



BUSINESS PLAN 2023 – 2024

April 2023



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Introduction

This Business Plan sets out our operational priorities for the financial year 2023-24. The plan has been shaped around our inaugural five-year [Strategic Priorities](#) which we published last year. Those outline our approach to delivering against our key aims to ensure qualifications and the qualifications system meet the reasonable needs of learners and to promote public confidence.

Our strategic priorities focus on areas of our work beyond the 'core' regulation of awarding bodies, principally our priorities for reforming qualifications. They therefore reflect the areas where we have greater choice about the work that we do.

The reforms that we are leading will give learners the opportunity to take the qualifications they need to help progress in life, learning and work. We will regulate to keep learners protected within a qualification system that operates fairly, efficiently and effectively, in the interests of all.

The key themes that underpin our work are:

- a **Made-for-Wales** focus - including securing a sustainable offer of high-quality bilingual qualifications
- taking a **dynamic evolutionary approach** to qualifications so that they remain up-to-date and relevant to modern society
- undertaking **careful change management and stakeholder engagement** to promote buy-in and deliver successful reforms
- using our influence to promote modern and **innovative assessment** approaches
- having **learner wellbeing** at the centre of our decisions

Over the next five years we will:

- co-create a **coherent and inclusive range of qualifications for learners aged 14-16** that meet the needs of the Curriculum for Wales
- work with awarding bodies and others to build an effective and sustainable offer of **high-quality robust qualifications for learners aged 16-19 and apprentices**
- use our powers and influence to encourage awarding bodies to **modernise assessment** approaches and prepare learning providers for an increase in digital assessment
- **support the qualifications system** by focusing our grant scheme in the most effective way to secure bilingual qualifications where they are most needed and a regulatory approach that is effective, proportionate, and appropriate

Ways of working

We will be formally subject to duties outlined in the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) from April 2023, along with our established *Public Sector Equality Duty*. This means involving stakeholders across the education system in our work, listening to views and collaborating with partners to successfully implement and manage change.

We will take decisions informed by research, data, formal consultation, stakeholder engagement and through learning from other nations. Our communications channels will inform learners and other audiences and give them a voice in our work whilst keeping them informed of progress.

We will also look further into the future to consider trends in society and employment so that we enable qualifications and the qualifications system to continually evolve to meet the needs of future learners. In doing so we will optimise the benefits available from greater use of digital technology.

We will review our approach to inclusion, diversity and belonging, whilst delivering against our [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#) and our [Carbon Reduction Plan](#). In addition, we shall continue to operate efficiently and effectively, in a collaborative way that generates and deserves public trust. We will continue to value and promote the wellbeing and development of our employees, and work closely with our recognised trade union, in social partnership.

Involvement, integration and collaboration

We strive to take balanced, evidence-based decisions. Over recent years we have increased our levels of direct engagement, building networks that allow partners and stakeholders to have an early say on ideas and to continually feed in views.

This co-creation approach complements our formal consultations. It means that we are in regular discussions with learners, practitioners, experts, senior leaders, public bodies and other education regulators.

Our *Qualified for the Future* project is shaped through strategic engagement based on the aims of the Curriculum for Wales. We engage with discreet interest groups alongside subject level experts and practitioners.

Our sector reviews gather opinions and insights from hundreds of individual employers, as well as from teaching and learning providers. Our work on modernising assessment is drawing on a wide range of expertise within the education sector and beyond.

Our research programme includes annual public confidence surveys and interviews. We also ensure that we involve awarding bodies in our approach to Welsh-medium qualifications and in changes to our [Qualifications in Wales](#) database.

Our corporate teams collaborate with other public bodies to share best practice to support organisational efficiency and effectiveness. We also involve our staff and unions in our work.

Operational planning

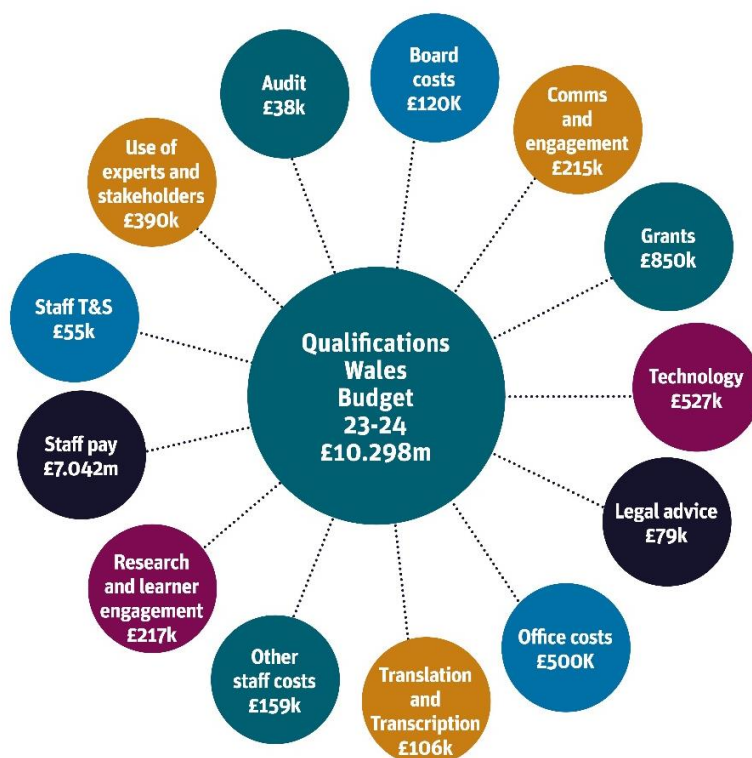
We have developed five operational priorities for the forthcoming financial year:

- **Reform**
- **Regulation**
- **Reach & Influence**
- **Research, Insight & Impact**
- **Resources & Corporate Capability**

Our work will be focused on several key areas including:

- publishing our decisions on new Made-for-Wales GCSEs and related 14-16 qualifications
- overseeing the award of qualifications in summer 2023 to a point broadly midway between the results for last year and summer 2019
- supporting the introduction of the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales and other new qualifications for the 2023-24 academic year
- introducing - subject to our recently completed consultation - new conditions requiring awarding bodies to make their bilingual policy clear and to promote availability
- reviewing our communications content and channels to better align them with our new audience-focused website

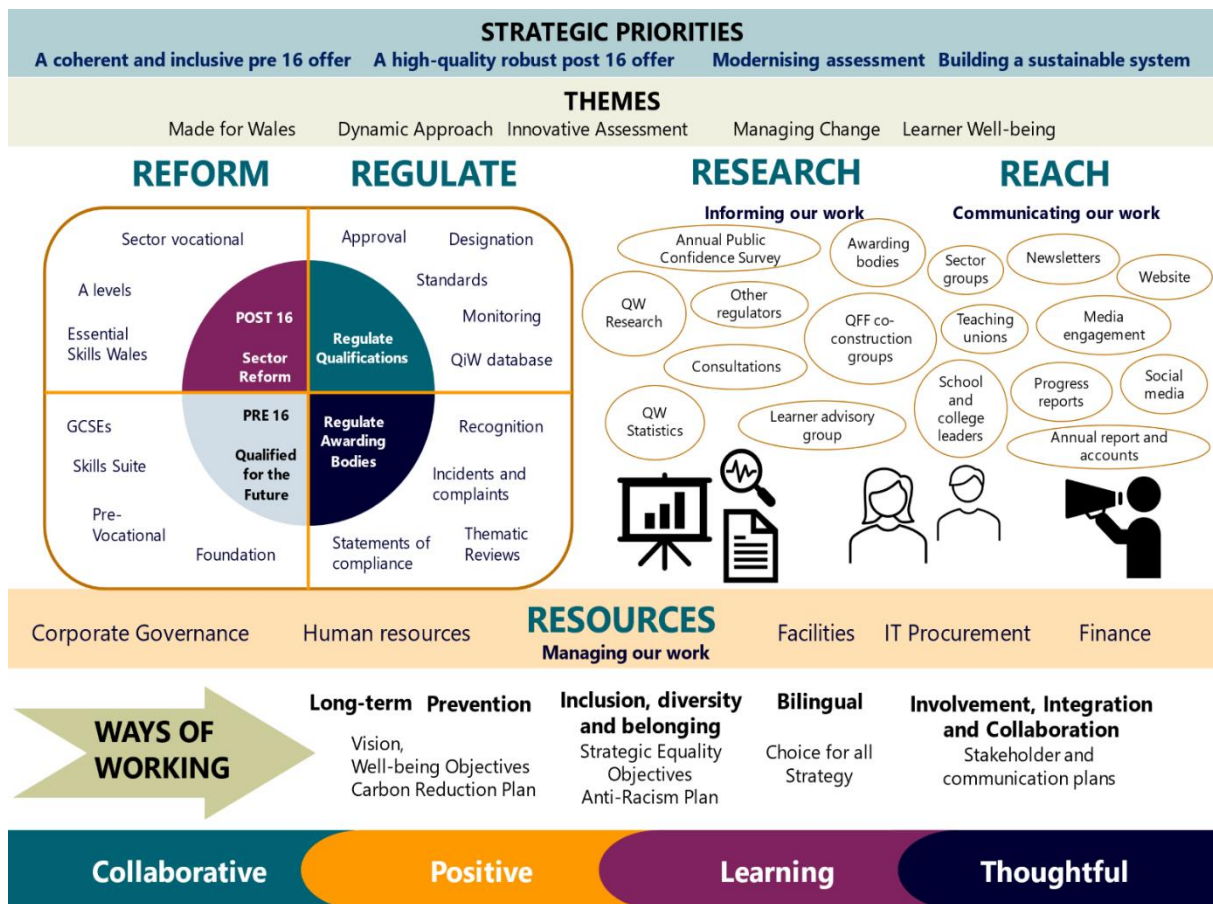
A budget for this financial year is £10.3m – the diagram below illustrates how we plan to spend this to carry out our operational priorities.



Operational priorities

Our work is therefore shaped by our strategy and ways of working, delivered under our **Reform** and **Regulation** operational priorities, influenced by and communicated through our **Reach & Influence** and **Research, Insights & Impact** work and managed effectively through our **Resources & Corporate Capability** activities.

Delivery of our [strategic equalities](#) and [wellbeing objectives](#), alongside our continuing commitments to Cymraeg – outlined in our Welsh language strategy [Choice for All](#) - are embedded within this business plan.



Reform

We keep qualifications under regular review to ensure they meet learner needs. Where reform is needed, we manage changes to the range, content or assessment approach of qualifications offered in Wales. We make changes to secure improved assessment, clearer progression routes, with focus on what education providers, employers and sector bodies tell us they want.

Ultimately, this helps create a skilled workforce appropriate for the 21st century. Our work helps learners progress and develop skills for life and work, thereby improving overall prosperity and economic growth. This work continues to be carried out through our [Qualified for the Future](#) programme, Sector Reviews and modernising assessment work. In 2023-24 we will be:

Reimagining the pre-16 qualifications offer – to deliver significant milestones in Qualified for the Future programme, reforming qualifications to support the new Curriculum for Wales. During the spring we will work with partners and stakeholders on the design requirements for new GCSEs, based on feedback to our recent consultation. We will publish the final requirements along with our decisions report in the summer term, so that awarding bodies can start developing new GCSEs for approval by summer 2024 ready for first teaching from 2025.

Delivery phases (GCSEs)



Made-for-Wales GCSEs delivery schedule

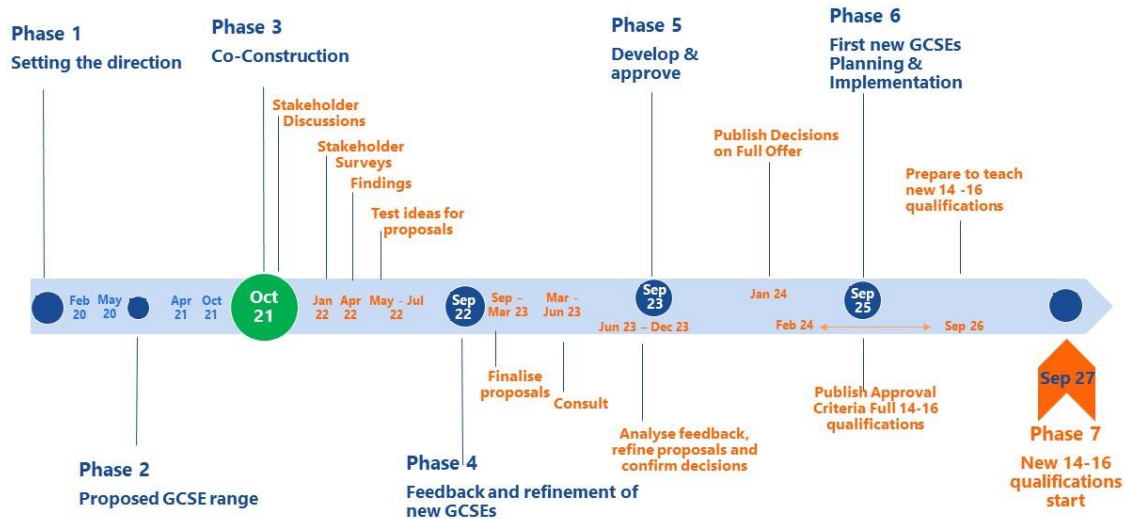
At the start of the summer, we will close our consultation on the Full 14-16 Qualifications Offer – a set of qualifications that will sit alongside the new GCSEs. Our proposals cover new foundation (entry level/level 1) qualifications, a suite of qualifications to help learners develop their integral skills, skills for work and life, and a broad range of pre-vocational qualifications spanning entry level to level 2.

We will publish our decision report at the end of 2023 and begin work to put the full 14-16 qualifications offer in place by September 2027. We will also consider the potential of developing a common national brand for all 14-16 qualifications in Wales.

Project Delivery



Full qualifications offer for 14-16 learners



Full 14-16 Offer delivery schedule

We will work closely with schools and other learning providers, while supporting Welsh Government and awarding body provision of professional learning and resources, so that teachers are fully prepared for the changes.

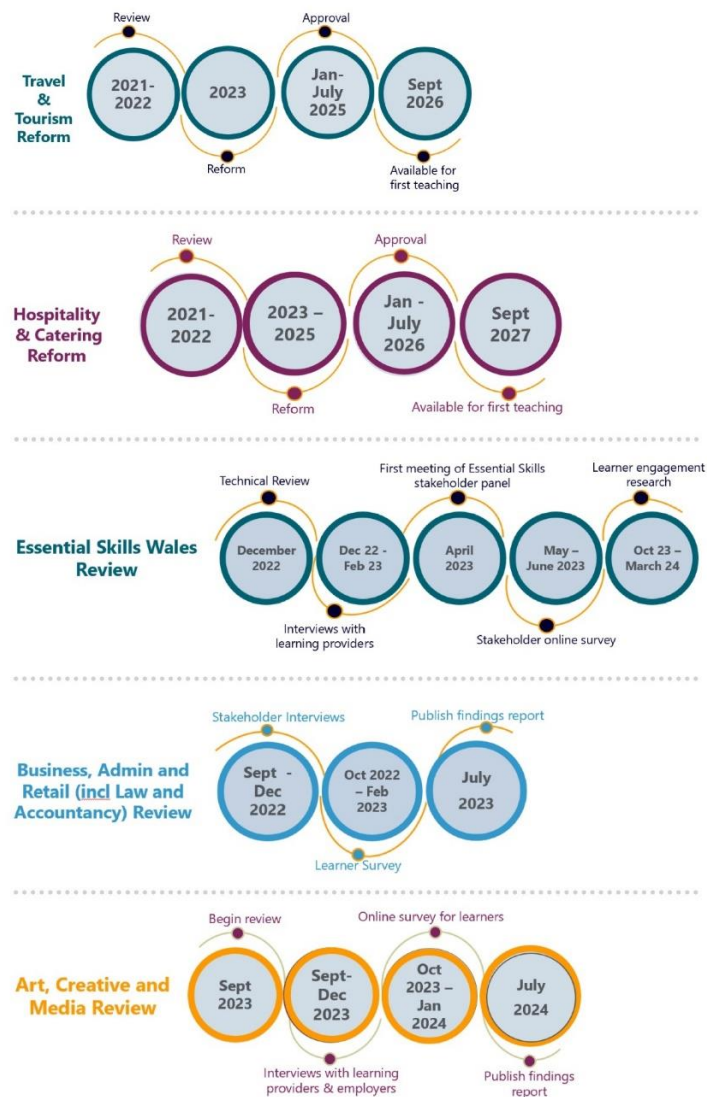
We will also plan the approach for setting standards and managing the transition from current to new qualifications. We will continue our work to measure benefits and evaluate the impact of our reforms. In line with our strategy, we will start to consider how we can engage stakeholders to look ahead into the longer-term and how qualifications might evolve to meet future needs.

Reviewing the post-16 qualifications offer – continuing our sector approach to review and, where necessary, reform post-16 qualifications. In March 2023 we published [Going Places](#), our report on our Travel Tourism Hospitality and Catering review and launched a consultation on our proposals to commission new Made-for-Wales qualifications in Hospitality and Catering.

Following the consultation, we will decide whether and how to proceed in the autumn. We will complete our review of Business, Administration and Retail qualifications and start our review of art, creative media and media qualifications.

We will continue to look at how new qualifications are performing, working with colleges and work-based learning providers to help explain and manage change. We will implement the actions from our early monitoring of reformed qualifications in Health and Social Care and in Construction and the Built Environment. For all new qualifications, we will undertake early monitoring after the first teaching year, and seek centre views, as standard practice for our reforms.

Next year we will be overseeing the implementation of changes to Essential Skills Wales (ESW) digital literacy qualifications and continuing our review of the full ESW suite. We will also complete the actions set out in our reviews of qualifications in Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing and in Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care.



Sector reviews delivery schedule

The next academic year will see first teaching of new digital technology qualifications and the introduction of the level 3 Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales.

We look forward to responding to the Vocational Qualifications Review, set up by Welsh Government and due to report in the summer. We also look forward to engaging with the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research as it comes into being next year.

Finally, we will develop plans for a short and pragmatic review of A and AS level qualifications to ensure smooth progression for learners from the newly reformed GCSEs.

Modernising assessment – we will plan a strategic approach to innovative assessment, including the greater use of technology by awarding bodies. A small, focused team will work with awarding bodies and the wider education sector to promote the use of digital bilingual assessment and support change. We will optimise the opportunities within *Qualified for the Future* with some subjects having digital only assessment.

We will work with digital platform providers to grow our own expertise and understanding of aspects such as remote invigilation and optional forms of assessment. We will work with partners to explore how digital technologies offer fresh approaches, including formative and continuous assessment, to assess a wide range of skills and knowledge for modern society.

Support our Strategic Equalities Objective

'Regulated qualifications are designed and assessed in a way that is fair for all learners.'

Regulate

Regulating awarding bodies

Monitoring and Compliance - we will consider applications from awarding bodies to be recognised or to surrender recognition. We will monitor compliance with our Standard Conditions of Recognition through our annual Statements of Compliance process, thematic reviews and by monitoring incidents and investigating complaints. We will continue to deliver our statutory regulatory functions, reviewing our regulatory framework to minimise burden on awarding bodies and improve transparency of rules and regulations.

Regulatory approach for reforms - over the year we will plan for the review and approval of submissions for reformed qualifications for 14–16-year-olds. We will review and adjust our regulatory approach to support our planned reforms, manage transition and ensure provision of the whole suite of GCSEs for the approval period. We will develop our regulatory approach to support the delivery of the Full 14-16 Qualifications Offer.

Regulating qualifications

Approvals – during this year we will start to consider the first submissions of new GCSEs, and plan work through to 2026 for approval of the full qualification offer for pre-16 learners.

Designation – we will continue to consider qualifications for designation and will work with awarding bodies to ensure our Qualifications in Wales database (QiW) provides accurate information to meet user needs.

Monitoring – we will monitor the delivery of the summer 2023 and winter 2023/24 exam series' and we will also monitor the award of vocational qualifications with a focus on those newly approved for Wales.

Maintenance of standards – this year we will oversee the award of qualifications in summer 2023 to a point broadly midway between the summer 2022 and summer 2019 results, before returning to pre-pandemic outcomes in 2024. We will consider ways to strengthen the current processes for setting standards and awarding to support the transition to new qualifications for 14–16-year-olds in 2025-2027.

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'Regulated qualifications are designed and assessed in a way that is fair for all learners.'

Reach & Influence

Promoting and maintaining public confidence in qualifications and the Welsh qualification system is central to our work. We ensure this by continually improving the ways that we communicate and engage with key audiences across the country. We have a range of channels and techniques, and work with partners across the education sector and civil society to communicate our work. In 2023-24 we will be:

Building public confidence and understanding – planning effective communications and engagement activity to maintain and grow public confidence and understanding of our role and purpose. This will improve our organisational reach, expertise and influence.

Delivering effective strategic engagement – through maintaining and developing existing and new stakeholder relationships, including with under-represented groups.

Delivering effective communications – through creative and engaging media, digital and communications activities. This will include reviewing content across all channels and maintaining a new audience-focused website.

Communicating and engaging on our key work – developing and delivering dedicated campaigns to promote and build engagement with our regulation and reform activities.

Continuously improving – improving the tracking and evaluation of our external engagement, review our internal communications and ensuring effective use of Cymraeg across our external communications.

Support delivery of our Strategic Equalities Objective

‘Engaging with and informing the qualification system - we communicate, engage, consult and conduct research with diverse groups, benefiting from a wide range of views.’

Research, Insight & Impact

We strive to take decisions that are balanced, and evidence based. We listen to stakeholders and provide clear information. Our work is supported by our approach to considering both the needs of future generations of learners (including Welsh-medium education) and our equalities duties - informed by our research and statistical analysis and our consultations and engagement activities. We will monitor our impact and be transparent, sharing our progress reports. In 2023-24 we will be:

Supporting bilingual qualifications - building on progress towards delivering our *Choice for All* strategy to secure improved bilingual qualifications offer. This includes – subject to consultation - introducing new conditions requiring awarding bodies to make their bilingual policy clear and to promote availability. We will review our grants provision to maximise their positive impact on Welsh-medium provision, strengthening our partnership with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to support Welsh-medium education for the post-16 sector, including the development of guidelines for assessing work in Welsh

Conducting and commissioning research – to deliver our research plan to support reform activities, including work on exploring teacher and public understanding of how qualification standards are maintained. We will examine modernising assessment, to inform thinking on use of digital assessment and moderation/verification approaches. We will also examine approaches to equality, equity, diversity and inclusion in the qualifications system.

Collecting data – we shall be collecting, analysing and publishing data and statistics, including analysis to help monitor standards, support for impact assessments and monitoring indicators. We will look to enhance the presentation of statistics through visualisation.

Supporting future generations – having been listed under the Well-being of Future Generations Act we will work towards producing a wellbeing statement and consider updated objectives for 2024 onwards. We will take a cross-organisational approach to considering our longer-term vision and the five ways of working, to build on the voluntary objectives that we already have in place.

Striving for equality – continuing to deliver our strategic equality objectives. Actions this year include short term work placements, training for board and employees and continued support for staff to carry out volunteering and other socially responsible activities. We will review progress against our existing objectives and, using evidence from our research with employees and external organisations and engagement with representative bodies, set new objectives for 2024 onwards.

Challenging racism - having published our first Anti-Racism Action Plan, we will deliver actions relating to qualifications content, engagement, recruitment, local communities, employee and Board training.

Reporting on our activities - producing and publishing regular corporate reports including our annual report, annual accounts and next year's business plan. There will also be progress reports on our future generations and equalities objectives.

Support delivery of our Strategic Equalities Objective

'Engaging with and informing the qualification system - we communicate, engage, consult and conduct research with diverse groups, benefiting from a wide range of views.'

Resources & Corporate Capability

We know that having strong and effective corporate capabilities supports our ability to deliver and enhances our reputation with stakeholders. We aim to continue to earn trust through robust and effective management of our resources and compliant corporate practices. We will continue to support employee well-being and development. We want our employees to be agile and flexible employees supported to develop within a diverse and inclusive organisation that is efficient and effective. In 2023-24 we will be:

Delivering corporate services – that support and challenge the organisation to be efficient, effective and compliant, and meet our corporate responsibilities. This will include effective implementation and use of our new systems for human resources and finance.

Building effective hybrid working – we have adopted new ways of working and adapted our policies and working environment. We will continue to look at process improvement to suit remote working and to explore ways to build engagement, listening to the views of staff and unions, as we continue to monitor effectiveness.

Developing our workforce – continuing to grow our employee numbers to deliver our reform work. Our people strategy will help our employees to develop their skills and experience and support their well-being, and our people survey will continue to inform our approach.

Supporting board development – following our review of board effectiveness we will address recommendations and continue to organise development days and training as required. Board members will continue to mentor individuals from an ethnic minority background to support the *Pathways to Board* project being run through the housing trusts.

Delivering on our plans to reduce carbon – this involves actions across the organisation to reduce the impact of our operation, our travel and our supply chain, and to influence the awarding bodies that we regulate.

Working collaboratively to improve efficiency and effectiveness – continuing to work with partners across the public sector, both to support the qualifications system and to make use of opportunities for greater efficiency or effectiveness. This includes providing information technology support and guidance, and supporting delivery of our collaborative management training contract for sponsored bodies.

Support our Strategic Equalities Objectives

'Our workforce and Board reflect the diversity of the population in Wales that we regulate for and work amongst.'

'We continue to build a culture where people feel that the organisation values them as individuals, appreciates their differences and makes good use of the range of experiences and insight available.'