

Business Plan 2019-20



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1. Qualifications Wales

1.1. Introduction

Qualifications Wales regulates awarding bodies offering qualifications in Wales. We are an independent body focused on publicly funded qualifications, including GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications. We work with others to review and reform qualifications.

Degrees are not part of our work, but we work with universities and colleges to make sure they understand qualifications so that learners can progress into higher education. We want qualifications to be the best they can be for learners, teachers and employers, helping people adapt in a rapidly changing world. We work with awarding bodies to extend the availability of qualifications through the Welsh language.

2019-20 is our fourth year of operation. We have established our longer-term strategy, and are looking forward to continuing with our programmes to support and strengthen the qualifications system in Wales. Our strategies are highlighted below:

[Qualifications Wales Strategy](#)

[General Qualifications Strategic Plan](#)

[Vocational Qualifications Strategy](#)

[Corporate Capability Strategic Plan](#)

This Business Plan for 2019-20 sets our priorities for the financial year, and has been established within the context of the current qualifications landscape and our ongoing work. These priorities have been approved by our Board.

We welcome any feedback you may have.

1.2. Our purpose

As the independent regulator, we have two principal aims:

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

This means that we place the learner at the heart of our activities.

We also have a responsibility to look across the qualifications system to check that it is working in the interest of learners, and to act or advise others to do the same, if necessary. Part of our work is to ensure that qualifications within the system are valued. We have

powers and duties to regulate awarding bodies and we can make positive interventions to secure improvements to qualifications or the qualifications system.

At Qualifications Wales, we protect the value of qualifications, overseeing the fair awarding of qualifications and reviewing and developing them as the needs of learners change.

As the trusted experts in qualifications, we provide Welsh Government with advice on relevant issues. We also consider the needs of employers, the higher education sector and professions.

2. Current context

This Business Plan covers our fourth year of operation. As always, education and the qualifications system remain of high political and public interest, and we are seeing a growing programme of reform and change.

We are reaching the end of the GCSE, AS and A level reform programme, with the last tranche of new qualifications being awarded for the first time in summer 2019. Our principal role now is to make sure that these qualifications continue to be assessed and awarded fairly, so that standards are maintained and public confidence secured.

We have learnt many lessons from the reform and will take these forward as we look at the changes to qualifications needed for 14 to 16-year-olds to complement the new Curriculum for Wales.

The timeline for reforming the curriculum means that Wales will need new qualifications ready for first teaching in September 2025 and awarded in summer 2027. We are working with stakeholders to develop our thinking and will undertake a consultation in autumn 2019. We will also consult on our work to consider improvements to the Welsh Baccaalaureate. We will make sure that qualifications in Wales are shaped for the future, and that the changes are made for teachers and learners to be supported. To support these reforms, we will ensure that we have the capacity and skills to deliver.

At the same time, we will continue our programme of sector reviews, looking at whether the range of qualifications in an industry sector meet learner and industry needs. We have already begun our Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing and Energy review and will be continuing with this through the coming year. We will be awarding a contract to develop and deliver new Construction and Building Services qualifications, following our review of this sector, and we will see first teaching of the first tranche of new Health and Social Care qualifications from September 2019. Where we make changes to qualifications, this is to secure improved assessment, clearer progression routes for learners and a clear focus on what employers and sector bodies tell us they want. This helps Wales to create a workforce appropriate for its needs in the 21st century.

Our work is supported by a programme of research and the collection and analysis of data. This builds our evidence base and understanding to support decision-making.

Looking outside Wales, we continue to monitor developments across the UK. We are keeping a close eye on the potential impact of the new T levels on the range of qualifications available in Wales. We are also continuing to monitor the impact of the differences in apprenticeship policy between England and Wales; and discussing the role that Qualifications Wales may play in the continuing development of apprenticeships.

The Welsh Government's ambition of one million Welsh speakers by 2050 lends a renewed importance to our work of increasing the number of qualifications that can be taken through the medium of Welsh. In the coming year, we will continue to offer grants and develop our Welsh language policies to make sure we are doing all we can to contribute to this goal.

We will continue to shape our regulatory approach. We hope to conclude work on new Standard Conditions of Recognition, working closely with Ofqual in England and CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland. We plan to consult on these during 2019 for effect in 2020. This coming year, we expect to see regulations being considered that, if passed, will confirm the scope of our powers to issue monetary penalties.

Although regulations have not yet been passed to apply Welsh Language Standards to us, we have voluntarily adopted many of these in advance. To demonstrate our commitment, we will publish a voluntary Welsh Language Scheme. Similarly, we have voluntarily adopted the ways of working deriving from the well-being of Future Generations Act. We will continue to deliver against our equality and our well-being objectives and to embed our Welsh language policies.

3. Operational priorities (2019-20)

3.1. Introduction and context

The 2019-20 operational priorities build on last year's plan and have been re-categorised to reflect our current approach. There are four of operational priorities for 2019-20:

1. Review
2. Reform
3. Regulate
4. Corporate capabilities and capacity

3.2. Priority 1 – Review

Our priority is to work effectively with the whole qualifications system in Wales. We are outward-looking, so we engage, communicate and collaborate to strengthen our understanding and ability to improve qualifications to better meet the needs of learners in Wales. To do this, we undertake research, engage with stakeholders such as schools, colleges, universities and employers and keep up-to-date with the wider policy landscape within Wales and other parts of the UK. We review and evaluate aspects of the qualifications system, with a view to ensuring learners' needs are met, thereby strengthening public confidence in qualifications and the wider qualifications system.

In 2019-20 we will:

Agree how 14-16 qualifications will need to change to support the new curriculum for Wales

The development of a new national curriculum for Wales is likely to bring about significant change in qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds. We will engage with stakeholders to develop high-level principles and vision for the future qualifications offer, and consult on this. We will then develop our plans for the design, development and delivery phases of the new qualifications. We will also identify any changes necessary for regulatory arrangements.

Conduct the Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing and Energy sector review

We have already begun our review of the Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing sector. This review will be spread over two years. In 2019, we will gather views from learners and stakeholders, undertake a technical review and an international comparison. We will draw together the findings and engage with stakeholders to consider if actions are needed and, if so, develop proposals.

Develop policy, strategy and guidance for cross-cutting vocational qualifications issues

There are several significant policy developments in England that will have an impact on the vocational qualifications market in the UK – including T levels and end-point assessments for apprenticeships. We will be closely monitoring changes in England and developing our approach to qualifications accordingly. We will continue to engage with stakeholders with an interest in vocational qualifications to strengthen the qualifications system.

Inform forward planning for qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales

We undertake research to provide an evidence base for strategic decision-making, to inform our regulatory policy, and to inform our longer-term planning. Topics will include:

- Non-examined assessment;
- Qualifications taken in schools (e.g. work on availability and take-up of qualifications over time and perceptions of reformed qualifications);
- Engagement and the use of technology in assessment;
- Public confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system.

3.3. Priority 2 – Reform

Our commitment is to review the qualifications offered in Wales and the qualifications system to ensure that they meet the reasonable needs of the learner and promote public confidence. This can lead to significant work to change existing or commission new ones. This is an important part of our work, and can have a significant impact. We engage with a broad range of stakeholders to understand and manage the impact of change.

In 2019-20, we will:

Take forward the recommendations from the review of the Welsh Baccalaureate

In April 2018, we published the review of the Skills Challenge Certificate and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate. In response to the recommendations in the report, we established a working group to look at the design of the Skills Challenge Certificate. In 2019-20, we will continue to work with this group to develop proposals for change and engage on these with stakeholders. We will also consider how these changes relate to the wider reforms that will complement the new curriculum.

Implement commitments from the Information and Communication Technology Sector review

In 2018-19, we published our sector review of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) – *Delivering Digital*. The review and subsequent proposals for action were well received, and so over the next year we will be progressing with the development of a new GCSE and A level in Digital Technology.

Implement commitments from the Health and Social Care and Childcare (HSC) review

Our Health and Social Care and Childcare review (published in 2016) identified the need for a reformed suite of qualifications. We have commissioned a consortium of City & Guilds and WJEC to develop these qualifications, which are in the process of being developed for first teaching from 2019 and 2020.

Implement commitments from the Construction and the Built Environment (CBE) review

In February 2018, we published our review of the Construction and Built Environment – *Building the Future*, and our consultation on proposals for reform of the qualifications in this sector. Our proposals were well received, and so we communicated our decision to reform qualifications in this sector. Over the next year, we will be awarding the contract for the development of a suite of new construction and building services qualifications.

Support the qualifications system through grant funding

We will continue to encourage awarding bodies to offer Welsh-medium qualifications and assessment, including the offer of grants to support the availability of qualifications through the medium of Welsh.

Communicate and engage on the reform agenda

Delivering targeted communications campaigns to support our core reform priorities will help our stakeholder audiences understand why changes are happening. We will continue to liaise with higher education colleagues across the UK to build a better understanding of changes to qualifications in Wales. It is important to make sure that centres in Wales get the information that they need, and that they are ready for changes in qualifications; we want centres to be informed and prepared.

3.4. Priority 3 – Regulate

We regulate qualifications that are developed and delivered by the awarding bodies that we recognise. When recognised, an awarding body must comply with the rules that we set. We monitor for compliance against our Conditions of Recognition, and use our enforcement and sanctions powers when awarding bodies fail to comply. Where appropriate, we use our enforcement powers to ensure that the system meets the needs of learners.

In 2019-20, we will:

Oversee the setting and maintenance of appropriate standards in general and vocational qualifications

We will oversee the fair award of standards from one exam series to the next. We will continue to work closely with other regulators so that there is a shared understanding of our approach to maintaining standards.

Monitor qualifications

We will closely monitor recently reformed qualifications to ensure they are effectively implemented and awarded to the appropriate standard.

Monitor awarding body compliance

Awarding bodies must provide us with an annual statement of compliance. We will review evidence submitted against our lines of inquiry, and will monitor non-compliant awarding bodies to ensure they take appropriate action to return to full compliance. We will continue our focused programme of audits on a selection of awarding bodies. We will publish our report on our monitoring of food safety qualifications, and move on to health and safety qualifications.

Process applications for recognition, surrender and designation

We will review applications from organisations wishing to become recognised awarding bodies. We will also process any applications from awarding bodies that wish their qualifications to be designated, or those wishing to surrender recognition of their organisation, or of specific qualifications.

Review and manage the qualification regulatory database (QiW)

QiW is a database owned and managed by Qualifications Wales. It holds information about qualifications eligible for public funding to learners in Wales aged under 19, excluding higher

education. Over the next year, we will continue to review and update QiW and respond to stakeholder feedback to continually improve the system.

Embed and keep under review our regulatory policies and procedures

We have a rolling programme of regulatory policy reviews. In 2019-20, we will review a selection of existing policies in line with the published review date. One of our significant activities will be to revise our Standard Conditions of Recognition. Working with other regulators, we will review and revise them.

Welsh Government have passed regulations that enable us to issue monetary penalties; awarding bodies will have a clear appeal route. We will establish the procedures to enable us to issue monetary penalties.

Collect data and produce official statistics

We will continue to collect the data needed to enable our functions and publish our suite of Official Statistics in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics. This data provides transparent information and trends about qualifications taken in Wales.

Communicate and engage on the qualifications system

Our communications are a core part of promoting public confidence. We will continue to strengthen our communications to explain the qualifications system. We work across Wales in supporting schools, colleges and work-based learning providers, to help them use the qualifications system effectively. We will also deliver the annual Awarding Bodies Forum to focus on developments in the system.

3.5. Priority 4 – Corporate resources

We know that having strong and effective corporate capabilities supports our ability to deliver our commitments and enhances our reputation with stakeholders. We strive to take decisions that are balanced, and evidence-based. We listen to stakeholders and give out clear information. We want to continue to earn trust through robust and effective management of our resources and compliant corporate practices.

In 2019-20, we will:

Continue to develop corporate resources to support and challenge the organisation to maximise use of its resources while maintaining compliance and safeguarding our reputation in the areas of:

- Communications
- Corporate Governance
- Facilities
- Finance
- Human Resources
- IT
- Procurement

Commence procurement of a new finance and HR system

During this year, we will start the process to re-tender the provision of our Finance and HR systems. In 2019-20, we will review and scope our requirements, engage with the market and develop a detailed procurement plan, including provision for the additional resource that will be required to implement any changes.

Continue organisational development

During the first quarter, we anticipate implementing structural changes within the organisations. Therefore, our priority will be to support staff and embed these changes smoothly. This will run in parallel to our response to our Annual People Survey, where we will be looking to agree and deliver the agreed actions. Our internal communication strategy will underpin all this work.

Continue to deliver our Equality Objectives

In January 2019, we launched our new Equality Objectives 2019-22. In developing these objectives, we engaged with a number of equality organisations. Over the next year, in addition to delivering the Year 1 actions set out in our plan, we are committed to continuing to develop our relationship with these organisations to enhance our equality work.

Continue to develop our corporate approach to the Welsh Language

We are committed to delivering our external functions bilingually and creating a workplace that supports the Welsh language. Although Welsh Language Standards do not yet apply to us, we will publish a voluntary Welsh Language Scheme during 2019-20.

Continue to work towards the Corporate Health Standard

In 2018-19, we achieved the Bronze level of the Corporate Health Standard, recognising the importance we place on health and well-being in the workplace. This year, we will continue our work and focus on embedding and maintaining an inclusive culture and approach to health and well-being.

Maintain our wider contribution to the Welsh public sector

In line with the Well-being of Future Generations 'Ways of Working', we will continue to provide IT advice and support to other Welsh Government Sponsored bodies (WGSBs), and will work with the WGSB HR group to develop shared arrangements for management training.

Establish resources required for curriculum reform

We recognise the significance of the curriculum reform. Over the next year, we will focus on planning and securing additional funding, staff and facilities to deliver the activities we have described in the 'Review' section of this plan.

4. Funding and planned expenditure (2019-20)

Qualifications Wales is primarily funded by Welsh Government. Our funding allocation for 2019-20 is £8.267m. We also plan to generate income of approximately £50k through the provision of ICT support services to two other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies and, as at 1 April 2019, held a usable reserve on our balance sheet of £353k.

We have a Medium-Term Finance Plan last updated in March 2019 for the period 2019-20 to 2021-22. This demonstrates how our anticipated activities and associated costs can be managed within anticipated funding levels over this period.

At a summary level, our 2019-20 budget is shown below:

Area	2019-20 Budget £'000
Pay	5,083
Grants	675
Programme Costs	1,056
Running Costs	1,378
Core QW Activity	8,192
Welsh For Adults Grant	200
Overall Total	8,392
Funded by	
Welsh Government Grant	8,267
Planned use of Reserve	125
Total	8,392

As we increase our involvement in the general qualifications curriculum reform programme during 2019-20, it is likely that we will start to incur additional costs. Welsh Government will provide additional funding should we not be able to absorb the costs of these additional activities within our core funding.

The diagram below further illustrates how we plan to spend our £8.392m budget:



5. Monitoring and review

We monitor progress against our plans regularly, with monthly reports provided to our internal Management Board and quarterly reports to our Board. We will publish a summary of the year's achievements in our end-of-year accounts. We will also provide a fuller account of our activities and achievements in our annual report (covering the academic year September 2018 to August 2019). We present our annual report to the National Assembly Children and Young People's Education Committee for their scrutiny; this forms part of our legal requirements under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015.

6. Useful links

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

- [Qualifications Wales Website](#)
- [Annual Accounts 2017-18](#)
- [Annual Report 2017-18](#)
- [Qualifications Wales Board Structure](#)
- [Qualifications Wales Executive Structure](#)