

CORPORATE CAPABILITY STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2022



JANUARY 2018

Overview

Qualifications Wales was established in September 2015 and has successfully completed two years of operation. This plan sets out our priorities for continuing to develop Qualifications Wales as an efficient, effective and sustainable organisation over the next three to five years.

Our people make Qualifications Wales what it is, and salaries and staff development costs represents almost two thirds of our expenditure. Our priority is to recruit and develop people with the right skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours, and create an environment where they can thrive and grow. We also aim to foster strong and effective relationships with those we regulate, those we support, those we work alongside, and those who supply us with advice and services.

As a young organisation, we recognise that we need to continue to strengthen our reputation. We strive to take decisions that are balanced and evidence based. We listen to stakeholders and give out clear information. We want to continue to earn trust through robust management of our resources and effective and compliant corporate practices.

This strategic plan is focused on how we operate as a corporate body, with emphasis on how corporate services support our regulatory activities. It describes the five main areas of focus for corporate services and describes some of the challenges we face as a small organisation with a large and publicly important remit.

This document is supported by our strategies for IT, Procurement, Governance, Communications and Stakeholder Relations and Workforce Development.



Our Values

Our work is underpinned by our values:

- **Collaborative** in the way that we work
- **Thoughtful** in the approaches we take
- **Positive** in our outlook
- **Learning** from experience and others

thoughtful

collaborative

positive

learning

Our Approach to Corporate Services

Our corporate functions have a range of responsibilities to the organisation. They lead the selection of people and assets and help to develop capability. They sit at the heart of our governance arrangements, ensuring compliance with legislation and best practice. They ensure that we meet the requirements of Managing Welsh Public Money. They also have a role to challenge us to think how best to maximise long term value for money. In doing so they protect our reputation. At the same time, it is important that they fully support staff in regulatory roles to focus on delivery, by providing processes and policies that are simple to understand and easy to follow, and by responding quickly to queries and issues.

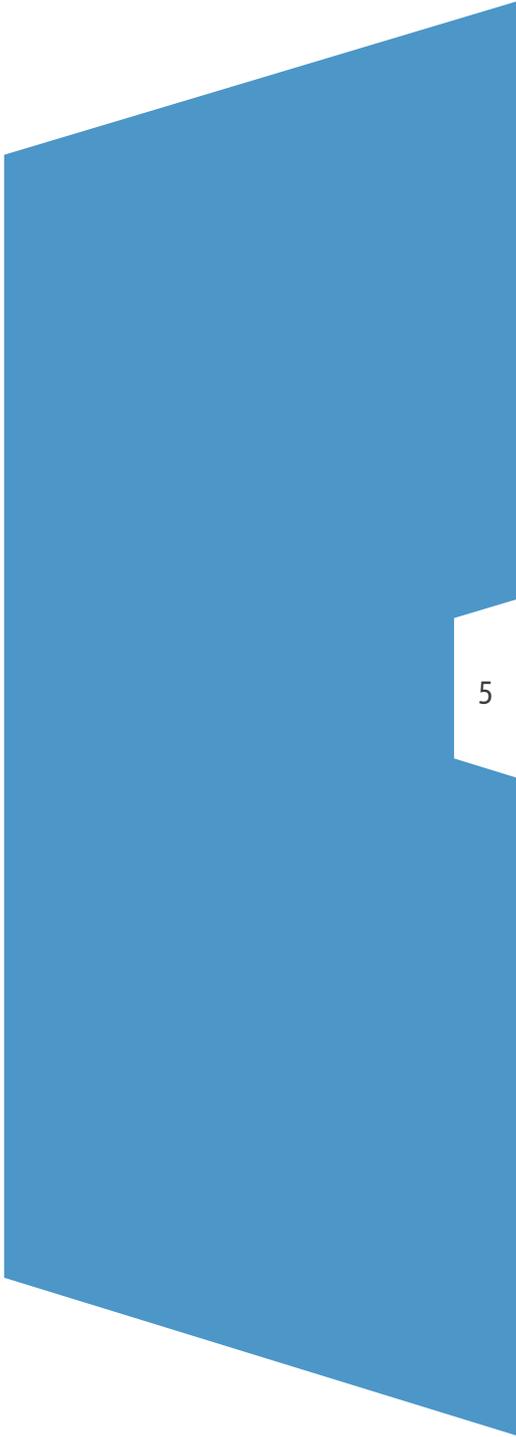
We have therefore invested in professionals who can balance the need for strong controls with the need to respond quickly and without being overly bureaucratic. We believe that staff in our corporate functions should

understand our duties and powers and how we want to regulate – and be able to provide input from their professional expertise where relevant. We also believe in teamwork and recognise that, as a small organisation, specialist staff will need to be flexible and support each other. We look outward and collaborate with other public bodies so that we all benefit from sharing information and expertise.

We aim to learn from experience. Our corporate functions regularly undertake forms of external assurance (including internal and external audit, third party accreditation, peer review, staff surveys and external benchmarking). We use feedback to continue to develop capabilities.



Finance and Corporate Services



Focus areas

This Plan describes our Focus areas:

- Enabling our regulatory work
- Making the most of our resources
- Maintaining and using professional skills
- Effective and efficient governance
- Evaluation and continuous Improvement

Challenges

It also describes the challenges that we face:

- Operating as a small organisation
- The medium term financial outlook
- Managing changes to legislation, regulation or policy
- Managing risks to our reputation

Focus area 1

Enabling our regulatory work

We want our regulatory staff to be supported in their work. We have set out to fulfil our legal obligations and manage public money with probity, without creating bureaucratic processes that delay action or limit our effectiveness.

This means our corporate teams creating clear policies and processes that are enabling, easy to follow and make best use of technology. It means putting in the right level of controls and separation, so that we have the safeguards that we need but can also be agile. We encourage our corporate staff to be accessible and respond quickly to queries.

Critically, we train and support regulatory staff, particularly line managers and budget holders, so that they are confident in the corporate responsibilities that are delegated to them.

Looking ahead, we will:

- continually review our policies and procedures, and listen to feedback
- undertake regular audit and third party assurance where appropriate
- provide regular opportunities for regulatory teams to receive training and guidance
- provide prompt access to corporate staff to respond to queries
- avoid bottlenecks by helping regulatory teams to plan ahead for work that involves significant corporate staff input
- ensure the organisation is transparent about how decisions are taken.

Focus area 2

Making the most of our resources

Qualifications Wales' resources include its people, its procurement or grant expenditure and its physical assets. These assets include our offices, our IT infrastructure, office software and bespoke systems.

Our aim is to maximise the value that we obtain from these resources. When we procure or issue grants we ensure that our processes allow our suppliers or grant recipients to respond effectively. We also collaborate where appropriate with other bodies to avoid duplicating effort, and we consider the cost/benefit of our expenditure decisions.

Looking ahead, we will:

- Produce an annual business plan and budget allocation, in line with our longer-term strategies and medium term financial plan
- Produce clear financial reports and forecasts
- Develop and deliver our procurement strategy
- Maintain clear processes for awarding contracts and grants, and manage the delivery of outcomes
- Ensure we communicate regularly and clearly with our stakeholders and the general public.

We aim to provide a working environment that supports agile working. This means IT and people policies that are flexible, and an office space that is welcoming and encourages collaborative working.

Learning is a core value and we aim to develop all our staff to grow in knowledge, skills and confidence.

Looking ahead, we will:

- Look after the well-being and health and safety of our staff
- Help staff to maximise their potential through on-going learning and development
- Deliver our IT strategy to build upon our infrastructure, providing IT equipment that allows people to work seamlessly in different locations
- Train staff to manage information security risks and be our first point of defence
- Manage and maintain our office to support staff needs
- Explore options to collaborate with other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies and provide shared corporate services if this makes us more efficient
- Enhance the functionality of QiW (our regulatory database) to increase value from our investment
- Ensure we are making the most of the functionality of our other software including our CRM and HR systems.

Focus area 3

Maintaining, developing and using professional skills

We recognise the benefit of investing in professional specialist staff. We expect our corporate staff to maintain Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through training, best practice events, peer networking and by reviewing changes in legislation.

We also empower corporate staff to use their professional skills to deliver our vision for corporate services and to support our regulatory functions. We encourage corporate staff to offer advice to regulatory staff on the review of awarding body operations where this includes functions that they deliver – for example in IT, governance and financial stability and resilience.

Looking ahead, we will:

- Support our corporate staff to be members of professional institutes and relevant public-sector groups
- Invest in Continuous Professional Development
- Support Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies professional networking events
- Support regulatory activities - including commissioning qualifications, awarding body reviews, and the recognition of awarding bodies.

Focus area 4

Effective and efficient governance

Good governance is at the heart of ensuring that our organisation is well run, competent, compliant, transparent and has impact. We recognise the Nolan principles for those holding public office – i.e. ‘selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership’ and build these into our culture and behaviours.

We aim to have the right systems and processes in place that are known and understood by our staff, and are underpinned by our values and effective behaviours. This helps us ensure compliance, effective decision making and efficient delivery of our work.

We want to create an environment where our staff are empowered and sufficiently informed to carry out their work with a good understanding of our system of control, their roles and responsibilities and their delegated authorities.

Looking ahead, we will:

- Ensure our staff know and understand our system of control and are able to maintain our governance standards within their daily work
- Develop and implement a robust governance assurance framework, ensuring legal and ethical compliance
- Maintain and further develop our systems and processes for risk management and internal control
- Deliver high quality Board and committee arrangements, including an annual Board work programme and development plan
- Help the organisation to manage its information and records effectively
- Help the organisation to take evidence-based decisions
- Ensure compliance with relevant standards and legislation including the Welsh Language standards 2011, the Equality Act 2010 and the Future Generations Act 2015
- Ensure effective communication and engagement with the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales.

Focus area 5

Evaluation and continuous improvement

We recognise that continuous improvement relies upon effective performance measurement, evaluation and learning.

We will:

- Run an annual employee survey and help the organisation to respond to issues with genuine actions
- Ensure that each corporate function sets up ways to measure on-going performance that include feedback and appropriate metrics and third-party assurance/audit
- Benchmark our functions as appropriate to ensure that corporate services represent value for money
- Help the organisation to set and measure objectives and monitor delivery of the annual business plan.
- Help the organisation to keep in mind opportunities to make good use of developments in digital technologies.

Challenge 1

Operating as a small organisation

Qualifications Wales is an organisation of less than 100 staff. One of the challenges of a small organisation is to fulfil the expectations placed on all public bodies, while keeping the corporate function to a size that is proportionate. Along with many similar sized bodies, we are over-reliant on individual specialists and cannot deliver full succession planning through internal development. While we remain open to looking at efficient ways of working, including supporting other bodies, we consider it critical that the core corporate functions are delivered on-site by our own staff since they have such a significant effect on our corporate culture.

We address the challenges of being small by good communication, allowing staff to provide some cover or support across functions, and by business continuity arrangements that allow us to deal with short term and longer-term risks. We also work collaboratively with other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies to support each other where appropriate.

Challenge 2

The medium term financial outlook

We receive an annual grant allocation and do not have certainty over future funding levels. We are conscious that there are many pressures on public funding and that we may have less available to us in the future. We also face an increase to our staff costs beyond inflation, as the majority of our staff move from entry pay levels to the target level of each band via annual incremental rises.

We address this by having a clear understanding of how our activities drive our costs. We use this understanding to carry out a rolling three-year medium-term finance plan, based on our long term strategic objectives, that allows us to plan for a series of funding scenarios. Each year we consider our budget needs across the organisation from scratch and where we experience staff turnover we review every post before recruiting.

Challenge 3

Managing changes to legislation, regulation or policy

Most Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies are listed in any legislation or regulations that apply to Welsh Government. Even when not listed we are expected to follow the principles. Often, regulations, statutory guidance or Welsh Government policies are aimed at larger organisations who provide services directly to the public, such as Local Authorities or the NHS. Sometimes these regulations are harder for smaller specialist organisations to implement.

We take each relevant regulation, guidance or policy and consider how we can adopt the provisions in an efficient and meaningful way. We try to look at the intention behind the requirements and then develop and deliver appropriate action plans.

Challenge 4

Managing risks to our reputation

Qualifications Wales has been the qualifications regulator for Wales for two years. As a relatively new organisation with an important public role, we cannot afford to make mistakes and must build and maintain our reputation. As we are small, our decisions, expenditure, and policies are scrutinised in detail. We need to show that our decision making is evidence based, transparent and compliant.

We maintain a high level of management oversight of decisions and public communication. We engage with stakeholders to help us develop our thinking and we employ a range of communication channels to provide clear information for our partners in the education and employment sectors, the general public and our own staff. By communicating our role consistently and clearly we aim to increase public understanding of the qualification system in Wales and thereby support public confidence.



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