

QUALIFICATIONS WALES PEOPLE STRATEGY – 2018 to 2021



CONTENTS

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Contents



Overview	3
Context	4
Our areas of focus	5
Building our capability	8
Wellbeing	11
A bilingual organisation	13
Culture and values	14
Our challenges	17
Our measures	23

Overview

Our employees, our people, have been at the core of the business since the establishment of our organisation in September 2015. This strategy outlines our approach to building, developing and enhancing our organisational capability to deliver our principal aims and strategic priorities.

This plan seeks to encompass our approach to workforce planning and learning and development over the next three years. We have identified five areas of focus and four challenges that we anticipate facing during this timeframe.

Context

Qualifications Wales has been established for two and a half years. The structure that was designed and developed prior to our establishment in September 2015 is largely unchanged and we do not anticipate any significant change to this over the next three years. We invested in higher band posts early on with the aim of building a knowledge based organisation with the ambition to be an organisation that invests in its employees at all levels. A large proportion of our organisation has been recruited from professions, e.g. educationalists, teaching, policy, researchers, HR, Finance, Procurement and IT. We sought to build a culture that was familial, with values developed around our commitment to deliver, respect for each other and an ability to work together and with our partners/stakeholders. This is our first people strategy.

We strive to be an employer of choice. We are a public-sector body but seek to compete with the wider market, demonstrating the benefits we offer such as flexible working and an attractive reward package comprising of competitive public sector pay, access to the Civil Service Pension Scheme and a generous annual leave allowance. Our office space reflects the organisation's spirit and values, having created a bright, collaborative, engaging working environment we are proud to share this with visitors and potential employees on our online recruitment pages. We are focused on creating an inclusive organisation and are ambitious and we will support our employees so that they are able to deliver.

Our areas of focus

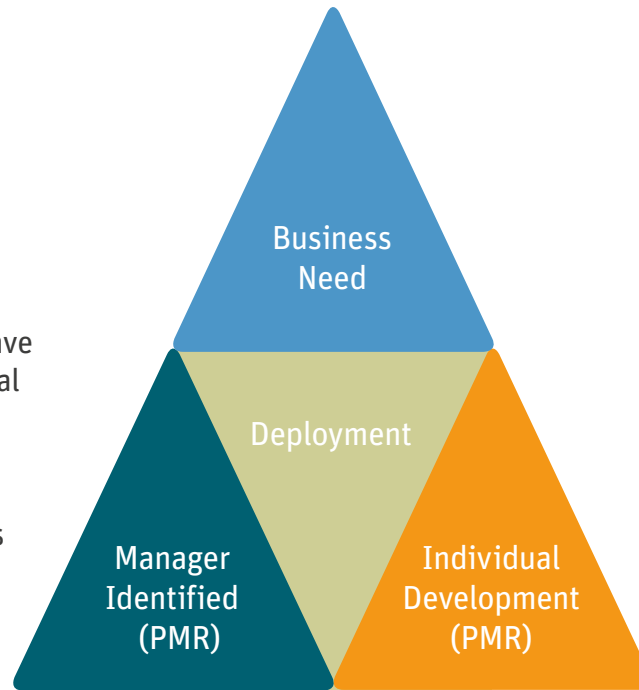


Shaping the workforce

Our Corporate Capability Strategic plan identifies 'enabling our regulatory work' and 'Maintaining and using professional skills' as areas of focus and these are critical when considering how we manage and shape our workforce over the next three years.

Our primary aim is to fulfil, maintain and manage the agreed structure, ensuring that the employees in post are engaged in the work they do, that our performance management supports their development and that they receive the training required for them to fulfil their role and to develop as potential successors. We want to ensure that our managers are effective and able to manage workload and engage their teams to deliver our operational priorities.

We sought to build flexibility into the organisation at the outset and within Development and Commissioning, Recognition and Approval, Monitoring and Compliance and General and Vocational Qualifications teams we identified 'deployment' roles which would enable us to move Qualifications Assistants, Officers and Managers between teams based on employees' existing skills and business need but also longer-term succession planning which can be individual or business led. This model has been built into our performance management process and we will engage with employees and managers annually on preferences and consider these alongside our business planning activity. Employee development sits at the heart of this model and the intention is to enable employees with career goals in the regulation of qualifications to experience all aspects of the qualifications cycle.



Within the organisation we have teams that require professional skills, for example Finance, Procurement, Statistics and Research. We will support employees in their continuous professional development through the achievement of appropriate qualifications and the maintenance of that professional knowledge through training and development. We will also be active in local professional groups and work with Welsh Government, Civil Service bodies and Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies to share skills and expertise, to work collaboratively and to build relationships that enable an interchange of employees through secondment agreements when they support employee development.

Our agreed structure comprises 83 FTE posts which are permanent roles, and whilst we don't envisage significant growth over the next three years we know there are challenges on the horizon, e.g. curriculum reform which require flexibility to respond to changing

priorities. To deliver we will utilise flexible contracts where appropriate, e.g. fixed term, secondment, interns and apprenticeships based on the role, the need and the appropriateness of the contract type.

Our Strategic Equality Plan outlines our objectives at establishment and in terms of our workforce focussed on ensuring our recruitment processes did not create barriers for applicants and the provision of our initial Equality and Diversity training for our employees and Board. We will continue to review our approach and work with representative groups to consider how we can best engage and attract skilled applicants from diverse backgrounds recognising that a range of experience will build strength and insight into our core business and that an inclusive organisation is ultimately a strong one. Our equality objectives will be refreshed in autumn 2018.

Building our capability

We will invest in our employees through our approach to learning and development to build and enhance our capability. We will respond to individual development needs as identified by the employee or the manager alongside corporately driven learning needs identified by the organisation. We will measure the impact and value of training and development opportunities for individuals and the organisation. We will also invest in the skills of our Board members; our approach will be outlined in our Corporate Governance Strategy.

Areas of focus for all employees will include:

- ▶ Leadership and management
- ▶ Regulatory skills
- ▶ Project management
- ▶ Audit and complaint handling skills
- ▶ Welsh language skills
- ▶ Digital capability
- ▶ Writing skills/tone of voice

We are also committed to supporting the professional development and the ongoing CPD for those within designated professions by funding professional membership fees (where the membership is a requirement for the role held) and supporting ongoing continuous professional development through attendance at peer networks and training.

Our intention at the outset was to build an organisation where all employees understood the business. This commenced during the initial phase of induction with training for all employees (regardless of function) on assessment and regulation. We will continue with this model as the organisation grows through formal training which will be open to all and internal peer led sessions which will provide insight into the work of the different teams and directorates.

We recognise that some employees will choose to specialise in regulation and assessment and will consider requests for further and higher education where personal development supports building the knowledge base within the organisation.

In line with our commitment to partnership working we will support our Union Committee members in training to help them fulfil their role.



Wellbeing

We recognise that supporting our employees' physical and emotional wellbeing is central to them feeling engaged with the organisation and being able to deliver at work is fundamental to their ability to maintain a work-life balance.

We have considered employee wellbeing during policy development, seeking to ensure that policies are inclusive. We have sought to go above the statutory minimum in terms of entitlements and to provide flexibility to take account of individual circumstances and situations. For example, our approach to our family friendly policies (maternity, paternity, shared parental leave, special leave) but also the policies that cover situations where things go wrong, e.g. discipline and grievance.

Wellbeing is not just about supporting employees who are absent due to sickness back into work, but also about preventing absences by promoting healthy and positive lifestyles. We have contractual arrangements in place for Occupational Health services to support us in doing this and have also delivered one-to-one lifestyle sessions to identify where employees can make personal choices to make health improvements.

Employees also have access to free eye tests and an Employee Assistance Programme which provides confidential, independent advice on a wide range of issues via an initial telephone service as well as online provision.

We are committed to learning and development on issues that relate to wellbeing such as Mental Health awareness, Resilience, Emotional Intelligence and Equality and Diversity. Training of this type is important for self-awareness but also in supporting each other and recognising when colleagues may be experiencing challenges and need support.

We will also take time to support smaller initiatives in and around the workplace such as running clubs and walking groups and volunteering and charity based activities.

We have established a Wellbeing and Inclusion group that considers how we can build upon where we are now and continuously improve. We will work towards achieving a minimum of the bronze Corporate Health Standard and reflect on how we can maintain our inclusive culture, valuing diversity and the insight that different backgrounds and experiences can bring.

Our IT provides employees with choice and gives them control of how and where they work, either in the office or at home. We are supportive of employee requests to work from home where it fits with business and employee needs. Our office environment provides space for employees to choose where they work and encourages interaction through communal space for lunch. We recognise that a flexible approach makes our people happy and enables them to be the best that they can be.

Through these actions we are creating a supportive culture that nurtures our people, ensures that they are informed about life and work challenges, promotes an open culture/space to talk and by doing so ensures that our people are productive and that our absence rates consistently fall below the public-sector average.

A bilingual organisation

Whilst the Welsh Language Standards are not yet applicable to our organisation we will continue to work towards preparing for their application, promoting and embedding the Welsh language.

The Welsh language is part of our culture and is spoken by a number across the office, with fluent speakers supporting and helping others to develop skills.

- ▶ We encourage and support those who want to learn and improve their Welsh language skills;
- ▶ Learning Welsh is encouraged and offered to all;
- ▶ Our approach to learning will respond to individual need and consider personal interest balanced with the need to develop language skills based on specific roles and business needs.

We strive to provide a HR service that is responsive to Welsh speakers, providing access to policies and the related processes bilingually.

Culture and values

collaborative

thoughtful

positive

learning

We involved our employees in shaping and establishing our culture and values in the initial induction phase in September 2015. Our values were embedded within our performance management process to encourage modelling of the associated behaviours. We set out to create a culture that was a fit for our small organisation, familial in nature, flexible in approach and without hierarchy in terms of how we live in our office space – the ‘sweep the sheds’ approach. Our office environment was designed to encourage collaboration and integration with colleagues across teams and Directorates and our IT supports this too.

We have responded to feedback and have re-focussed and re-worded our values in a way that resonates better with employees. Our values are:

Collaborative in the way that we work

Thoughtful in the approaches we take

Positive in our outlook

Learning from experience and others

Our Board are committed to these values and live them through their work and their engagement with our employees. We also engage with the Board on issues relating to people, e.g. our policies, wellbeing and development and they have had the opportunity to be part of the shaping of this strategy.

We have re-launched these with a colourful and engaging campaign, we will establish a framework of behaviours that underpin our values and these will be built into our performance management system and our recruitment process.

As an employer, we are committed to working in partnership with our employees. During our September 2015 induction phase, employees voted to be represented by a Trade Union and we have worked with them to help them establish their own branch. We hold quarterly Partnership Forums during which the CEO, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services and the Head of HR and Chair and Secretary of the branch meet and consider matters relevant to employees. We have a Partnership Agreement that outlines how both parties will engage and work together.

We engage with all employees more generally via monthly Town Hall gatherings which enable colleagues to update on work or share information and successes with peers. These sessions also invite colleagues to share their views and ask questions. We encourage employee consultation and collaboration across teams by holding internal 'Lite-bites' on key pieces of work which are open to all to attend regardless of role and Board de-brief sessions which keep all informed. We measure our employee engagement using an annual people survey and act at a corporate and directorate level sharing actions and impact through our internal communications channels and at our annual employee development day.



Our challenges

Resilience

As a small organisation with an agreed structure of fewer than 100 posts, our resilience can be challenged in terms of knowledge as well as resources. Periods of absence or employee turnover can have an immediate impact, and redeploying within the organisation can result in reduced resources in other areas. Whilst we aim to be flexible to respond to changing needs, the knowledge based aspect of the large proportion of our roles means that recruitment can take time to get right and that the market may not always be able to deliver the people we need when we need them. This is particularly the case when we draw from the teaching profession and notice periods are based around term times. We will use our performance management process and outcomes to inform succession planning alongside business planning and bi-annual engagement with Executive and Associate Directors regarding their teams.

Regulatory

We will use our deployment model as the basis for building resilience with the regulatory aspects of our business. This model will ensure that we develop the skills of the employees to enable us to allocate people to planned priorities while responding to new demands.

We recognise that curriculum reform will bring challenges. Short-medium term resourcing changes may be required and we will need to respond to quickly and seek to build flexibility into our structure to deliver, this may involve fixed term appointments, further secondments and temporary contracts.

Corporate Services/ Policy and Research

Within Corporate Services, we have recruited professional ability at all levels and our skills and knowledge base is strong; the challenge lies within the structure where the head of the team is a couple of bands higher than the colleague(s), which does not allow for easy succession planning.

We will continue to build relationships with similar bodies and explore opportunities for secondments outwards and inwards to enable our employees to build their skills outside the organisation whilst enabling the movement back in to offer a long-term career path where possible.

In Policy and Research the position is similar: employees have been appointed based on their skills and with a view to developing knowledge of our regulatory role and the education sector. There are clearer succession routes in both teams, but we anticipate using

secondments in this directorate and there are relationships in place with other bodies, for example engagement with Welsh Government in the context of the Government Statistical and Research professions to share best practice and knowledge.

Diversity

Our organisation has good gender balance across roles and a good age distribution; however, we recognise that there are other challenges to ensuring that our organisation is truly inclusive. We understand that our role as a public-sector regulator may be a barrier to applicants from minority groups. We will work with bodies representing these groups to ensure that we minimise any physical or perceived barriers to applications for employment or engagement with us through our stakeholder activity. We will provide training for staff on equality issues.

Maturity

As an organisation that has been in existence for two years, we can no longer be considered 'new', but aspects of our organisation do not have the maturity of an established organisation. Most roles within the organisation have now settled into the structure, but we also need to ensure that we build flexibility into our policies to enable us to effectively manage change that could affect structure or roles and work in partnership with our Union to manage these changes appropriately and without negative impact on employees.

Regulatory/ Policy and Research

Our redeployment model is in place to build resilience and capability but it will also be a challenge to ensure that we do not destabilise effective teams but that conversely concerns about this do not hold us back from building the broader knowledge base of some colleagues. We need to ensure balance between allowing employees to specialise and managing expectations regarding long-term career development.

We will measure the maturity of the organisation and the workforce through public confidence in our ability to deliver and the impact of our published work.

Corporate Services

During the first two years, the Finance and Corporate Services Directorate have focused on building and establishing the policies and processes that the organisation needs to function effectively and appropriately. The development of individual teams' maturity is measured within the organisation's operational plan.

The 'newness' of the organisation can bring benefits, in that our 'way of doing things' is not too ingrained and our people are generally flexible and open to change when it is recognised that our internal processes can be adapted to be more effective.

Financial

Successfully managing the organisational structure and turnover will be a challenge when budgets are set annually. Whilst we have a reasonable indication of our funding and model to maximise spend of the pay budget, turnover and absences can have a greater impact in a small organisation. When we commit to exploring flexible contract options (fixed term contracts, secondments), these need to be balanced with permanent appointments to avoid succession difficulties in the future. We also need to balance the cost elements of secondments, given that they attract VAT as an additional cost and balance that with managing public money appropriately and in the most effective way.

We have learnt that our sectoral approach to reviewing vocational qualifications has the potential to identify work beyond the initial scope which can have an impact on our resources. We will manage this through business planning and reviews of our operational plan.

Our approach to pay seeks to recognise the importance of managing pay fairly and consistently in a way that motivates employees to make a positive contribution, and is affordable. The decisions we take regarding pay are crucial to maintaining equality across the organisation.

Sustaining engagement

At establishment in 2015, engagement was high, and our people were highly motivated and excited by the challenge of being part of a new organisation and passionate about making it work. One year later we measured our employee engagement in our first annual People Survey and achieved an engagement indicator of 76%, which was amongst the highest within the public sector in Wales.

We will commit to an annual survey of our employees' views and will undertake exit interviews with employees who decide to leave our organisation to evaluate where we can make positive changes and demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement.

We will work in partnership with our Union to maximise our employee engagement and work together to manage change successfully and resolve employee concerns effectively.

In Corporate Services, we will also seek to evaluate the service we provide to the organisation through feedback from peers.

We will look outwards and benchmark with similar organisations (public sector and regulators) to make sure we learn from others and are competitive in terms of what we offer and that our organisation is recognised as an employer of choice.



Our measures

We will measure the success and impact of our People Strategy by:

Recruitment – We will measure the impact of our recruitment processes in terms of our ability to attract applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds with the appropriate skills and track the progression of our employees and the effectiveness of our succession planning. We will consider how our organisation is perceived externally and the impact of our online presence in attracting future employees, using soft measures as well as data.

Exit interviews – When our employees choose to leave us, our aim is that they do so having had a positive experience, and that they have developed during their time with us, and that Qualifications Wales added value to their career path.

People Survey – We will strive to maintain or improve our initial engagement index of 76% and build upon the positive outcomes from our first two surveys. We will respond

to the results annually by engaging with our employees and seeking to make improvements where needed.

Learning and development – Our people survey will be one measure of the impact of our L&D, but we will also seek to measure impact post training ensuring that employees use the investment made, but also to ensure that the suppliers we use are relevant and deliver to meet our organisational need.

Operational priorities – We will measure the impact of the strategy in terms of the ability and flexibility of our workforce to deliver our annual business plans and achieve the operational priorities.

Accreditation – We will measure the impact of specific pieces of work via external accreditations and awards such as the Corporate Health Standard.

Organisational key performance indicators – e.g. tracking absence, vacancy rate, Internal churn – positive and negative.



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