



REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REVISED ESSENTIAL SKILLS QUALIFICATIONS

December 2017

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1. Executive summary

The Essential Skills Wales suite of qualifications was substantially revised by Welsh Government following the publication of their 'Review of Qualifications for 14-19-year-olds in Wales' in 2012, which recommended that a new suite of Essential Skills qualifications should be developed with more robust assessment methods. Four awarding bodies developed the revised qualifications that were approved by Welsh Government for teaching from September 2015.

Qualifications Wales monitored the implementation of the revised qualifications and, in April 2016, we identified aspects of the qualifications that required close and in some cases, immediate attention. We ensured that the awarding bodies took action to overcome the urgent concerns and made the decision that we would review the implementation of the qualifications in early 2017.

From April to June 2017, we conducted an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement to gather the views of learners, centres and awarding bodies about the revised qualifications. We interviewed representatives from the four awarding bodies offering the qualifications and key personnel at 36 centres delivering the qualifications. We also conducted a learner survey, which received over 2000 responses.

Several positive findings emerged from our review, including:

- Centres perceive that the revised qualifications are more rigorous and robust than their predecessors;
- Many centres reported that they have overcome a number of the challenges that they initially faced;
- The majority of centres are delivering the qualifications using qualified Essential Skills practitioners, which was not common practice for the legacy qualifications; and
- Awarding bodies are sharing expertise and good practice with each other.

However, our review identified that the implementation of the revised qualifications has been challenging for learners, centres and awarding bodies. These challenges included:

- The design principles being published later than expected and subjected to further unplanned changes which put initial pressure on the awarding bodies;
- The collaborative approach between awarding bodies leading to assessments taking longer than expected to be developed; and
- The delay in the availability of tasks and tests proving challenging for centres and learners.

Our review also identified a number of current issues, concerns and challenges. These are:

- The collaborative approach taken by the awarding bodies would benefit from more strategic input from senior staff within the awarding bodies;
- Centres and learners feel that some of the current controlled tasks are not contextually relevant;
- Centres and learners perceive that some of the current controlled tasks are unclear;
- Centres perceive that some of the current mark schemes are unclear and/or inconsistent with the controlled tasks;
- Centres are frustrated that learners are required to re-sit the whole controlled task if they fail one element;
- It is challenging for centres to adhere to the eight-week rule for the completion of controlled tasks;
- Centres and learners feel that the time allocated to complete some confirmatory tests is insufficient;
- There are fewer assessments available in Welsh than in English, and these were not released at the same time as the English versions; and
- Work based learning providers offering apprenticeships, and their learners, are facing many other challenges that are outside our regulatory powers, including:
 - Apprenticeship providers' view that insufficient funding is available for the delivery of Essential Skills qualifications within apprenticeships;
 - The limited time that apprenticeship providers allocate to teach and assess Essential Skills qualifications;
 - The challenge of completing all the qualifications that are required within apprenticeship frameworks;
 - Some learners are required to complete Essential Skills qualifications at a significantly higher level than their initially assessed level; and
 - It is challenging for learners to be released by their employers.

There is a prevalent view that the revised qualifications are more robust and rigorous than their predecessors and widespread support for the efforts to strengthen their design and assessment. However, the implementation of the qualifications has been challenging for learners, centres and awarding bodies, and it is evident that there are certain aspects of the qualifications that require attention both in the short term and the longer term. Our actions aim to address the concerns identified by this review and support the continued implementation of the revised Essential Skills qualifications for the benefit of learners in Wales.

2. Action we will take

		To be completed by
1	We will set up an Essential Skills Oversight Board. Membership of this Board will include Qualifications Wales, senior representatives from the four awarding bodies offering the qualifications, and key stakeholders. The Board will oversee actions 2-8 listed below and have oversight of the strategic direction of Essential Skills qualifications moving forward.	31 January 2018
2	We will develop, in collaboration with the awarding bodies, guidance for centres to support the development of centre specific controlled tasks and mark schemes.	1 August 2018
3	We will require the awarding bodies to put in place a clear and efficient process for quality assuring and approving centre developed controlled tasks and mark schemes.	1 August 2018
4	We will require the awarding bodies to gather feedback from centres on the clarity and consistency of all available controlled tasks and supporting mark schemes. We will require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of the action that they have taken, including any amendments or changes that they have made following feedback from centres.	1 August 2018
5	We will amend the Essential Skills Design Principles to allow partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three. We will then require the awarding bodies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) separate the presentation element (part 3) of the controlled tasks and develop a consistent process for implementing partial re-sits; and b) make available the opportunity for partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three. 	31 January 2018 31 March 2018 1 August 2018
6	We will amend the Essential Skills Design Principles to clearly state that the eight-week period for the completion of controlled tasks does not include academic holiday periods	31 January 2018

	and valid learner absence. We will require the awarding bodies to amend their qualification specifications and guidance documents accordingly and communicate these changes to centres.	
7	We will require the awarding bodies to analyse the confirmatory test data to identify whether any confirmatory tests require a time extension and what appropriate extension is required. We will require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of their analysis including a rationale for any changes they propose.	31 March 2018
8	We will require the awarding bodies to identify with centres the demand, including likely future demand, for Welsh language tasks and tests. We will require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of the action they have taken and how they are meeting any current and likely future demand.	31 March 2018
9	We will review the assessment model for the Essential Skills qualifications (which have an operational end date of 2020) and make updated versions available for first teaching from September 2020. This update will aim to address the remaining concerns and ensure that the qualifications and their assessments continue to be valid and reliable, whilst also addressing their manageability in order to meet, more fully, the reasonable needs of learners in Wales.	First teaching September 2020 – revised specifications to be with centres with sufficient time to implement changes.

3. Background

In 2012, the Welsh Government published their findings following their review of qualifications available for 14-19-year-olds in Wales¹, which recommended a review of the content and assessment of Essential Skills qualifications. The report recommended that a new suite of Essential Skills qualifications should be developed with 'more robust, consistent and reliable assessment methods, and a greater proportion of externality'. This led to the development of revised Essential Skills qualifications in:

- Essential Application of Number Skills (Level 1 – Level 3)
- Essential Communication Skills (Level 1 – Level 3)
- Essential Digital Literacy Skills (Entry level 1 – Level 3)
- Essential Employability Skills (Entry level 3 – Level 3)

These qualifications, combined with the entry level qualifications in Application of Number and Communication that were not revised, form the new suite of Essential Skills qualifications. Four awarding bodies (Agorod Cymru, City & Guilds, Pearson Education, and WJEC) worked with the Welsh Government to develop the content of the revised qualifications and subsequently the awarding bodies worked collaboratively to develop, quality assure, standardise and approve the assessments.

The revised qualifications, introduced for teaching from September 2015, are considerably different to their predecessors, most notably in the way that they are assessed. The revised qualifications are assessed via a controlled task and confirmatory test², or a controlled task and structured discussion³, in place of an internally-assessed portfolio that was used in the legacy qualifications. These changes have presented some challenges for learners, centres and awarding bodies.

Qualifications Wales monitored the implementation of the revised qualifications and, in April 2016, we identified aspects of the qualifications that required close and in some cases, immediate attention. We identified issues including:

- Limited availability of controlled tasks;
- A delay in the availability of confirmatory tests; and
- No Welsh language confirmatory tests.

¹ [Review of Qualifications for 14-19-year-olds in Wales.](#)

² Essential Application of Number Skills (Level 1-Level 3) and Essential Communication Skills (Level 1-Level 3).

³ Essential Digital Literacy Skills (Entry level 1-Level 3) and Essential Employability Skills (Entry level 3-Level 3).

We ensured that the awarding bodies took action to overcome the urgent concerns and made the decision that we would review the implementation of the qualifications in early 2017.

This report outlines how we conducted the review, our findings, and the actions that we will take following the review.

4. Aims and objectives

The aim of our review was to identify and assess the concerns of stakeholders and propose actions to address the valid concerns. As entry level qualifications in Application of Number and Communication were not revised in 2015, the review focussed on the revised Essential Skills qualifications.

The objectives of the review were to:

- Gather the views of learners and identify the challenges that they are facing when studying the revised qualifications;
- Gather the views of centres and identify the challenges they are facing when teaching and assessing the revised qualifications;
- Gather the views of awarding body representatives and identify the challenges they have faced when implementing the revised qualifications;
- Critically assess the validity of the identified issues, concerns and challenges; and
- Propose actions to support the continued and successful implementation of the qualifications.

5. Approach

The focus of this review was on stakeholder engagement and gathering the views of learners, centres and awarding bodies about the revised Essential Skills qualifications. We focused on triangulating and corroborating concerns and, where possible, ascertaining their root causes. Our approach had three strands; awarding body interviews, centre interviews and a learner survey.

5.1 Awarding body interviews

Firstly, we interviewed representatives from the four awarding bodies during the week commencing 3 April 2017. We conducted semi-structured interviews with operational and senior staff at the awarding bodies. Our interview questions were designed to gain a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the

revised qualifications and the challenges that awarding bodies have faced when implementing the qualifications. Our interview questions covered:

- The qualification design process;
- Qualification content, structure and assessment methods;
- The design and development of assessments;
- The collaborative work between awarding bodies;
- Support, continual professional development and training offered to centres;
- Stakeholder feedback;
- Their views on the key concerns identified through our monitoring, including the eight-week rule, partial re-sits and the perceived lack of sector-specific controlled tasks;
- Their relationship with Qualifications Wales;
- Their views on the future direction of Essential Skills qualifications; and
- Their views on the upcoming review.

The interview questions are included in annex A. With consent, interviews were recorded to permit full responses to be captured.

5.2 Centre interviews

Between April and June 2017, a team of Qualifications Wales staff conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 centres who offer the revised qualifications. We interviewed 21 work based learning providers, 11 further education colleges, two prisons, and two adult community learning centres. We selected a sample that broadly represented the types of centres offering the qualifications based on sector, geographical area and awarding body. Centres ranged considerably in size, from further education colleges with a few thousand Essential Skills learners to a prison with under 20 Essential Skills learners. We met with a range of centre representatives including teachers, assessors, internal quality assurers, heads of department, quality managers and senior managers. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face but we also conducted three interviews by video conference and three by telephone. Interview questions were designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of centre perceptions about the qualifications and identify the challenges they have faced when teaching and assessing the qualifications. Our interview questions covered:

- Their approach to teaching and assessing the qualifications, including the number of hours that they allocate to teach and assess the qualifications;
- The experience and competence of the staff they use to teach and assess the qualifications;

- The strengths and weaknesses of the controlled task, confirmatory test and structured discussion and any challenges they have faced when assessing learners;
- Welsh and bilingual assessment;
- The support they have received to teach and assess the qualifications; and
- Feedback they have received from learners.

The interview questions are included in annex B. With consent, interviews were recorded to permit full responses to be captured.

5.3 Learner survey

In April 2017, we launched a learner survey for a five-week period and we received 2359 responses⁴. The purpose of the survey was to gain a snapshot of learner opinions and perceptions about the qualifications and to identify the challenges they have faced when studying the qualifications. The sample was self-selecting as we made the survey available to learners via our website⁵ and publicised its availability to learners, centres and key stakeholders. The survey asked learners:

- If they had enough time to learn the required skills to complete the assessments;
- Their views about the controlled task, confirmatory test, and structured discussion (if applicable);
- If they preferred to take their assessment in Welsh, and if so, if they had been given the opportunity to do so; and
- If anything about the qualifications had prevented them from achieving to their potential.

The questionnaire included a combination of open and closed questions. The open questions were used to elicit detailed responses from learners that could be used to gain an understanding of their experiences and views. Of the 2359 responses, 1427 respondents provided detailed responses. The survey questions are included in annex C.

⁴ This number includes partial and fully completed responses to the survey.

⁵ Two prisons were issued with paper versions of the survey.

6. Findings

6.1 Strengths of the qualifications

Given the nature of this review, much of this report focusses on the issues and concerns of learners, centres and awarding bodies and the challenges they are facing with the revised Essential Skills qualifications. However, it is important to report that we identified several strengths of the revised qualifications including:

- Widespread support for the additional rigour of the revised qualifications compared with the legacy qualifications;
- Widespread support for the use of externally approved assessments compared with the assessment methodology used in the legacy qualifications;
- Many centres reported that they have overcome a number of the challenges they originally faced when the revised qualifications were first introduced;
- Several centres reported that they have made positive changes to their approach to teaching and assessment, which has supported them to overcome challenges;
- Awarding bodies are sharing expertise and good practice with each other; and
- The majority of centres are using qualified Essential Skills practitioners to teach and assess the revised qualifications, which was not common practice for the legacy qualifications.

The remainder of the report focuses on the issues and concerns raised by learners, centres and awarding bodies and the actions that we will take to seek in response to these.

6.2 Collaborative approach taken by the awarding bodies

During our awarding body interviews, all four awarding bodies acknowledged that the implementation of the revised qualifications has been challenging. They identified a number of factors that affected the initial implementation of the qualifications including: the design principles were published later than expected and were subject to further unplanned changes (e.g. the removal of grading from the Essential Employability Skills qualifications immediately prior to the launch of the qualifications); inconsistencies in the Essential Employability Skills standards leading to their subsequent revision in November 2016; and the lack of a comprehensive pilot. Awarding bodies reported that these issues subsequently impacted on the development of tasks and tests and led to the qualifications being introduced in September 2015 when an insufficient number of assessments were available. This meant that awarding bodies and centres were unable to prepare effectively for the revised qualifications.

Despite these initial challenges, the awarding bodies have worked collaboratively to overcome many of the challenges that they faced. Four awarding bodies working collaboratively on a suite of qualifications is currently unique in Wales and awarding bodies reported that there have been both strengths and weaknesses to this approach. They reported that collaborative working has led to standardised assessments and the sharing of expertise and good practice. We received comments from awarding bodies such as:

"It has led to better outcomes because of the range of expertise that sits in the group. We've all got different types of practices and what we've ended up doing is pulling out best practice from a range of those, which has been a useful consultation process."

"There are learning gains, there are efficiency gains and all sorts of quality gains."

"From a positive perspective for the centres and the candidates, there is one agreed set of assessment materials out there, so there isn't actually any difference between awarding body A and awarding body B being perceived to be easier or more challenging. The problems had been previously that it was felt that there were variable standards amongst the awarding bodies."

However, awarding bodies also reported shortcomings to the collaborative approach, most notably that tasks and tests take more time to be developed, approved and made available to centres. This was, in the view of some awarding bodies, one of the reasons for the initial delay in the availability of the confirmatory tests in early 2016. We received comments such as:

"The collaborative approach was the thing that was difficult to start with. Getting that to work has taken time, you're taking four disparate awarding bodies with different processes and different ways of working. There were areas that could have been explored more thoroughly before we leapt into developing the materials and designing things."

"If we had been individualised as awarding bodies we could have had ten tasks out much more quickly. When you have different sized organisations, you have different levels of red tape that you have to go through in terms of publication."

Despite the challenges, the awarding bodies felt that they have overcome many of the initial challenges they faced and that the collaborative approach should continue. The awarding bodies acknowledged that the Assets Management Group, which consists of representatives from each awarding body, has been effective in supporting the development of tasks and tests and standardising assessment guidance. However, they also acknowledged that the group has not included enough strategic input from senior staff at some awarding bodies, which has led to issues not being escalated appropriately within awarding bodies. We received comments from awarding bodies such as:

"I think that we need some sort of internal mechanism across the four awarding bodies for a more strategic take stock. We've got an operational group who deal with some strategic issues but they don't deal with bigger issues. There needs to be a strategic overview across the boards."

"I think that (a strategic group) would be sensible and that is missing. There was a reluctance within awarding bodies to escalate. Even speaking from my own experience when I escalated internally it was then going to be a friendly chat with the other person in the awarding body rather than actually escalating to the Responsible Officer. I think that was the same issue that others had as well."

There was a strong view from all four awarding bodies that there should be more strategic input from senior staff at awarding bodies when making key decisions relating to Essential Skills qualifications. There was strong support from the four awarding bodies for the creation of a strategic group that would complement the Assets Management Group and have oversight of the strategic direction of Essential Skills qualifications. Therefore, we will setup an Essential Skills Oversight Board. This will allow the Assets Management Group to be refocussed as an operational group that reports to the Essential Skills Oversight Board. Membership of this Board will consist of Qualifications Wales, senior representatives from the four awarding bodies offering the qualifications, and key stakeholders. The Board will oversee actions 2-8 outlined in this report and have oversight of the strategic direction of Essential Skills qualifications moving forward. We will work closely with the awarding bodies, and other key stakeholders, to establish this Board and agree the terms of reference.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
1	We will set up an Essential Skills Oversight Board. Membership of this Board will include Qualifications Wales,	31 January 2018

	senior representatives from the four awarding bodies offering the qualifications, and key stakeholders. The Board will oversee actions 2-8 as outlined in this report and have oversight of the strategic direction of Essential Skills qualifications moving forward.	
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6.3 Assessment

The revised qualifications are assessed via a controlled task and confirmatory test⁶, or a controlled task and structured discussion⁷, in place of the internally assessed portfolio used in the legacy qualifications. We identified widespread support from centres for the additional rigour offered by the revised assessment methods. However, feedback from learners and centres suggests that there are a number of challenges that are currently impacting on the effective implementation of the assessments, namely:

- Centres and learners feel that some of the current controlled tasks are not contextually relevant;
- Centres and learners perceive that some of the current controlled tasks are unclear;
- Centres perceive that some of the current mark schemes are unclear and/or are inconsistent with the controlled tasks;
- Centres are frustrated that learners are required to re-sit the whole controlled task if they fail one element;
- It is challenging for centres to adhere to the eight-week rule for the completion of controlled tasks; and
- Centres and learners feel that the time allocated to complete some confirmatory tests is insufficient.

These concerns are covered in more detail in the next sections.

6.3.1 Relevance of controlled tasks

There was a very strong view by most centres that there is a limited number of contextually relevant controlled tasks available. Examples such as 'Space Travel', 'Microchipping your Dog' and 'Staycation' were given, which centres felt were irrelevant, lack context and are not engaging for most learners. We received comments such as:

⁶ Essential Application of Number Skills (Level 1-Level 3) and Essential Communication Skills (Level 1-Level 3).

⁷ Essential Digital Literacy Skills (Entry level 1-Level 3) and Essential Employability Skills (Entry level 3-Level 3).

"There needs to be a wider choice of papers and these need to be more relevant to the needs of young people." (Work based learning provider)

"Lack of vocational variety, there is still a limited number of tasks and some of them have zero vocational relevance to some groups." (Further education college)

"What scares them a lot is the relevance of the subject. If it's something they're familiar with they are more inclined to get involved with it. Examples like sports drinks or micro-chipping a dog with health and social care learners. Unless they can relate it to their daily occupation, so it does become relevant and they can see the connection, we don't stand a chance of engaging the learners." (Work based learning provider)

"With the police and the Welsh Ambulance Service – these are large clients and they want tasks more appropriate to their workplaces... It has not been popular asking senior staff within the police service to complete a task about going on holiday." (Work based learning provider)

This view was also supported by learner feedback to our survey. We received comments such as:

"Very long task, no link to context of management course being undertaken."

"I am studying a motor vehicle course and I have been doing a controlled task on staycations. I don't think this has any relevance to my course."

"The subject matter was very specific with no opportunity to relate to work place knowledge or experience."

There was a view from centres and learners that tasks should be contextualised and more relevant. Many centres also suggested that tasks would be more engaging for learners if they were contextually relevant. Producing controlled tasks that are contextually relevant for the diverse range of centres offering the qualifications and the learners undertaking the qualifications is very challenging for awarding bodies. This is due to the range of subject-specific knowledge required and the significant time involved in the development of fit-for-purpose controlled tasks. Awarding bodies have a process in place to support centres to develop their own controlled tasks and mark schemes. However, it was interesting to note that very few centres were aware they could develop their own controlled tasks and even fewer have developed their own. Several centres expressed an interest in developing their own tasks and by utilising the subject specialisms of centres, additional tasks could be developed that satisfy this demand. However, if centres are to develop appropriate tasks, clear and comprehensive guidance is required. We will develop, in

collaboration with the awarding bodies, guidance for centres to support the development of centre specific controlled tasks and mark schemes.

As centres begin to develop their own contextualised controlled tasks, awarding bodies will need to implement a consistent approach to approving centre developed controlled tasks. The awarding bodies will need to consider whether their current approach of collaboratively quality assuring and approving controlled tasks and mark schemes will be appropriate and manageable. We will require the awarding bodies to ensure that they have a clear and efficient process in place for quality assuring and approving these controlled tasks and mark schemes.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
2	We will develop, in collaboration with the awarding bodies, guidance for centres to support the development of centre specific controlled tasks and mark schemes.	1 August 2018
3	We will require the awarding bodies to put in place a clear and efficient process for quality assuring and approving centre developed controlled tasks and mark schemes.	1 August 2018

6.3.2 Clarity and consistency of controlled tasks and mark schemes

A majority of centres reported that some tasks are unclear. In particular, they reported long-winded and vague instructions and terminology that is too complex for some learners to understand. This view also featured in the learner survey feedback. We received comments such as:

"The language in the tasks overall is complex and confusing." (Prison)

"The terminology used in the Application of Number task is too difficult for learners to understand." (Work-based learning provider)

"The task was confusing and poorly articulated...the language used in these tests was vague, overly-prescriptive and repetitive. Tasks seemed to overlap, and the subject matters were largely irrelevant." (Learner)

"I felt the controlled task was worded in a convoluted way, when actually what they wanted to evidence was straightforward. Very off-putting and I would

imagine leads to people who have the skills required actually failing the task as they don't understand what is being asked of them." (Learner)

In addition, over half of the centres we interviewed identified a lack of clarity across mark schemes and inconsistencies between the controlled tasks and the supporting mark schemes which caused challenges when marking the tasks. We received comments such as:

"I think that the marking guide can be ambiguous and it doesn't always ask the learner or tell them exactly what we're looking for." (Work based learning provider)

"The mark schemes for the controlled tasks have not been clear and have required significant interpretation by the tutors." (Work based learning provider)

Although centres and learners reported a lack of clarity and consistency in controlled tasks and mark schemes, very few learners and centres gave specific details of the tasks and mark schemes they were referring to. It was also difficult to ascertain whether these issues had already been addressed by the awarding bodies or were ongoing issues. The awarding bodies have conducted collaborative standardisation events which have scrutinised the controlled tasks using Essential Skills specialists and they have not identified a lack of clarity and consistency in controlled tasks and mark schemes. Further work is needed to determine whether there is a lack of clarity and consistency in the controlled tasks and mark schemes or if it is a perception from centres and learners based on historical issues that have since been rectified.

Therefore, we will require the awarding bodies to gather feedback from centres on the clarity and consistency of all controlled tasks and mark schemes. We will require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of the action that they have taken, including any amendments or changes that they have made following feedback from centres.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
4	We will require the awarding bodies to gather feedback from centres on the clarity and consistency of all available controlled tasks and supporting mark schemes. We will require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of the action that they have taken, including any amendments or changes that they have made following feedback from centres.	1 August 2018

6.3.3 Partial re-sits

Almost half of the centres we interviewed told us about the challenges of supporting learners who fail one element of the controlled task and are then required to re-sit the whole task. This was particularly evident for the Essential Communication Skills qualifications. Frustration amongst learners with the current system also featured in our learner survey. We received comments such as:

"We had the challenge of trying to find an additional five hours from their employers when they could re-sit the task. This was particularly an issue when the learners who were failing only failed on one section – in Communication often failing on the writing task." (Work based learning provider)

"Our view is that if learners have completed the majority of sections of the task that should be considered a pass, and the learner should not have to sit the whole task. They should just focus on the one theme they have failed." (Work based learning provider)

"I have failed my communication on my first attempt. I failed it by 2 marks. I have now found out that I have to re-sit the whole qualification again, instead of just re-sitting what I marginally failed on. It's very time consuming when I work a full-time job and have a young child. This is also on top of actually trying to complete my QCF (main qualification) on time." (Learner)

"The only thing I didn't like about the task was having to retake it all when I have only failed a small part of it." (Learner)

Some centres, particularly further education colleges, also identified the operational and logistical challenge of supporting learners who failed the controlled task at the same time as supporting learners who had passed and were preparing for the confirmatory test. We received comments such as:

"How are they (tutors) going to manage how they carry on preparing for the test with the ones who passed but then for the two (who failed) there isn't a classroom assistant to hand them over to." (Further education college)

"There is the logistical challenge of arranging re-sits." (Further education college)

This was identified as a frustration for centres assessing Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three, which has a separate presentation task that is discreetly assessed. If learners fail this element, they are required to re-sit both the reading and writing element and the speaking and listening element, in addition to the presentation. We received comments such as:

“Communications is the biggest challenge in that it’s not partial achievement. If they fail the one section they have to do the whole thing again. And especially with Communications level three where it’s eight hours.....they have to come back and be re-assessed on something that they’ve already proved they’re competent in.” (Work based learning provider)

“For Communication, we have to double man the controlled task because of the presentation. We are finding it a logistical nightmare to try and get learners through the controlled task because if they fail they have to go back and do it over again.” (Further education college)

“Try telling someone that they’ve failed that one element (Communications) by one mark and they have to do the whole eight hours again. What sort of a scenario are you going to get.” (Work based learning provider)

There was a very strong view by many centres that partial re-sits could, and should, be implemented for the presentation element of Essential Communication Skills qualifications at levels two and three. As the presentation element of the controlled task for Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three is discretely assessed, it can be assessed separately without a significant re-design of all controlled tasks. Awarding bodies acknowledged that one of the options considered in the development of the qualifications in 2015 was to allow partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills but this option was not implemented by Welsh Government. There was also support from the awarding bodies to allow partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills at level two and three. We received comments from awarding bodies such as:

“Initially, we were all in favour, we thought that we were going ahead as the initial model was that they would have partial re-sits in Communication. So, going forward we would be quite happy do partial re-sits.”

“Taking the presentation that arises in Communications levels two and three, there probably is an argument there for allowing that to be separate because it is a relatively self-contained activity.”

We will amend the Essential Skills Design Principles to allow partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three. We will then require the awarding bodies to separate the presentation element (part three) of the controlled tasks and develop a consistent process for implementing partial re-sits. We will require the awarding bodies to make available the opportunity for partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three from 1 August 2018.

While some centres raised this concern for other qualifications the majority of the feedback related to the Essential Communication Skills qualifications. Controlled tasks for all other qualifications are holistically assessed and assessment elements are integrated throughout. Implementing partial re-sits across the suite would require the re-design of all current controlled tasks and/or the development of new controlled tasks designed specifically to allow partial re-sits. On balance, we consider that the risks of implementing partial re-sits across the suite outweigh any benefit to learners and centres.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
5	We will amend the Essential Skills Design Principles to allow partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three. We will then require the awarding bodies to:	31 January 2018
	a) separate the presentation element of the controlled tasks and develop a consistent process for implementing partial re-sits; and	31 March 2018
	b) make available the opportunity for partial re-sits for Essential Communication Skills at levels two and three.	1 August 2018

6.3.4 Eight-week rule

The requirement to complete the controlled task within a consecutive eight-week period was identified as a challenge by several centres, primarily further education colleges and apprenticeship providers. Further education colleges find it challenging to complete the controlled tasks within academic half-term periods, given that most continuous periods in the academic calendar are shorter than eight weeks. Further education colleges also identified that if a learner is unable to attend a session due to illness, the eight-week requirement becomes a significant challenge, which is a common issue also experienced by apprenticeship providers. We received comments such as:

"The eight-week rule doesn't really fit academia. Half term is invariably 6-7 weeks so whichever term you go into you're going to hit a holiday period. It's not the best method. A lot of learners did their controlled task in the previous half term so when they got to the end of half term it was Easter (weeks 7 and 8) so if you did have someone who missed one or two sessions you'd effectively chop their available time in half." (Further education college)

"From a further education perspective, if you look at a further education calendar, there is never an eight-week period without a break." (Further education college)

"The eight weeks can be a problem because obviously you get people that go off on sick, short staffed, can't be released." (Apprenticeship provider)

It is evident that the eight-week rule is causing challenges for some centres. However, it is important to note that the controlled task was designed to be completed over a fixed period without any teaching or feedback provided between sessions. Furthermore, several centres have reported that the completion of the controlled task works better, and is more appropriate for learners, when it is arranged over two or three sessions within a short period of time. The challenge for some centres appears to be that academic holiday periods and valid learner absence during the eight-week period are impacting on the completion of controlled tasks. We will amend the Essential Skills Design Principles to clearly state that the eight-week period for the completion of controlled tasks does not include academic holiday periods and valid learner absence. We will require the awarding bodies to amend their qualification specifications and guidance documents accordingly and communicate these changes to centres.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
6	We will amend the Essential Skills Design Principles to clearly state that the eight-week period for the completion of controlled tasks does not include academic holiday periods and valid learner absence. We will require the awarding bodies to amend their qualification specifications and guidance documents accordingly and communicate these changes to centres.	31 January 2018

6.3.5 Timings of the confirmatory tests

Over half of the centres that we interviewed reported that learners struggled to complete the confirmatory tests within the allocated time and had insufficient time to check their work. We received comments such as:

"The time to read a question is 2 minutes per question roughly in numeracy, this is too short, they can't process it because it's quite wordy as well." (Work based learning provider)

"The timings are very strict – learners have no time to go back and check their earlier answers." (Work based learning provider)

"There's very limited time for the confirmatory test. If they can't read quickly they haven't got enough time to sit that test." (Work based learning provider)

This was strongly supported by feedback from learners to our survey. We received comments such as:

"The amount of time allowed was totally inadequate for the number of questions that were required, also the questions were laid out in such a way that the whole thing could not be seen on one screen, which wasted more time looking up and down the question to find the information required."

"I found there was not enough time, I am not fast at calculating even though the answers given were correct. Instead of penalising slow thinkers, maybe adjust so that they can have a better chance at completing."

"The time given to actually do the exam was wholly insufficient. 20 questions were required to be completed within 45 minutes. That is just more than 2 minutes per question. 2 minutes may be ok for a basic calculation but it is not sufficient when the question requires reading and working out of big sums."

The evidence from our review suggests that learners and centres feel that additional time is required for the completion of some confirmatory tests. However, the feedback gathered in this review does not give us reliable evidence of which tests, if any, require time extensions. The awarding bodies have closely monitored the confirmatory tests and have the evidence to make a decision on the appropriateness of current timings, and whether any time extensions are required. We will require the awarding bodies to analyse the confirmatory test data to determine if any tests require time extensions and, if so, the appropriate time extensions required. We will require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of their analysis including a rationale for any changes they propose.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
7	We will require the awarding bodies to analyse the confirmatory test data to identify whether any confirmatory tests require a time extension and what appropriate time extension is required. We will require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of their analysis including a rationale for any changes they propose.	31 March 2018

6.4 Welsh language assessments

Whilst only a few centres reported that they have assessed learners in Welsh, the majority of these centres strongly felt that there has been a lack of parity between the availability of English and Welsh language assessment materials. Centres gave examples of Welsh materials not being released at the same time as the English versions, less variety of Welsh language controlled tasks and fewer Welsh language confirmatory tests, with the consequence that learners are re-sitting the same test on more than one occasion. We received comments such as:

*"There are very limited Welsh options for many of them (the qualifications)."
(Further education college)*

"The resources aren't there, so for example there are no sample tasks there for them in Welsh. We're trying to promote the fact that we can deliver it in Welsh and then we don't have the resources there." (Work based learning provider)

The Essential Skills qualifications are Approved qualifications and we are committed to ensuring that sufficient assessment materials are available in Welsh and English. We will require the awarding bodies to identify with centres the demand, including likely future demand, for Welsh language tasks and tests. We will then require the awarding bodies to provide us with evidence of the action they have taken and how they are meeting any current and likely future demand.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
8	We will require the awarding bodies to identify with centres the demand, including likely future demand, for Welsh language tasks and tests. We will require the awarding	31 March 2018

	bodies to provide us with evidence of the action they have taken and how they are meeting any current and likely future demand.	
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6.5 Apprenticeships

This section captures our findings in relation to apprenticeships and the additional challenges that apprenticeship providers and their learners are facing with the revised qualifications. As Welsh Government are responsible for apprenticeship policy in Wales, we cannot take direct action to overcome these challenges. However, we can share the evidence and offer advice to Welsh Government based on the findings of our review.

We identified that work-based learning centres offering apprenticeships were reporting more challenges than other centres. Apprenticeship providers identified many issues, concerns and challenges including:

- The limited time that they can allocate to teach and assess Essential Skills qualifications;
- The challenge of completing all the qualifications that are required within apprenticeship frameworks;
- They perceive that insufficient funding is available for the delivery of Essential Skills qualifications within apprenticeships;
- Some learners are required to complete Essential Skills qualifications at a significantly higher level than their initially assessed level; and
- It is challenging for learners to be released by their employers.

Many of these concerns were supported by learner feedback in our survey. We found that a higher proportion of apprenticeship learners reported that factors were preventing them from achieving to their potential compared to learners not completing apprenticeships. We explore these issues in more detail in the sections below.

6.5.1 Approach to teaching and assessment

There was some evidence from centre interviews that apprenticeship providers were allocating significantly less time to teach and assess Essential Skills qualifications than centres who do not offer apprenticeships. Some apprenticeship providers reported that they allocate less than 12 hours, and even as little as 8 hours, to teach and assess each Essential Skills qualification. Given that the guided learning hours for each qualification is 60 hours and there is between 4½-9 hours of assessment

(depending on the level) for each qualification, this allocation allows very little time, if any, to teach learners the skills to adequately prepare for the assessments. Examples of the responses that we received from apprenticeship providers included:

"The average number of hours is anywhere between 8-10 hours and that is communication level two in its entirety."

"One-day teaching for communications, one-day teaching for application of number and then the task day after it."

"Most learners do 2 or 3 workshops of 5 to 6 hours."

This is supported by the findings from our learner survey. We found that fewer learners on apprenticeship programmes felt that they are given enough time to learn the required skills compared to learners undertaking other programmes of learning. We received comments from apprenticeship learners such as:

"Only given 3 hours of very disorganised and limited teaching."

"My assessor is only allowed to see me for two hours each month and this was usually put towards my main qualification."

"I found having to do this task without any classes to help really daunting."

The limited time allocated by apprenticeship providers to teach and assess the revised qualifications is concerning and may account for some of the challenges that they and their learners are facing with the revised qualifications.

6.5.2 Delivery of apprenticeship frameworks

Almost all centres offering Essential Skills as part of apprenticeships reported that there is limited time available to complete all the qualifications required within apprenticeship frameworks. We received comments from apprenticeship providers such as:

"Business admin is nine months so they've got nine months to do three Essential Skills qualifications, their main vocational qualification and work full time."

"Speaking to colleges they do maybe three hours a week (for Essential Skills) on a timetable over 20 weeks which works out as around 60 hours of learning. That equates to almost five years of an apprenticeship delivery and we've only got 12-16-month programmes. Our challenge is how can we deliver five years' worth of training that a college would do in 12 months and that is a massive, massive problem that we're facing."

"They're on programme for 18 months so they've got 18 months to finish their vocational qualification, the three Essential Skills and employability. If you take into account that it's six visits just to do one (Essential Skills qualification) by the time you've been through the sample paper, upskill them a bit and done a bit of that and to do the controlled tasks, then feedback on the controlled task, then the confirmatory test that's six (sessions) and when you've got three of those that's your 18 months gone and that's not allowing for anything else."

This is supported by feedback from apprenticeship learners to our survey. We received comments such as:

"I need more support and my tutor states that in work based learning there is no funding nor any time in which to do this. I have to do a lot independently which I struggle to do with my QCF and my job role alongside family/personal life."

"My assessor can spend 2.5 hours assessment time with me each month. This equates to 37.5 hours funded learning for my diploma and three essential skills. You do the maths?"

"I felt quite rushed. I failed the first time and I need to resit. I only have a few months left of funding and worried I won't finish in time."

There was a strong view by apprenticeship providers that they struggle to deliver all the qualifications required within apprenticeship frameworks in the time that they can allocate to apprenticeship learners. Some centres reported that the introduction of proxies in October 2016 has been helpful and has reduced the number of qualifications that need to be completed by some learners. However, for learners who do not possess a previously achieved qualification that can be accepted in lieu of Essential Skills qualifications, the requirements to complete all qualifications included on apprenticeship frameworks, in the limited time that apprenticeship providers reported that they are able to allocate, continues to be a significant challenge and places additional pressure on learners.

We shared this finding with Welsh Government and they responded by stating:

“Welsh Government sets no limits on the time it takes to achieve an apprenticeship. Individual Apprenticeship Plans should be designed around the individual. Careful planning is required to understand the needs of the apprentice, relevant learning activities need to be designed to address needs, and regular assessments of progress should be routine.”

6.5.3 Apprenticeship funding

There is a perception among apprenticeship providers that there is insufficient funding available for the delivery of Essential Skills as part of apprenticeships. Some apprenticeship providers stated that the reason for the limited time that they allocate to teach and assess the revised qualifications is due to the limited funding available. We received comments from apprenticeship providers such as:

“I think that something should come from Welsh Government with regards to the amount of funding. Where is this money coming from?”

“For the apprenticeship, even without the data, I can tell you that we are delivering far more hours than we are getting paid for, for literacy and numeracy, and I know everyone is.”

(When asked the reason why the centre allocates very few hours to teach and assess Essential Skills, they responded) *“Welsh Government. Well, funding. For example, on average if we take a business admin level 3 for the qualification you’ve got 14 months to deliver the qualification but within those 14 months you’ve got to deliver the three Essential Skills alongside the QCF qualification and that’s the challenge we face in 2 to 2.5 hours per visit.”*

We shared this finding with Welsh Government and, in response to the comments from apprenticeship providers, they told us that a scheduled review of the apprenticeship funding methodology is in progress and should be concluded by Spring 2018.

6.5.4 Essential Skills levels required in apprenticeships

Another key issue identified by apprenticeship providers is that some learners are initially assessed at a significantly lower level than the Essential Skills levels required for the apprenticeship frameworks. Centres gave examples of learners being initially

assessed at entry level but having to undertake Essential Skills qualifications at level two or three. We received comments from apprenticeship providers such as:

"We have had to get some learners initially assessed at entry level to levels two or three in communications over just five sessions."

"We've just had a level five learner, a registered manager, sign up who has come in at entry level three which is three levels below the level they are supposed to be."

"You have some learners who need a level three communication but come out at entry three on WEST. The majority of my learners are at least one, most often two, levels below where they need to be."

Combined with many apprenticeship providers allocating very little time to teach and assess the qualifications, this creates a very challenging situation for learners, which was reflected in our learner feedback. We received comments such as:

"I find the expectation for me to develop my entry level maths to what is equivalent to GCSE in 15 months really unrealistic."

"Coming from entry level onto level 2 is stressful. The requirements for this level are hard and challenging for people who struggle with maths."

"It has been causing me a great deal of stress and pressure by trying to complete tasks and tests that are above my ability...I am required to learn to level 3, which is not a level I am capable of."

Several centres disclosed that the Essential Skills requirements in apprenticeships has influenced their recruitment approach. Some centres disclosed that they now recruit learners capable of achieving the Essential Skills qualifications required for the apprenticeship frameworks, rather than those who are best suited to the vocational route. We received comments from apprenticeship providers such as:

"Many learners are way below (the level required) and we've made the decision now that we can't sign learners up if they're more than a level below because there is no way on this earth that they'll complete the apprenticeship framework."

"We now need to make sure that our sign-up process is a lot stricter... so we allow for learners to come on that have got the basic skills to start with because we haven't really got the time to spend delivering qualifications at level two when they're coming in at entry two."

Several centres also reported that this was more challenging in the health and social care sector where Essential Digital Literacy Skills qualifications were also part of apprenticeship frameworks. Social Care Wales has since announced that it has removed the requirement for digital literacy from the apprenticeship frameworks which should remove this additional challenge.

6.5.5 Employer release time

Almost all apprenticeship providers reported that a significant obstacle that they face is getting learners released by their employers, which has become more marked with the revised qualifications. We received comments from apprenticeship providers such as:

"The biggest, biggest challenge for delivery is release time."

"Learners find it difficult to be released from their employment to come in for these days. Also, if you account for some of the sectors that we deliver in, childcare, health and social care, those sort of areas, they're obviously governed with their ratios of staff, so we can't pull them from there. Particularly in childcare, there's a ratio on it so it's difficult for us to take them out."

"They have to come in on their days off. They're not being released by their employers. You may get one or two employers who do it but most say it's too important that they're in work."

This was supported by learner feedback to our survey. We received comments such as:

"I can't finish the course as I will have spent 3 x 8 hours in preparatory workshops and 3 x assessments. This is too much to ask my employer for."

"I work, every time I go to a class I am having time off work and my employer was very unhappy. This made it very stressful because I had to do research at home and could only attend a few sessions because I was afraid of getting sacked."

"It's so hard to be released from work as it is, and we lose pay to come in and sit them (the tests) as we are on zero-hour contracts, or we have to do them on our days off. How is that fair?"

Some centres have overcome this challenge by clearly communicating their expectations to employers from the outset. Others have implemented a day release

model where learners attend the centre each week or have adapted their delivery model to include teaching workshops. Centres reported that this offers consistency for employers and allows them to plan shift patterns around the release of learners. However, employer release continues to be a significant challenge for centres, particularly for centres who continue to deliver and assess in intermittent one-to-one settings.

The challenges outlined in this section of the report are exclusive to apprenticeship providers and learners undertaking apprenticeships. Essential Skills qualifications are a key component of apprenticeships and findings suggest that apprenticeship providers and their learners are facing many challenges with the revised qualifications. However, many of these challenges are not specifically linked to the qualifications but relate to apprenticeship providers' experience of, and response to, the requirements for publicly-funded apprenticeships in Wales. We have shared this report with Welsh Government as they are responsible for apprenticeship policy in Wales. In response to this report, Welsh Government stated:

“The Welsh Apprenticeship policy, published in February 2017, outlines our intention to drive up average skill levels. It also indicates the need for our Apprenticeship provision to be more flexible; flexible enough to be accessible to all, regardless of individual circumstances, whilst also accommodating the time and business constraints which are characteristic of many Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs). We are determined to focus on increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities and supporting a 'gold-standard' scheme that leads to good quality jobs. Our policy has been communicated widely to stakeholders and apprenticeship providers across Wales, and we expect standards to improve over time.

Over the last few years Welsh Government has taken action to boost the quality and popularity of apprenticeships and continues to work with Estyn to identify and address sub-standard apprenticeship schemes, and raise quality standards. Therefore, it is particularly disappointing that this review has identified a lack of understanding by some providers regarding the detail contained within the Apprenticeship Programme Specification that is issued by Welsh Government.”

7. Longer term plan for the qualifications

This review has identified that the implementation of the revised Essential Skills qualifications has been challenging for learners, centres and awarding bodies. There were shortcomings in the introduction of the qualifications in 2015 and this led to challenges for learners, centres and awarding bodies. The actions outlined in this report seek to respond to the immediate concerns identified by this review.

However, our evidence suggests that concerns are likely to remain about the longer-term manageability of the Essential Skills qualifications within the context of the learning programmes in which they are typically delivered. These concerns relate to the extent to which the assessment instruments are effective, appropriate and manageable for learners and centres.

The current suite of qualifications is approved for registrations until 31 August 2020. To ensure that an effective and manageable suite of qualifications is in place for first teaching from September 2020 we need to consider the form that the qualifications should take longer-term. Using evidence from this review, evidence from our monitoring of the qualifications and taking into account best practice elsewhere, we will review the assessment model for these qualifications in time for teaching from September 2020. This update will address the remaining concerns and ensure that the qualifications and their assessments continue to be valid and reliable, whilst also addressing their manageability in order to meet, more fully, the reasonable needs of learners in Wales.

Action we will take

		To be completed by
9	We will review the assessment model for the Essential Skills qualifications (which have an operational end date of 2020) and make updated versions available for first teaching from September 2020. This update will aim to address the remaining concerns and ensure that the qualifications and their assessments continue to be valid and reliable, whilst also addressing their manageability in order to meet, more fully, the reasonable needs of learners in Wales.	First teaching September 2020 – revised specifications to be with centres with sufficient time to implement changes.

8. Conclusion

As outlined in this report, most centres welcome the additional rigour of the revised qualifications. However, the implementation of the qualifications has been challenging for learners, centres and awarding bodies. In addition, centres and learners are continuing to encounter challenges with the revised qualifications. This is owing to their views that some controlled tasks lack context and relevance; some controlled tasks lack clarity and consistency; it is challenging to support learners to re-sit controlled tasks and complete them within the eight-week period; centres and learners perceive that the time allowed to complete some confirmatory tests is insufficient; there are a limited number of Welsh language assessments; and apprenticeship providers and their learners are facing many other challenges that are outside our regulatory powers.

Our proposed actions aim to address the issues that we have identified through our review. We will refer to the findings when reviewing the qualifications by their current operational end date in 2020. In the meantime, we will work with the awarding bodies, and other key stakeholders, to support the continued and successful implementation of the revised Essential Skills qualifications for the benefit of learners in Wales.

Annex A – Awarding body interview questions

Design and development of the revised qualifications

We would like to go back prior to September 2015 and briefly reflect on the design and development of the revised qualifications and these questions are relating to the initial design and development of the qualifications.

1. Please can you outline your initial motivation or business reason for deciding to offer the revised Essential Skills qualifications in Wales?
2. Please can you outline your experience of being involved in the design and development of the revised qualifications including any challenges that you faced, how these were overcome, and any lessons that can be learnt from the process?

Design and development of assessments

3. Please can you outline your views, including the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the collaborative approach to designing tasks and tests?

Collaborative work between awarding bodies

4. What has been the strengths and weaknesses of the collaborative work between awarding bodies?
5. Please can you outline the challenges that you have faced, in relation to the collaborative work, and how you have overcome these challenges?
6. From your perspective, what do you see as the future development of the collaborative approach including the future role of the Assets Management Group?

The suite of qualifications

7. Can you outline any issues/shortcomings that you have identified with the qualifications that may pose unreasonable barriers to learners? These could relate to the qualification content, structure or assessment methods.
8. Thank you for your recent response to feedback about having a distinct Welsh language Communication qualification. Would your awarding body want to be involved in the development of a distinct Welsh language Communication qualification?

9. Have you conducted any cost-benefit or value for money analysis in relation to the revised qualifications? If so, what has been the outcomes of this analysis?

Centre support

10. Please can you outline your approach to supporting centres offering Essential Skills qualifications? This could include CPD events, standardisation/moderation events, your approach to external quality assurance, etc.
11. Has the support that you provide to centres differed for the revised qualifications compared with the legacy qualifications?

Feedback from stakeholders

12. Have you received any relevant feedback from stakeholders about the revised qualifications that may inform this Review? This could be positive or negative feedback received from:
- a. Centres
 - b. External verifiers/External quality assurers
 - c. Membership groups
 - d. Employers

The viability of implementing change

We have received anecdotal feedback from centres and membership groups that some elements of the qualifications are posing challenges and/or unreasonable barriers to learners completing the revised qualifications. We would value your views about this feedback and the feasibility of implementing changes if identified by the Review.

13. What are the challenges and feasibility of making changes to remove the 8-week rule for the completion of controlled tasks?
14. What are the challenges and feasibility of implementing partial re-sits for controlled tasks?
15. Some membership groups have suggested that they could work with awarding bodies to design a range of sector specific controlled tasks. What are your views on the strengths, weaknesses and feasibility of this? Would your awarding body be prepared to do this?

Your relationship with Qualifications Wales

We value ourselves on being a collaborative regulator that works with those that we regulate, where appropriate, to overcome challenges to qualifications and the qualifications system. We value your feedback to improve our approach to regulation.

16. In your view, please can you outline the strengths and weaknesses of Qualifications Wales' role over the past 18 months in relation to Essential Skills qualifications?
17. Is there anything that Qualifications Wales could do over the next 12 months to support the effectiveness of the revised qualifications?

The future direction of the suite of qualifications

18. What is the future direction of Essential Skills qualifications at your awarding body?
19. What future work could be done, and by whom, to improve the suite of qualifications? This could cover work to be done by:
 - e. Awarding bodies
 - f. Assets Management Group
 - g. Other stakeholders e.g. Colegau Cymru, NTfW

The Review

20. Is there anything that you would like the Review to focus on during our engagement with centres and learners?
21. Do you have any concerns or questions about the Review?

Any other information and/or questions from you

22. Do you have any further information or feedback that you would like to share with us?
23. Do you have any questions for us?

Annex B – Centre interview questions

Background information

1. Please can you outline your role at your centre?
2. Which Essential Skills qualifications are offered at your centre? And the approximate number of learners working towards each Essential Skills qualification at your centre?
Try to get as accurate information as possible.
3. Which awarding body do you use for Essential Skills qualifications?
4. At your centre, are Essential Skills qualifications used as part of a programme of learning e.g. apprenticeships?

Your approach to delivery and assessment

5. Please can you outline your approach to delivering and assessing the revised qualifications including the number of sessions and hours allocated to deliver and assess the qualifications?
6. Please can you outline any changes that you have made to your delivery and assessment model for the revised qualifications compared with the legacy qualifications? Have these changes been effective?

Staff experience and competence

7. Does your centre use specialist Essential Skills practitioners to deliver and assess Essential Skills qualifications?
For the purpose of this question, an Essential Skills practitioner is a person who holds a level 3 or level 5 Essential Skills practitioner qualification and who has sufficient experience of delivering and assessing Essential Skills qualifications.
- 7a. If yes, has this been effective?
- 7b. If no, why not?

Assessment

8. Please can you outline the strengths and weaknesses of the controlled task including any challenges that you have faced and if/how you overcame these challenges?
9. Please can you outline the strengths and weaknesses of the confirmatory test including any challenges that you have faced and if/how you overcame these challenges?
10. Please can you outline the strengths and weaknesses of the structured discussion including any challenges that you have faced and if/how you overcame these challenges?

The suite of qualifications

11. Excluding assessment, please can you outline any other strengths and weaknesses of the qualifications including any challenges that you have faced and if/how you overcame these challenges?

Welsh language/bilingual assessment

12. Have any learners at your centre been assessed through the medium of Welsh or bilingually?
13. If yes, have you faced any challenges when assessing learners in Welsh and/or bilingually and how have you overcome these challenges?
14. If no, why not?

Centre support and CPD

15. Please can you outline the support and training that you have been given to be able to deliver, assess and internally quality assure the revised qualifications? Has this been effective?
This could include support and training offered by your organisation, support and training offered by your awarding body and/or training offered by membership groups e.g. NTfW, Colegau Cymru.

Learner feedback

16. Please can you tell me about any feedback that you have received from learners in relation to the revised qualifications?

Any other information and/or questions

17. Do you have any further information or feedback that you would like to share with us? Or do you have any questions?

Annex C – Learner survey questions

1) Tick which ONE *Essential Skills* qualification you would like to comment on.

Application of Number

Communication

Digital Literacy

Employability

2) Please tick the level at which you are studying your *Essential Skills* qualification.

Entry level 1

Entry level 2

Entry level 3

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

3) Where are you studying your qualification? ⁸

FE College

WBL: Apprenticeship

WBL: Traineeship

School

⁸ This question was not included in the paper version of the survey that was issues to two prisons.

Adult Community Learning Centre

Other

4) What has been most useful about studying for your *Essential Skills* qualification? Please explain.

You may wish to consider how useful the qualification could be for employment, further education, everyday life, etc.

5) What has been least useful about studying for your *Essential Skills* qualification? Please explain.

You may wish to consider how useful the qualification could be for employment, further education, everyday life, etc.

6) Do you feel that there is enough time given to learn the skills you need to complete the assessments?

Yes

No

Don't know

Please explain your answer

7) Have you completed the Controlled Task?

The Controlled Task is a project that will take between 4 and 8 hours to complete.

Yes

No (*please move on to question 9*)

- 8) If you answered 'Yes' to question 7, please let us know your views about the Controlled Task.

You may wish to consider the timing, where you sat the Task, the guidance you were given, etc.

- 9) Have you completed the Confirmatory Test?

The Confirmatory Test is a multiple-choice exam-style test, that is usually completed after finishing the Controlled Task.

(Please note: the Confirmatory Test is only taken on the Application of Number and Communication qualifications)

- Yes
- No *(please move on to question 11)*
- N/A *(please select if you are studying the Digital Literacy or Employability qualifications)*

- 10) If you answered 'Yes' to question 9, please let us know your views about the Confirmatory Test.

You may wish to consider the timing, where you sat the Test, the guidance you were given, etc.

- 11) Have you completed the Structured Discussion?

The Structured Discussion is a formal discussion completed in a one-to-one or small group setting.

(Please note: the Structured Discussion is only taken on the Digital Literacy and Employability qualifications)

- Yes
- No *(please move on to question 13)*
- N/A *(please select if you are studying the Application of Number or Communication qualifications)*

12) If you answered 'Yes' to question 11, please let us know your views about the Structured Discussion.

You may wish to consider the timing, where you conducted the Discussion, the guidance you were given, etc.

13) Would you prefer to take any (or part) of your assessments in Welsh?

Yes

No (*please move on to question 15*)

14) If you answered 'Yes' to question 13, have you been given the opportunity to take your assessments in Welsh?

Yes

No

15) Has anything about your Essential Skills qualification prevented you from achieving to the best of your ability?

Yes

No

If 'Yes,' please explain

16) Please let us know if you have any other comments about your Essential Skills qualification that you would like to share.