

More top universities now accept Welsh Baccalaureate

Mar 15 2007 [Abbie Wightwick](#), Western Mail

More universities are accepting the Welsh Baccalaureate in offers made to students this year.

Schools said all universities in Wales accepted the baccalaureate as an equivalent to an A-level, and that around half of universities in England now did as well.

Last year the Welsh Assembly Government warned pupils they should not rely on the new qualification to get into some top centres like Oxford.

But yesterday heads from the 31 schools piloting the qualification said the baccalaureate was 'gaining in credibility'.

Universities offering students places if they get three A-levels or two A-levels and the Welsh Bac this summer, include Oxford, Manchester, Birmingham, Exeter, Reading, Liverpool and Bath.

One student at St David's College in Cardiff has been offered a place to read medicine at Manchester with at least one A and one B in science at A-level and the Welsh Bac.

Another student from Pen-y-Dre High School in Merthyr Tydfil has been offered a place to study medicine at Cardiff with two A-levels and the bac.

St Andrews, Bristol and some Oxford colleges have told schools they will not accept the new qualification.

Oxford colleges which have accepted it include Brasenose and Mansfield, which have made offers to two St David's students in Wales to read geography if they get two A-levels and the Welsh Bac.

St David's College spokeswoman Catherine Grace said, 'The number of universities accepting the Welsh Baccalaureate as an equivalent to A-level is up on last year. There has been a move to accept it as a fully-valid qualification, probably because of the recognition from Ucas.'

Ucas, the university admissions body, has given the baccalaureate 120 points, the same as an A at A-level.

She said that fears that the baccalaureate would not get the best students into the top universities were groundless.

'These students generally do three A-levels anyway.

'Even if you are going to university you can still develop other skills. The baccalaureate is to be welcomed as a way to prepare people for employment whether or not they go to university. The essence is to gain a broader education and to develop confidence.'

John Williams, head of Pen-y-Dre, said more pupils were also opting to take the baccalaureate.

'Any educational change takes time to be accepted,' he said. 'All our evidence is that universities are accepting it more and more, not just as an add-on. That's increasing confidence in the qualification itself. We have 40 17-to 18-year-olds who are taking A-levels and completing their Welsh Baccalaureate portfolios at the moment. Last year the number was only 12.'

A further 45 schools and colleges across Wales will offer the Welsh Bac to 3,790 students from next September.

But Professor Alan Smithers of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Buckingham said, 'The value of a qualification is where it gets you. I can't see the Welsh Baccalaureate ever taking over from A-levels.'