

HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS GUIDE

Revised March 2018

Contents

Introduction	5
What are the main changes to qualifications in Wales?	6
The Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc)	7
Skills Challenge Certificate	8
Offer making – Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate	9
GCSE	10
GCSE and grading	11
Vocational qualifications	12
Signposting to specifications and other resources	13
Working with Higher Education	13
Frequently asked questions	14
GCSEs in mathematics	14
Welsh Bacc	15
About Qualifications Wales	16



Introduction

Qualifications in the UK are changing, with reforms taking place in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

The aim of this publication is to explain the changes to qualifications in Wales.

The new, reformed general qualifications in Wales were rolled out over a period of three years between 2015 and 2017. The final set of the new GCSEs and A levels will be awarded and certificated in 2019.



What are the main changes to qualifications in Wales?

A level

AS and A level qualifications in Wales have been reformed. The new qualifications have been introduced in three waves between 2015 and 2017. They are the same size, rigour and portability as those in England and Northern Ireland.

The main points to note about the new qualifications are that:

- the content requirements have been updated and remain very similar to the AS and A levels being reformed in England;
- the AS qualification continues to contribute to the overall A level (whereas in England, the AS is now decoupled from the A level);
- the AS level assessments contribute to 40% of the A level;
- where appropriate for the subject, practical skills are assessed and count towards the final grade;
- all A levels continue to be unitised, but assessments are now offered during the summer examination series only. January assessment opportunities have been discontinued (as in Northern Ireland and England);
- candidates may re-sit each unit once only prior to certification for the qualification, with the better outcome contributing to the overall grade;
- candidates may retake the whole qualification more than once.

In subjects where there is no Wales-specific A level, state-funded learners can choose from the A levels that have been reformed for England, as long as they have been designated by Qualifications Wales as eligible for use on publicly funded learning programmes in Wales.

More information about the reforms in Wales, England and Northern Ireland can be found at www.qualificationswales.org

TIP FOR HE

- Although there are some differences between A levels in Wales and England, for the purposes of making offers, Higher Education Providers (HEPs) should view them as interchangeable.
- In low take-up subjects, some learners in Wales may be taking A levels developed for England.

The Welsh Baccalaureate

The revised Welsh Baccalaureate was introduced in September 2015. It is considerably different from the version previously offered.

From 2017, universities will see a significant rise in the number of applicants with the Welsh Baccalaureate.

At the heart of the Welsh Baccalaureate is the Skills Challenge Certificate, a new and innovative skills-based qualification. The Skills Challenge Certificate assesses skills including literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving, planning and organisation, creativity and innovation and personal effectiveness. The Skills Challenge Certificate is the same size as an A level (360 guided learning hours) and is graded A* to E.

Along with the Skills Challenge Certificate, the Welsh Baccalaureate also includes:

- i) a minimum of two level 3 qualifications (e.g. A levels);*
- ii) GCSE English or Welsh Language and GCSE Maths or Maths - Numeracy.*

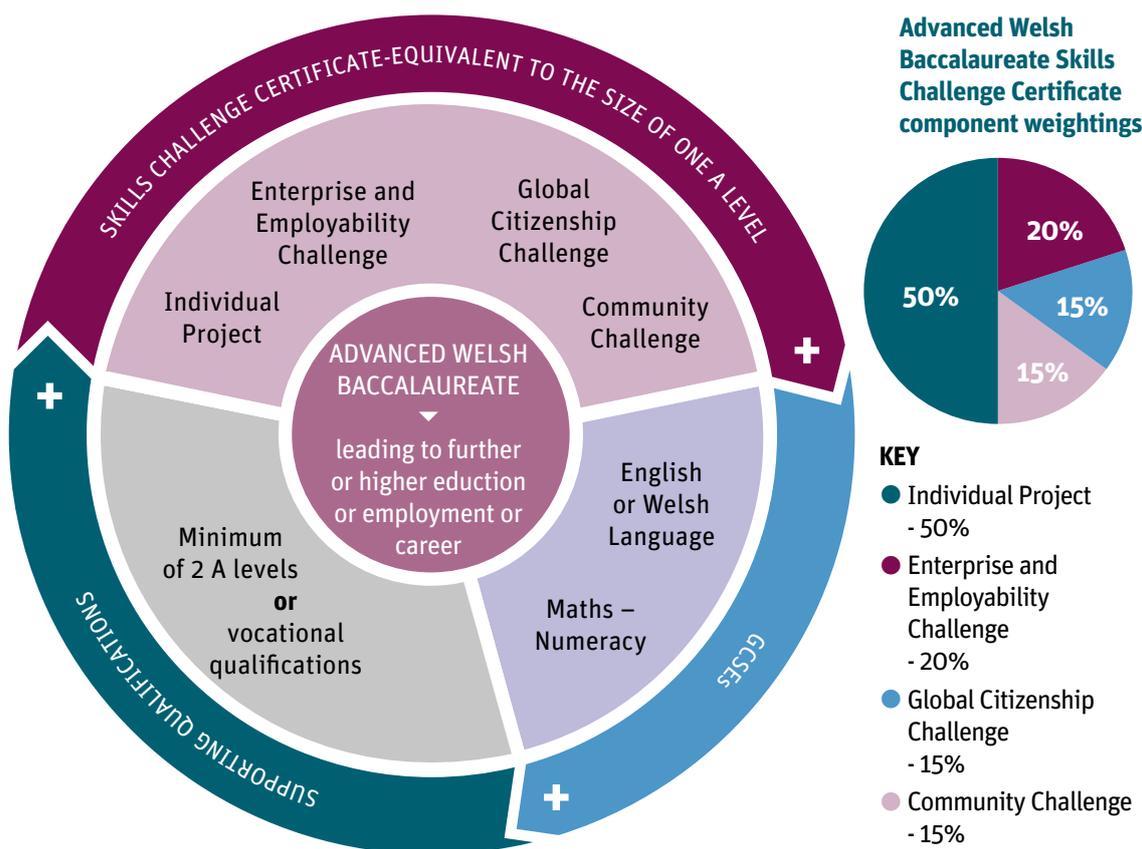
It is expected that most learners intending to progress to HE will be taking two or more A levels, or equivalent, alongside the Skills Challenge Certificate.



TIP FOR HE

- Most applicants from Wales will be taking the Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate, which includes the Skills Challenge Certificate qualification.
- The Skills Challenge Certificate is the same size as an A level and has the same grading structure.
- It attracts the same UCAS tariff points as an A level for each grade.

BREAKDOWN OF THE NEW ADVANCED WELSH BACCALAUREATE



Skills Challenge Certificate

Skills Challenge Certificate components				
	Individual project (50%)	Challenges	Global Citizenship (15%)	Community (15%)
<i>Purpose</i>	To develop learners' research skills	Enterprise and Employability (20%) 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
<i>Emphasis</i>	Future educational or careers aspirations	To develop the 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
<i>Skills demonstrated</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research skills and knowledge • high level of independent study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numeracy • digital literacy • creativity and innovation • personal effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy • critical thinking • problem-solving • creativity and innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning and organisation • personal effectiveness
<i>Assessment</i>	Extended written account or artefact/ product supported by written evidence	Challenge brief	Challenge brief	Challenge brief

Offer making – Advanced Welsh Bacculaureate

Offers can be framed in terms of the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate (graded A* to E), which has the same tariff points as an A level (for further information, please see www.ucas.com). A typical offer might include, for example, a grade B in the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate, B in A level French, and C in A level History.

Typical offers might be as follows:

Course applied for	Qualifications taken	Offer
Sports Management	A level English Literature A level History A level PE Advanced Welsh Bacculaureate	Grades ABB from 3 A levels or Grades AB from 2 A levels + grade A in Welsh Bacculaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate
International Management	A level Business Studies A level Economics A level Mathematics Advanced Welsh Bacculaureate	Grades AAB from 3 A levels or Grades AA from 2 A levels + grade B in Welsh Bacculaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate or Grades AB from 2 A levels + grade A in Welsh Bacculaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate
International Relations and Politics	A level Biology A level History A level Physical Education Advanced Welsh Bacculaureate	Grades AAB from 3 A levels or Grades ABBB from any combination of 3 A levels + Welsh Bacculaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate but must include A level Biology and History



GCSE

GCSEs have been reformed in Wales. The main features of reformed GCSEs in Wales are:

- They continue to be graded A* to G.
- Reformed GCSEs have more exam-based assessment than their predecessors; however, they include non-exam assessment where it is appropriate to assess knowledge, understanding and skills that are intrinsic to the subject.
- Some are linear, others are modular.
- There are two mathematics qualifications: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy. The two qualifications are the same size, and offer the same demand. GCSE Maths – Numeracy assesses the mathematics that learners will need in their everyday lives, in the world of work, and in other general curriculum areas. GCSE Mathematics extends to aspects of mathematics such as algebra, geometry and probability, that are needed for progression to scientific, technical or further mathematical study. For information, please see the FAQs on page 14.

In some low take-up subjects, GCSEs are being reformed for England, but not for Wales. In subjects where there is no Wales-specific GCSE, state-funded learners will be able to choose from the GCSEs that have been reformed for England.

These qualifications are designed to meet requirements set by Ofqual, the qualifications regulator for England, and are graded on a scale of 9 to 1, not A* to G.

TIP FOR HE

- Universities and colleges need to be mindful of the different GCSE grading scales operating across Wales, England and Northern Ireland when communicating their entry requirements. Reformed GCSEs are being phased in across different subjects over several years. During this transition period, there will be a mixed economy of A* to G and 9 to 1 grades operating in England. In Wales, learners studying some low take-up subjects will take reformed GCSEs that have been developed for England, which means they will have a mixture of lettered and numerical grades.

GCSE and grading

The reformed GCSEs in Wales retain the grading scale of A* to G. However, GCSEs in England and Northern Ireland have adopted different grading scales. Therefore, there will be different grading scales for GCSEs across Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

No precise comparison can be made between the current alphabetical grading scale and the revised numerical scale in England, as there is no direct equivalence between the two grading scales. It is not possible, for example, to say that a grade B is precisely equivalent to a grade 5 or a grade 6. Some broad comparisons can be drawn, however, as we explain below.

Ofqual has been clear that it expects the new GCSEs in England to be accessible to the same range of candidate ability as the legacy qualifications. It expects broadly the same proportion of learners that achieved a grade C and above in any subject in the old qualifications to achieve a grade 4 and above in the new ones. The proportion of candidates achieving grades 9 to 7 will broadly equate to those who would have achieved grades A* to A. Fewer grade 9s will be awarded than A*s are currently.

For more information, please see www.ofqual.gov.uk

GCSE grading structures from 2017

England	Wales
9	A*
8	
7	A
6	B
5	
4	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
	G
U	U

Vocational qualifications

There are a wide range of valuable and challenging vocational qualifications taken by learners at 14-19. Many vocational qualifications are offered on a three-country basis (i.e. Wales, England and Northern Ireland).

Qualifications Wales is adopting a long-term strategic approach to the review and reform of vocational qualifications in Wales through our programme of sector reviews. In July 2016, we reported on our first review of qualifications in the Health and Social Care (including Child care) sector and we have subsequently commissioned the development of new qualifications, at levels 1 to 5, for first teaching from September 2019. The present qualifications will continue until that time.

In February 2018, we reported on our second review of qualifications in Construction and the Built Environment and we intend to publish our third review – on qualifications in the ICT sector – at the end of 2018. In each sector review we engage extensively with employers, learning providers and learners to assess the effectiveness of the current qualifications and the underpinning system.

In the meantime, we continue to accept qualifications into the Welsh qualifications system if there is evidence of employer support, relevance to Welsh learners, learner demand and age appropriateness. Therefore, most vocational qualifications in Wales are currently identical to those awarded elsewhere in the UK.



Signposting to specifications and other resources

A full list of qualifications that are eligible for use on publicly funded programmes of learning for 14- to 19-year-olds in Wales can be found on our database, www.qiw.wales

A levels and GCSEs reformed specifically for Wales are only delivered by WJEC. Specifications and further information on GCSEs and A levels for Wales and the Welsh Baccalaureate can be found at www.wjec.co.uk

More information on the changes to A levels and GCSEs in Wales can be found on the Qualifications Wales website. This includes a statement from the qualifications regulators on the key similarities and differences between Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

UCAS has extensive and very useful resources on qualification reform across the UK; for further information, please see www.ucas.com

Working with higher education

Qualifications Wales involves Higher Education Providers in the commissioning and design of qualifications, and consults extensively with higher education, as well as other stakeholders. Given that HEPs are major consumers of the qualifications that we regulate, we are keen to maintain an active dialogue wherever possible.



Frequently asked questions

The following FAQs are based on queries from HEPs and will be particularly useful for admissions practitioners:

GCSEs in mathematics

Q: Is GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy a double award?

A: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy are two separate qualifications. They are significantly different from the previous GCSE Mathematics qualifications, and each other, with each assessing different content and skills. The vast majority of learners in Wales will take both.

Q: Are GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics- Numeracy half GCSEs?

A: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy are both full GCSEs, of the same size and demand.

Q: Can someone who passes GCSE Mathematics be expected to pass GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy easily?

A: Not necessarily; the assessment focus and contexts are different and applicants may do better in GCSE Mathematics than in GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy or vice versa.

Q: Will learners from Wales be expected to achieve both GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy?

A: Most learners are expected to take both GCSEs, especially those who are likely to go on to higher education.

Q: Which of the new GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy qualifications should we require for entry to courses?

A: This is likely to vary from course to course. Both new GCSEs are of equal demand and rigour. GCSE in Mathematics-Numeracy assesses the mathematics that learners will need in their everyday lives, in the world of work, and in other general curriculum areas. GCSE Mathematics, on the other hand, extends to aspects of mathematics needed for progression to scientific, technical or further mathematical study. The differences mean that not every candidate will get the same grade on both qualifications.

Q: We need a pass in GCSE Mathematics to fulfil our general minimum requirement for any degree scheme as evidence of general academic attainment and breadth; which GCSE Mathematics should we stipulate?

A: Our advice is that either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy is equally acceptable for this general purpose.

Q: We run very competitive courses and look for a certain specified number of very high grades, e.g. A* at GCSE to pre-screen applicants for further consideration. Which GCSE Mathematics should I count?

A: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy are separate GCSEs with their own specifications and focus of assessment. They are comparable in demand and rigour, so either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy should count.

Q: What should be the requirement for applicants for Science, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM subjects)?

A: Currently, many courses for STEM subjects require applicants to have gained a grade C or higher in GCSE Mathematics in addition to the required A levels.

Given its specific focus on the mathematics required for progression to scientific, technical or further mathematical study, we suggest that satisfactory completion of the GCSE Mathematics qualification alone would be sufficient, in combination with the appropriate A levels, or other qualifications, to meet course requirements.

Q: We currently require GCSE Mathematics for progression to Social Sciences, e.g. Accounting, Economics, Psychology. Which GCSE Mathematics should I stipulate for applicants from Wales for these subjects?

A: Our advice is that there would be sufficient knowledge of relevant mathematical techniques and assurance of mathematical skills in either of the new mathematics GCSEs to meet the progression needs of these subjects.

We would urge you to look at the specifications for both GCSEs to assist your decisions, but we recommend that you frame offers to include either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy.

Q: What GCSE Mathematics requirements are needed for Initial Teacher Education and Training in Wales?

A: The Welsh Government has decided that the requirement for a grade B in Mathematics to enter ITET in Wales will continue to apply and will be satisfied by attainment of grade B in either GCSE Mathematics or Mathematics-Numeracy.

Q: Which GCSE will applicants need to fulfil the numeracy requirement of the Nursing and Midwifery Council in Wales for entry to their regulated degree schemes?

A: A grade A* to C in either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy would meet the evidence requirements for numeracy.

For further details of the content and structure of the new mathematics GCSEs, please see the specifications for both GCSEs on WJEC's website at www.wjec.co.uk

Welsh Baccalaureate

Q: Is the Welsh Baccalaureate the same as the English Baccalaureate or the International Baccalaureate?

A: The Welsh Baccalaureate is entirely different from the English Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, French Baccalaureate or any other Baccalaureate. Please do not bracket them together as similar in your entry requirements.

Q: Is the Welsh Baccalaureate an alternative qualification to A levels in Wales?

A: All learners in Wales are expected to study the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate alongside their A levels or equivalent qualifications.

Q: Is the Welsh Baccalaureate only available in Welsh?

A: The Welsh Baccalaureate can be studied through the medium of either English or Welsh.

About Qualifications Wales

Who are we?

Qualifications Wales is the independent regulator of non-degree qualifications in Wales. Established through the Qualifications Wales Act 2015, we are a Welsh Government Sponsored Body but are accountable, through our annual report, to the National Assembly for Wales. This gives us independence from government.

What do we do, and how?

We work on behalf of learners, to make sure that qualifications, and the qualification system in Wales, are suitable for the needs of learners in Wales, and we promote public confidence in them.

We do this by:

- recognising awarding bodies to offer regulated qualifications;
- identifying qualifications that are eligible for public funding;
- monitoring awarding bodies to make sure they operate fairly and consistently and meet our requirements;
- reviewing qualifications that are already in the system;
- designing new qualification requirements and commissioning awarding bodies to help develop new qualifications for Wales;
- conducting research to inform our regulatory approach.

More information

For further details on our work, please visit www.qualificationswales.org



Q2 Building,
Pencarn Lane,
Imperial Park,
Newport
NP10 8AR

☎ 01633 373 222