



# **Qualifications Wales Business Plan 2017/18**

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## 1. Qualifications Wales

### 1.1. Introduction

Qualifications Wales is the regulator of non-degree qualifications in Wales, we took on our regulatory functions with effect from September 2015.

2017/18 is our second full year of operation and as we enter this period we do so with the experience of the last 18-months and a real energy and drive to continue developing our work. We have made some significant achievements over the last 12-months: these are summarised in this plan.

This business plan for 2017/18 sets our priorities for the financial year and have been established within the context of the current qualifications landscape and our previous achievements. These priorities have been approved by our Board. They were developed by our staff and were guided by the thoughts of those who deliver or support the qualifications system in Wales.

We welcome any feedback you may have, particularly as during 2017/18 we will be finalising our longer-term plans.

### 1.2. Our Purpose

As the independent regulator, we have two Principal Aims:

- 1 – Ensuring that qualifications (and the Welsh qualification system) are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and
- 2 – Promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualifications system.

This means that we place the learner at the heart of our activities. It also means that we have responsibilities to look across the qualification system to make sure it is working in the interest of learners; taking action or advising others to do so when needed.

## 2. Current Environment

As we plan for our second full year of operation, we do so in an environment where the political and public interest in education remains high.

There continues to be divergence between the education policies of Wales, England and Northern Ireland. This is the first year when many of the GCSEs and A levels taken by students in Wales will be new qualifications reformed for Wales. Changes have also taken place in England and are planned for Northern Ireland, which include moves away from current A\*-G grading for GCSEs. The shared nature of the GCSE and A level brands places particular importance on effective joint working between regulators from each nation to maintain standards and public confidence in the qualifications. Good working relationships have been developed and Memoranda of Understanding are in place.

Looking further ahead, in Wales, Welsh Government continues to lead work on curriculum reform. Qualifications Wales is engaged with various working groups and has considered what the implications might be for qualifications. We have identified and started planning areas of research that can help with this work. It is important that any changes to qualifications complement teaching approaches, and that change is managed carefully.

In England, delivery of the Skills Plan is likely to have a major impact upon the UK Awarding Body market. The current intention to structure 'technical' qualifications under fifteen routes and to license one awarding body to deliver each route will inevitably reduce the available market for those bodies not appointed. Changes in Apprenticeship policy and the move to more end-point assessment will also have an impact. We will carefully monitor the impact on awarding bodies, and on choice for learners in Wales, recognising the importance of portability. We will be continuing with delivery of our Vocational Strategy and our Sector Reviews but will be mindful of developments in England when considering options and recommendations.

In terms of changes in legislation in Wales, Qualifications Wales expects in due course to be listed in regulations concerning the Welsh Language Standards, and to be listed under the Well-Being of Future Generations Act. We also anticipate regulations being considered to confirm the scope of our powers to issue monetary penalties and to transfer the status of 'appropriate regulator' (under the Equalities Act) to us from Welsh Government. We will also continue to monitor the impact of the UK withdrawal from the EU and of any associated UK legislation.

### **3. Operational Priorities (2017/18)**

#### **3.1. Introduction and Context**

The 2017/18 operational priorities build on last year's plan, for example the focus of the corporate functions is moving from building to maturing our capabilities, the vocational qualifications strategy is moving from strategy development to implementation, and activities to support the qualifications system in Wales is increasingly influenced by stakeholder feedback.

There are five operational priorities for the 2017/18 year:

1. Deliver the General Qualifications aspects of our work;
2. Deliver the Vocational Qualifications aspects of our work;
3. Deliver the core regulatory aspects of our work;
4. Engage with and support the Welsh qualification system;
5. Continue to develop our corporate capabilities and capacity.

### 3.2. Priority 1 - Deliver the General Qualifications aspects of our work;

As a regulator, our priority is to ensure that standards are maintained. The GCSE and A level brands are important to learners, employers and universities and our job is to work with other regulators to make sure that while there may be differences in detail between England, Wales and Northern Ireland – the overall standards are maintained.

We have responsibilities for oversight of how well the qualifications system is working. In this capacity, we will be looking in more detail at the effectiveness of the new reformed qualifications. We will also be considering the impact on learners and teachers. This will include looking at issues such as early and repeat entry, the approach to the maintenance of standards and opportunities to improve confidence in marking. We will also be reviewing the effectiveness of the Skills Challenge Certificate and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate.

What did we achieve in 2016/17?	What are our plans for 2017/18?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We completed the final phase of approval for the new GCSEs and A levels by 31 March 2017, as planned, ready for first teaching September 2017;</li> <li>• We established a Welsh Baccalaureate Working Group to monitor action plans developed following our implementation review;</li> <li>• We established an Essential Skills Steering Group to monitor progress and to identify any concerns;</li> <li>• We provided grant funding to the four awarding bodies delivering Essential Skills to support the initial roll-out of tasks and tests;</li> <li>• We commissioned work to review the design and assessment model of the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate.</li> <li>• We completed an extensive monitoring programme for the summer and winter examinations series.</li> </ul>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversee the setting and maintenance of appropriate standards in general qualifications;</li> <li>• Monitor the delivery of the summer and winter examination series (legacy and reformed);</li> <li>• Monitor the overall effectiveness of reformed qualifications;</li> <li>• Evaluate the impact of qualification reform.</li> </ul>

### 3.3. Priority 2 - Deliver the Vocational Qualifications aspects of our work;

Our focus is on delivering our VQ strategy. This year that will involve widening our monitoring plan to cover high uptake subjects in First Aid, Food Safety and Essential Skills Wales. In the summer, we will award a contract to one or more awarding bodies to develop a new suite of Health and Social Care qualifications, ready for first teaching in September 2019. With this new suite, we will be able to build progression routes that strengthen the skills of the workforce in this devolved sector. We will be working across the system to ensure that the changes are delivered effectively, learning lessons from an evaluation of the impact of our workshops on assessment skills. In autumn, we will publish the findings of our sector reviews in Construction and the Built Environment (CBE). We will consider the findings and consult on any proposed actions. In the Autumn, we will publish our findings of the sector review for Construction and the Built Environment. Our sector review of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will report later in 2018.

What did we achieve in 2016/17?	What are our plans for 2017/18?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We published our VQ strategy, explaining our plans for Sector Reviews and how we would monitor VQs;</li> <li>• We commenced our programme of focused monitoring, starting with a comprehensive review of First Aid qualifications.</li> <li>• We started our Construction and Built Environment and Information Communication technology Sector Reviews;</li> <li>• We consulted on the options for delivering the commitments of the Health and Social Care Review. We have since issued our decision to restrict provision and are well underway in procuring awarding body[ies] to develop the new qualifications. We have worked closely with sector representatives to develop draft subject content for these new qualifications.</li> </ul>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver the VQ monitoring programme for 2017/18;</li> <li>• Deliver Sector Reviews (CBE and ICT);</li> <li>• Implement commitments from the Health, Social Care and Childcare (HSC) review.</li> </ul>

### 3.4. Priority 3 - Deliver the core regulatory aspects of our work

Our focus is on publishing our regulatory framework and approach which will balance the needs of Wales with the principles of good regulation. We will be consulting on our proposal to introduce the intended regulatory outcomes. We will also be reviewing our Standard Conditions of Recognition and completing our schedule of policy development and review. In addition to our annual review of awarding body Statements of Compliance we will also be starting a programme of awarding body visits and audits, and improving the way that we manage information that we hold.

Having reviewed our approach to designation we will also be finalising our designation policy and procedures.

What did we achieve in 2016/17?	What are our plans for 2017/18?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We started a full review of designation</li> <li>• We undertook a full review of the regulatory framework that we adopted from Welsh Government</li> <li>• We drafted Regulatory Outcomes for public consultation in April 2017;</li> <li>• We made good progress in completing our suite of policies – including publishing the Consultation Policy, Restricted Priority Qualifications Policy, Recognition Policy and Regulatory Appeals Policy;</li> <li>• We agreed a process for the Exam Procedure Review Service (EPRS)</li> </ul>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and communicate our regulatory framework and approach;</li> <li>• Monitor awarding body compliance with our Conditions of Recognition;</li> <li>• Further develop our regulatory systems and procedures;</li> <li>• Process applications for recognition and surrender of qualifications.</li> </ul>

### 3.5. Priority 4 – Engage with and support the Welsh qualification system

Our priority is to work effectively with the whole qualifications system in Wales. We will deliver our engagement plan with our stakeholders. Our centre support team will continue to regularly meet with and support schools and colleges and other learning providers, providing advice to support the integrity of the qualifications system across Wales.

We will undertake research to provide evidence for our decisions and to inform our longer-term planning – this includes work to support Welsh Government’s development of a new curriculum for Wales. We will start to develop our view of a language continuum and options for assessment. This year will also see the second phase of the longitudinal study into public confidence in the qualifications system.

What did we achieve in 2016/17?	What are our plans for 2017/18?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We recruited our team of seven researchers and statisticians;</li> <li>• We published research into public confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system;</li> <li>• We commissioned several research projects linked to our VQ sector reviews and our review of the Welsh Baccalaureate &amp; Skills Challenge Certificate;</li> <li>• We developed a more consistent approach to learner engagement and data collection;</li> <li>• We revised and published our Regulatory Welsh-medium and Bilingual Qualifications Policy</li> <li>• We worked with key stakeholders to clarify the availability of Welsh medium teaching and learning resources they will be offering to support the introduction of the new GCSE and A level qualifications;</li> <li>• We launched QiW on 1st April;</li> <li>• We held our first Annual Awarding Body forum;</li> <li>• We have developed our website and two regular newsletters.</li> </ul>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulate for a bilingual nation (including managing grant funding);</li> <li>• Enhance our digital channels and strengthen our external engagement;</li> <li>• Support schools and colleges and other learning providers (centres);</li> <li>• Inform (through research) our forward planning for qualifications and the qualification system in Wales.</li> </ul>

### 3.6. Priority 5 – Continue to develop our own corporate capabilities and capacity

We will continue to develop our corporate capabilities, moving towards a greater level of maturity. This year we intend to develop our Workforce strategy which will help us to further invest in our people for the future. We will be taking our Data Collection and Statistical Publications project forward to enable us to commence data collections directly from awarding bodies to support our publications and research activities. We will also be preparing for the Welsh Language Standards to be applied to our organisation.

What did we achieve in 2016/17?	What are our plans for 2017/18?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We published our first Annual Accounts</li> <li>• We set up and reviewed our business continuity plans</li> <li>• We published our family friendly HR policies</li> <li>• We have established our staff performance management and deployment processes;</li> <li>• We ran our first Staff Survey achieving a 96% response rate and an engagement index of 76%,</li> <li>• We delivered Equality and Diversity training and 'Kick off Cymraeg' Welsh awareness training to staff and Board members;</li> <li>• We achieved Cyber Essentials Plus information security accreditation</li> <li>• We delivered our procurement plan awarding 56 contracts and published our procurement policy</li> <li>• We completed five internal audits with one substantial, three satisfactory and one limited assurance ratings;</li> <li>• We have reviewed our governance arrangements</li> <li>• We have developed our risk management processes, agreed the Board's risk appetite</li> </ul>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop the maturity of each of the finance and corporate services functions, to support and challenge the organisation to maximise use of its resources while maintaining compliance and safeguarding our reputation in the areas of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications and External Relations</li> <li>• Corporate Governance</li> <li>• Facilities</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Human Resources</li> <li>• IT</li> <li>• Procurement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop our Workforce Strategy;</li> <li>• Deliver the data collection and statistical publications project;</li> <li>• Ensure readiness to comply with the Welsh language standards.</li> </ul>

## 4. Funding and Planned Expenditure (2017/18)

Qualifications Wales has set a budget of £8.217m for 2017/18. This is made up of the £8.042m annual grant allocation from the Welsh Government to cover its operational costs, plus the utilisation of £175k from internal reserves to meet one-off costs associated with specific projects.

At a summary level, our expenditure forecast is as follows:

Budget Area	2017-18 Budget £'000
Pay Costs	4,509
Grants	1,118
Programme Budgets	1,022
Running Costs	1,568
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,217</b>

The diagram below further outlines our planned expenditure:



## 5. Looking Ahead

During this year, together with our Board, we will be reviewing our Strategic Priorities and considering our longer-term development within the evolving qualifications system in Wales. This will include monitoring changes in our operating environment which are identified on page 4 (current environment).

We will review our Vocational Qualifications Strategy, revising it to be our Strategic Plan for Vocational Qualifications.

Our longer-term focus areas are set out in our Vocational Qualifications Strategy and General Qualifications Strategic Plans. These can be viewed on our website.

## 6. Monitoring and Review

We monitor progress against our plans regularly, with monthly reports provided to our internal Management Board and quarterly reports to the Board. At the end of the year we will publish a summary of the year's achievements in our end of year accounts (covering the same period as this plan, that is the financial year April 2017 to March 2018). We will also provide a fuller account of our activities and achievements in our annual report (covering the academic year September 2017 to August 2018). We present our annual report to the National Assembly Children and Young Peoples Education Committee for their scrutiny – this forms part of our legal requirements under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015.

## 7. Useful links

Please see below links to some useful documents that may give additional context to this Business Plan:

- [Qualifications Wales Website](#)
- [Qualifications Wales Annual accounts 2015/16](#)
- [Qualifications Wales - Annual report 2015/16](#)
- [Qualifications Wales Board structure](#)
- [Qualifications Wales Executive structure](#)