

UCAS' response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry in to the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ)

UCAS is an independent charity providing information, advice, and admissions services to inspire and facilitate educational progression. We are best known for running undergraduate admissions services for around 400 universities and colleges. In 2017, we handled nearly three million applications for full-time undergraduate courses, from 700,000 students.

We aim to be a trusted choice for high quality information and advice about options for progression. Our information and advice services support people of all ages interested in undergraduate and postgraduate courses, including teacher training and, increasingly, apprenticeships.

We recognise there are many types of higher education, and many pathways to get there. This means that informed student decision-making is of upmost importance. In response to the National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee's call for evidence to inform the inquiry into the revised Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, we have drawn on our quantitative data and insights and recent qualitative outputs. The data and examples used are specific to Level 3 and reflect on the 2017 entry cycle. At the time of writing the 2018 entry cycle is still live.

UCAS would be willing to expand on any points raised in this evidence and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee going forward.

The 2017 admissions cycle

In 2017, 699,850 students applied to higher education via UCAS, a decrease of 18,500 on 2016 (2.6 per cent), making this the second successive fall. Of these, 533,890 were accepted, a decrease of 1,290 (-0.2 per cent), making this the first decline since 2012, but still the second highest number on record. However, this decline in the number of applicants is against a backdrop of a declining 18 year old population.

There were 24,620 applicants from Wales, a decrease of 780 (-3 per cent). Acceptances of Welsh domiciled students mirrored the overall trend, with 20,665 students accepted (a decrease of 50 students; -0.2 per cent).

Entry rates are a good indication of higher education acceptances in a wider population context. The entry rate is the proportion of the population accepted onto an undergraduate higher education course through UCAS. The entry rate refers to

the cycle in which an applicant is accepted, and includes both acceptances for immediate entry into higher education, and those that were deferred until the next academic year.

In 2017, the UK 18 year old entry rate was 32.6 per cent, the highest on record. This is 0.7 percentage points higher than in 2016, meaning UK 18 year olds were 2.3 per cent more likely to enter HE through UCAS than in the previous cycle. The UK 18 year olds entry rate in 2017 was 7.8 percentage points higher than at the beginning of the reporting period in 2006, meaning they were 31 per cent more likely to enter HE this year, compared to 11 years ago.

After increasing each year since 2011, the entry rate for Wales fell by 0.1 percentage points to 29.4 per cent in 2017. This is a notable shift against the recent trend, but despite this, 18 year old entry rates in Wales are the second highest on record.

Applicants with the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate

In 2017, there were 5,890 applicants holding the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate (ASCC) alongside A levels. It should be noted that there may have been a number of applicants holding the ASCC with other qualifications in addition to the A level numbers, however the figures in this response focus on A levels as the largest cohort. Of these, 33 per cent applied holding the ASCC with two A levels, and 67 per cent applied holding the ASCC with three A levels. From these applicants, 5,465 were placed in higher education, with 32 per cent of those accepted holding two A levels alongside the ASCC, and 68 per cent holding the ASCC with three A levels.

Students holding the ASCC were accepted to HE providers (HEPs) across the UK, with the majority being placed at Welsh universities and colleges (53.8 per cent) followed by providers in England (45.5 per cent), and small numbers in Scotland (0.6 per cent) and Northern Ireland (0.1 per cent).

HEPs across the UK can be grouped based on the average levels of attainment of their UK 18 year old acceptances, summarised through UCAS Tariff points. Three groups are created, referred to as higher, medium and lower tariff providers, which each account for around a third of all UK 18 year old acceptances in recent cycles. Higher tariff providers are those which have accepted, on average, UK 18 year old applicants with the highest Tariff points in recent cycles, while lower tariff providers are those which have accepted those with the lowest. In 2017, 33.9 per cent of students with an ASCC alongside A levels were accepted to higher tariff providers, 37.2 per cent to medium Tariff and 28.8 per cent to lower.

UCAS qualification provision survey 2018

The [qualification provision survey 2018](#) is the latest in a series of qualification reform surveys from UCAS, designed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the

response to qualification reform across the UK, and to inform recommendations for UCAS, higher education providers, and schools and colleges.

Prior to 2018, the survey was focused on A level and AS level reform in England, with the scope broadening year-on-year to include not only AS and A level provision, but also GCSEs and vocational qualifications. For 2018, UCAS expanded the survey further, to incorporate a wider range of provision, and cover all four nations of the UK.

Between November 2017 and February 2018, UCAS issued a survey to over 4000 registered schools and colleges in the UK using its services, and the results of the survey cover the 2017 – 2019 teaching cohort of students. There were 626 responses to the survey, of which 464 were individual and analysable.

In Wales, 34 schools and colleges responded to the survey. The main findings in relation to qualification reform and the Welsh Baccalaureate were:

- 85% of respondents offer the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate. Of those respondents, 69% offer it alongside two A levels, and 24% alongside three.
- 69% felt that universities and colleges had a good to reasonable understanding of the Welsh Baccalaureate, with 3% feeling they have no understanding at all.
- 41% of centres have changed their qualification offering because of qualification reform.
- 88% of respondents felt that universities and colleges have a good to reasonable understanding of qualification reform in Wales.
- 74% felt informed when making decisions about reformed qualifications, and only 6% described themselves as 'not at all informed'.

The full report, along with comments from respondents regarding the teaching and wider understanding of the Welsh baccalaureate, can be found [here](#).

UCAS qualification information services

UCAS has taken a central role in disseminating intelligence regarding qualification reform to ensure that both the HE and secondary sectors have a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities that the changes present. In addition to survey work, and presenting and facilitating workshops at numerous events and conferences, UCAS produced and promoted a range of support materials for providers, advisers, and students to explain qualification reform and the impact on applying to higher education. These and a number of other publications and resources are freely available on our [qualification reform](#) and [applying to HE with reformed qualifications](#) web pages.

In addition, UCAS has produced a range of resources to support universities and colleges in making informed decisions about qualifications. For example, our

Qualification Information Profiles provide objective, comparable information about qualifications that admissions practitioners can use to inform their admissions decisions. They rely on a common format to provide a detailed overview of qualifications, and enable HE admissions staff to compare less familiar qualifications and programmes with ones that are more familiar. They include a range of information, such as size, grading, assessment, structure, and content, and accommodate a range of regulated UK and EU/international qualifications, including the ASCC. In addition, the ASCC has been allocated UCAS Tariff points and forms part of our Awarding Body Linkage (ABL¹) process.

UCAS continuously works with the secondary and HE sectors, as well as qualification regulators and awarding organisations. We would be happy to explore how the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Baccalaureate could be further supported, and the outcomes of any consultation be disseminated.

¹ Awarding organisations have an agreement to let UCAS have exam results before their publication date. This allows providers that have signed and agreed to the results embargo agreement, to make Confirmation decisions for applicants with pending exam results in time for publication day.