. Another told us that it was a tremendous help in developing her personal statement for her university application. The freedom to choose a topic which they could investigate independently was frequently discussed,

“The Individual Project you can really work on something you want to and we just get on with it because we know what we doing. There is more freedom [Advanced].”

Although some learners noted that they liked being able to choose their own topic for the Individual Project, others considered this to be a challenge,

“Also, with the Individual Project it was made a bit difficult if you started researching something and that began to prove difficult because perhaps there is not enough information this should be a better guide at the beginning. Perhaps we should be given a choice out of 10 different topics that are suitable [Advanced].”

Another added they were given two A4 sheets of ideas of topics for their Individual Project, but they were not sufficiently specific and just led to too many ideas.

However, the observation that there was not enough guidance in choosing topics from this learner can be contrasted with the statement from another group that they received guidance from their teachers in narrowing down the topic for their Individual Projects,

“The teachers did tell us to go over something that was specific that would not become too vague so make it something that was certain instead of choosing a broad range [Advanced].”

In focus group conversations, mentions were also made of the development of research skills and the satisfaction that learners experience when they find something out on their own. We found that there was a strong association between learners or groups that were positive about the Individual Project and those who told us that they felt that the Individual Project contributed to building their research skills. This observation holds true across all levels of learners. For example, a KS4 group noted that,

“Like with the Individual Project, we enjoyed the research and enjoyed doing it and we learned how to do it better.”

However, there were definite areas in which learners noted that they struggled. The perception that the Individual Project requires the demonstration of the analysis of statistics or complex data was a clear area of concern for many; we were told things like,

“With the individual you have to have an example of maths in the results well for some of us who just don't do maths it is not easy, it is different for the ones who are doing A-level Maths, but we just do not understand [sic]” [KS4].

Some groups conveyed the sense that learners could not see the point of the Individual Project. One group of learners studying the Advanced SCC told us that it was *“just sitting behind a computer writing long essays”*, while another told us that they can see the point in academic work as they get a GCSE or a vocational qualification out of it, but that they don't really know what the Individual Project is going to lead to.

Overall, negative references to the Individual Project outweighed positive mentions by a narrow margin.

Teachers' experience of the Individual Project

Most of the teachers interviewed felt that the Individual Project is the most valuable and rewarding component of the course. Throughout the interviews that we conducted, we were able to identify three common themes that shed light on what teachers see as the key attributes of the Individual Project:

- Developing different skills to other subjects and the Challenges
- Building soft skills ¹⁴
- Flexibility

The observation about the development of different skills triangulates with the reports from the focus groups. Almost all the teachers mentioned research skills, problem solving, critical thinking and organisation as being among those attributes that they have seen learners acquire. One teacher mentioned that the learners themselves don't always realise the extent of the skills that they have gained. We have also encountered many uses of the words 'creativity' and 'innovation' in the context of responses to our questions about the Individual Project. Just as important as specific skills being built through the Individual Project, teachers see its value for building 'soft skills' critical to employability and higher education. For example, teachers directly linked gains in learners' confidence and self-efficacy to preparation for interviews both in Higher Education and future employment,

“Other skills? Yes! Self-efficacy and self-confidence. Some dread presenting and then build confidence. They struggle with [the idea of] 'reflection' but find it beneficial.”

We were told by most of our interviewees that the Individual Project affords the most flexibility of any component of the SCC to learners. Teachers felt that as learners have more freedom to choose their topic, they have embraced this well and that it has positive effects. There was a shared perception among all those who specifically mentioned the freedom of learners to choose their topic that this is a qualitatively different process to other parts of the academic curriculum in schools.

¹⁴ 'Soft skills' are routinely identified in the UK Employer Skills Survey as being the biggest barrier to the entry of school leavers into the labour market. See, for example: “UKCES Employer Skills Survey 2015: UK report” (2016).

5.2.4 Workloads

Another theme that emerged from the engagement with learners and teachers was about workloads and, in the case of teachers, staffing.

5.2.4.1 Learners

Reports on the workloads associated with the SCC were mixed. Many learners felt that the workload for the SCC was appropriate for the outcomes and the skills learned and that it reflected the workload of their other subjects. However, some learners noted that the volume of work required for the SCC affected their time to complete other work. The perception of some learners was that to do well in the SCC, they need to devote a disproportionate amount of time to each of the components of the SCC,

“There is a lot of work and it makes you question whether you need that qualification. It is ridiculous the amount of work they had had to put in [sic]” [Advanced].

Many groups suggested that while the amount of time needed to complete the SCC is quite high, the level of difficulty was not such a concern. One Post-16 learner stated that,

“The difficulty is not the issue anyone can do it given the time, it does not require high levels of academic ability it just requires dedication and a strong work ethic. So, level of work did not compare but amount did with A-level if not more than A-levels [sic]”

In some cases, learners identified the SCC as putting them under pressure,

“Teachers appear to be putting more pressure on us for the Challenges than with other coursework with our core subjects and I’m fine with other subjects but with the Welsh Bacc work I am over the top with stress.”

Many also mentioned that the combination of in-school and after-school learning requirements for the SCC were eating either into their leisure time or homework time. Some groups felt that too much time was spent explaining the SCC in class, so they had to spend more time out of school completing the work.

5.2.4.2 Teachers

All interviewees have enjoyed aspects of the SCC, but the volume of work has detracted from their enjoyment of and support for the qualification. The time and the resources required to deliver and assess the SCC was a widespread concern. One teacher remarked,

“The SCC is content and assessment heavy. It’s more expensive and takes more time than traditional subjects.”

When questioned about what they felt could be changed about the SCC, nearly all of the interviewees felt that it could be streamlined. The main concern was that the volume of assessment and the time required to ensure accuracy and consistency when assessing learners' work which impacted on the teaching time. In the context of us asking whether workloads for the SCC are appropriate, interviewees reported to us that in their experience, when specialist, motivated and enthusiastic staff lead on delivery of the SCC, learners seem to enjoy the experiences and produce good work.

It was reported to us that staffing is a challenge in many centres. In all the centres visited, staff commented that there is a vision to build and retain a stable team of staff with the appropriate expertise to ensure consistency and quality year on year. It was reported to us that this has proven to be a challenge in centres for a variety of reasons. Turnover and movement of staff were amongst the reasons cited, alongside lack of expertise or willingness to teach the SCC, as well as stress and anxiety directly related to the volume of work.

It was reported that there is support available for teachers who are delivering the SCC. The interviewees who were also moderators for WJEC reported that they support other centres in their area, while others noted there are peer-support groups where ideas and resources are shared. There are also opportunities to come together to undertake standardisation of learners' work. Many interviewees reported that they prepare their own resources and share them on the Regional Education Consortia websites. All the interviewees were positive about opportunities for sharing expertise and supporting each other, but it is not always possible for individuals to attend workshops as they have other commitments. As a result, interviewees explained that information is often shared through informal, rather than formal, networks.

The administrative workloads from data recording were also identified as a source of concern. Our assessment of the responses to our questions is that there is a shared feeling that there are 'pinch points' during the year that make collection and recording of data a challenge for some. There were three groups of responses from our sample, which split roughly into thirds; some feel it is manageable, some feel pressured but are 'staying afloat', and some feel that they are 'drowning'. In almost all of our interviews, we encountered discussion about the E Portfolio 'XERTE' system. Some of our interviewees from FE colleges had already received training on the system, and reactions were mixed. While there is an acknowledgment that the system is intended to help with the assessment of the Individual Project (and to create more flexibility for learners), there was concern expressed that learners may not be able to readily use the system and that it might complicate teachers' ability to monitor progress.

5.2.5 Summary of observations about the experience of the Skills Challenge Certificate

- Although learners had strong views about the SCC and most focus group discussions were animated, comments did not tend to go beyond noting that they found it 'fun' or 'boring'.
- There were varying levels of response to each component of the SCC from learners, with the Global Citizenship Challenge and the Enterprise and Employability Challenge receiving higher levels of enthusiasm, while the Individual Project received the lowest;
- Many learners suggested that while the amount of time needed to complete the SCC is quite high, the level of difficulty is appropriate.
- The majority of teachers interviewed felt that the Individual Project is the most valuable and rewarding element of the course.
- Many of the teachers interviewed stated that they enjoy delivering the SCC and find it professionally rewarding. All the interviewees were positive about the principles of the SCC, but many felt that it needs refining and streamlining to make it clearer and more manageable. A number commented that it is not always clear how the skills are built through each of the components of the SCC and that there is too much repetition across each component and level of the SCC.
- Many teacher interviewees reported facing challenges in assessing learners' work due to the complexity of the assessment model. They felt that the assessment criteria are too generic and lack clarity and precision. The majority felt that the volume of assessment is too high.
- Many teacher interviewees noted that staffing is a challenge in many centres, but that support is available to those who are delivering the SCC. All the interviewees were positive about the opportunities for sharing expertise and supporting each other.

5.3 Skills developed through the Skills Challenge Certificate

The third theme that we identified explores the skills that learners and teachers feel the SCC helps learners develop and how these skills could be applicable in their future. In both the focus group sessions and interviews with teachers, we asked specific questions relating to the perceptions of skills assessed and acquired (see Annex 2 and 3).

5.3.1 Learners' perceptions of the skills developed through the Skills Challenge Certificate

The SCC was viewed positively by learners in terms of skills development and help for future employability or further study. The perception of new skills being developed was particularly high among learners studying the KS4 or Advanced SCC (see Annex 5).

Across all the focus groups, the skills most cited as being developed through studying the SCC were, in order of frequency of mention: research, interpersonal communication, organisation, leadership, public speaking and finance.

Learners told us that they felt that their communication skills had improved as a result of studying the SCC. One FE college group discussed how these skills could help them in the future,

“...also socially when you are first away and possibly sharing a house with others, communication skills are useful.”

Much of the positive discussion of the benefits and gains of the SCC was based on the development of organisational skills, particularly in relation to research and data collection,

“The independent aspect of collecting and compiling data and working as an individual was useful being responsible to yourself with organisation and timing [sic]” [Advanced].

Leadership, especially in the context of the Enterprise and Employability Challenge, was also raised by learners as being a skill that is enhanced through the SCC,

“We are finding leadership such as a project manager is meaningful and the planning aspects is also useful [sic] [Advanced].”

5.3.2 Teachers’ perceptions of the skills that learners develop through the Skills Challenge Certificate

Most interviewees thought that the skills embedded in the SCC prepared learners well for the world of work and for further or higher education,

“We can see skills relevant to Higher Education and the world of work... strengths of the SCC [Translated].”¹⁵

“It helps their future prospects. Reflection... helps with personal statement for UCAS. They are confident at interview when they can talk about their IP [Individual Project].”

However, a few of them thought that learners would have developed these skills anyway. Most interviewees felt that the seven essential and employability skills are a strength of the SCC and a definite improvement on how skills were previously included in the curriculum and assessed.

The presentations, or pitches, together with the group tasks required in some of the Challenges were seen in a positive light by all those interviewed. The interviewees felt that these tasks helped learners gain in confidence and self-efficacy,

“They gain confidence presenting in front of an audience... a main skill they might not have developed otherwise.”

In addition, interviewees tended to single out organisation as one of the primary skills pointed to by learners and another gain of the SCC,

“They learn organisation and persistence. They reflect on their own work and think critically.”

¹⁵ Ni’n gallu gweld sgiliau’n berthnasol i Addysg Uwch (HE) a byd gwaith... cryfderau y THS

Among the teachers that we interviewed, there was also a sense that, in particular, the Individual Project helps learners build the kind of research skills that learners themselves had cited as one of the positive aspects of the SCC,

“The IP [Individual Project] helps with research skills and referencing.”

A high proportion of the teachers that we interviewed observed that resilience and meeting deadlines are the main skills that learners need to succeed in the SCC. One teacher summed it up as,

“Resilience and time management and working under pressure. This has been the focus... massively...”

5.3.3 Summary of observations about skills developed through the Skills Challenge Certificate

- The SCC was viewed positively by learners in terms of skill development and help for future employability or further study. Most learners were able to identify skills that they had developed through the SCC, such as research, communication, organisation, leadership, public speaking and finance, identifying how these skills could be useful in their future.
- Most teacher interviewees thought that the seven essential and employability skills embedded in the SCC prepared learners well for the world of work and further or higher education. They also pointed to additional ‘soft skills’ that they have seen learners gain through the SCC, such as perseverance and resilience.

5.4 Support from teachers, the family and community

The fourth theme that we identified was support from teachers, the family and the community. We were keen to explore the support that learners reported getting from their teachers, how learners engaged with their families on the subject and how centres have developed relationships with local communities.

5.4.1 Support from teachers

To understand further the support they received, learners were asked by facilitators about the role of their teachers in the SCC and whether their relationship with teachers differed or had developed through the SCC.

One of the characteristics of the SCC is that it offers the possibility of guided rather than directed learning, where greater independence on the part of the learner is mirrored by a greater flexibility in support from the teacher. In general, many of the learners in the focus groups felt that this had worked well and that it had given them learning opportunities that they would not otherwise have had. However, in a few focus groups, learners suggested that they did not really see anything particularly different about the SCC.

We observed that the SCC allowed learners to seek out other teachers in the school who had subject-specific knowledge or competencies relevant to their project, but with whom they would not otherwise have worked. We were told that, particularly in larger schools and FE colleges, it was possible for learners to have multiple sources of support for different components of the SCC – particularly the Individual Project. We observed that learners were being genuinely motivated to seek out advice and that this was reflective of the different learner-mentor relationship afforded by the SCC. For example, one learner studying the Advanced SCC told us that she was interested in studying obesity for her Individual Project, regarding which she was able to go to the health and nutrition teacher who gave her a lot of support.

One group told us that they had been able to discuss their research with their teachers prior to undertaking it and that they had got support in how to collect and analyse data for the projects. Our conclusion from this discussion was that learners feel empowered and benefit from the independence of learning afforded by the SCC.

We also encountered quite a lot of approval among learners for the flexibility that the SCC affords them in developing questions and topics for their individual projects, with some learners reporting feeling that this was valuable to their development. One learner compared it to,

“Working in a job, where you are given something to do and you get on with it.” [Post-16 Foundation and National]

However, in many cases, learners reported being challenged by the demands of a more independent approach to studying. Some groups felt that they needed more support in developing their projects as they had just been given a list of topics and left on their own to pick one. One learner in an FE college suggested that it would have been helpful to have had *“an all-day workshop on how to do the projects”*.

Other learners reported being given limited guidance on how to use the templates and felt like they had to figure it out for themselves. Some learners stated that, as a result, they worked closely with their peers to understand the work.

Our analysis of the coded data (see Appendix 5) shows that there are limits to which learners participating in the focus groups felt supported by their teachers. While we have cited the example of the learner completing their Individual Project on obesity and who was able to find support from a health and nutrition teacher, there were counterbalancing examples of learners who felt that they had either not received enough guidance or that they had been unable to find someone to help them with specific areas of research. In another group, when a learner told us that she felt lucky that she was doing an art-related project and had been able to find support but that she felt that her friends had not got that same level of guidance, there was general assent in the room with her observation. Similarly, a KS4 learner felt that *“Half the time is spent chasing around the school trying to find a teacher who can help us with what we are doing”*. [KS4]

Focus group participants also commented on their perception of teacher readiness for delivering the SCC. One group noted that they felt one of the teachers had been much better prepared (in the current year of delivery), as she had *“attended a conference on the Welsh Bacc”* [sic].

Where learners reported dissatisfaction with the support they had received, they often linked this feeling to a perceived lack of preparation on the part of the teachers. There were multiple instances in the group discussions where learners told us that their experience is that the SCC was delegated to supply teachers or less experienced teachers. By this, we understood focus group participants to be referring to teachers newer to the profession as a whole, not the SCC in particular. Hence, there was a constant sense, even in the highly aware groups, that the teaching staff involved in the SCC do not really understand how to deliver it,

“The teachers might have known what they were doing but it did not feel like that. They were just teaching from a syllabus and from a PowerPoint rather than teaching from what they knew to teach us.” [Advanced]

Whatever the sense of disappointment that we have encountered with the lack of preparedness on the part of teachers, it must be stressed that almost all these criticisms were offset by sympathetic comments made towards the teachers, reporting that it is *“not their fault”* [KS4].

Many focus groups also pointed towards what they perceive to be a lack of consistent information and messaging about the SCC. We have already touched upon some of this in the sections on assessment and guidance above, but the inconsistency of messaging bears upon teacher support more generally and accounts for much of the perception that more support is needed. Although we are unable to compare learner responses to other subjects where they have more than one teacher, we were told things like,

“This year the two teachers have not been communicating so they have both been telling us to do different things on the same project and so we have not really got properly what we are meant to be doing.” [Advanced]

One learner told us that *“different teachers taught different parts at different times and it would be really confusing.”* Here the learner is referring to different activities within each single component of the SCC. Many other learners cited the constant changes in teaching personnel assigned to the SCC as being a source of inconsistency and contradiction from their perspective. However, it should be noted that having different teachers delivering different components of a qualification is not unique to the SCC. We are therefore unable to comment on whether this is a reflection of the SCC itself, or a broader issue about this type of delivery model.

5.4.2 Discussion with family members

Learners were also asked about how they engage with the families about the Welsh Bacc. In general, we found that the frequency and intensity of discussion about the SCC with family was not high, but that where conversations did occur, they were quite positive. However, it is important to note that we have no means of comparing how discussion of the SCC with the family compares with discussion of other qualifications.

Some learners had siblings who had either done the Welsh Bacc or another qualification that they saw as equivalent (e.g. the International Baccalaureate). One learner reported that

“[I am] from quite a big family and some of my siblings are in college doing the Welsh Bacc so they talk about it all the time and one day I visited and joined in and I used my knowledge to help develop their knowledge and we had a discussion and ours was quite similar to what they are doing even though it is in college.” [Advanced]

Others told us that they had mentioned the Welsh Bacc and/or the SCC to their parents, but that the parents don't really know much about it themselves;

“it might be useful [if] parents had information about the course because [my] mother viewed it as a waste of time.” [Advanced]

Where we did find examples of learners talking about the SCC with their families, mentions were made of things like parents approving of the way that it helps build skills and seeing it as a potential pathway to university. One learner told us,

“[my relatives] said it is good because it teaches you life skills some other subjects will give you stuff you will never use” [KS4].

Several learners reported that the only reason they had for discussing the SCC with their family was to voice their discontent. One group said that they and their families were unhappy that their school made all learners study the Advanced Welsh Bacc because they did not think it should be compulsory. In a few other instances in the focus groups, we encountered reports of parents expressing concerns that time being spent on SCC-related activities should have been spent on doing other homework.

5.4.3 Centre links with the community

The Community Challenge and Enterprise and Employability Challenge allow learners to carry out activities with or in the local community. Many teachers commented that they have very good links with local employers. In most cases, we found that employers have been invited to centres to contribute to the Enterprise and Employability Challenge on Enterprise Days. We also found examples of Careers Fairs, where learners studying for the Advanced SCC showcase their work. In some cases, we were told that local employers act on the judging panel for the business 'pitch' and presentations. Teachers reported that their contribution is valued, and that in their experience learners “react positively in a professional and business-like way.”

Across the centres, we observed a general commitment to forge new links with local employers and businesses, although we did encounter a very small number of centres where engaging with local employers was *not on the radar*. Most of our interviewees saw that the opportunity is there for support with the Community Challenge and the Enterprise and Employability Challenge. As one teacher commented,

“We have lots of individuals coming in to school as guest speakers and Dragons’ Den works well. This is one to build on. Local employers want to be involved”.

Teachers reported having excellent links with engineering companies in a few centres and the support of ‘Big Ideas Wales’ and Careers Wales with the Enterprise and Employability Challenge was also mentioned.¹⁶ In a few instances, teachers noted that local companies have been involved with writing the brief for a Challenge, e.g. ideas for fund raising for their charity, and felt that this was a beneficial process,

“If local employers are involved in writing briefs they would have a better understanding of what is involved.”

However, in each case we were told that the companies then had no further engagement.

Despite the will and efforts to engage with companies, along with the good links that many centres have forged, we were told in interviews that this can be a struggle. Centres that reported most difficulties in developing such links were largely clustered in rural areas and in industrial southeast Wales. Most recognised that links with the community and local employers are underdeveloped without attributing specific reasons why or what might be done to progress further employer and business links in the context of the SCC.

5.4.4 Summary of observations about support

- One of the characteristics of the SCC, particularly the Individual Project, is that it encourages independent learning. In most cases, learners reported being able to find guidance and support from teachers and felt that they had gained skills from seeking out this support for their work. However, other learners felt that they had not received enough guidance or noted that they had not been able to find teachers who are able to support them in their chosen subject-area. Many focus groups also pointed towards what they perceived to be a lack of consistent information and messaging about the SCC.
- There doesn’t appear to be a particularly high or noteworthy level of discussion about the SCC between learners and their families.
- Many teachers commented that they have very good links with local employers and demonstrated a commitment to forge new links. However, there remains scope to develop these links further to help support the SCC.

¹⁶ <https://businesswales.gov.wales/bigideas/>

5.5 Final observations from teachers

Towards the end of each interview, the respondents were asked if they had any final observations about the SCC. We identified three recurring points in response to this question, with interviewees noting that:

- HE institutions, employers and parents need to recognise the value and status of the SCC
- Advice and guidance should be consistent and delivered in good time to be acted upon
- Quality exemplar materials and resources should be available and easily accessible.

Teachers in centres on the border with England commented on their catchment area being an added challenge to marketing the Welsh Bacc. Both FE colleges and schools close to the border remarked that they were losing potential candidates who opted to study at centres where the SCC is not offered, or where it is advertised as optional.

Our interviews showed that many teachers felt that there is a link between the content of the SCC and the principles of the new Curriculum for Wales,¹⁷ which is currently being developed by Welsh Government, and hence that any discussion of the SCC needs to take place acknowledging the wider context. One interviewee summed up her feelings by stating,

“The curriculum is changing: this is the way forward. It [the SCC] needs to be on teacher training programmes. New teachers all need the experience of teaching the SCC.”

¹⁷ Discussed in Graham Donaldson, “Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales”, February 2015

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) has consisted of two key components; a desk-based review of evidence relating to the design and assessment model of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc, and engagement with learners and teachers. The desk-based review mainly examined the design of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc, whilst the fieldwork focused on gathering information about learners' and teachers' experiences of the SCC.

The review found that the SCC is an innovative qualification that gives learners valuable opportunities to gain real-life skills and to develop their interests by choosing areas of study which are relevant to them.

The desk-based review reported that there is a clear vision for both the Welsh Bacc and the SCC, which is underpinned by highly relevant principles. There is a clear intention for learners to experience different forms of learning and to have greater choice in what they study and how. These principles will bring benefits to individuals, as well as broader social and economic benefits. The teachers proclaimed widespread and strong support for the aims and purpose of the SCC. The SCC is becoming more established, with centres adapting, embedding and refining their approach to delivering it.

The content of the Challenges and Individual Project has high relevance to developing the required skills. Each Challenge is designed to meet real world needs and to take place within authentic work and community contexts.

Learners and teachers have reported many rewarding components of the SCC. Learners reported that they had enjoyed specific aspects of the SCC, such as going out into the community or learning business skills. Many teachers commented on the successes of individual learners who had excelled in their work, particularly in areas that they found challenging. Most of the teachers interviewed were highly committed to the SCC and found it, on balance, to be professionally rewarding.

Learners and teachers pointed to development and progression in skills and learning gained through the SCC that are not available in other subjects. These skills included interpersonal communication skills, public speaking, leadership skills and financial skills, which represent real gains for many learners and reflect the aspirations of the design and delivery of the SCC.

6.2 Recommendations

The desk-based review and engagement with learners and teachers confirmed that the principles underpinning the Welsh Bacc and the SCC are strong and relevant. Therefore, we strongly advise that the SCC is retained and revised to build on its strengths and to reduce its complexity.

Any detailed and critical analysis of a qualification's design is likely to identify some areas for improvement. We certainly did so for this review, which examined the design of a new and innovative skills-based qualification, spanning learning from ages 14-19. We have identified areas for improvement and propose a series of recommendations to support stakeholders in developing the SCC in the future.

6.2.1 Establish a process for reviewing the recommendations

We would note that previous revisions to the implementation of the Welsh Bacc have left some scepticism among learners and teachers – as reflected in our fieldwork focus groups and interviews – and we therefore advise any developments to be considered carefully. We recommend that such change processes should involve stakeholders such as Welsh Government (WG), WJEC, Estyn, Regional Education Consortia, education professionals (including senior leaders, teachers and Welsh Bacc co-ordinators) and representatives from Higher Education, as well as employers, learners and parents.

Recommendation 1: Qualifications Wales to establish a process to review the recommendations of the report so that any developments are implemented in a considered and timely manner and involve key stakeholders. Any developments should be communicated in a clear, comprehensive and consistent manner.

Whilst much of the comment that we received from teachers and learners related to the delivery of the SCC, the desk-based review focused on its design. We have therefore separated our remaining recommendations into these two distinct categories:

- Improvements to the delivery of the SCC - In our view, these are short-term improvements that may be addressed without any fundamental changes to the design of the SCC (recommendations 2 to 5).
- Improvements to the design of the SCC - In our view, these relate to the design and assessment model of the SCC and its place within the Welsh Bacc. They require careful consideration over a longer period (recommendations 6 to 8).

6.2.2 Revise and better promote information about the Skills Challenge Certificate and the Welsh Baccaulaureate

Within the report, we note that the documentation that has been reviewed that supports the delivery of the SCC is not always clear and consistent. Teachers reported that they felt this documentation is too complex. This sense of complexity has not been helped by piecemeal changes to the documentation since the introduction of the SCC in September 2015. The desk-based review also identified that the current documentation does not communicate the sophistication and specialist nature of the skills being developed. To support the delivery of the SCC, we therefore feel that attention should be given to reviewing the core documentation to ensure clarity and consistency.

The report also acknowledged that learners do not tend to discuss the SCC with their families and that their parents do not really know much about the qualification. We note that there are currently no specific pages on stakeholders' websites for learners and their families to access information about the SCC or the Welsh Bacc. We believe that having information targeted at learners and their families would be beneficial to encourage engagement with, and understanding of, the SCC and Welsh Bacc. We also note that there is still legacy information available on the internet, which is not always clearly labelled as such.

Recommendation 2: Qualifications Wales, WJEC and Welsh Government to review the information available about the SCC and the Welsh Bacc to ensure that it is clear, consistent and accessible. The review should include:

- (a) the regulatory design principles, qualification specifications, delivery handbook, administration handbook and code of practice;
- (b) how information about the SCC and the WB can be tailored more effectively to learners and their families.

6.2.3 Develop teachers', senior leaders' and support staff's knowledge, skills and understanding of the Skills Challenge Certificate and the Welsh Baccaulaureate.

The teachers interviewed felt that they had a good understanding of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc. However, they reported finding it a challenge to explain to learners, other teachers and parents. They also felt that teachers not directly involved, and in some cases, senior management did not always understand it. Alongside revising and promoting information about the SCC and the Welsh Bacc (recommendation 2), we also believe that there is a need to develop knowledge of teachers, senior leaders and support staff as well as the understanding of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc.

The desk-based review notes that the SCC appears to have been designed for a wide range of teachers to be able to teach and assess without specialism in skills development. This is the case by necessity since it is not a curriculum area that currently exists and does not feature in initial teacher education (ITE). This could mean that the SCC is viewed as a non-specialist area and that the skills are not demanding to teach or assess, which is far from the case. It is therefore paramount that appropriate, on-going CPD opportunities are provided for all staff involved in the delivery of the SCC.

Although the teachers felt that they are becoming more confident in delivering the SCC and were positive about the opportunities for attending CPD training and workshops, they also identified a need for on-going support for teachers and centres.

Recommendation 3: QW, working with stakeholders, to increase awareness and understanding of the SCC and the Welsh Bacc among teachers, senior leaders and support staff.

Recommendation 4: WJEC, with support from Qualifications Wales, to continue to offer Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and training for all staff involved in the delivery of the SCC.

Recommendation 5: Welsh Government to consider whether initial teacher education (ITE) could help to prepare teachers for developing and assessing the skills included in the SCC.

6.2.4 Examine the design of the Skills Challenge Certificate

The desk-based review concluded that the design of the SCC is complex. This finding was corroborated by teachers who reported that the SCC needs refining and streamlining to make it clearer and more manageable. The principal areas of complexity in the design of the SCC include:

1. The four forms of the SCC (i.e. KS4, Post-16 Foundation, Post-16 National and Advanced) are very similar. As a result, there is repetition in content, learning outcomes, methods of assessment and assessment criteria across each form. This leads to a lack of clarity about progression. Teachers also reported difficulty in motivating learners moving from one form to another;
2. Repetition across the four components (the Individual Project and the three Challenges) of the SCC. The benefits of pursuing all three Challenges as separate tasks, as opposed to fewer in a more consolidated and focused way, are not clear and there are questions about how specific skills are aligned within each Challenge;
3. At National and Foundation levels, the inconsistency in the requirements for literacy and numeracy in the Individual Project between the KS4 SCC and the Post-16 qualifications;
4. The lack of a rationale for the size and weightings of each of the three Challenges;
5. The lack of clarity regarding the role and status of the artefact in the Individual Project, particularly at Foundation and National levels when it does not contribute to the word count.

In addition to the complexity of the design of the SCC, the report has also identified that there is potential for more integration of the SCC into the curriculum. While we offer the observation that the uniqueness of the SCC is that it builds skills that may not be addressed through other subjects, we note that there appear to be some missed opportunities for increased curricular integration, particularly through the Individual Project and digital literacy.

Recommendation 6: Qualifications Wales to review the design of the SCC, including its structure and content. This should consider the principles of Constructive Alignment and include:

- (a) Reviewing the need for three Challenges with overlapping Learning Objectives, alongside the Individual Project. If appropriate, identify where the number of Challenges could be reduced by analysing the synergies between them. For example, Qualifications Wales could consider:
 - i. Removing the Community Challenge and reallocating the skills ‘planning and organisation’ and ‘personal effectiveness’ to the Enterprise and Employability Challenge where they clearly support the learning aims;
 - ii. The extent to which the aims of the Challenges and the essential and employability skills could be included and assessed within the Individual Project.
- (b) Considering the case for introducing one SCC qualification at Post-16 spanning Foundation and National levels.
- (c) Reviewing whether literacy and numeracy should continue to be assessed in the SCC at Post-16.
- (d) Reviewing the allocation of GLH and weighting attributed to each component.
- (e) Reviewing the examples of appropriate Challenges offered in the specifications at KS4 and Post-16 Foundation and National levels to achieve greater consistency and clearer opportunities for progression.
- (f) Exploring the opportunities for increasing the assessment of digital literacy. For example, as part of ‘raising awareness methods’ within the Global Citizenship Challenge.
- (g) Considering how the Individual Project might be further improved, for example by:
 - i. revising the word length of the written report and the purpose for the artefact;
 - ii. exploring the potential to increase opportunities for learners to develop digital literacy skills;
 - iii. exploring opportunities to assess creativity and innovation skills;
 - iv. exploring how it can be better integrated into the curriculum.

6.2.5 Consider how the assessment model can be refined

The desk-based review concluded that many demands are made of the assessment model, which has led to complex assessment structures. Learners and teachers reported finding it confusing and difficult to understand.

The desk-based review identified that the learning outcomes and assessment criteria are not always aligned. In addition, the assessment criteria lack specificity. As a result, it is not always clear how to differentiate between the performance bands when assessing learners’ work. For example, one performance band requires ‘limited ideas generated for an enterprise concept’, whilst the next performance band requires ‘basic ideas generated for an enterprise concept’. In this example, the difference between ‘basic’ and ‘limited’ is unclear. Teachers commented that the lack of clarity and precision in the wording of the assessment criteria is leading to challenges when assessing and standardising learners’ work. As a result, teachers

reported that they spend a disproportionate amount of time assessing learners' work and standardising assessor's judgements.

Currently, each of the seven essential and employability skills are assessed to differing degrees, with some being over-assessed. Whilst we recognise the challenges of designing to assess skills through 'real world learning' experiences, attention needs to be given to ensuring that the assessment model is more aligned with what is being learned.

As a result of the complex assessment model, the grading system for the SCC qualifications and their components is also found to be complex.

Recommendation 7: WJEC to consider how the assessment and grading model could be made clearer for the Challenges and the Individual Project at all levels. This should include:

- (a) Reviewing the assessment criteria to look at:
 - i. How assessment criteria align with the learning outcomes;
 - ii. Developing better quality, clearer assessment criteria;
 - iii. Introducing consistent features in the criteria that provide common indicators of attainment at Foundation and National levels;
 - iv. Rationalising the over-complex sets of marks, bands, grades and levels, while introducing one set of criteria that can be applied across all learners at Foundation and National levels, modelled on the current KS4 matrix.
- (b) Reviewing ways in which the assessment model can be made more transparent so that learners understand what is expected for each performance band.
- (c) Considering how the reliability of assessing group work within the Challenges can be strengthened.

6.2.6 Consider reviewing the Welsh Baccalaureate framework

Whilst reviewing the design and assessment model of the SCC and its relationship with the Welsh Bacc, we have also noted that there is scope to consider the purpose of the Welsh Bacc framework. Through our engagement with learners and teachers, we have identified some confusion between the legacy Welsh Bacc and the current framework, which is impacting on the status of the SCC. As a result, we make the following recommendation:

Recommendation 8: Qualifications Wales to review the WB framework to:

- (a) Consider the viability of the SCC (or revised components of the SCC) as a discrete qualification, independent of the Welsh Bacc.
- (b) Consider whether the Welsh Bacc should continue as a composite award.

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Annex 1

Documents included in the analysis

- Administration handbook – 2016/17
- Centre Code of Practice
- Design principles for the Welsh Baccalaureate
- National/Foundation (KS4) SCC delivery handbook
- Foundation (Post-16) SCC delivery handbook
- National (Post-16) SCC delivery handbook
- Advanced SCC delivery handbook
- National/Foundation (KS4) specification
- Foundation (Post-16) specification
- National (Post-16) specification
- Advanced specification
- Addendum to the document 'Design Principles for the Welsh Baccalaureate – November 2014. Applicable for courses commencing teaching September 2015'. Qualifications Wales.

Annex 2

Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. Could you describe your understanding of the SCC? How does this fit into the Welsh Baccalaureate framework? How many of you have started the SCC work? Have you completed any of the challenges or the Individual Project? Which one are you currently working on/have you most recently completed?
2. How do you feel the SCC is going? Could you tell us a little about what you feel is going well? Why do you say that? Are there areas in which you feel that things are not going as well? What are the challenges with it?
3. Could you tell us a little more about the work that you have done so far on the SCC? Are there components of it that you have found particularly interesting? Why? Are there areas that you have found to be a bit more of a struggle? Why is that?
4. How did you choose your topic for the Individual Project? [MODERATOR NOTE: level of choice differs according to the level of the SCC – at Key Stage 4 it is related to a personal interest or future education, at Post 16 National or Foundation it is related to their learning programme or future employment aspirations, at Advanced level it is related to future education or career aspirations]? What guidance did you receive? Who did you talk to, to help you decide on your topic? If they have completed the Individual Project, how did they feel it went?
5. Could you tell us a little bit about the role of your teachers in the Skills Challenge Certificate? Have you developed different relationships with teachers through the SCC? [For Post-16 and advanced learners] Have those relationships changed as you have gone on in the Bacc?
6. Do you think that the SCC has helped you developed new skills? What are they? How useful do you think those skills are? Would you have developed them anyway without the SCC?
7. Do you think that the SCC will help you in your future? If so, how? Do you think it may help you get a job, or be better prepared for work when you leave school [for Post-16: do you think the skills you have learned during the SCC have prepared you for going to university?]
8. How do you find the level of work required for the SCC? Do you think it is too light? Too heavy? Has the SCC had any impact (both positive and negative) on any of your other school subjects? Your leisure time? How does the level of work compare to your other subjects?
9. How do you feel about the way you are assessed for each of the challenges and the IP? (Use of controlled assessment).
10. Do you think that the SCC assessment (grading) has been fair? Is it fairer than in other subjects? Less fair? Why? Have any teachers talked to you about the assessment (grading) system?

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11. Do you understand the grades you can get in the SCC and the WB? Do you understand what these mean and how they differ? (At Post-16 – do they understand how the grades differ from KS4?)
12. Have you done any group work in the SCC? Are you looking forward to doing group work? Do you like group work in general? In the SCC? Do you think that the assessment of the group work is as fair as the assessment of your individual projects? If so, why? If not, why not? Has doing group work helped you to be more confident?
13. What do you most like about the SCC overall? Least like? Has working on the SCC helped you to be more independent in your learning? Is that a good thing? Why? Will you be proud to pass the WB? Get the SCC? Has it helped you to build your self-confidence?
14. Have you talked to your parents about the Welsh Baccalaureate? The SCC? If so, how do they feel about it? If not, why not?
15. If you could change one thing about the SCC, what would it be?

Annex 3

Teachers Discussion Guide



Review of the Design and Assessment Model of the Skills Challenge Certificate and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate framework

First of all, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed.

This is a guide for the discussion that we would like to undertake with you as part of the above review. We would be grateful if you can find a few minutes to read it in advance of the discussion. It includes some background information about the review and a list of questions that we would like to discuss with you. This discussion guide is however exactly that - a *guide* to the issues that we would like to discuss during the meeting. We would, of course, be happy to discuss any other issues which you feel are relevant.

Some background

Qualifications Wales has commissioned Wavehill to undertake a review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) (the core component of the Welsh Baccalaureate) and qualitative research with teachers and learners who are currently teaching or studying the SCC within maintained secondary schools, sixth form colleges and FEFE institutions in Wales. In particular, QW are interested in determining whether the current configuration of the SCC is fit for purpose; for the purposes of this review, QW's interim standards of recognition will be used to define 'fit for purpose'. The interim standards clearly state that 'A qualification will only be fit for purpose if that qualification, as far as possible, secures the requirements of i) validity, ii) reliability, iii) comparability, iv) manageability and v) minimising bias'.

Any comments that you make will be confidential and the information you provide will only be used for the purposes of reporting and dissemination of the results of this evaluation. Comments that you make will not be attributed to you unless we have your explicit permission to do so, and you will have the chance to review any interview notes for accuracy. It is also important to note that the team undertaking the evaluation *do not* work for Qualifications Wales or any of the organisations that are involved in the delivery or funding of this project. This is an *independent* evaluation.

Background

1. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself? How long have you been teaching? What are your main subject areas? What do you enjoy about teaching? Your job? What do you not enjoy about teaching?
2. Could you tell us a little about how you became involved with the SCC? Was it by choice? How many others are involved in the delivery of the SCC at your schools? Are you also responsible for co-ordination of the WB? If so, please can you also tell us about how you became involved in this?

SCC design

3. What do you think the purpose of the SCC is? What do you think the purpose of the WB is? What do you see as the relationship between them?
4. Do you feel the purpose of i) the WB as a whole, and ii) the SCC have been adequately communicated to teachers? If so, how has it been communicated? What did you find positive about that communication? If not, why not?
5. And what about the Individual Project and each of the three challenges? Do you feel that you have an adequate insight into their purpose and role in both the SCC and the WB framework?
6. A. Do you feel that the SCC is meeting its defined (or intended) purpose? Why do you feel this?
 - (a) Do you feel that the WB is meeting its defined (or intended) purpose? Why do you feel this?
 - (b) Do you feel that other teachers feel the same way as you? If so, how do you know? If not, why not?
7. Do you feel that the structure of i) the SCC and ii) the WB as a whole are fit for purpose? Again, do you think that this is an opinion that is shared by other teachers? If so, why? How do you know? If not, why not?

Delivery

8. Which of the three challenges or the Individual Project have you been involved in? How have you been involved? How many hours have you been allocated in your work programme for your work on the SCC? How many of these hours are for teaching, and how many for preparation? Do you think that this is an accurate reflection of the time that you have spent on it? How does it compare to time allocation for other comparable subjects?

9. Have you worked with the Challenge briefs at KS4 and/or KS5? How have you found working with the Challenge briefs? Have you taught learners taking SCC at KS5 who also studied it at KS4? Do you think the Challenge briefs support progression at KS5. If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
10. Have you had opportunities to share good practices in the SCC with other teachers in your school? In other schools? If so, when and how has this been completed? Was it worthwhile? Are there enough opportunities for learning about good practices?
11. How is the administration side of the WB co-ordinated within your centre? (If the interviewee is responsible, how have you found the administration side of the SCC? Has the collection and recording of required information been manageable?)

Content:

11. What do you think about the content of each of the three challenges and the Individual Project? Is it relevant to Wales in the current day? (It may also help to prompt them to consider the content in relation to the curriculum principles that Donaldson outlined e.g. empowering, engaging and ambitious? – do teachers feel that the SCC achieves this for learners?)

How do you feel about the seven essential and employability skills? Are learners given suitable opportunities to develop these through the three challenges and Individual Project?

Is there a good link between the content of the SCC and what is required for assessment?

Do you have any ideas for how the content could be developed? Is there anything missing?

Assessment

12. Do you think that the assessment model (i.e. learning outcomes, method of assessment [controlled assessment tasks], assessment grid) is fit for purpose? What about the overall volume of assessment?
13. Are the assessment grids helpful/easy to use? How do you find the language that is used for the performance band descriptors?
14. Have you received clear guidance on what is required for assessment? If so, could the guidance have been improved? How?
15. How have you found it to apply the assessment criteria at KS4? How have you found the application of the assessment criteria at the different levels of KS5? If you have assessed both KS4 and KS5, how does applying the criteria compare across both?
16. What are your internal moderation practices? How do you find the moderation of learner work for the SCC? (At Post-16 – do you have any feedback from the external moderation of work? Were the moderator reports helpful?)

17. How do you think your pupils have reacted to the SCC? Has the reaction been mainly positive or otherwise? Have there been any surprises in terms of learner performance and attitudes? Have there been any particular areas of concern that have been expressed to you? What are they? Why do you think this is? Is the level of work required from learners comparable to other subjects? How do learners feel about the wider Welsh Baccalaureate framework?

Outcomes and impacts

18. Have you discussed the SCC or the WB with any parents? What has their general reaction been? What about others in the community? Local employers? How has the SCC and WB been communicated to parents?
19. What do you think are the main outcomes/benefits for learners from the SCC? Future employability skills? Higher Education skills? Do you think the WB and the SCC have helped pupils develop language skills? Clarity of expression? Other critical learning skills?
20. What has been your experience of involving employers in the provision of the SCC? How do you feel this has gone?
21. What about self-efficacy and self-confidence? Has the SCC enabled learners to build those in any way that they otherwise would not have been able to?
22. Do you think that the progression between levels of WB is clear? How does the SCC fit into that progression route, in your view? Are there any issues with it? How does the progression model of WB and SCC fit with the national literacy and numeracy frameworks? Digital competencies? Are there areas of synergy/overlap?

Conclusion

23. In general, has being involved with the WB and the SCC been an enjoyable experience for you? Professionally rewarding? Would you recommend being involved to other teachers? If so, why? If not, why not?
24. Do you have any comments or suggestions on how the SCC or WB could be developed in the future?
25. Is there anything else that you think that we should have covered in this interview or that you were expecting to be asked but which we have not done so?

That concludes the interview – thank you

Need more information or to reorganise the interview?

If you need to reorganise the appointment we have made for the interview for any reason, please contact Tracy Newman on 01545 571711 or via email to tracy.newman@wavehill.com.

You can find more information about Wavehill on our website: www.wavehill.com. All our researchers work within the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct (<http://www.mrs.org.uk/standards>).

If you have any questions or queries about either the interview or the evaluation more generally, or if you have any feedback on the way the interview was undertaken, please feel free to contact Mark Willis (t: 01545 571711 | e: mark.willis@wavehill.com) at Wavehill.

Annex 5: Technical Annex for learner and teacher engagement

This annex provides a technical outline of the approach used to collect and analyse data for this report.

General approach

Learner engagement

Researchers at Wavehill facilitated a series of focus group sessions with learners in schools and FE colleges across Wales. The data collected from these focus groups provides the basis for the learner engagement element of this report. As discussed in the methodology, small focus groups of between six and ten learners were selected as the appropriate platform for learner engagement to allow for interaction and joint reflection among participants in a non-intimidating setting. Focus groups also enable more in-depth data to be collected through a 'constitutive' discussion (i.e. where learners can build upon comments from other participants to enable more in-depth discussion and reflection) than would normally be collected through one-to-one interviews and/or surveys with learners. We recognise the potential for this approach to lead to the voices of some individuals to be heard more than others. However, our facilitators are well-trained to ensure all participants are involved in the discussion, have the opportunity to contribute their views, and challenge the views of others within a safe environment.

A discussion guide (see Annex 2) was prepared for the facilitators and was reviewed for accuracy and fitness for purpose by Qualifications Wales. A briefing session for facilitators was held prior to the commencement of the fieldwork.

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed, using professional transcription services in either English or Welsh. Those transcripts were then subjected to textual analysis, which we describe below.

Teacher engagement

Engagement with teachers, lecturers and Welsh Bacc coordinators took place in the context of semi-structured, one to one interviews. The interviewer was a former school educator with many years of teaching experience and who was familiar with the SCC and the assessment model. The teacher interviews were conducted face to face wherever possible¹⁹, and in the language medium of the interviewees' choice. Discussion guides were prepared and were reviewed by Qualifications Wales for accuracy and fitness for purpose and then distributed to teachers in advance.

¹⁹ All efforts were made to complete interviews face to face as the preferred mode. In some circumstances, teachers were either unavailable face to face or requested that the interview be rescheduled and/or conducted by telephone. Ultimately, nine interviews were completed by telephone.

Interview notes were taken, and then shared by email with the interviewee for review and consent prior to being shared with the larger review team for evaluation and analysis. Interview notes were structured using the questions contained in the discussion guide. There was a total of four requests for minor amendments, all of which were incorporated.

Research Output

The learner and teacher engagement generated rich data both in quality and quantity. In total, the research generated 47 learner focus group transcripts, encompassing 538 pages and 198,000 words for analysis. We also asked our facilitators to take notes of any general impressions of the group sessions (e.g. to report if they felt learners had been coached in responses, were unwilling or unable to engage, where they had to be prompted, etc.). Where these notes feed into the reporting, we reference that explicitly in the text.

The approximate average time for teacher interviews was 75 minutes. Together, the interviews yielded approximately 131 pages of text and 40,000 words for analysis.

Analysis

Identification of themes: focus groups

In the initial analysis stage, all transcripts from the focus groups were examined to identify overarching themes. These themes were then validated against the transcripts and the categories were refined. In the initial stage of the data analysis three researchers trained in qualitative methods independently examined the focus group transcripts and identified top level themes. These were then compared and discussed in a session moderated by the research manager. Areas of common identification and of divergence in identification were explored and probed in this discussion.

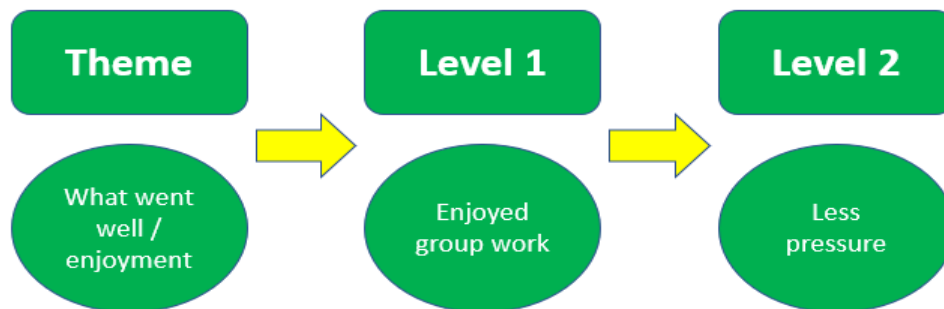
In the end, five top level themes were retained for analysis, which closely resemble the discussion areas covered in the discussion guide (see Annex 2). These were:

1. Understanding of the Skills Challenge Certificate and the Welsh Bacc
2. Support from teachers and family
3. What went well/enjoyment
4. What could be improved/challenges
5. Development of new skills and help with future employability

Development of an initial coding framework: focus groups

Transcripts were then further examined to establish a coding framework which would capture the key areas noted by learners in relation to each of the five themes. Initially, the transcripts were examined manually by Wavehill researchers to start forming the coding framework.

Based on these five themes, in total we developed 34 categories at level 1 and 36 categories at level 2. Level 1 categories include broad, general feedback while level 2 categories provide more detailed responses. The illustration below provides an example of this approach. In this example, the extract relates to a learner, responding to thematic area 3 (what went well/ what they enjoyed about the SCC), stating that they had enjoyed the group work and one of the reasons for that is because they felt that there is less pressure in such a setting.



We then investigated the feasibility of aligning these themes with the data gathered from teacher interviews. At a high-level, we found a strong relationship between the themes identified in the learner engagement, and the themes emerging from the teacher engagement. However, for clarity and consistency, we decided to:

- Combine the ‘what went well/enjoyment’ and ‘what could be improved/challenges’ themes in reporting to enable comparison. This developed a new high-level theme entitled ‘Experience of the SCC’.
- Include an ‘other’ category for issues not covered in the high-level themes

Machine coding: focus groups

Once an initial coding framework had been developed, it was inputted, along with transcripts, into the machine coding platform that Wavehill employs for the analysis of large scale qualitative data²⁰. The coding framework was refined and further developed during the machine coding process.

We coded the 47 transcripts from the learner focus groups using machine codes developed from the thematic, level 1 and level 2 categories described above. In total, we derived 102 “nested” codes, by which we mean codes that have a hierarchical relationship between them (7 at the top level (representing each theme), 51 “children” (an expansion on the Level 1 categories), and 44 “grandchildren” (an expansion on the Level 2 categories)). Of those 103 codes, 78 were non-directional (present/absent), and 24 were directional codes (more/less, positive/negative).

²⁰ Wavehill used Dedoose, a cross-platform software used to encode and analyse qualitative data.

The coding protocol allowed for multiple codes to be assigned to excerpts. We also assigned 'highlight' codes to noteworthy or illustrative excerpts for inclusion as quotations in the reporting stage; we identified over 400 such excerpts. In Annex 4 we show a 'word cloud' that gives the relative frequency of the overall applications of each of the 103 codes that we developed from the coding frame to the transcripts from the learner focus groups.

Table A5.1 below provides a full list of the 102 nested codes developed for the machine coding process. The codes in bold are directional while the other codes are non-directional.

Table A5.1: Understanding of SCC, by level

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild code
1 Understanding of SCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Understanding of the Marking Scheme > Understanding of the Grading > Confusion as to whether group work is marked as a group or individually 	
2a Support from teachers 2b Discussed it with family outside school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Not enough guidance / had to chase up for help > Good guidance when needed and enjoy the independence > Teachers are not comfortable with it / Don't understand what it's about > Inconsistent messages from teachers > Learning curve for teachers > Relationship has been different > Support to choose Individual Project topic > Family are confused about what it is > Concerned about amount of work / impact on other subjects / don't believe it's useful > Family were positive e.g. thought it was useful/interesting > Family say it shouldn't be compulsory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sympathy for teachers > Teaching of Welsh Bacc has improved since it was introduced > Left to work on their own more than in other subjects

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild code
<p>3&4 Enjoyment of SCC</p> <p>4b Suggestions for improvements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A Community challenge > B Global Citizenship Challenge > C Enterprise and Employability Challenge > D Individual Project > Emphasis on working independently and ownership of projects > Group work > Inconsistent delivery > Pride in achieving a good grade in Welsh Bacc/ SCC > Fairness of the assessment > Workload > Enjoyed that it is different to other subjects > There should be more group work > Should be more good practice examples > Structure of groups e.g. smaller, more complementary > Provide more time / Reduce workload > Other subjects shouldn't affect assessment > Make it less numeracy orientated > More emphasis on life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Topic areas (a) > Volunteering experience > Topic areas (b) > Enjoyed learning about global issues > Personal responsibility / ownership of project (a) > Enjoyed debating > Developed employability skills > Enjoyed organising my own business > Freedom to choose area of interest > Useful to prepare for University (b) > Struggled with the numeracy element > Struggled to source information > Difficult to choose title > Personal responsibility / ownership of project (b) > Useful to prepare for University (a) > Learners feel pressured > Good for building confidence / improving communication skills > Less pressure to work as a group > Social aspect i.e. work with friends, get to know new people etc. > Lack of control / reliant on others > Should be monitored better > Assessment is unfair i.e. affected by other group members > Received different instructions from different teachers > Instructions changed midway through exercises > Good grade in Welsh Bacc/SCC valued as highly as other subjects > Useful to prepare for University (c) > More relief than pride > Leans too heavily on numeracy > Unfair that it relies on other subjects > Affects other subjects > Not enough time to complete exercises > Causes stress > Affects leisure time > Work is easier but more of it > Comparable to other subjects

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild code
5a Developed new/existing skills 5b Help for future	> Organisational > Teamwork > Communication and presenting > Confidence > Time management > Referencing and bibliography > Creativity > Life skills e.g. money management > Researching / Sourcing > Working independently > Essay writing > Business > English > Analytical / critical thinking > Develop these skills in other subjects > Helped re University prospects > Helped to prepare for employment > Can't see any benefit > Helped to think about future	> Developed HE relevant skills e.g. essay writing, presenting etc. > Not accepted by University > Strengthened application through UCAS points > Developed CV > Developed transferrable skills > Didn't choose Welsh Bacc / Would rather concentrate on other subjects

Top-level qualitative analysis: focus groups

Below, we present the top-level analysis and statistical score generated for each thematic area, outlining the basis from which statistical scores were calculated. Under each thematic area we provide an overview of the questions asked to collect data and how the responses were then scored.

Understanding of the SCC

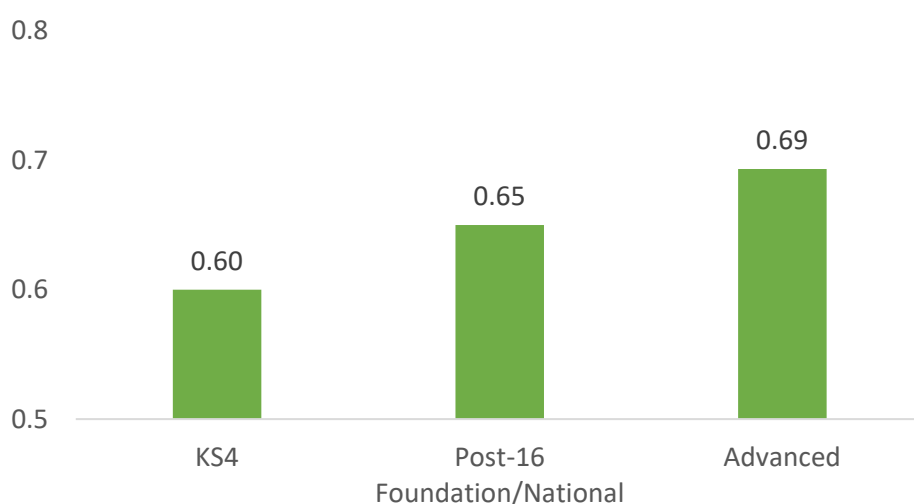
The score for this theme was mostly calculated on the basis of responses to the first set of questions asked by the facilitators of the focus group sessions:

- Could you describe your understanding of the SCC?
- How does this fit into the Welsh Baccalaureate framework?
- How many of you have started the SCC work?
- Have you completed any of the Challenges or the Individual Project?
- Which one are you currently working on/have you most recently completed?

The top-level analysis for the understanding of the SCC (including child codes), by level of learners, is presented in Figure 1 below. This theme has a mid-point of 1, 0 representing no understanding at all and 2 representing perfect understanding. A score of 0 was assigned on each occasion the learners demonstrated a complete lack of understanding when discussing the questions above. Those demonstrating some, but not complete, understanding were scored a 1 and those with comprehensive understanding were scored a 2.

The sample mean for the theme is 0.66, indicating that there is a substantial gap in the understanding of the SCC. It shows very little difference between learners in KS4 and the two other groups (Post-16 Foundational/National and Advanced), leading us to conclude that understanding levels are not contingent upon what level of the SCC the learner is studying, but other factors.

Figure A5.1: Understanding of SCC, by level



Support from teachers and family

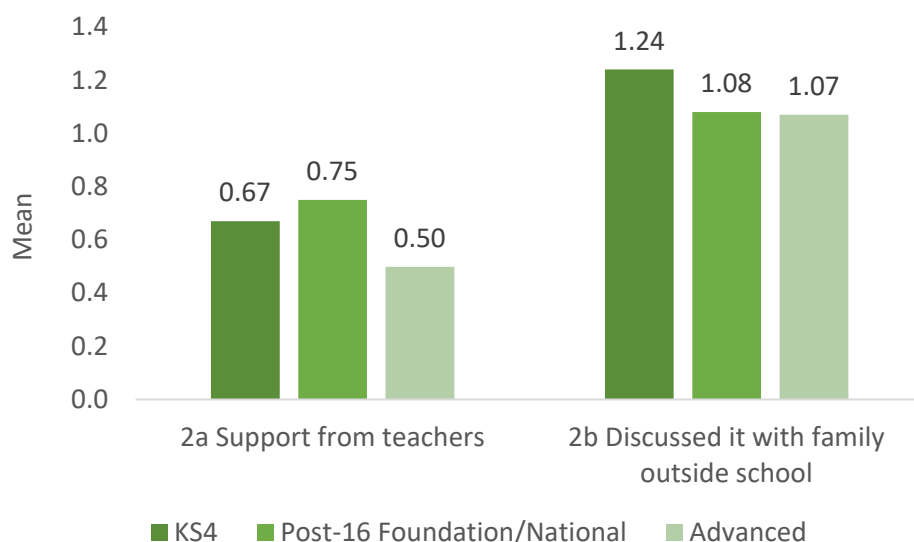
The following questions were asked and have provided the basis for scoring this theme:

- How did you choose your topic for the Individual Project? What guidance did you receive? Who did you talk to, to help you decide on your topic?
- Could you tell us a little bit about the role of your teachers in the Skills Challenge Certificate?
- Have any teachers talked to you about the assessment (grading) system?
- Have you talked to your parents about the Welsh Baccalaureate? The SCC?

Support from teachers and the discussion had with family, by level of SCC being studied, is shown in figure A5.2 below. It should be noted that the support from teachers is a *directional* measure that ranges from 0 to 2 (mid-point 1) in the data, while the question of whether learners had discussed Welsh Bacc with family is a *frequency* measure that ranges from 0 to 1. Thus, for the teacher support measure, an excerpt was coded 0 if it was negative, 1 if it was neutral, and 2 if it was positive; for the family discussion measure, an excerpt was coded 1 if there was a mention of conversation with the family/friends, otherwise it was coded 0 if there was a mention of no conversation with family/friends.

The data in figure A5.2 has been harmonised, by multiplying the family scores by a factor of two. **The sample mean for 2a is 0.57 and the standardised mean for 2b is 1.26.** The data show that levels of support from teachers (negative < 1) were perceived in our focus groups as being lower than the neutral midpoint, while there is a positive overall score to whether learners discuss this with their families (positive, > 1).

Figure A5.2: Support and communication with teachers and family, by level



We note that reports of teacher support are generally lower among learners studying the Advanced SCC. In contrast, the data shows that reports of discussions of the SCC with family outside of school are higher among KS4 learners than the other two groups.

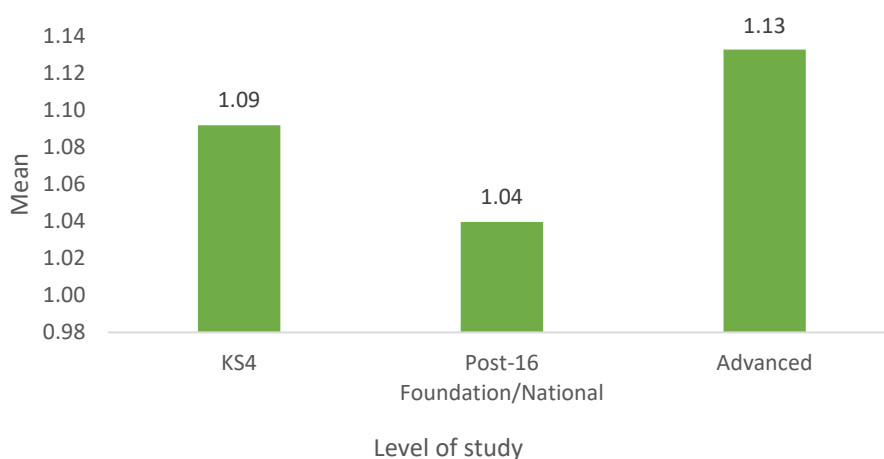
Experience of the SCC (What went well/enjoyment & What could be improved/challenges)

Several questions were asked to encourage discussion under these themes. Again, the score generated is largely based on the following questions (although, they also include any positive/negative feedback to other questions about SCC and elements of it):

- How do you feel the SCC is going?
- Could you tell us a little about what you feel is going well?
- Are there areas in which you feel that things are not going as well? What are the challenges with it?
- Are there elements of it that you have found particularly interesting?
- Are there areas that you have found to be a bit more of a struggle?
- If they have completed the Individual project, how did they feel it went?
- How do you find the level of work required for the SCC?
- Do you like group work in general? In the SCC?
- What do you most like about the SCC overall? Least like?
- If you could change one thing about the SCC, what would it be?

In figure A5.3 below, we show the data for levels of enjoyment for the SCC. In these figures, we are able to combine the data for enjoyment/what went well, and what could be improved/challenges by using directional codes; the scale ranges from 0 (no enjoyment at all) to 2 (full enjoyment), with a mid-point of 1 (neutral). The mean scores include the codes for feedback on enjoyment of SCC; its four components (scored individually); and working independently and in groups.

Figure A5.3 Enjoyment/what went well/challenges, by level of study



Overall, the data show that there is a positive balance in experiences of the SCC, with the sample mean for the experience of the SCC at 1.1; however, as explored in section 5.2 of the report, this mean score masks a certain polarisation in the responses reflecting a polarisation of respondents, in which positive reports about enjoyment of the SCC were almost exactly balanced by negative reports.

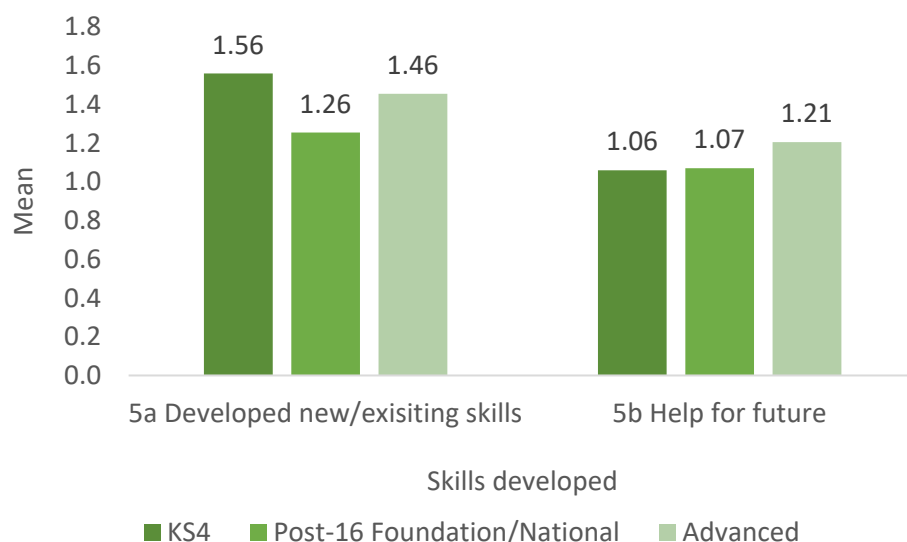
Development of new skills and help with future employability

Much of the focus group discussion also revolved around the development of new skills and how SCC will help them in future. This theme was scored using the following questions:

- How do you feel the SCC is going?
- Could you tell us a little more about the work that you have done so far on the SCC?
- If they have completed the Individual Project, how did they feel it went?
- Do you think that the SCC has helped you developed new skills?
- How useful do you think those skills are?
- Would you have developed them anyway without the SCC?
- Do you think that the SCC will help you in your future?
- Do you think it may help you get a job, or be better prepared for work when you leave school?
- Do you think the skills you have learned during the SCC have prepared you for going to university?
- Has working on the SCC helped you to be more independent in your learning?
- Has it helped you to build your self-confidence?
- Has doing group work helped you to be more confident?

In Figure A5.4 below, we present data from theme five; the development of skills and help for the future. Where learners mentioned a new skill they have developed which they had not also developed elsewhere, we coded this as 2; where there were mentions of skills that they have developed in the SCC but have also developed in other subjects, this was coded as 1. Where learners explicitly said they have developed no new skills, this was coded as 0.

Figure A5.4: Development of skills and help for the future, by level of study



The sample mean for theme 5a (skills development) is 1.52 and the mean for 5b (help for the future) is 1.12. We conclude that the balance of responses indicates that many learners feel that they have developed new skills through the SCC that they could not have developed elsewhere. In general, we can see that the SCC is seen quite positively by learners in terms of skills development and help for future employability, with the former a little stronger and the latter a little weaker in positive support. A perception of new skills being developed was particularly high among learners studying either the KS4 or Advanced SCC.

Data analysis: teacher interviews

Data from teacher interviews were not subjected to formal machine coding as (a) each interview had one respondent, compared to multiple participants in the focus groups, and (b) the overall volume of data (word counts) was lower. However, the interviews were conducted using structured discussion guides that allowed the data to be collated by question response, thus permitting the easy identification of common themes and responses.

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