



**Qualified for the future:  
The right choice for Wales  
Analysis of consultation  
responses**

**Produced for Qualifications Wales  
by Opinion Research Services  
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## 1. Glossary

<b>Acronym / Key word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
Area	Area of Learning and Experience
BSL	British Sign Language
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CAD	Computer Aided Design
CAM	Computer Aided Manufacturing
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCF	Digital Competence Framework
EAL	English as an Additional Language
E-BAC / EBacc	English Baccalaureate
ESW	Essential Skills Wales
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
ISTD	Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing
LAP	Learning Area Programme
MAT	More Able and Talented
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NEA	Non-Examination Assessment
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSE	Personal and Social Education
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health, and Economic education
RVE	Religious and Values Education
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
STF	Specialist Teaching Facility
QW	Qualifications Wales
Welsh Bacc	Welsh Baccalaureate
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee: WJEC CBAC Limited (Awarding body)

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Background

Qualifications Wales is currently reviewing the main qualifications taken by 14 to 16-year-olds in Wales. This review has so far included two public consultations called Qualified for the future.

The first of these consultations took place in 2019-20 and was led by Arad Research and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)<sup>1</sup>. Following the initial consultation, Qualifications Wales agreed that the main qualifications taken by 14 to 16-year-olds should still be called GCSEs, but that the content and assessment of GCSE qualifications should change to meet future needs.

This report summarises the analysis of the findings from the second consultation in the Qualified for the future series. This consultation was hosted by Opinion Research Services (ORS) and ran between 27 January and 16 April 2021. Full consultation documents are available [here](#) on Qualifications Wales' website.

The consultation aimed to gather views on the GCSE subjects and other qualifications that should be available to schools to help them deliver the new Curriculum for Wales and meet learners' needs. Once Qualifications Wales has agreed on the main made-for-Wales qualifications, they will then develop and consult on detailed plans for each one, including content and assessment methods. Qualifications Wales will also take steps to ensure that a range of other qualifications are available, alongside any made-for-Wales qualifications.

Qualifications Wales developed specific proposals for the consultation which spanned the six Areas of Learning and Experience ('Areas'), as described in the Curriculum for Wales Guidance ('Curriculum Guidance'<sup>2</sup>). The six Areas are:

- Expressive Arts
- Health and Well-being
- Humanities
- Languages, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology.

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<sup>1</sup> Qualifications Wales / The story so far

<sup>2</sup> Curriculum for Wales - Hwb (gov.wales)

## 2.2. Methodology

Qualifications Wales promoted and circulated the consultation through a variety of channels to raise stakeholder awareness. However, as the consultation took place during COVID-19 restrictions, no face-to-face engagement events were undertaken. Instead, Qualifications Wales held a series of online webinars<sup>3</sup> which targeted specific stakeholder groups. Youth Cymru also held some online events for young people on behalf of Qualifications Wales.

Consultation responses were mainly collected via an online survey which was hosted by ORS. A youth-friendly (summary) version of the survey was also available, both for online completion, and as a printable PDF. The standard and youth-friendly (summary) versions of the survey were available in Welsh and in English. In addition to the online survey, it was possible to email or post consultation responses.

All versions of the consultation included the same core questions and a series of questions about the impact of the proposals. For each proposal, respondents were invited to complete a closed question, which required them to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with it or the impact they expected the proposal to have, and an open-ended question, which allowed them to express their views in detail. The youth-friendly (summary) version was worded in a way that was appropriate for young people.

Overall, there were 1,501 responses to the consultation, comprising:

- 1,033 (84%) responses to the main consultation;
- 203 (16%) responses to the youth-friendly consultation; and
- 12 responses received by email, and 253 virtually identical responses from members of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg<sup>4</sup> which addressed the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area consultation questions.

No responses were received by post. The following sub-section explains how all the consultation responses were analysed and reported.

The surveys were structured in line with the Areas, allowing respondents to focus on their area(s) of interest. The 1,236 online survey responses include those who answered only a small number of questions, as well as those who answered most or all of them.

The table below provides a broad overview of the different types of respondents to the online survey. Education professionals are responsible for a large proportion of responses to the consultation.

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<sup>3</sup> Further details and recordings of the webinars can be found here: [Qualifications Wales / Consultation Webinars – Qualified for the future – the right choice for Wales](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Hafan | Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg](#)

Broad category of respondent	Number of respondents
Learner	113
Education professional	745
Parent / carer / member of the public	106
Other	67
Not stated	205
Total respondents	1,236

### 2.3. The analysis

The consultation included 23 closed questions, which have been analysed and are presented in this report in chart format, and 28 open-ended questions, which were coded and analysed thematically. ORS included all responses received in the analysis. Where consultation responses were received separately to the structured survey, all feedback was taken into account.

Most of the responses received via email were data-entered by the ORS team and merged with the survey dataset using Excel. Some of the responses received via email gave detailed views on specific proposals. It is not always possible to merge each emailed response in with the survey data in its entirety. However, where parts of the feedback within email responses directly related to one or more of the proposals covered by questions in the consultation, this was data-entered by the ORS team, merged with the survey data for coding and analysis, and reported in the relevant section of this report.

The responses from Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg provide feedback on the organisation's views and concerns about the proposals which related to Welsh language qualifications and must therefore be given due consideration. The responses from Cymdeithas Yr Iaith have been included in the dataset as one viewpoint, with due consideration given to the number of respondents behind this viewpoint, as demonstrated in the LLC Area.

A few of the other responses received via email did not relate to specific consultation questions but reflected broader perspectives in relation to the consultation. These responses were not included in the analysis but were shared with Qualifications Wales for them to consider.

Initially, ORS's coding team removed minor spelling errors from the data. They then reviewed it and organised it into broad overarching themes which summarised the main sentiments being expressed in respondents' feedback. The coders then developed coding frames<sup>5</sup> for each open question based on the overarching themes. Each coding frame was developed by two coders working together to ensure that all

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<sup>5</sup> A coding frame lists all of the themes which are present within a qualitative dataset. It is used to structure and organise the data under each theme, treating all codes with the same level of specificity and importance.

codes were created consistently. The coding frames were shared with Qualifications Wales for comment before proceeding to the in-depth analysis and reporting stage.

Following feedback from Qualifications Wales, ORS's qualitative researchers analysed the coded data in depth, refining the themes and drawing out the nuances within the data. To ensure consistency, the researchers discussed the themes collaboratively to agree how they should be interpreted and presented in the report.

## **2.4. The report**

Section 3 of this report summarises the consultation responses under the key themes which emerged from them. This section is structured in line with the proposals and the corresponding consultation questions.

Each sub-section presents each proposal, a chart which shows the extent of agreement with the proposal, a description of the closed question data obtained, followed by a discussion of the themes and main points made within the feedback received via the open-ended questions. The themes are ordered by strength of feeling under each proposal.

Each closed and open-ended question received different numbers of responses. The percentages shown for the closed questions may not consistently equal 100% because they have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

The points made and views expressed in the report are based entirely on the consultation responses. They do not reflect the views of ORS or Qualifications Wales.

The report does not present the numbers of respondents who raised each theme. Instead, it uses terms like, "some", "a few", "most", and "many", to broadly indicate strength of feeling.

Throughout the consultation responses, many respondents referred to "Key Stages" 2 to 5, "core subjects", and "Modern Foreign Languages" ("MFL") in their feedback. Key Stages, core subjects, and MFL do not exist in the new Curriculum for Wales, although they do feature in the current National Curriculum. Key Stage 2 equates to Years 3-6; Key Stage 3, Years 7-9, Key Stage 4, Years 10-11, and Key Stage 5, Years 12-13. The core subjects of the current National Curriculum are Welsh and English, maths, and science. MFL comprises French, German, and Spanish. To reflect respondents' feedback accurately, references to these terms have been included in the report as quotes, where relevant.

The responses to some of the open-ended questions suggest that some respondents misunderstood some specific proposals. Throughout the report, it is made clear where this occurs. Regardless of any possible misunderstanding of the proposals, ORS has considered all feedback equally. This ensures that all respondents' voices are heard and valued to the same extent. The proposals which some respondents appear to have misunderstood were:

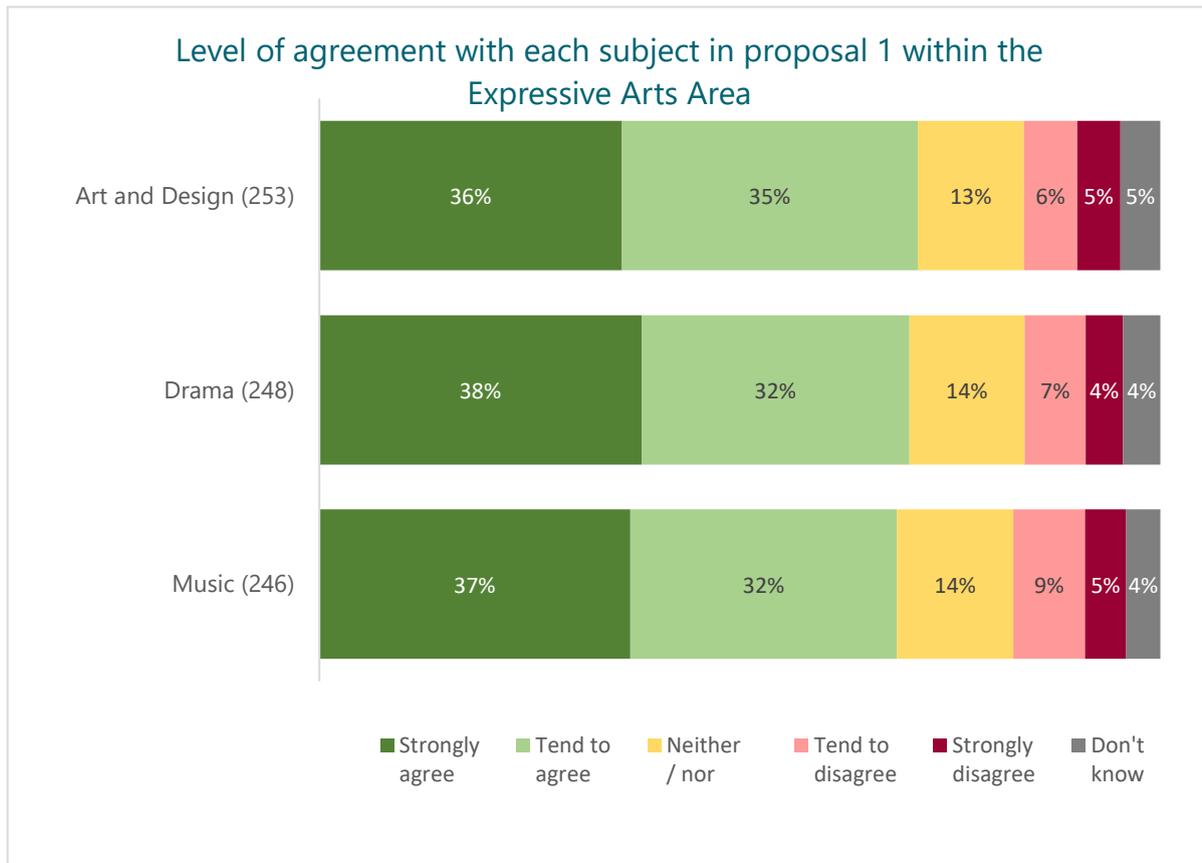
- Expressive Arts Proposal 3: How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to make sure that a choice of qualifications that assess dance continues to be available to learners and schools?
- Expressive Arts Proposal 4: How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to continue to give schools a choice of qualifications in Expressive Arts that offer a multi-disciplinary approach?
- Humanities Proposal 3: How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new integrated GCSE in Humanities if feasible?
- Languages, Literacy and Communication Proposal 3: How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a set of small Welsh language skills qualifications that can be taken in addition to a GCSE to support progression along the Welsh language continuum?
- Mathematics and Numeracy Proposal 2: How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new small qualification that can be taken in addition to the GCSE to assess a learner's numerical proficiency, using an on-screen assessment method?
- Science and Technology Proposal 1: How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review and reform GCSEs in Computer Science, Built Environment, Design and Technology, and Digital Technology?

### 3. Expressive Arts

#### 3.1. Proposal 1

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review and reform GCSEs in: Art and Design, Drama and Music?

Figure 1: Level of agreement with each subject in proposal 1 within the Expressive Arts Area



Around 250 people answered questions on each of the subjects in this proposal, ranging from 253 for Art and Design to 248 for Drama. Around seven in ten agreed with the proposal to review and reform the three GCSEs discussed. Just over one in ten disagreed with the proposal to reform Art and Design (11%) and Drama (11%), although this rose to 14% for Music. 60% (150 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below. Although the proposal was to review and reform the qualifications, which had strong support, respondents also took the opportunity to raise a range of related points.

### 3.1.1. Retaining separate GCSEs within the Expressive Arts Area

The need to retain GCSE Art and Design, GCSE Drama and GCSE Music was emphasised by many respondents. Nearly all of the learners who commented on this proposal expressed support for keeping GCSEs within the Expressive Arts Area as separate disciplines to cater for their strengths and preferences.

There was strong feeling that expressive arts subjects are often overlooked and that learners should be encouraged to engage with them more. Keeping qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area as separate GCSEs would, it was felt, help prevent them from being side-lined by “*core*” subjects.

Respondents felt that keeping separate qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area would help the subjects retain their value and identity. Greater take-up of the subjects would also, it was said, enrich learners’ education, moving away from an overly heavy focus on more “*academic*” subjects.

*“Too many learners are being told to study so called 'academic' subjects and the expressive art subjects are still being seen as second to these subjects. Parents and learners need to understand the value and importance of creativity in a learners' life”*

*Education professional*

Conversely, a few respondents felt that a combined, multi-disciplinary Expressive Arts GCSE should be developed (possibly offering the opportunity to specialise through a subject-specific module) to widen choice for learners who wish to study more than one GCSE within the Expressive Arts Area.

*“My question is - how does this GCSE enable learners to realise the four purposes? How does this proposal ensure equity for our learners? How does this proposal ensure that all learners value the importance of expressive arts in learning in all the other AoLEs? There is a missed opportunity to design a radically different GCSE which encompasses the three aspects in the creative process”*

*Education professional*

### 3.1.2. Learners’ progression, specialism, and skills

Some respondents felt that keeping discrete GCSEs in art and design, drama and music would enable learners to gain a wide range of experience and would support them to progress in their preferred fields. The discrete GCSEs were said to cover a wide range of content that fosters valuable and diverse skills and deep subject knowledge. This was said to help learners prepare well for post-16 qualifications and the world of work in their specialist subject areas.

Several respondents highlighted the importance of the skills that learners develop through studying expressive arts subjects, and the need to keep skills development at the forefront of these subjects. Among the specific skills highlighted were creativity, confidence, expression, communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

Others noted that qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area can lead to opportunities in a fast growing and important industry, both in Wales and overseas.

They also said that GCSE Drama equips learners with valuable transferable and employability skills.

### 3.1.3. Qualification content and assessment

Many respondents made suggestions for how the new GCSEs within the Expressive Arts Area should be assessed in future. There was some feeling that they should retain a strong focus on practical work rather than written assessment and theoretical aspects. It was also suggested that there should be a consistent approach to assessment across all new expressive arts GCSEs.

Respondents who expressed this opinion also noted that focusing too heavily on written work at the cost of developing skills could discourage less able learners and does not accurately reflect practice in further or higher education, or in the world of work.

One respondent suggested that moderation for the new GCSE Art and Design should take place face-to-face rather than online to ensure that the visual details of learners' work could be fully appreciated.

According to some respondents, qualifications in the Expressive Arts Area need to be updated, modernised, and refreshed to make them more relevant to learners and to reflect current practice in expressive arts sectors. This, in turn, may help to increase uptake of these subjects, it was said.

A few respondents noted that the current GCSE Music is too focused on traditional or classical music. To modernise this qualification, it would benefit from including a music technology module, or by making music technology available as a separate GCSE, according to a few other respondents. It was also noted that GCSE Drama should be updated to incorporate more contemporary works as well as traditional references.

In addition, a few respondents felt that there should be more continuity in pedagogy<sup>6</sup> and curriculum from "Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4"<sup>7</sup> to consolidate prior learning and make learning more engaging.

*"In some of these disciplines, uptake has been falling. The reason is that they are not all relevant to our young learners. Music is a particular case. Whilst they have made attempts to move with the times (and I don't mean abandon history) they have not moved enough. The difference between what and how pupils learn across KS2 and 3 doesn't seem to translate very well at exam level"*

*Education professional*

### 3.1.4. Alignment with the new Curriculum for Wales

Some respondents felt that the current qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area work well and that they enable learners to develop and show their skills, although a few

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<sup>6</sup> The method and practice of teaching.

<sup>7</sup> As noted in the introduction to this report, many respondents referred to "Key Stages" in their feedback. Key Stages do not feature in the new Curriculum for Wales, although they feature in the National Curriculum.

acknowledged that their teaching and learning should be updated to ensure that they are fully aligned with the new curriculum.

However, a few respondents felt that the proposal is not sufficiently aligned to the ideas, concepts, or philosophy of the new curriculum. They said that a more radical review of the qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area is needed to meet the aims of the new curriculum and the needs of all learners.

### 3.1.5. Technology, facilities, and staffing

There is an increasing need for modern-day technology and software to be incorporated into delivering expressive arts subjects, according to some respondents. This would enhance learners' skills and reflect the widespread use of technology and software throughout the expressive arts industry. However, a few cautioned that digital technology should not be "*a prerequisite*" for teaching and learning qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area. To ensure that learners in all schools in Wales are able to access up-to-date technology to support their study of qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area, one respondent suggested that Hwb<sup>8</sup> could allow access to software commonly used by creative industries.

Some respondents emphasised more broadly that all schools need equal access to funding, support, and/or equipment to meet the advanced digital technology requirements needed to enable all learners to access the Expressive Arts curriculum. Access to specialist staff and facilities was also emphasised.

*"Investment is needed to ensure that children of all ages are able to access facilities, and this should be made available direct to the schools, not through other agencies"*

*Education professional*

### 3.1.6. Meeting the needs of all learners

A few respondents said that GCSE Music needs to be changed to make it suitable for all learners. They noted that the current GCSE is more suited to learners from "*middle-class*" backgrounds, and that the curriculum and assessment approach should be reconsidered to include learners from all backgrounds.

*"For over 40 years, some academics have been proposing that the reason why working-class children 'fail' in the classroom is not only related to the often-cited home environment, but because they are forced to engage with a curriculum that is principally taken from middle class culture. With this in mind, I would like to see a consideration of not only the 'inclusion' of certain types of music in the curriculum (which is already taking place to a certain extent) - but also the ways through which we encourage young people to think about music. How can WJEC in particular ensure that the ways through which it frames its assessment resonates with all types of music?"*

*Education professional*

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<sup>8</sup> Hwb is the digital platform for learning and teaching in Wales. Hwb provides its users with access to a range of centrally-funded, bilingual, digital tools and resources. It is the Welsh Government's strategic digital channel to support the delivery of the curriculum in Wales.

One respondent felt that the current GCSE Music listening exam is not suitable for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Another noted that BTEC<sup>9</sup> Music is more suitable for lower ability learners than GCSE Music.

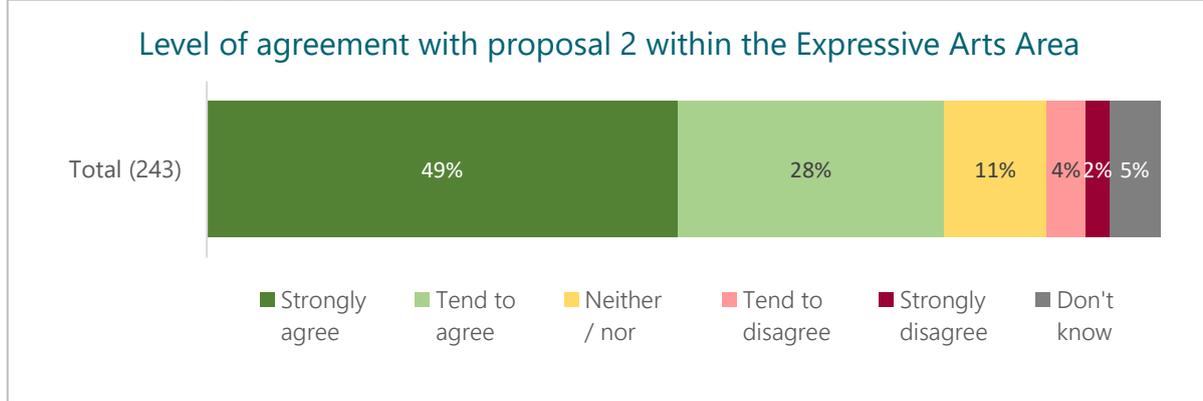
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<sup>9</sup> BTEC stands for Business and Technology Education Council. BTECs are specialist work-related qualifications which are available in schools, further education institutions, and training centres in a range of sectors.

### 3.2. Proposal 2

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new GCSE in Film and Digital Media?

Figure 2: Level of agreement with proposal 2 within the Expressive Arts Area



A total of 243 people responded to this question and the majority (77%) agreed with the proposal. Parents and carers, and members of the public, were particularly supportive whilst education professionals were the least likely to agree strongly with the creation of this new GCSE. Just over half (51%, 125 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

#### 3.2.1. Learners' progression, specialism, and skills

The theme expressed most frequently by those who commented on this proposal was that a GCSE in Film and Digital Media would give learners the opportunity to develop valuable specialist skills to support their future studies and prepare them for careers in film and digital media industries. A few emphasised that progression routes to further qualifications must be considered if a new qualification is developed.

*"This will bring the qualification in this area up to date and provides an additional entry route into this popular area as well as providing ready for work skills required by employers"*

*Education professional*

Many emphasised that increasing numbers of young people are interested in working in expressive arts industries, which they noted were growing and important. The wider relevance of the proposed GCSE to learners' lives and contemporary society was also noted, especially given the increasing reliance on and use of digital technology.

Conversely, a few did not feel that the proposed GCSE would provide a strong enough foundation to study media or film at A level, especially when compared to the existing GCSE Media Studies.

### 3.2.2. Alignment with the new Curriculum for Wales

Some respondents noted that the proposed qualification is well aligned with the new Curriculum for Wales, and with the design of the Expressive Arts Area. However, a few felt that the proposal does not go far enough.

*“Seems an addition rather than a fundamental change to how we work - which is what the new curriculum is all about”*

*Education professional*

### 3.2.3. Technology, facilities, and staffing

Some respondents expressed concern about how schools would ensure learners can access the software, technology and equipment needed to deliver the proposed GCSE. A few felt that the cost implications of this could make the qualification *“elitist”*.

*“The level of digital deprivation means that there will be a clear disadvantage to those students who cannot access a range of top-spec equipment, making this qualification elitist”*

*Education professional*

Others highlighted a lack of specialist staff with the skills, confidence and experience that would be required to deliver the subject. They emphasised that the qualification would mean mass retraining or even redundancy for existing staff.

*“Schools do not as yet have enough resources, confidence or expertise to offer this qualification and needs addressing”*

*Education professional*

A few highlighted that the current PGCE<sup>10</sup> does not cover film and digital media to the extent needed to deliver the new qualification, and that this should be addressed to ensure that newly qualified teachers enter the profession with the required skills.

### 3.2.4. Take-up and interest

Some respondents predicted that a GCSE in Film and Digital Media would be of great interest to learners (although a few disagreed). It was seen to reflect many learners' interests and specialisms. A few noted that the qualification would be a good option for learners to engage in an expressive arts discipline who are not performers or who do not excel in subjects such as the sciences. It was felt that this would enable them to choose qualifications in a wider range of other subjects. It was also felt that the qualification would appeal to learners who would prefer to study multiple aspects of media studies.

*“I think it would be brilliant to have had this option and I know I would definitely take this as a subject if it were for me. This suggests that also many other children in schools would like to do this and it will become a very popular subject, which means that everyone will want to do it”*

*Learner*

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<sup>10</sup> The Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is an academic qualification in teaching that combines school placements with study of the theory of teaching and learning.

### 3.2.5. Parity and value

A few respondents emphasised that, if adopted, the qualification should be designed to ensure it is equally valued and respected relative to similar qualifications available elsewhere in the UK. Others noted that it would place film and digital media studies on a par with other subjects in the Area.

*“Careful consideration should be given to how the new made-for-Wales GCSE in Film and Digital Media will provide opportunities for young people to develop the right level of film and screen-related skills and knowledge compared to counterparts undertaking the designed-for-England Film Studies GCSE course offered in England or at some Welsh institutions. Young people in Wales should not be held back or unable to progress into this area further because of the gaps in their course provision”*  
*Education professional*

### 3.2.6. Qualification design

Due to the natural overlap between them, a few respondents agreed that it would be sensible to combine film and digital media subjects to create the proposed GCSE. However, some felt that there is potential for overlap or duplication with other subjects. For example, it was noted that there are common aspects of digital technology and media that may already be included in other GCSEs such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Art and Design. They therefore cautioned that if this new GCSE is developed, it must be carefully designed with existing and new qualifications in mind to prevent duplication and to ensure coherence with them.

Some respondents felt that film and digital media are too different as subjects and should not be combined. Attempting to combine them would, it was felt, result in a *“watered down”* qualification that is not fit for purpose.

*“I’m unsure why film and digital media have been lumped together here; they are two very different disciplines. I am very concerned that the proposed qualification will end up being a mish-mash of different topics with very little cohesion and that does not provide young people with skills that they need in order function most effectively in an increasingly media-driven society, nor with the skills that they would need to progress into further study in either film or media”*  
*Education professional*

A number of different points were made in relation to the proposed qualification, as follows:

- The qualification would be welcome as it would replace the *“outdated”* content of current qualifications in film and digital media. Conversely, by focusing on digital media, a few were concerned that more traditional forms of media would be overlooked.
- The qualification should be available alongside complementary subjects within the Expressive Arts Area such as drama, music, and art, perhaps as a smaller qualification like those proposed for the Science and Technology Area.

- The qualification should guarantee broad and deep engagement with high-quality, relevant knowledge and provide the opportunity to develop skills.
- The qualification should be developed by subject specialists, employers, and industry bodies, and be made available in Welsh and English.

*“There is an urgent need for a qualification that will develop skills and knowledge in film and digital media in Wales, with that qualification in particular available through the medium of Welsh”<sup>11</sup>*

*Education professional*

- The qualification should be modular to make it accessible to lower ability learners because the diversity of topics and information within the qualification could make it challenging for them. A modular qualification could also allow learners wishing to specialise in related subjects at A level to choose topics which are aligned with their interests.
- The qualification should focus on more practical elements as opposed to theory and practitioner-based learning, as seen in the current GCSE Media Studies: *“making films rather than analysing them” (Education professional)*.

Others made the following specific suggestions regarding the content of the proposed GCSE Film and Digital Media.

- The study of music should be included to avoid risking *“short-changing learners”*, given its significance within the industry.
- There is a need to consider varied approaches to exploring, communicating, and creating work using digital media.
- The GCSE should link clearly with the Expressive Arts Area by incorporating different topics such as art, performing arts, and music composition or production, and sound effects specifically for film.
- Links should also be made with other Areas, for example with science and technology through computation, and with mathematics and numeracy for shutter speeds and timeframes.
- Ethics and fake news should be included as topics.

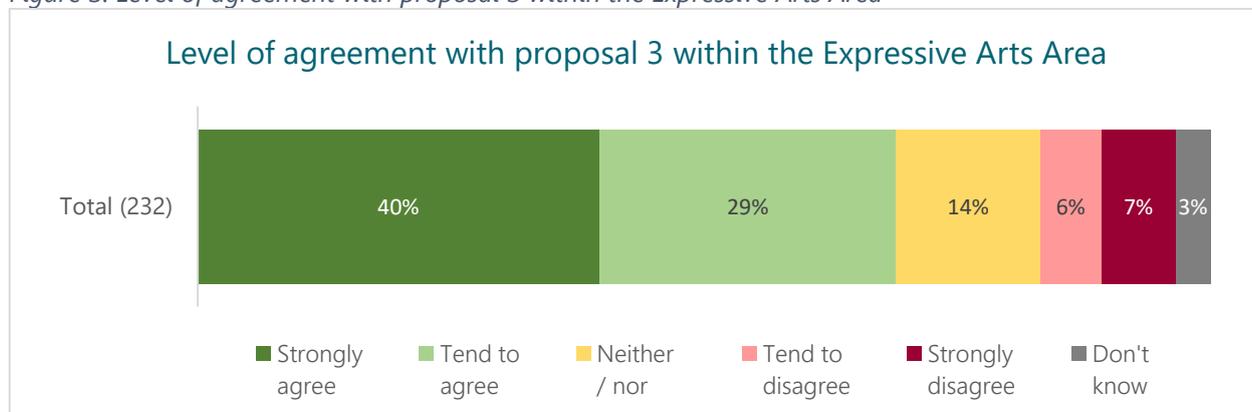
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<sup>11</sup> *“Mae angen dybryd am gymhwyster fydd yn datblygu sgiliau a gwybodaeth ym maes ffilm a chyfryngau digidol yng Nghymru, gyda'r cymhwyster hwnnw yn benodol ar gael drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg”*

### 3.3. Proposal 3

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to make sure that a choice of qualifications that assess dance continues to be available to learners and schools?

Figure 3: Level of agreement with proposal 3 within the Expressive Arts Area



A total of 232 people rated this proposal, and the overall reaction was positive with over two in three people (69%) agreeing. Among education professionals, agreement rose to 72% whilst among learners it fell to 59%.

Just over half (52%, 121 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below. Many of those who agreed with this proposal commented on it based on the misunderstanding that Qualifications Wales proposed to make available a made-for-Wales GCSE in Dance. Conversely, most of the others who commented on this proposal reflected on Qualifications Wales' intention to discontinue GCSE Dance. All comments are considered equally in this discussion.

#### 3.3.1. The continued need for GCSE Dance

The greatest concern expressed by those who commented on this proposal was that GCSE Dance should continue to be offered to learners in Wales. Many emphasised that a made-for-Wales GCSE Dance should be available in Welsh and English, with some stating that it should be offered alongside other appropriate qualifications to continue offering flexibility and choice to learners. Fewer of those who broadly agreed with the proposal chose to comment in depth.

There was strong feeling among respondents that removing GCSE Dance would make the subject less accessible for learners whose families are unable to afford to pay for dance lessons outside of school.

*"I think it is important that qualifications assess dance as it gives people more opportunity to learn the skill, as learning dance outside of the education system can be expensive upon families. By including a dance qualification offered for all learners across Wales [it] would mean that everyone is giving a fair opportunity to improve the skill [sic.]"*

Learner

If learners in Wales are to be offered the GCSE Dance currently available to learners in England, a few respondents expressed concern that it would not reflect the new Curriculum for Wales.

There was some suggestion that Qualifications Wales and awarding bodies should work with dance teachers and relevant organisations in Wales to develop appropriate made-for-Wales dance qualifications.

Most of the other themes discussed in this sub-section were raised by respondents in the context of their discussion of the continued need for GCSE Dance.

### 3.3.2. Interest, take-up, and value

Many of those who commented on this proposal discussed the uptake of and interest in GCSE Dance in general. Some predicted that demand for a made-for-Wales GCSE in Dance would increase with the roll-out of the new Curriculum for Wales, given the new approach to expressive arts within a more flexible curriculum model. Others felt that interest in GCSE Dance would increase in line with the greater emphasis on teaching dance at “*Key Stage 3*”. Improving the links between the “*Key Stage 3*” and “*Key Stage 4*” dance curriculums would also, it was felt, serve to increase interest and take-up.

There was some feeling that offering a newly designed GCSE Dance would boost take-up. Some of those making this point said that learners’ interest in dance should be monitored carefully over the next few years as the new curriculum is embedding, and that the proposal not to create a made-for-Wales GCSE should be reviewed in line with this.

Others felt that the proposal was based on current GCSE take-up alone, which, they noted, is overly simplistic and lacks ambition. They also emphasised that many learners in Wales were currently very interested in studying dance, which highlighted the need to offer a made-for-Wales GCSE in Dance.

Some noted that many schools in Wales simply choose not to offer GCSE Dance, or marginalise it within their curriculums, which was the explanation behind the low national take-up figures cited in the consultation document.

It was also suggested that dance is poorly supported in Wales more broadly, leading to low take-up at GCSE. A few noted that teachers of other subjects or parents and carers may be dissuading learners from taking GCSE Dance because they do not perceive it to be of equal value to other subjects. They therefore felt that this needs to be redressed to prevent learners from missing out on dance altogether.

*“What is happening in our schools’ dance lessons that so few are engaging with it at an exam level? It is certainly not that children do not enjoy dance as the amount of children who access dance in many forms outside of schools can testify. Are they being dissuaded by their parents or other subject teachers? Is dance as a qualification still being ‘down talked’ as unnecessary or ‘just for fun’ and not to waste one of their (few) options on by the adults around that child? That’s what I feel needs to be considered here. Too many children are dissuaded to take dance as a GCSE by the adults in their lives”*

*Parent / carer*

Noting that many learners participate in dance outside of school, yet few study it at GCSE, some respondents felt that teaching and learning in GCSE Dance should be improved to make it more attractive.

*"There is an obvious disconnect here between the prevalence and popularity of dance groups and clubs and as a pastime in nightclubs - what are schools/quals doing to make it so uninteresting?"*  
Education professional

In the context of the need to retain GCSE Dance, many emphasised the wider value of dance to learners and to society. It was said that dance contributes to physical and mental well-being, encourages expression, and develops creative skills, confidence, creativity, identity, teamwork, physical and mental coordination, and sense of self. A few also noted the contribution of expressive arts to the economy.

There was some concern that not offering GCSE Dance would devalue the study of dance more broadly, and that perceptions of dance as being of unequal value to other subjects must change.

*"It's important to put emphasis on the arts because they often aren't taken seriously enough or are deemed to be a bad industry to work in. We need to work to change these attitudes and get young people into dance because it can be so much more than a hobby"*  
Not stated

On the other hand, a few of the respondents who commented felt that the proposal was *"pragmatic"*, largely based on the low take-up of GCSE Dance. Continuing to offer qualifications in dance whilst not creating a made-for-Wales GCSE could also, it was said, free up space for learners to choose other qualifications.

*"Sensible approach to allow students to study dance whilst low entry figures for Wales historically and the challenges associated with this for standardisation and moderation"*  
Other

One respondent also felt that most learners would not choose to pursue GCSE Dance, as it is too specific or specialist relative to other qualifications.

### 3.3.3. Meeting the needs of all learners

Some respondents said that GCSE Dance should be promoted as part of a curriculum that meets the needs of all learners. They felt that dance is valuable to learners with disabilities, and that it can give lower ability and *"less academic"* learners the opportunity to succeed. Learners who may otherwise struggle to find connections to expressive arts subjects may also be affected if GCSE Dance is not available, according to a few respondents.

*"There is far too much emphasis on academic qualifications at present and pupils feel like failures if they are not successful in these areas. Having a range of dance qualifications is a great alternative pathway for pupils to thrive in an area where they are more suited"*  
Education professional

### 3.3.4. Learners' progression

Some respondents felt that not offering GCSE Dance would limit learners who want to pursue further study and careers in dance. A few of those who expressed this view referred to the growing dance sector in Wales and elsewhere.

*"Dance is a vital part of the performing arts. All musical theatre degree courses require a dance module so those who wish to go to drama school will not be adequately prepared if they have never been examined/assessed for their dance units"*

*Education professional*

Others emphasised that learners in Wales must have access to the same range of qualifications as learners in the other parts of the UK. They felt Welsh learners would be disadvantaged relative to learners elsewhere if a made-for-Wales GCSE was not available. One respondent added that female learners are more likely to be disproportionately affected by this, and some others felt that a made-for-Wales GCSE Dance must be available to avoid disadvantaging those who prefer to learn in Welsh.

### 3.3.5. Offering dance as a standalone subject or as part of other qualifications

Respondents expressed mixed opinions around whether dance should be offered as a standalone subject, or whether it should be offered as part of other qualifications.

Some felt that dance should be an optional element of GCSE Physical Education (PE) rather than a standalone qualification, with a few expressing concerns that offering GCSEs in Dance as well as in PE could affect take-up of PE. Others suggested that dance should be offered as part of GCSE Drama.

*"In drama, a candidate can currently be assessed on acting or a design skill. It would be logical to include dance as another option for assessment"*

*Education professional*

Conversely, another respondent felt that dance should be offered as a standalone qualification rather than being offered within PE to accommodate those who enjoy dance but do not excel at sport more widely.

*"I disagree with this proposal because to complete GCSE physical education, you need to be assessed in three sports. I know many people - specifically dancers, who chose GCSE PE and then had to drop the subject because they didn't have three sports that they could be assessed in"*

*Learner*

Some respondents felt that dance could be offered as part of an expressive arts or performing arts qualification rather than as a standalone qualification. This could include a combination of compulsory and optional units that enable learners to customise their qualification in line with their interests and experience the expressive arts holistically.

### 3.3.6. Staffing

A few respondents expressed concerns around the staffing of GCSE Dance. Noting that dance teachers in Wales are in short supply, they felt that many schools may struggle

to find teachers with the relevant experience or qualifications to deliver dance at GCSE level and beyond, linking this with take-up of the qualification in future.

One respondent felt that offering GCSE Dance in schools may affect the income of private dance teachers in Wales. Another felt that not offering GCSE Dance would reduce the numbers of dance teachers in Wales.

### 3.3.7. Existing dance qualifications

Some respondents commented on the suitability and availability of existing dance qualifications.

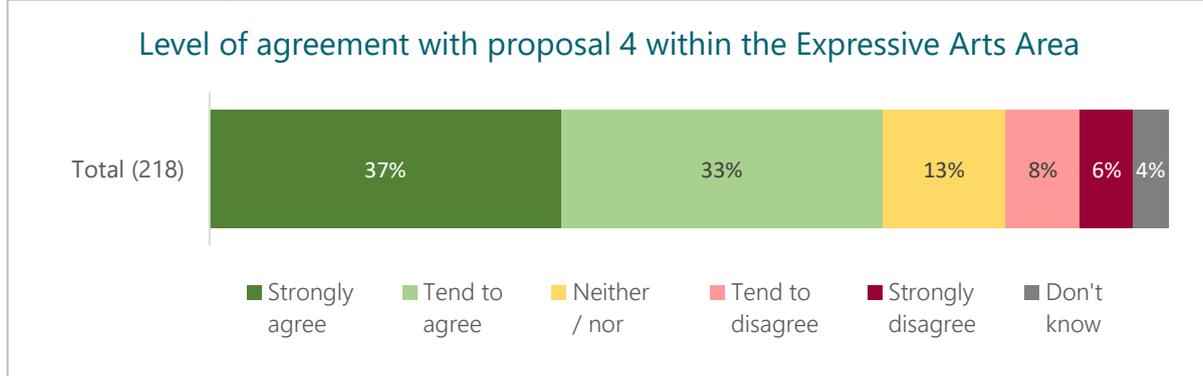
One respondent felt that qualifications offered outside school assess dance more thoroughly and benefit learners more than GCSE Dance. Another noted that BTEC Dance is more appropriate than GCSE Dance due to its strong "*hands on*" element.

A few respondents noted that qualifications offered by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) tend to be offered only by private dance schools and are not currently offered to learners in schools in Wales. The ISTD qualifications were associated with higher entry fees and additional costs through the need to purchase special uniforms and equipment. Their narrow focus was also criticised. This led these respondents to question whether these qualifications would be appropriate for learners in Wales. Another respondent said that the AQA GCSE Dance qualification is unsuitable as it does not include work from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) artists. Addressing this should be a priority for any new made-for-Wales GCSE.

### 3.4. Proposal 4

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to continue to give schools a choice of qualifications in Expressive Arts that offer a multi-disciplinary approach?

Figure 4: Level of agreement with proposal 4 within the Expressive Arts Area



Slightly fewer people responded to this proposal, with 218 responses received. As with the other proposals within the Expressive Arts Area, there was broad support for this one, with seven out of ten (70%) expressing agreement. Learners and education professionals showed a similar level of support (both 70%).

Just under half (48%, 105 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

Many of those who commented on this proposal appear to have misunderstood it, believing that the proposal was to create a specific made-for-Wales multi-disciplinary Expressive Arts qualification. Regardless, all comments are considered equally in this discussion.

#### 3.4.1. Continuing to offer a choice of multi-disciplinary qualifications in the Expressive Arts Area

Many respondents who said that they agreed with the proposal emphasised the need to keep offering separate GCSEs in Expressive Arts. Existing qualifications were already said to offer cross-curricular opportunities. In addition, some respondents felt that some subjects within the Expressive Arts Area and their components are too distinct to be combined meaningfully.

*"We believe that learners in Wales should continue to have the choice of qualifications in Expressive Arts that offer a multi-disciplinary approach. The performing arts are interrelated and learners who study, music, drama and dance have a clear career path available to them. However, we believe that the unique characteristics of art and design do not sit as well within an Expressive Arts qualification as some other disciplines may. We strongly favour a discrete GCSE in Art and Design for learners with an interest in this subject"*

*Other*

There was also some feeling that continuing to offer separate GCSE subjects within the Expressive Arts Area is essential to enable learners to acquire the depth of knowledge and skills required to specialise post-16.

A few respondents felt that learners would be less interested in studying a multi-disciplinary qualification compared to a range of expressive arts qualifications as it would reduce their choice and ability to specialise.

*"I believe this could be addressed to some extent within the reformed separate quals, ensuring there are more links made to other disciplines and how creative processes connect across all. Ultimately I do believe in giving pupils the opportunity to specialise and feel that is more important than offering a multi-disciplinary [qualification]"*

*Not stated*

### 3.4.2. Learners' progression, specialism, and skills

Continuing to offer a choice of subjects within the Expressive Arts Area that offer a multi-disciplinary approach was seen by many respondents as vital in encouraging learners to develop valuable and varied skills, and support their progress to further study and the world of work.

*"Allows students to develop independent and creative learning skills which benefit all aspects of society. When students leave school, they need to be creative learners in a fast paced and ever-changing work"*

*Education professional*

A few respondents felt that the proposal would benefit learners wanting to specialise in subjects within the Expressive Arts Area or those seeking to keep their options open due to uncertainty around which subject(s) they want to specialise in.

*"...as a pupil I think this should be offered because I'm not sure what I want to specialise in yet... the opportunity to do GCSEs in Expressive Arts offers a special opportunity to be more creative and cross-curricular, also it offers a clear path after KS3, to learning about Expressive Arts"<sup>12</sup>*

*Learner*

The proposal was said by some to help ensure that learners in Wales have equal access to expressive arts curriculums relative to learners in the rest of the UK. However, others highlighted that the qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area which are offered to learners in Wales must be made-for-Wales and have an innovative approach to content and assessment, rather than using *"made-for-England"* qualifications to provide the multi-disciplinary approach.

A few respondents noted that the content of qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area must be tailored to learners' interests, and that learners across all schools in Wales must have the opportunity to study the same qualifications to ensure fairness. One

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<sup>12</sup> *"...fel disgybl bydda i'n meddwl cynnig hwn oherwydd efallai nad wyf yn sicr beth rwyf eisiau arbenigo mewn eto. Gyda hynny mae'r cyfle i wneud TGAU mewn celfyddadau mynegiannol yn cynnig cyfle arbennig i fod yn fwy creadigol a thrawsbynciol, yn ogystal mae'n cynnig llwybr clir ar ôl CA3, o ddysgu am Celfyddydau mynegiannol" [CA3 = Cyfnod Allweddol 3; does dim Cyfnodion Allweddol yn y Cwricwlwm newydd i Gymru, ond maen nhw yn y Cwricwlwm Cenedlaethol.*

respondent (who supported the development of a multi-disciplinary qualification to run alongside discrete qualifications in the Expressive Arts Area) said that the proposal should not be reliant on “partnerships” that may not be available in all areas of Wales.

### 3.4.3. Creating a made-for-Wales Expressive Arts qualification

There was some feeling that a multi-disciplinary made-for-Wales qualification within the Expressive Arts Area should be created, in line with the ethos of the new curriculum. Some respondents felt that proposing not doing this is confusing when this had been proposed for the Humanities Area, and that it goes against previous discussions held with education professionals.

*“There should be a made-in-Wales EA [Expressive Arts] qualification. This proposal is weak, lacks imagination and does not reflect the need for such an opportunity for learners. I believe that would be a stronger argument for a made-in-Wales EA qualification than a humanities one”*  
Education professional

A few respondents said that the proposal does not go far enough, and that a full reform of all qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area is needed to ensure they fulfil the ethos of the new curriculum.

Some of those who supported the creation of a multi-disciplinary qualification within the Expressive Arts Area said that it should be modular and offered alongside the existing separate qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area. This, it was felt, would offer learners a wide choice of qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area that they could tailor in line with their interests. One respondent suggested that a double award qualification within the Expressive Arts Area should be offered, or a single qualification within the Expressive Arts Area which has multiple pathways.

Others noted that a dedicated qualification would help keep learners’ options open, allow them to experience multiple expressive arts disciplines, and increase their creativity.

*“Whilst we are fully supportive of ensuring that learners can start to specialise at the age of 14, at the same time we [believe] very strongly in keeping pupils' options open and allowing them the opportunity to taste a wide range of areas, and a wide range of aspects within areas. We believe that that is fully in line with the ethos and intent of the new curriculum. In order to do that, we need to re-look at the vision and wider structures that we are putting in place. Not doing so would be a real missed opportunity, and would be a failure for our learners for a long time to come”<sup>13</sup>*

*Not stated*

A few respondents felt that a multi-disciplinary qualification within the Expressive Arts Area may suit lower ability learners. An alternative proposal made by two respondents

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<sup>13</sup> “Er ein bod yn gwbl gefnogol i sicrhau y gall dysgwyr ddechrau arbenigo yn 14 oed, ar yr un pryd rydym yn gryf iawn am gadw opsiynau disgyblion ar agor a chaniatáu iddynt gael y cyfle i flasgu ystod eang o feysydd, ac ystod eang o agweddau oddi fewn i feysydd. Rydym o'r farn bod hynny'n cydfynd yn llwyr ag ethos a bwriad y cwricwlwm newydd. Er mwyn gwneud hynny, mae angen ail-edrych ar y weledigaeth a'r strwythurau ehangach rydym yn rhoi yn eu lle. Byddai peidio gwneud hynny yn golli cyfle gwirioneddol, ac yn gwneud cam â'n dysgwyr am gyfnod hir i ddod”

was to create a “*vocational*” performing arts qualification for learners planning to progress directly into a career in the expressive arts rather than pursuing further study.

Other points raised in relation to creating a made-for-Wales Expressive Arts qualification were that such a qualification should give equal emphasis to all expressive arts subjects and cover subjects in enough depth and breadth; and that teachers should receive appropriate training and CPD to prepare them to deliver it.

Some of those who expressed concerns about or disagreed with creating a multi-disciplinary qualification within the Expressive Arts Area felt that it may not be valued equally to more established qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area.

There was also some feeling that a multi-disciplinary qualification within the Expressive Arts Area would not be able to cover the expressive arts subjects in enough depth to support learners to progress to post-16 learning in this Area.

#### 3.4.4. Qualification content

It was suggested that the qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area should incorporate:

- Dance;
- Elements of production (e.g. lighting, sound, and direction); and
- Wales-specific content and a Welsh focus: Welsh history, culture, tradition, heritage, and language.

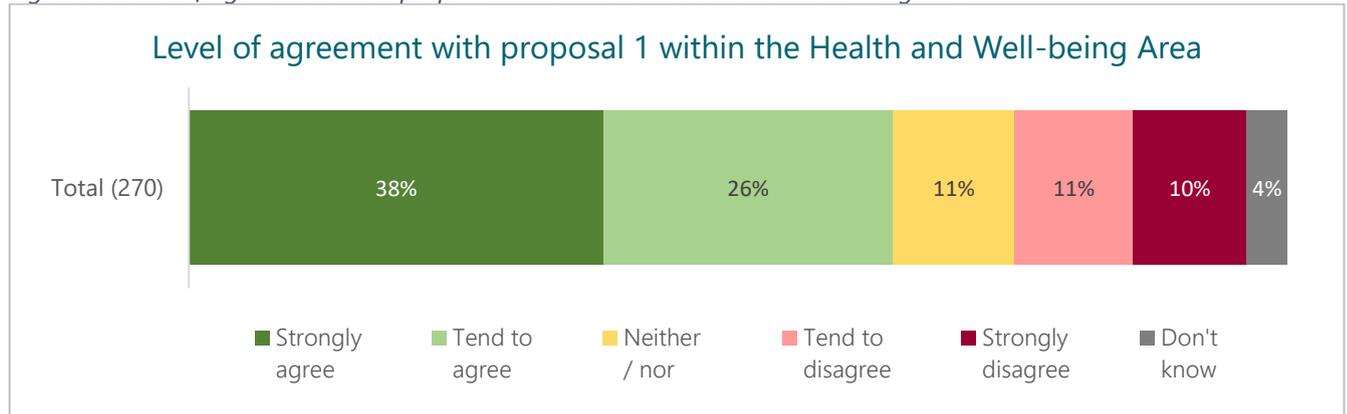
It was, though, unclear from the comments whether these suggestions related to existing separate qualifications within the Expressive Arts Area or a new multi-disciplinary qualification within the Expressive Arts Area.

## 4. Health and Well-being

### 4.1. Proposal 1

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal not to create a new qualification intended to support the delivery of the whole of this Area?

Figure 5: Level of agreement with proposal 1 within the Health and Well-being Area



A total of 270 people responded to this proposal. Just under two in three (64%) agreed with it overall. There was a notable difference in opinion between education professionals and learners, with learners less supportive: less than half (44%) of learners were in favour of the proposal compared with 70% of education professionals.

Just over half (51%, 138 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

It should be noted that respondents who disagreed with Qualifications Wales' proposal not to introduce a new qualification in the Health and Well-being Area were somewhat more likely to provide comments than those who agreed: whereas just over one fifth (21%) of respondents overall disagreed with the proposal, over one third (34%) of those who added comments did the same. This may have the impact of making the overall feedback seem more negative than was actually the case; nonetheless it is important to understand those concerns.

#### 4.1.1. Learners' progression, specialism, and skills

Most respondents agreed that Health and Well-being is an important Area, with physical and mental health, resilience, and self-confidence mentioned as areas in which learners benefit from input at school. Some also highlighted the importance of appropriate teaching and learning for development in areas that would benefit learners in the long-term: self-care, physical and practical skills (including cooking), diet and exercise, and sex education were all mentioned, among other topics.

*"It would help young people to understand about different aspects of health and wellbeing so much ... if it was around when I was younger it would have helped me loads"*

*Learner*

Where there were differences in views, they mostly focused on the relative advantages and disadvantages of the proposed approach of not introducing a new qualification in the Health and Well-being Area. Among respondents who agreed with the proposal, some felt that the focus of this Area should be on the personal development of learners, not on a qualification to be passed or failed.

*"On balance, we agree with Qualification Wales' decision not to create a qualification to support the delivery of the whole of this area. We believe that it will be important for teachers to prioritise the health and well-being of their learners"*

*Other*

Some respondents felt that the qualifications already on offer that relate to different aspects of health and well-being are valuable and could be reformed and reviewed if necessary to align with the new curriculum. A few stated that, by integrating health and well-being into other parts of the curriculum, schools would be able to meet the needs of their learners without recourse to a new GCSE. These included suggestions of reviewing elements of the Skills Challenge Certificate.

*"The rationale for not having a standalone qualification is strong. However, as evidence of activity and reflection in this area, I wonder if health and well-being might be included in the Skills Challenge Certificate..."*

*Parent / carer*

Among respondents who disagreed with the proposal, most who added comments felt that a subject as important as health and well-being needs to be recognised by the introduction of a new qualification. A few respondents described the proposal as a *"lost opportunity"* to place health and well-being at the heart of the curriculum.

*"This is an extremely important area and I feel that students gaining a qualification reflecting this Area is very important"*

*Education professional*

Future prospects for learners were raised by some respondents. A few stated that creating a new GCSE would provide a valuable addition to the suite of qualifications available, and that it could be a useful pathway to further learning or future careers in health and well-being.

*"I think it would be nice for people to have a qualification in health and well-being, especially if they want to go into an area of work that could require this knowledge, like healthcare and education"*

*Not stated*

One respondent who disagreed with the proposal outlined their recommended approach to a substantial reform of health and well-being teaching and learning in Wales. In doing so, they drew on an established evidence-based framework, the Health

Promoting Schools Approach<sup>14,15</sup>, which they felt could be adopted and implemented, alongside a whole-school approach<sup>16</sup> and in partnership with the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes<sup>17</sup>, to establish a new qualification supporting learners to become “*healthy, confident individuals*” in line with the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. In practice, it was said that this qualification could comprise:

*“A core programme for all who take it, consistent with the whole-school approach, and subsequently different pathways to enable an element of specialism (for example, food technology, health and social care, and childcare)”*

*Education professional*

This respondent argued that this approach would give schools the freedom they need to design their own curriculums that meet the needs of their learners and encourage learners’ personal development in health and well-being.

A few respondents, however, felt that other established vocational qualifications and GCSEs, including Physical Education and Health and Social Care, and Childcare already offer appropriate routes to higher qualifications for learners interested in pursuing a career in those areas. One respondent also felt that the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the teaching and assessment of relatively recently reformed qualifications meant that making additional changes in the same Area would be inadvisable.

#### 4.1.2. Take-up and interest

Some respondents felt strongly that not having a new qualification to support teaching and learning in the Health and Well-being Area could devalue the Area in the eyes of learners. This was viewed as particularly concerning, as they felt it might negatively impact learners’ development, or lead them to take their personal health and well-being less seriously.

*“My concern is that subjects without a qualification will not be taken seriously by learners. This area of education is vital to learners’ future success in a world that prioritises academic success over health and well-being and I believe that if learners don’t take seriously their own well-being then no amount of other qualifications will bring them happiness in their future”*

*Not stated*

Even those who supported Qualifications Wales’ proposal not to create a new qualification acknowledged that it might reduce interest in, and commitment to, the subject. A qualification, it was felt, might be an incentive to engage.

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<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization (2021) *Health Promoting Schools Approach*. Langford et al (2015) The World Health Organization’s Health Promoting Schools Framework: A Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Public Health*, 15, 130.

<sup>15</sup> Langford et al (2015) The World Health Organization’s Health Promoting Schools Framework: A Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Public Health*, 15, 130.

<sup>16</sup> Welsh Government (2020) *Draft framework guidance on embedding a whole-school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing*.

<sup>17</sup> Public Health Wales (2021) *Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme*.

*“Health is something personal to everyone and should not be quantified. However, a qualification is for many people an incentive and that is important to get people interested”*

*Learner*

There was also a concern that schools themselves might not adopt new approaches to teaching and learning without the pressure of having to prepare learners for an assessed qualification. This might, some felt, dampen interest, and reduce commitment to the Area among learners.

*“To me, it seems as though not having a GCSE in this Area will devalue the importance of health and wellbeing and will mean that schools do not change their approach”*

*Education professional*

There were, however, some contrasting views. These included the suggestion that learners might be less engaged with the subject if a new qualification were introduced. One respondent drew a parallel with the introduction of assessments in Personal and Social Education (PSE) and referenced a report, published in 2019<sup>18</sup> which stated that, *“...learning in these schools [which use qualifications in PSE] often becomes focused on completing tasks associated with the qualification, and lessons are less likely to feature engaging and meaningful learning experiences about important health and wellbeing issues.”*

#### 4.1.3. The health and well-being curriculum, teaching, and learning

The challenges of ensuring that the Health and Well-being Area is prioritised appropriately were raised by respondents on both sides of the debate in relation to whether or not a new qualification in health and well-being should be created for Wales. Regardless of whether or not they agreed or disagreed with the proposal itself, most highlighted the need for a cross-curriculum and multi-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning to reflect the breadth and depth of the subject matter.

Those in favour of a new qualification argued that it would afford equal status to Health and Well-being in the school curriculum. This, they said, would help to ensure that the necessary teaching time and resources, including appropriately trained staff, would be allocated as required. Indeed a few respondents felt that without a new qualification, the Area might not be prioritised.

*“We consider that a new qualification for the Health and Well-being Area is essential in regards to: supporting teaching and learning ... influencing curriculum design ... supporting the concept of the new curriculum [and] emphasizing the need for collaboration/co-construction involving a range of local and community partners [and] providing an opportunity to address the potential gaps in staffing and ensuring that schools recruit specialist staff ...”*

*Other*

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<sup>18</sup> Estyn (2019) *Healthy and happy: school impact on pupils' health and well-being*. Available at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-report/healthy-and-happy-school-impact-pupils-health-and-wellbeing>

Similarly, some respondents who agreed with the proposal felt that some mitigation would be necessary to ensure the Area is not “*side-lined*” in the absence of a new qualification.

*“We agree with the rationale proposed in the consultation document. However, we must be aware of the difficulties that may arise from areas that are not assessed in terms of securing sufficient timetabled space and learner adherence when other requirements are pressing. Alternative ways of ensuring appropriate priority will need to be found for this crucial area”*<sup>19</sup>  
Other

Perhaps because Qualifications Wales does not propose to create a qualification in the Health and Well-being Area, some respondents focused on teaching and learning in the Area, which is not within Qualifications Wales’s remit.

The risk of schools failing to prioritise health and well-being might be mitigated, a few respondents felt, by new Welsh Government guidance on adopting a “*whole-school approach*” to mental health and emotional well-being, the two areas most often highlighted by respondents as being unsuited to formal assessments or qualifications. The principle of a whole-school approach to health and well-being, it was felt, demands that schools have the autonomy to design a curriculum that meets the specific needs of their learners.

*“In order to have a positive impact upon the health and well-being of learners and the whole school community, a whole-school approach is a crucial component of this area. It is therefore essential that schools build a curriculum for health and well-being that is responsive to their needs”*  
Other

Another potential mitigation suggested was to recognise and celebrate schools that ensure that the Health and Well-being Area is being prioritised appropriately.

*“I feel there should be pressure on leaders in the school not to compromise this area of learning experience ... if a uniform assessment is not created. We should be celebrating schools that direct fair and appropriate amounts of time to this area. This, for me, is the overarching area that contributes to whole-school ethos and success”*  
Education professional

Some respondents agreed with the proposal not to create a new structured qualification on the basis that doing so might prevent schools from adopting the most suitable approach for their learners if it means they must achieve targets and meet goals they have not been able to set themselves.

A few respondents also expressed concern that bias or staff preferences might affect curriculum content and teaching in some aspects of health and well-being without the structure provided by a qualification. There was recognition from some respondents, however, that while the freedom for schools to adopt flexible and creative approaches

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<sup>19</sup> “Cytunwn â'r rhesymeg a gynigir yn y ddogfen ymgynghorol. Fodd bynnag, rhaid bod yn ymwybodol o'r anawsterau all ddod yn sgil meysydd nad ydynt yn cael eu hasesu o ran sicrhau digon o ofod ar yr amserlen ac ymlyniad gan ddysgwyr pan fydd gofynion eraill yn pwyso. Bydd angen dod o hyd i ffyrdd amgen o sicrhau blaenoriaeth briodol i'r maes hollbwysig hwn”

to course content and delivery is desirable, it is also important that there is sufficient consistency between schools to ensure that all learners in Wales benefit from effective teaching and learning. In the absence of a qualification, they felt that enough guidance would need to be provided to schools to ensure this is the case<sup>20</sup>.

Among those respondents who disagreed with the proposal and advocated for the creation of a new qualification within the Health and Well-being Area, a few raised the importance of drawing from expertise, experience, and proven best practice to inform the design of a new qualification that would cover the Health and Well-being Area.

*"Have you talked to the teachers who wrote the Area in Curriculum for Wales? They should be the ones who are involved in creating GCSEs that will prepare our learners for the future and not for the past. Please be forward thinking"*

*Education professional*

Also, one respondent suggested that collaboration with local and community partners be considered if a qualification were to be developed.

*"We consider that a new qualification for the health and wellbeing Area is essential in regard to [...] supporting the concept of the new curriculum framework in embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being, and emphasising the need for collaboration/co-construction involving a range of local and community partners"*

*Other*

#### 4.1.4. Combining health and well-being subjects

Among those respondents who agreed with Qualifications Wales' proposal not to introduce a new qualification, most felt that health and well-being is an Area that is too broad to be captured by a single qualification. Some expressed that a qualification that attempts to bring together too many topics would inevitably lead to the *"watering-down"* of content related to important areas of personal development to the extent that it would become meaningless.

*"We support this proposal. We feel that health and wellbeing is about developing a lifelong positive approach and making healthy choices. This should be threaded throughout students' education rather than reduced to a single qualification, which would feel tokenistic"*

*Education professional*

Attempting to introduce a *"traditional"* qualification to cover Health and Well-being, some respondents felt, might lead to a narrowing of curriculum content to focus on those areas that can be measured, at the expense of key elements that are less suited to formal assessment.

*"This area is focused upon learners developing a blend of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions essential to support their own and others health and well-being, both now and for their futures. If a qualification was introduced in this area it is agreed there is a risk that emphasis may shift towards only learning about aspects that can be measured/assessed"*

*Other*

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<sup>20</sup> Welsh Government develops curriculum guidance for schools.

Some respondents emphasised the importance of preserving the existing, discrete qualifications within the Health and Well-being Area, including GCSEs in Physical Education, Food and Nutrition, Health and Social Care, and Childcare. These subjects, it was felt, need to be maintained to ensure that learners can develop specific knowledge and skills, and to ensure that important aspects of existing qualifications are not lost.

*"I don't think it helpful to 'lump' qualifications together to meet the needs of an area of learning, much of which may be irrelevant to the pupil's prospective path into further education or employment "*

*Education professional*

#### 4.1.5. Alignment with the new Curriculum for Wales

Among respondents who disagreed with the proposal to not introduce a new qualification within the Health and Well-being Area, some focused on the subject's status as a key element of the new Curriculum for Wales. This, they felt, was reason enough to create a new GCSE in Health and Well-being that would reflect the increased emphasis on health and well-being in the new curriculum, as well as in other guidelines and legislation including Sustainable Development Goals, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and draft Welsh Government guidance on a whole-school approach to mental health and emotional well-being.

*"A qualification affords the h&wb agenda equal status, which is a significant intention of the reforms"*

*Education professional*

This view was typified by one education professional who argued that a new integrated Health and Well-being qualification should be developed to reflect the new curriculum for Wales' fresh approach.

*"There should be a GCSE for health and wellbeing. Curriculum for Wales places well-being at its heart and the inclusion of an Area in health and wellbeing means that it should have a GCSE ... If you want to take a truly radical approach to create GCSEs which are about the Four Purposes, then the GCSEs should be multi-Area ... This should be a curriculum for the 21st century"*

*Education professional*

This request for a fresh approach was echoed by some other respondents, including some regional education consortia stakeholders, who felt it would ensure that health and well-being teaching and learning in schools has a positive and long-lasting impact on learner outcomes.

*"New approaches to learning and assessment in line with the principles of Curriculum for Wales would encourage deep learning in this crucial aspect"*

*Other*

#### 4.1.6. Assessment

Some respondents who supported the proposal not to create a new qualification within the Health and Well-being Area agreed that assessing learners' progress in a broad area of learning like health and well-being would be challenging, if not impossible.

They particularly felt that establishing an objective measurement of achievement in a subject that emphasises personal development and individual needs would be difficult.

*"Health and well-being matters so much more in reality than as an exam that can be measured. What is right for one person's mental health is not always right for another's. Therefore, there are often no right or wrong answers to certain areas within the topic"*

*Learner*

There was strong agreement from some respondents that preparing for and passing assessments might divert learners' attention away from developing their own health and well-being, contradicting the principal purpose of including it in the curriculum. Furthermore, some others were concerned that introducing any assessment that might cause anxiety to learners would be counterproductive.

*"If we keep categorisation based on grades (which are based pretty much solely on external exams/assessments for all pupils) it impacts negatively across the board on actual pupil learning and opportunities for their future life and their health and well-being"*

*Education professional*

Some respondents also agreed with Qualifications Wales' statement that creating a qualification could *"have a narrowing effect in teaching and learning"*. There was concern that, by introducing assessment, the emphasis of the qualification's content might shift toward aspects that are *"measurable"*.

A few respondents disagreed though, suggesting that if introducing assessment leads to a narrower focus, then the same could be said of all qualifications. Rather than a reason not to introduce a new qualification, it was thought to be a reason to be innovative when creating one.

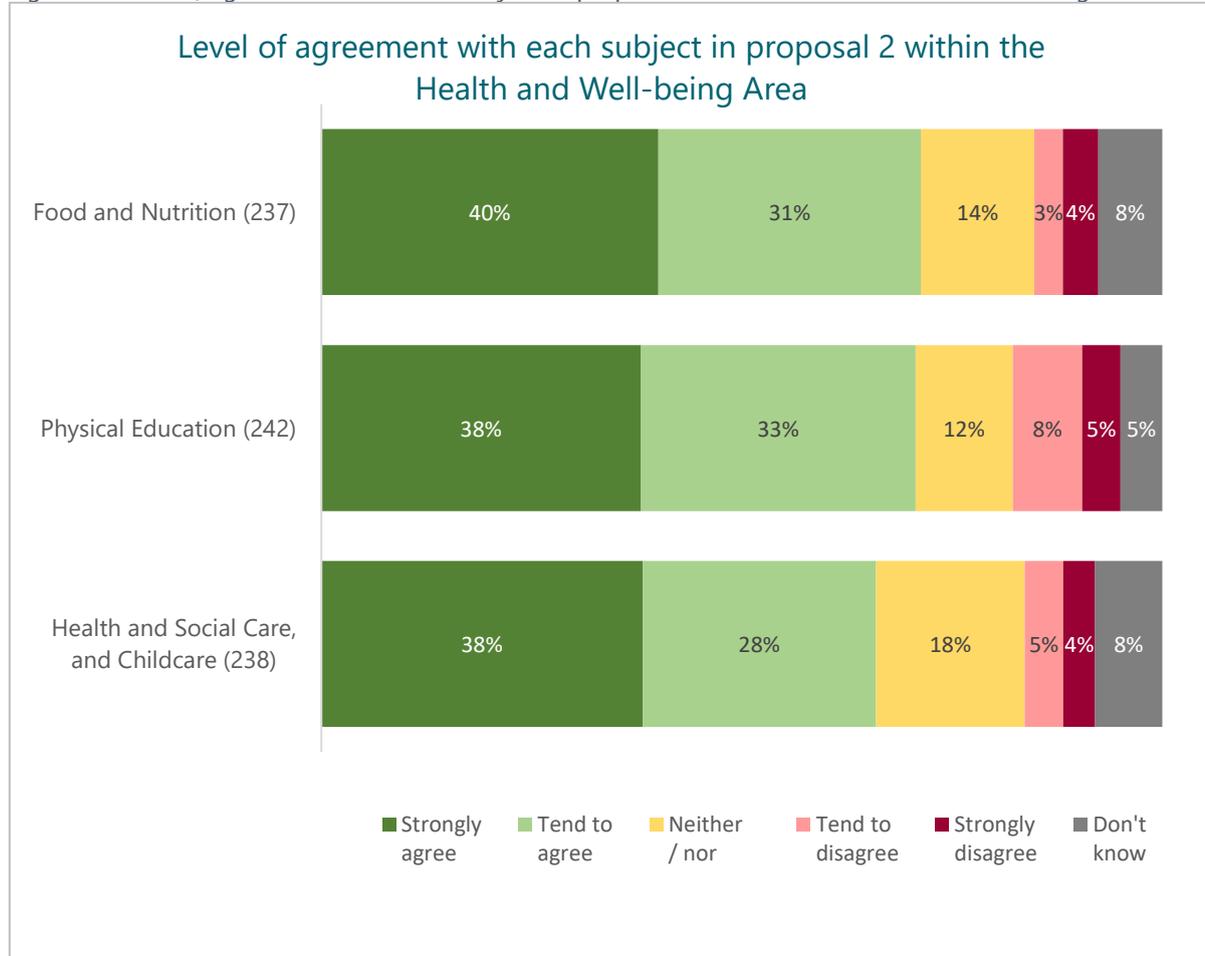
*"[This] does not need to be seen as a reason not to offer a qualification, but a reason to re-imagine and re-invent the methods used to assess a qualification. What can we learn from other countries?"*

*Other*

## 4.2. Proposal 2

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review and reform GCSEs in Food and Nutrition, Physical Education, and Health and Social Care, and Childcare?

Figure 6: Level of agreement with each subject in proposal 2 within the Health and Well-being Area



Around 240 people answered questions on each of the subjects in this proposal, ranging from 237 for Food and Nutrition to 242 for Health, Social Care, and Childcare. Seven in ten (71%) supported the proposals for Food and Nutrition and Physical Education whilst 66% supported a review of Health and Social Care, and Childcare. The highest level of disagreement was for Physical Education where 13% of respondents disagreed.

94 respondents (39% of those who answered this question) provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

#### 4.2.1. Learners' progression, specialism, and skills

Overall, most respondents who commented on this proposal recognised the importance of health and well-being for learners. These subjects, they felt, are important elements of the school curriculum that introduce the principles of health and well-being and equip learners with life skills.

*"These are basic life skills that aren't always taught from home, particularly in more deprived areas. More focused learning of these could impact the wellbeing of future generations"*  
Parent/carer

There was also recognition of the benefits for learners of retaining separate qualifications in Physical Education, Food and Nutrition, and Health and Social Care, and Childcare. Some respondents stated that continuing to offer separate GCSEs in the Health and Well-being Area would allow learners to focus on specific skills and knowledge in their chosen areas of learning.

*"I agree that having separate GCSEs would continue to be beneficial ... Learners are more likely to focus and engage in subjects they've personally chosen"*  
Learner

Others referred to the importance of individual qualifications that provide pathways to further qualifications, and to future careers. For some, this was a reason to ensure that the current choice of subjects remain available to prepare learners for future employment.

The potential for learners to progress to further study was for some, though, reason enough to consider substantial reforms that reflect changes to curriculums at post-16 and beyond. A few respondents recognised that this might require additional training to ensure that teaching staff are suitably equipped to deliver the qualifications.

*"It is essential that progression to the next level of study - vocational or academic - is suitably taken into account when reforming or designing these GCSEs ... The emphasis on expert delivery, especially for the care curriculum, needs to be strengthened"*  
Other

A few respondents felt that the extent of any required changes to individual GCSEs would likely vary from subject to subject, and that priority should be given to those subjects that have not already been subject to recent reforms. Furthermore, while not opposed to review and reform in principle, a few respondents felt that there have already been changes to GCSEs in Physical Education and Health and Social Care, and Childcare in recent years that have not yet been fully tested.

*"The current syllabus on offer at GCSE PE has been in existence since the summer exams of 2018. [Because of Covid-19 and cancelled exams], five sets of examinations would have been sat by pupils following the current 'new' format prior to implementation of the 2025 examination cohort. As a department, we have revamped schemes of work, purchased resources which are barely used, adapted our teaching methods to meet the needs of this current specification and we feel this does not need to be changed"*  
Education professional

Some respondents disagreed with the need for any review or reform of qualifications in Physical Education, Food and Nutrition, and Health and Social Care, and Childcare. A few expressed a desire to avoid, *“change for change’s sake”*, while others felt that current provision in this Area is adequate, with enough elements related to broader themes of health and well-being to meet the needs of learners.

*“The range of content at GCSE is already very broad. It covers areas within it that allow students to become more aware of the importance of physical, mental and social health”*

*Education professional*

#### 4.2.2. Take-up and interest

There were mixed views on learner take-up and interest in the GCSEs that currently sit within the Health and Well-being Area. Some respondents stated that the subjects were popular with learners; among the learners who responded, most said they enjoyed the subjects. The same was also true of the small number of parents and carers who commented. Education professionals and other stakeholders felt that continued review and reform of the qualifications would ensure that uptake continues to be strong.

A few respondents felt that ensuring the qualifications are viewed as *“academically robust”* would increase their value in learners’ eyes. There was a strong emphasis from some on the need for qualifications to be relevant to life beyond school, particularly given current and future developments in these subject areas. In this context, the importance of ensuring equivalence to similar qualifications awarded in other parts of the UK was mentioned.

There were, however, some contrasting views. A few respondents felt that increasingly theoretical or *“academic”* approaches might put some learners off the subjects. One education professional was concerned that an increased focus on elements such as legislation in the GCSE in Health and Social Care, and Childcare had made the subject less interesting and therefore less attractive. These respondents stated that emphasis should instead be placed on practical activities to ensure continued take-up and retention.

*GCSE Health, Social Care, and Childcare is now a very boring course with the main focus on work and legislation for the single award .... Practical activities on physical measures would have been a more contemporary approach to the first unit given health issues in Wales. Why choose HSCC when learners could have a more interesting time studying other subjects?”*

*Education professional*

#### 4.2.3. Alignment with the new Curriculum for Wales

Most respondents agreed that a review of current GCSEs in Food and Nutrition, Physical Education, and Health and Social Care, and Childcare is needed. Some of those who commented focused on mainly practical changes, such as introducing non-sporting and nature-based outdoor activities into the Physical Education curriculum.

Some other respondents, however, saw a need for more fundamental reforms in light of the Curriculum for Wales, and felt that a thorough review of qualifications in the Health and Well-being Area should be undertaken. This view was particularly prevalent among regional and national stakeholder organisations, including some regional education consortia, local authorities, and awarding bodies.

*“These qualifications need to be reviewed and reformed to support the purpose and principles of the Curriculum for Wales. The review and reform of qualifications is an excellent opportunity to complete a mapping exercise of the current content and identify gaps and opportunities for developments within this Area”*

*Other*

For some respondents, there is a need to reform the existing qualifications so that they fit better in the broader context of the Health and Well-being Area of the new curriculum.

*“The current qualifications in this Area do not provide the full breadth and depth of coverage. These need to be reviewed and reformed to support the purpose and principles of the Curriculum for Wales”*

*Other*

Some respondents felt that it is important for health and well-being teaching and learning to not be restricted by the demands of GCSE qualifications. A few called for a holistic approach to teaching and learning within this Area so that learners who do not choose these specific qualifications do not miss out on the opportunity to develop their knowledge and learn important life-long skills.

A few respondents also questioned whether the proposals are sufficiently aligned to the Health and Well-being Area of the new Curriculum for Wales, or ambitious enough to transform the way that subjects related to health and well-being are taught. They were concerned that an opportunity for far-reaching changes, which would benefit learners, might be missed.

*“I believe that there should be a holistic approach to GCSE design which is radical in its thinking and helps to create learners who really are truly healthy, fitter ... and better placed to make informed decisions”*

*Education professional*

One respondent pointed out that the staff who would deliver, assess, and evaluate the reformed qualifications would require appropriate training and development.

#### 4.2.4. Qualification design

Some respondents felt that qualifications within the Health and Well-being Area need to be reviewed to support more updated approaches to teaching and learning. GCSE Physical Education, in particular, was highlighted as needing to be reviewed and reformed to widen its scope: continuing to focus on performance and competition, some respondents felt, was not in keeping with the proposed qualifications in the Health and Well-being Area.

*"There is a need to refocus these subjects, e.g., exercise, to ensure that all pupils can learn the importance of keeping healthy for physical health and well-being rather than thinking that all elements of exercise are about excelling and competition. Learning is needed to participate in exercise as a life skill and not just as an area for competition."<sup>21</sup>*

*Education professional*

A few respondents stated that the current GCSE Physical Education is too heavily focused on sport, and that other elements of fitness and physical activity should be included as part of a broader Health and Well-being curriculum. This, it was said, might increase the appeal of the subject and allow new elements to be introduced to the curriculum.

Suggestions for new activities included yoga and aerobics, among others. There was also a strong argument from a few respondents that dance should feature in the Physical Education curriculum, or that an entirely new GCSE Dance should be created for Wales.

*"Physical Education in particular should be given more priority and perhaps include a wider array of physical activities, not just team sports. The mental health benefits of being active should be promoted and utilised more here. Maybe also introducing practices such as yoga, dance and ballet would help attract more students to the subject"*

*Other*

Some respondents argued, though, that the practical focus of the current GCSE Physical Education curriculum is important and should be maintained or expanded, including elements related to competitive sport.

*"It is disappointing that the new curriculum only refers broadly to sport - removing the Physical Education qualifications that include the practical options of sport would be a huge step back"<sup>22</sup>*

*Education professional*

In relation to the other qualifications in the Health and Well-being Area, some respondents referred to the importance of ensuring that the GCSEs are designed and delivered in a way that prepares learners for future study and career opportunities. This was particularly the case with Health and Social Care, and Childcare, and one voluntary organisation specialising in Welsh-medium early years provision specifically referenced newer advanced qualifications.

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<sup>21</sup> *"Mae angen newid ffocws y pynciau yma e.e. ymarfer corff, i sicrhau bod bob disgybl yn medru dysgu pwysigrwydd cadw'n iach ar gyfer iechyd corfforol a lles yn hytrach na meddwl bod pob elfen o ymarfer corff yn ymwneud a serenu a chystadlu. Mae angen dysgu i gymryd rhan mewn ymarfer corff fel sgil bywyd ac nid yn unig fel maes i gystadlu"*

<sup>22</sup> *"Mae'n siomedig fod y cwrwiclw m newydd ond yn cyfeirio'n fras at chwaraeon - byddai cael gwared ar y cymwyster Addysg Gorfforol sy'n cynnwys opsiynau ymarferol chwaraeon yn gam enfawr yn ôl"*

*“These qualifications as they stand allow pupils to specialise in a subject and go on to choose a career in their chosen field [and] supports progression towards the suite of new qualifications in Children’s Care, Play, Learning and Development, and the AS and A levels in Health and Social Care, and Childcare. These have all only existed since September 2019<sup>23</sup>”*

*Other*

Some education professionals called for Health and Social Care, and Childcare to be separated into discrete qualifications. For some, this was about recognising that they are separate subjects with their own career paths. For a few, it was to differentiate between more *“academic”* topics, and those related to broader life skills such as nurturing and developing children.

More recognition and emphasis for care as a GCSE subject was welcomed by one stakeholder organisation, which works to raise awareness of social care, early years, and childcare in Wales. They expressed concern, however, about the long-term prospects for the subject and whether it might be discontinued in the future, although did not give a reason for this.

Fewer comments were made around GCSE Food and Nutrition. A few respondents did highlight the importance of the subject in the wider context of the Health and Well-being Area. Equipping learners to make healthy lifestyle choices around food and nutrition was emphasised, and an approach that balances the needs of different individuals was recommended.

*“Especially with food and nutrition, there needs to be a balanced approach that helps pupils understand that there is no such thing as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ food. Disorder eating is at its highest currently, and we need to be more aware of what we tell our learners and how we approach health”*

*Not stated*

#### 4.2.5. Meeting the needs of all learners

Some respondents raised issues around the suitability of qualifications in the Health and Well-being Area for all learners. A few pointed to the benefits of qualifications with a strong practical element. They felt that this provides good opportunities for less able learners to achieve qualifications that would benefit their future prospects.

Some highlighted the importance of meeting the needs of all learners in relation to the assessment of GCSEs in the Health and Well-being Area. A few of these focused on the need to ensure that the requirements for involvement in sporting activities for GCSE Physical Education do not negatively impact learners who might find it difficult to engage in activities outside of school, e.g., those from more deprived areas.

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<sup>23</sup> *“Mae’r cymwysterau yma fel ag y maent yn caniatáu i ddisgyblion arbenigo mewn pwnc a mynd ymlaen i ddewis gyrfa yn y maes o’u dewis [ac] yn cefnogi dilyniant tuag at y gyfres o gymwysterau newydd mewn Gofal, Chwarae, Dysgu a Datblygiad Plant a’r cymhwyster UG a Safon Uwch mewn Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol a Gofal Plant. Mae’r rhain i gyd ond yn bodoli ers Medi 2019”*

*"I would also like to see the removal of a compulsory individual activity, as the current assessment benefits students who compete in an activity outside of school. As a teacher in a socially deprived area of Wales, not many of my students can afford to attend clubs in these activities"*

*Education professional*

Also related to GCSE Physical Education, some respondents felt that the definition of *"sporting"* should be expanded to include other physical activities. A few suggested that doing so would help to meet the needs of all learners, while it was also said that the requirement for GCSE Physical Education learners to compete in multiple sports might create difficulty for some learners due to lack of time or because of the cost involved in doing so outside school. A more flexible approach to current requirements was recommended.

*"New qualifications should ensure all learners can achieve success in the practical element of the qualification within a school setting, should be fully inclusive and not rely on external sporting participation factors"*

*Education professional*

In other qualifications in the Health and Well-being Area, a few respondents felt that past changes to qualifications might have disproportionately affected learners with, for example, English as an additional language, or lower literacy levels. One respondent pointed to the discontinuation of BTEC Health and Social Care as an example, and a few mentioned the amalgamation of the subject with childcare as having a negative impact on lower ability learners.

Changes to subject specifications that emphasise theory and a more *"scientific"* approach were also mentioned by a few respondents as a potential barrier to learning for some learners. There were, however, a few respondents who felt that qualifications in the Health and Well-being Area are viewed as *"easy"* and therefore less *"academically rigorous"* than other subjects. While recognising the importance of meeting the needs of all learners, they felt it was also important that qualifications are designed to equip all learners to undertake additional study or to pursue careers related to health and well-being.

#### 4.2.6. Assessment

Some respondents felt that reviewing and reforming the way that all qualifications in the Health and Well-being Area are assessed is vital to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and align with the aims of the new Curriculum for Wales and encourage genuine learning.

*"All qualifications need to be reviewed and updated to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose within the progress models that pupils will be building through the new curriculum 'what matters' statements and progression steps. They also need to be reviewed in terms of the assessment procedures used as well, to make them accessible to more pupils and the learning opportunities within them more authentic and not just simply taught 'to a test', which does not provide the best learning for the rest of their life"*

*Education professional*

There were, however, differences in views around assessment for GCSE Physical Education. Some respondents felt strongly that there should be more emphasis on assessing practical elements as it is primarily a practical subject, and assessment should reflect this. Indeed, placing too much emphasis on theoretical elements might, it was felt, make the subject less attractive to some learners.

*"Insufficient marks awarded to the practical element is making the subject less attractive to a lot of students. A better balance to the grading system would be 60/40 in favour of the practical element. This would allow more students to be successful"*  
*Education professional*

The inclusive nature of physical education as a GCSE subject was mentioned by some respondents, with concern expressed that assessment should allow learners to demonstrate their progress in different ways so that lower ability learners, or those with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, are able to attain qualifications.

*"The subject tends to attract a lot of students who have their strengths in practical, kinaesthetic learning ... a review needs to look at increasing the practical element of this subject and reducing the theoretical side, without compromising the status of the subject. I believe this would increase the uptake of the subject and raise attainment levels"*  
*Education professional*

A few respondents, however, took a different view, stating that there should be more emphasis on theory and that other ways of assessing learning could be introduced. It was suggested, for example, that assessment related to refereeing, or coaching and leadership could be introduced in a reformed specification.

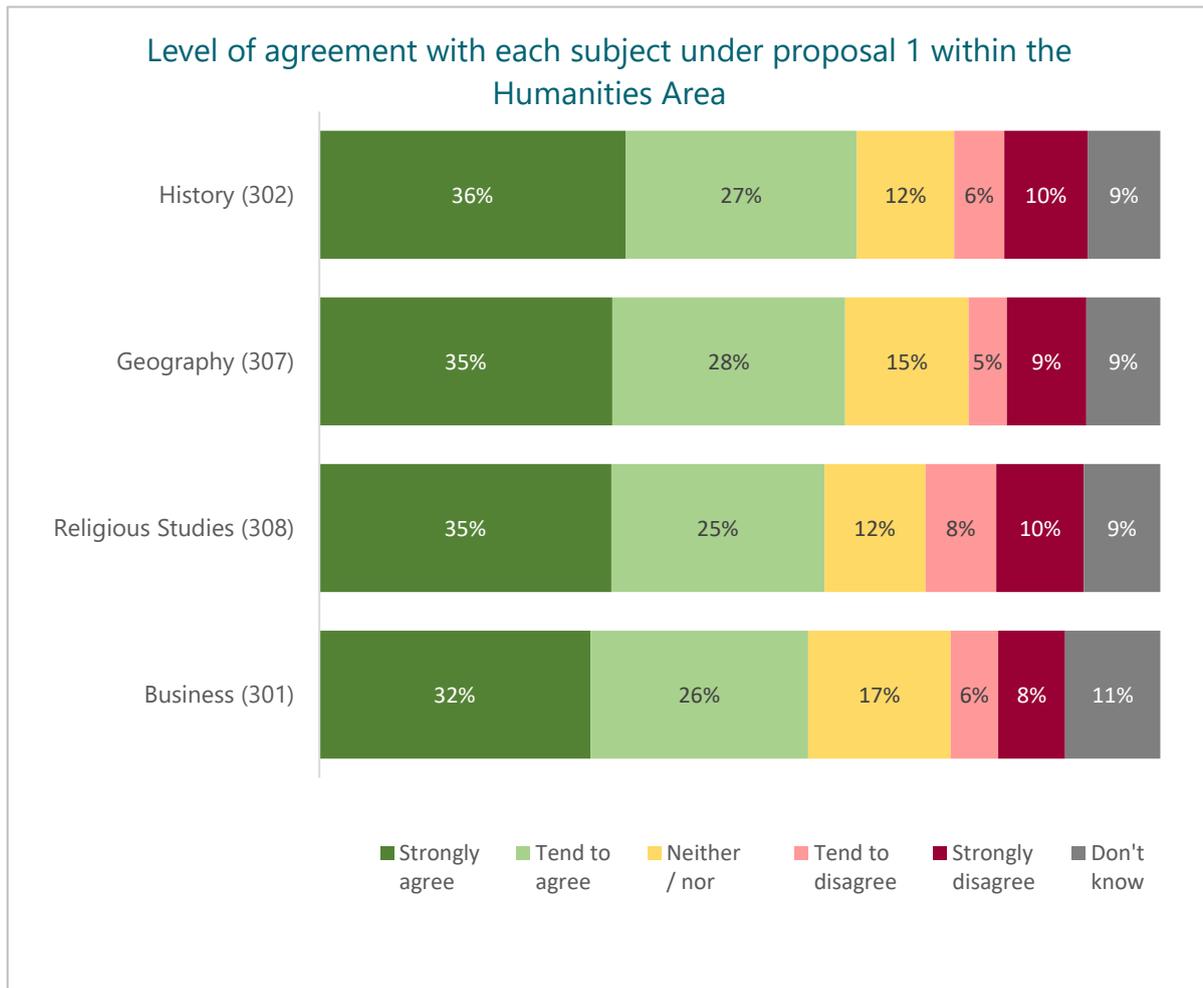
*"PE needs to provide the opportunities for learners to be assessed as leaders and coaches rather than purely as performers. PE is about far more than performing a practical skill and should provide learners with the opportunity to be assessed in other roles that are far more applicable post school education"*  
*Education professional*

## 5. Humanities

### 5.1. Proposal 1

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review and reform GCSEs in: Business, Geography, History and Religious Studies?

Figure 7: Level of agreement with each subject under proposal 1 within the Humanities Area



Just over 300 people chose to respond to this proposal. The majority agreed with the proposal to review and reform the four GCSEs included in the proposal. The lowest level of agreement was for Business at 58%. This subject also showed the highest level of neutral and don't know responses, suggesting that familiarity with this subject may have been lower than with the other three.

More than two in three (68%, 205 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

### 5.1.1. Retaining separate GCSEs in the Humanities Area

There was strong agreement with the proposal among respondents, with many expressing that existing GCSEs within the Humanities Area should remain separate. They emphasised the importance and value of individual humanities subjects and felt that retaining separate subjects would maintain discipline-specific rigour and prevent the dilution of subjects. Some also emphasised, though, that the subjects' commonalities and interdisciplinary nature should be explicitly recognised.

*"The key processes and themes of each of the above subjects should still be taught, but students should be taught the skills to make links, apply knowledge and create understanding through problem solving. I feel the new GCSE should still contain these key themes, but rather than trying to teach pupils everything under the sun, there should be a focus on principles or key subject areas"*

*Education professional*

Some respondents noted the importance of having a range of choices for learners at GCSE level to further develop subject knowledge. Others agreed with the proposal to continue teaching religious studies as a separate subject to ensure that learners develop accurate knowledge of different faiths and build tolerance of other cultures and groups.

Some also noted that keeping the subjects separate would help learners develop the skills and depth of knowledge required to progress to A level and beyond.

Some respondents suggested that a combined or integrated approach to GCSEs within the Humanities Area should be considered, as detailed in proposal 3 in this Area. A few highlighted the need to keep separate GCSEs within the Humanities Area, whilst also stating that a combined GCSE Humanities could be offered alongside them.

Respondents suggested that an alternative could be to offer a common core humanities module which runs throughout separate GCSEs within the Humanities Area. This, they said, would allow learners to specialise in their chosen subjects in a way that is manageable for schools.

Others noted that any reviewed and reformed GCSEs within the Humanities Area should emphasise cross-curriculum links, for example the close relationship between geography and science. It was noted that geography is more closely related to science than humanities in some schools, and that this should be recognised. Some respondents felt that the reviewed and reformed GCSEs within the Humanities Area should also harness and further develop the transferable skills gained through previous integrated humanities learning in school.

*"At the same time, many pupils enjoy the more holistic approach to 'humanities' and the independent learning skills they have developed. It would be nice to see this being further developed at GCSE"*

*Education professional*

A minority of respondents felt that it could be difficult for learners to progress in separate disciplines at GCSE level after studying combined humanities during "Key Stage 3". Moreover, a few suggested that offering a multi-disciplinary qualification

could help learners *“keep their options more open and flexible”* and appreciate the inter-relationship between subjects in the Humanities Area.

*“This review and reform of GCSEs should consider the interdisciplinary nature of the area, the links and connections between subjects, and the contexts where the subjects can provide complementary lenses through which to view content”*

*Other*

### 5.1.2. The “heavy” content of GCSEs within the Humanities Area

Many respondents expressed concern around the *“content heavy”* nature of the current GCSEs within the Humanities Area. These comments were made about GCSEs within the Humanities Area in general, and specifically about GCSE History and Geography. There was some feeling that the heavy content of these qualifications removes teachers’ ability to teach the subjects creatively, innovatively and in enough depth. Some respondents also felt that the qualifications’ heavy content reduces teachers’ ability to teach key skills and conduct formal assessments. The future qualifications, they said, should therefore be more focused on developing skills and enjoying the subjects.

There was quite strong feeling that the heavy content of the GCSEs within the Humanities Area disadvantages or discourages lower ability learners, those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), or lower literacy levels. This was mentioned most often in relation to GCSE Religious Studies and GCSE History.

*“Many lower attaining learners end up being excluded from continuing to study these discrete subjects even if they enjoy learning about them because they’re just not accessible in their current format”*

*Education professional*

Heavy content was also said to discourage learners from studying A levels in History and Geography, including those who are more able. Several respondents said that the proposed new GCSEs within the Humanities Area should be accessible to lower ability learners as well as providing appropriate challenge for higher ability learners.

Some respondents pointed out that it is important to strike a balance between developing key skills and covering essential content.

*“I do agree that current GCSEs are too content heavy for the time given in which to deliver the content and develop the students’ skills. I would not like to see a heavy swing of the pendulum to an over-emphasis on skills to the detriment of content. The balance has to be struck ... The content of our disciplines is what drives our passion for our subjects and the awe and wonder we feel at learning them. It is a skill in itself - highly prized - to be able to store much knowledge but to be able to select from that and deploy it effectively”*

*Education professional*

### 5.1.3. Reviewing the content of future GCSEs within the Humanities Area

Some respondents suggested that the content of future GCSEs within the Humanities Area should be more diverse, up to date and relevant, with a broader world or international focus. They noted that there is often too much focus on traditional and

UK or Wales-based topics and the current GCSE History was particularly criticised for lacking diversity. Respondents who made this point highlighted that wider representation of the perspectives of those of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) heritage is needed across the curriculum. A few also noted that a new GCSE Geography should encourage learners to develop geographical subject-based skills as well as stronger global perspectives.

Some respondents said that a new GCSE Religious Studies should retain its knowledge-based focus and not become too closely focused on skills development. They highlighted that the current GCSE already presents valuable opportunities for learners to develop and showcase skills, for example, through applying, interpreting, analysing, and evaluating knowledge.

Some also highlighted that learning in qualifications within the Humanities Area should be more self-directed and interactive, and that topics should be more interesting and relevant to learners<sup>24</sup>. The need for GCSEs within the Humanities Area to be taught by specialist teachers was emphasised, especially given the depth and breadth of their content.

A few respondents highlighted that, while it would be desirable to include a greater emphasis on enquiry-based learning across the subjects within the Humanities Area, it should be recognised that the approach will vary between different subjects.

Knowledge and skills gained from subjects within the Humanities Area are important in shaping learners' knowledge and awareness of related issues, according to a few respondents. Learning a wide variety of subjects pre-16 was said to help learners develop deep subject knowledge. GCSEs within the Humanities Area should link clearly to previous learning and skills, and there was some feeling that this is not currently the case.

*"Now that pupils are studying 'humanities' in years 7 and 8 at our school, there are few links between the current GCSE subjects and what pupils have studied previously"*  
*Education professional*

Conversely, a few respondents felt that schools' greater autonomy over the curriculum at "Key Stage 3" could lead to inconsistencies in content coverage, especially in geography. This may make the transition to "Key Stage 4" challenging for learners, it was said. Although schools could choose specific content at "Key Stage 4" to address this, it was said that reliable structures should be in place to overcome the challenges this could present when learners are assessed. A related point was that the content of GCSEs within the Humanities Area needs to link well or better to the content of related A levels to prepare learners for further study.

Respondents suggested a range of specific possible improvements to the content of GCSEs within the Humanities Area:

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<sup>24</sup> Specific suggestions for improving the content and assessment of humanities GCSEs are discussed in a separate sub-section.

For GCSE Geography, these were to:

- Include more environmental geography to educate young people about sustainability and link up the earth's physical processes with their causes to enable learners to understand the impact of human activity on the planet (e.g. climate change, desertification, and poor soil quality).
- Further develop the meaningful study of human, physical and environmental themes, and the study of place.
- Further develop key skills through fieldwork and the use of geographical information systems.
- Cover more contemporary content, such as the geography of disease, growth of Chinese power in the global economy, and recent examples of urban planning.
- Include self-study units in learners' areas of interest, e.g. researching alternative energy supplies.

For GCSE History, these were to:

- Incorporate more practical elements such as archaeology.
- Remove Welsh medicine, as learners do not tend to enjoy it or find it relevant.
- Incorporate learning about modern Welsh history (not just focusing on traditional topics such as industrialisation) and the diverse contributions of different Welsh people.
- Include a more international focus. A few respondents expressed that history GCSE is too Wales-focused, leading learners to become *"insular and lack a wider knowledge"*.
- Cover British colonialism and Britain's impact on Wales through, for example, slavery, emigration, and immigration, reflecting points made elsewhere about increasing diversity in the history curriculum.
- Increase consistency between units in GCSE History. Some units were said to include more content and detail than others, complicating teaching and learning.
- Allow schools to choose their own historic Welsh site.

For GCSE Business, these were to:

- Incorporate entrepreneurship and ideas for practical kinaesthetic learning<sup>25</sup> in the community, e.g. working with local business partnerships.
- Incorporate the study of economics more fully, as well as personal and general finance.

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<sup>25</sup> Kinaesthetic or tactile learning involves learning through conducting physical activities rather than listening to lessons or watching demonstrations.

- Cover a greater range of “*vocationally relevant*” skills, such as applied numeracy and digital literacy.

For GCSE Religious Studies, these were to:

- Grant local authorities in Wales the autonomy to set their own syllabi for GCSE Religious Studies to ensure that it is appropriate for learners in schools of a religious character and those in non-denominational schools.<sup>26</sup>
- Have a stronger emphasis on exploring what happens when people die. This would prepare learners for later life and would enable them to understand different belief systems.
- Cover other religions as opposed to focusing too heavily on Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Islam.
- Include ethical themes like business ethics, transgenderism, animal rights, and the environment.

One respondent suggested that GCSE Classical Studies should be made available to all learners in Wales.

#### 5.1.4. The need for reform

Many respondents agreed with the need to review and reform GCSEs within the Humanities Area to ensure they meet the needs of the new Curriculum for Wales and, in some cases, to improve how the subjects are taught and assessed. While they welcomed the proposed reforms, some felt there is a need to retain the aspects of the current GCSEs that work well and emphasised the need to conserve the value of individual humanities subjects when reforming them.

Conversely, a few respondents felt that the proposal is not sufficiently aligned to the new curriculum.

*“The proposals don't seem to be in alignment with Curriculum for Wales, so I want to ask you - what do the teachers say? Who wrote the humanities guidance in Curriculum for Wales? And how does your proposal support learners to progress towards the four purposes? How does it prepare them for critical thinking, problem solving, and communication required to build a cohesive society where people act in the common good for the best of our environment?”*  
Education professional

Some noted that it was too soon for another reform, that the recently reviewed qualifications are fit for purpose, and believed that further reforms would only lead to minor changes. The amount of time and effort required to prepare to teach new GCSE specifications was noted. Some respondents referred to the substantial impact of

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<sup>26</sup> The new Curriculum for Wales Framework which was published by Welsh Government in January 2021 states that schools in Wales will design their own curriculums for all Areas. Welsh Government has undertaken a further consultation on its guidance to support Schools in designing RVE in their curriculum for all learners aged 3 to 16, which closed in July 2021: [consultation-document-curriculum-for-wales-religion-values-and-ethics-guidance.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/consultation-document-curriculum-for-wales-religion-values-and-ethics-guidance.pdf)

COVID-19 on teaching and learning, stating that they did not feel that further changes were timely in light of this.

*"There have been too many (unnecessary) changes already"*  
*Education professional*

A few respondents said they were unhappy with the recent reforms to GCSEs within the Humanities Area. For example, changes to GCSE Religious Studies were seen to have damaged the subject and made it less relevant.

*"I believe that the recent reforms to religious studies have done massive damage to the subject and would prefer a return to relevance or allow for the non-teaching of it"*  
*Education professional*

### 5.1.5. Assessment

Many of those who commented on this proposal reflected on the assessment of the current GCSEs within the Humanities Area. Some said that they are too focused on preparing learners for assessments, limiting teachers' ability to teach the key skills in each discipline, and limiting learners' enjoyment of the subjects.

Others highlighted the need for the assessment of future GCSEs within the Humanities Area to be more innovative and interactive, and less focused on learning content to pass exams. They noted that the new GCSEs should include a wider range of assessment types that build on learners' skills and competencies and develop broad subject knowledge.

*"Assessments need to provide learners with a genuine opportunity to communicate their understanding and depth of knowledge in a subject area or disciplinary skill in creative and varied ways. Often the assessment formats, in particular exams, do not afford pupils time for reflection, introspect and in essence thinking. The nature of assessments need to facilitate pupils' conceptual understanding of the subject disciplines"*  
*Education professional*

There was some feeling that learners struggle to complete the current exams (especially in GCSE History) within the allocated time and to the required standard. GCSE History assessment is considered by some to be focused on *"regurgitating notes"*, which is linked to the content-heavy specifications. The language used within GCSE History was also thought to be too difficult for less able learners.

Assessing GCSE Religious Studies entirely by examination was said to prevent it from being considered equal to other subjects within the Humanities Area (while also reducing its ability to meet the needs of all learners and its attractiveness to some learners), which incorporate a combination of assessment methods.

GCSE Business was also said to need a coursework or non-examination assessment (NEA) component to bring it in line with other subjects within the Humanities Area. To address these issues, it was suggested by a few that all GCSEs within the Humanities Area should have comparable assessment models in future, possibly including modular assessment.

It was also noted that introducing a different approach to NEA could also help make GCSE History more accessible to learners, as could introducing fewer and more graduated examination questions. One respondent suggested that business case studies could be shared before exams to help learners to develop their skills and build confidence.

A few respondents felt that there should be more recognition of the value of teacher-assessed work, harnessing the experiences of schools since the COVID-19 pandemic. It was, though, pointed out that assessment must be manageable for both teachers and learners.

*“There is broad agreement for greater recognition of teacher-assessed work, particularly building on the experiences in schools since March 2020”*

*Education professional*

The need to use an ongoing, progressive, digital, and blended approach to teaching, learning and assessment was highlighted by some respondents, as was the need for an increased focus on individual progression and formative assessments over summative assessments. Informal oral assessments should also become more prominent, especially for learners with lower literacy skills, it was said. It was also noted that the assessment of all GCSEs within the Humanities Area should incorporate literacy, numeracy, and the requirements of the Digital Competence Framework (DCF).

#### 5.1.6. Consistency and design

There was some feeling that all qualifications within the Humanities Area should be structured in a similar way and be consistent with each other. Indeed, some respondents commented that the qualifications must have clear aims and criteria to ensure fitness for purpose and comparability between subjects and must balance content breadth with depth to ensure that all learners are appropriately challenged and have a firm basis for progression to further study. Some respondents also noted that specifications for all qualifications within the Humanities Area should be available at the same time in Welsh and in English.

In line with this, it was suggested that all subjects within the Humanities Area should be allocated equal teaching time within the curriculum, which is said not to be currently the case<sup>27</sup>.

A few respondents felt that, to ensure the GCSEs within the Humanities Area are consistent, all should remain the same size; subjects should be separate; and tiers and short courses should be removed.

One respondent noted that GCSE Religious Studies does not require learners to display evaluation skills to the same extent as GCSEs in History and Geography, which was seen to be unfair to learners.

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<sup>27</sup> To clarify, the time allocated to teaching and learning is a timetabling matter for schools. A full GCSE is 120 guided learning hours. The time schools allocate to teaching a qualification does not fall within Qualifications Wales’ remit.

*“Where I see the biggest disparity within the humanities range is with the extent of skill needed in RS and the UMS<sup>28</sup> scale to award grades. History, and to an extent geography, are required to really utilise evaluation skills that is not expected at RS. E.g., RS students are expected to have an understanding of what different interpretations say, but they do not have to test the extent of the validity of these based upon i) the validity of the author; ii) why the author has his/her particular view and iii) the primary evidence used. I fail to see how history and RS can be compared year-on-year when there is such disparity between skills, lower UMS scaling for RS and every paper in the RS exams having the same types of questions”*

*Education professional*

However, some respondents expressed strong support for introducing a short course or an equivalent level 2 qualification alongside a full GCSE in religious studies. It was felt that this would ensure all learners have a grounding in religious education and would prepare those who wish to specialise in the subject for further study. It would also ensure the continued availability of religious education and would make the subject’s delivery and assessment more manageable for schools.

*“Special consideration must be given to the statutory nature of studying religious studies / RVE to the age of 16 and this must be recognised and accounted for in qualification reviews. A distinction is therefore required between a statutory qualification in religious studies and an optional, discrete qualification. In turn, a name and / or title difference will be required for review to reflect this distinction... a bilingual, inclusive and broad suite of qualifications are required in religious studies at GCSE level”*

*Other*

It was also suggested that the short course and full GCSE should be renamed to reflect their nature and content. Suggestions were that the full GCSE could be called *“Religion and Worldviews”* or *“Values Education”*, and the short course could be called *“Religion, Values, and Ethics”*<sup>29</sup>. One respondent felt that the title of the GCSE Religious Studies should not include the word *“religion”*, as this was perceived to be off-putting to learners. It was also said that a proportion of NEA could be introduced for learners wishing to specialise in religious studies, while assessing those who study the short course digitally/online.

### 5.1.7. Parity and value

The need to ensure learners in Wales are not disadvantaged and that their learning offer is comparable with England and other jurisdictions in the UK was raised by some respondents. They stated that the content and rigour of revised GCSEs in Wales must be comparable to those of the equivalent qualifications offered in England and elsewhere to support learner progress onto further learning. In addition, it was said that reform must not damage the reputation of GCSEs in Wales relative to those offered elsewhere in the UK.

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<sup>28</sup> UMS = Uniform Mark Scale. A UMS is used to standardise the marking of papers across different examination boards, allowing comparison of marks from different examination boards.

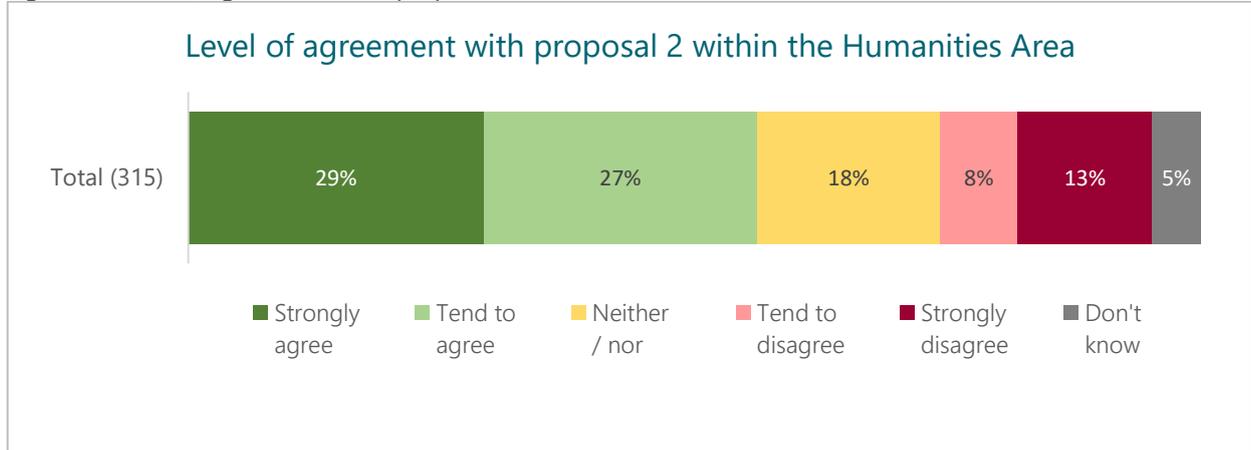
<sup>29</sup> “Religion, Values and Ethics” (RVE) will be a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales for all learners from age 3 to 16. Draft guidance has been developed to support schools to design a syllabus for RVE.

*“Adapting these qualifications, making them on par with other country's qualifications, would design a qualifications system that would be recognised around the world and in individual subjects that are recognised and acknowledged highly in academia settings”*  
*Education professional*

## 5.2. Proposal 2

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new GCSE in Social Studies, if feasible?

Figure 8: Level of agreement with proposal 2 within the Humanities Area



315 people responded to this proposal. Just over half (56%) agreed with the proposal to create a new GCSE in Social Studies. Education professionals were slightly less supportive: 53% agreed while more than a quarter (27%) disagreed, including 17% strongly disagreeing. Over half (57%, 180 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

### 5.2.1. Relevance and importance

Many respondents who commented on this proposal felt that a GCSE in Social Studies would cover topics that are important and relevant to learners. Some noted that the qualification would help broaden learners' knowledge of international issues, helping them become more empathetic and understanding.

*"An awareness of a range of different issues earlier in their learning would be greatly beneficial. The feedback from many Year 11 pupils is that they feel unprepared for the world, despite having studied a wide range of very specific subjects. Social studies could help pupils develop a much broader knowledge that would benefit them in the future and open their eyes to a much wider variety of post-16 subject areas"*

*Education professional*

Some respondents also said that a GCSE in Social Studies would help support those who wish to study social studies and related subjects like law, sociology, politics, and criminology at A level and beyond, and prepare them for later life. One respondent also noted that it would be useful for learners wishing to become teachers in future.

GCSE Social Studies would also, it was felt, help learners develop useful transferable skills, such as methodology and analysing evidence, and would place the subject on an equal footing with others in the Humanities Area.

### 5.2.2. Take-up, interest, and value

Some respondents predicted that a GCSE in Social Studies would be popular among learners, especially lower ability learners who may struggle with separate GCSEs in the Humanities Area. A few respondents suggested that higher ability learners would also welcome this qualification. One questioned whether an A level equivalent would be developed to provide an opportunity to progress and specialise in the subject.

GCSE Social Studies may also appeal to learners who want to study different subjects in the Humanities Area, some respondents suggested. Social studies was seen to offer an opportunity to continue studying humanities among learners who do not wish to pursue the more traditional disciplines.

*“It will also give learners an opportunity to continue studying an aspect of humanities even if they didn't want to take business studies, geography, history or RE [sic.]. For learners who have a strong interest in the humanities subjects, there is a possibility that social studies could be taken as a GCSE alongside another humanities subject to broaden their opportunities in this area further”*

*Education professional*

A few respondents stated that social studies could become a valuable *“extra subject”* through providing opportunities to study Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE), citizenship, human rights, and elements of humanities subjects. To be credible, though, it must have adequate depth and breadth, and skills and knowledge coverage, it was said.

On the other hand, a few respondents felt that learners would not be interested in a new social studies qualification, and that they would instead choose to study more traditional humanities subjects. Several others suggested that a GCSE in Social Studies would be a *“watered-down”* qualification, lacking depth and rigour. Some referred to qualifications in social studies, citizenship, and sociology that had been offered to learners in Wales and England in the past but had since been discontinued due to their apparent lack of rigour, depth, and challenge.

Related to this, some felt that GCSE Social Studies would not be meaningful or valued by higher education institutions or employers relative to more established qualifications within the Humanities Area.

Others did not feel that the proposed social studies qualification could cover all the necessary topics in enough depth, meaning that learners would be less well-prepared to study subjects within the Humanities Area in further and higher education. To be successful, respondents emphasised that the qualification would need to have the same rigour as other qualifications within the Humanities Area and would need to complement rather than replace established subjects.

### 5.2.3. Competition, duplication, and integration with existing qualifications

Many respondents expressed concern that the proposed social studies qualification would overshadow or *“side-line”* existing GCSEs within the Humanities Area, placing them at risk of marginalisation within school curriculums and timetables. It was thought

that this could affect the uptake of other subjects within the Humanities Area at A level and beyond. It was also thought to have the potential to increase competition between subjects within this Area.

There was some feeling that social studies is already covered by the other GCSEs within the Humanities Area and aspects of the Skills Challenge Certificate.

*“How will this be different from the Welsh Bacc<sup>30</sup>? A mixture of topics and approaches - it seems quite diluted, and schools are already under pressure to teach a diverse curriculum, plus deliver Welsh Bacc with non-subject specialists - I am really surprised this is even being considered”  
Education professional*

Some respondents suggested that the proposed GCSE Social Studies could replace the Skills Challenge Certificate at “Key Stage 4”, or that the Skills Challenge Certificate could be adapted to include some of the proposed content for GCSE Social Studies.

A few respondents suggested that, instead of introducing a new GCSE Social Studies, gaps in the other qualifications within the Humanities Area should be addressed. There was also some suggestion that social studies should be incorporated into other subjects such as religious studies (or into the proposed integrated GCSE Humanities that is discussed separately in this report), rather than creating a new separate qualification. One respondent suggested that politics should be offered instead of GCSE Social Studies especially now the voting age for the Senedd Elections has been lowered in Wales.

A few others felt that social studies would offer new content that is not covered by the more traditional disciplines within the Humanities Area. The content of a GCSE Social Studies would, though, need to be carefully thought out to avoid duplication with existing qualifications within the Humanities Area, it was said.

It was also noted that the proposed qualification should make explicit the links between the humanities subjects and reflect their naturally integrated nature, whilst retaining a distinct identity.

*“While there are many complementary and cross-curricular links across and between humanities subjects, including the social studies proposals, it is critical that the course requirements are written within a social studies framework. The subject and qualification would then be an additional, academic, and discrete discipline that complements other made-for-Wales qualifications within the humanities. It would be important to ensure that the disciplinary elements of social studies are clearly identified and distinguished from other disciplines within the humanities”*

*Other*

#### 5.2.4. Alignment with the new Curriculum for Wales

Several respondents stated that multi-disciplinary qualifications such as this are strongly aligned with the aims and purposes of the new curriculum.

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<sup>30</sup> This respondent referred to the “Welsh Bacc” when they appeared to mean the Skills Challenge Certificate component of the Welsh Baccalaureate.

*“The current lack of a made-for-Wales GCSE in this discipline is a clear gap in terms of alignment between qualifications and the new curriculum, as shown in the consultation paper. Social studies will be an important discipline within the new curriculum for learning about equalities and human rights, social issues and citizenship”*

*Other*

There was also support for the qualification to be made-for-Wales, designed by Wales-based subject specialists, available in Welsh and English, and include Wales-related context and emphasis to meet the needs of Welsh learners.

#### 5.2.5. Staffing

Some respondents expressed concerns about how GCSE Social Studies would be taught, suggesting that schools may have trouble recruiting enough specialist staff to deliver it. Specialist social studies teachers were said to be a scarce resource, and while the proposed qualification could be taught by specialists in other disciplines, it was said that they may not be as passionate about it relative to their own subjects.

*“The lack of specialist staff teaching this at Key Stage 3 would likely make it an unpopular and less well taught subject. It would likely become the responsibility of geography, history or RE [sic] teachers to include in lessons, diminishing the time we have to teach the subjects we are qualified in and experts at teaching”*

*Education professional*

This situation could also, it was felt, lead to workload issues, with some respondents emphasising that staff would need upskilling, supporting resources and clear guidance to enable them to deliver GCSE Social Studies.

#### 5.2.6. Content and assessment

GCSE Social Studies should incorporate community engagement, for example, through engaging with community groups and those with lived experience of the issues under discussion, according to a few respondents. This, it was said, would help build relationships between different generations and foster community cohesion. A few others also suggested that learners should be able to select modules on different topics in line with their own interests.

Some further suggestions were made around the content of the proposed GCSE Social Studies, including:

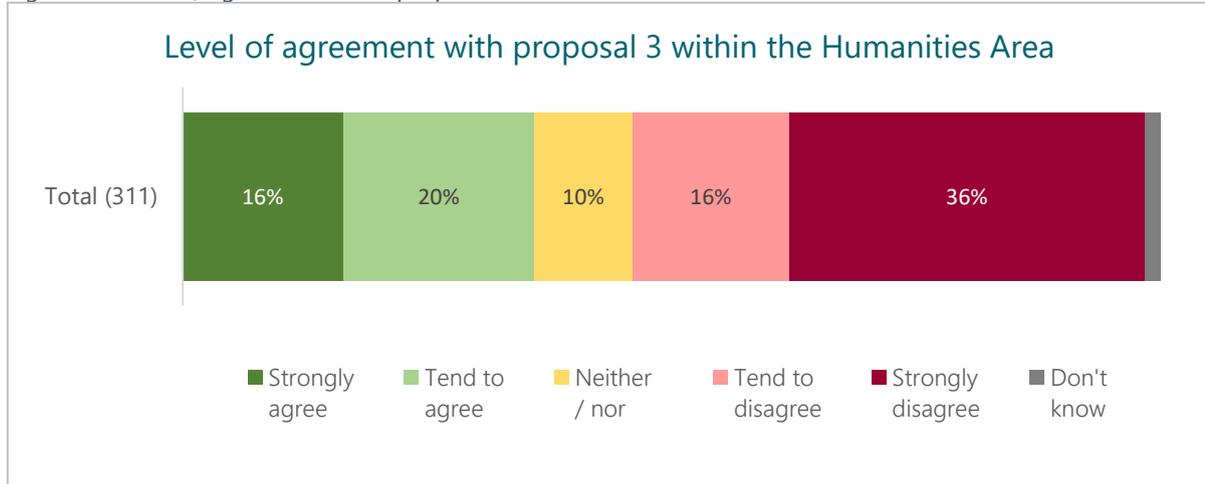
- A balance of historical and contemporary issues, including how past events have shaped today’s society.
- Democracy, politics, and economics to prepare learners to vote at 16 and become global citizens.
- Social issues, identity, rights, and social organisation.
- The impact of social media on society.
- Racism and citizenship.
- Critical thinking skills and philosophical enquiry.

A few respondents commented on how GCSE Social Studies should be assessed. One suggested that the assessment should reflect the rigour and standard of the individual GCSEs within the Humanities Area. Another emphasised that the DCF should be incorporated into the assessment criteria; and another felt that further information was needed regarding the balance of NEA and exams to assess the qualification.

### 5.3. Proposal 3

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new integrated GCSE in Humanities, if feasible?

Figure 9: Level of agreement with proposal 3 within the Humanities Area



A total of 311 people responded to this proposal and more than half (52%) disagreed with the idea of developing a new integrated GCSE in Humanities. This included 36% who strongly disagreed. Among education professionals, disagreement was even more pronounced with 61% disagreeing, including 41% who strongly disagreed with the proposal.

Almost two in three (63%, 197 people) of those who responded also provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

#### 5.3.1. Qualification depth and breadth

The issue of greatest concern was that a new GCSE Humanities could make the subject areas covered too broad; dilute subject knowledge and skills; limit opportunities for specialisation; and seek to incorporate too much content into one qualification.

Considerable concern was also expressed that a new GCSE Humanities would seek to cover too much content, making it difficult to teach and study. Some respondents were concerned that it would cover subjects within the Humanities Area in too little depth. The prospect of “*watering down*” well-established and respected disciplines and omitting essential learning worried some other respondents.

While a few respondents agreed that a double award may be more appropriate than a single award qualification to ensure that all of the subjects within the Humanities Area would have equal emphasis within it, a greater proportion felt that a double award would still not cover the subjects within the Area in enough depth and breadth. The extra space a double award GCSE would take up within the timetable and its potential to “*side-line*” other subjects was emphasised in relation to this point.

Some respondents noted that the content of the proposed integrated GCSE in Humanities qualification would be difficult for schools to decide on, and plan, given the diversity of the subjects within the Humanities Area and the limited space available within the curriculum.

A few respondents felt that the proposed GCSE Humanities qualification should not be offered in place of separate GCSEs within the Humanities Area, suggesting that they had misunderstood the proposal. Conversely, a small number felt that the proposed qualification could be offered as an alternative to separate GCSEs within the Humanities Area. If this were the case, such an alternative must, it was said, be *“academically robust”*.

Several respondents suggested that links and transferable skills should be made across GCSEs within the Humanities Area instead of creating a new GCSE Humanities qualification.

*“We are unsure if a truly integrated approach to humanities is appropriate at GCSE. We believe it is more manageable for the majority of learners to study separate disciplines at KS4, then progress to qualifications with a greater emphasis on the links between them”*

*Other*

### 5.3.2. Learners' progression

Most respondents felt that the proposed GCSE Humanities would not provide learners with the subject-specific skills and knowledge they need for further study of subjects within the Humanities Area, potentially affecting their take up at A level and beyond.

*“Only those exceptional students are able to cope with the further challenge of taking up an A level in one of the humanities if they haven't taken it at GCSE - source analysis and interpretations skills at AS history / essay-writing across the humanities range is very difficult for many students without the grounding at GCSE. A humanities GCSE would not necessarily prepare them for the level of expertise to apply skills to new contexts / content at AS and A2”*

*Education professional*

Some of those who expressed this opinion also emphasised that individual units or modules within the Humanities Area should be offered in appropriate breadth and in depth in any new GCSE Humanities.

Similarly, respondents noted that learners studying GCSE Humanities may be disadvantaged compared to others who have studied separate GCSEs within the Humanities Area when progressing to further and higher education, potentially affecting their future prospects. Higher education institution admissions departments may not, it was said, view GCSE Humanities as equal to more traditional qualifications within the Humanities Area. The need for learners in Wales to have qualifications within the Humanities Area which are considered equal to their counterparts in the other UK nations was also noted.

A related point was made by a few respondents who noted that, while integrated humanities could work at *“Key Stage 3”* and below, it is not relevant at GCSE level when learners need to start specialising in particular subjects. They felt that a GCSE in

Humanities should therefore not be offered as it would prevent learners from specialising. Conversely, a few respondents felt that studying multiple disciplines in this way could enable learners to pick from wider range of subjects at A level.

A few who were broadly supportive of the proposed GCSE Humanities felt that an integrated Humanities A level should also be available to enable progression from the GCSE.

*“There is a question about whether learners would have the right to expect to study an integrated humanities qualification at post-16 level and whether such a qualification would need to be developed”*

*Other*

A few respondents noted that the proposed GCSE Humanities should initially be available in and piloted by schools that deliver an integrated humanities curriculum at *“Key Stage 3”* to support delivery at GCSE.

### 5.3.3. Competition and duplication with existing qualifications

Many respondents felt that the proposed integrated GCSE in Humanities would undermine the importance of the individual subjects within the Humanities Area, reducing their take up, leading to a loss of specialism among learners, and the marginalisation of other subjects within the Humanities Area within school timetables.

There was some feeling that subjects within the Humanities Area are too distinct from each other to justify creating an integrated GCSE in Humanities. The proposed qualification would therefore mean *“forcing subjects together”*, making weak or less meaningful links between the disciplines. For example, a few respondents noted that the physical, scientific, and geological elements of geography could be lost through combining the subject with others.

*“This is dangerous for all three subjects. You would not expect Welsh, French, and Spanish to become one GCSE just because they are languages. They are very distinct, which can also be said for RS, history and geography”*

*Education professional*

Some respondents expressed concerns around how the proposal would affect mandatory Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE). They feared that schools might end up using the proposed GCSE Humanities to replace mandatory RVE.

A few respondents emphasised that creating the proposed GCSE Humanities would need careful consideration to avoid duplicating the existing qualifications in the Humanities Area as if content of the new GCSE is too similar, it could lead to issues around competition with and viability of the existing qualifications.

*“Presumably, an integrated humanities GCSE would have to include different content in order to ensure there is no overlap or repetition with the individual humanities GCSE subjects? If not, this sounds like an alternative to the individual subject GCSEs which may cause issues for them in terms of competition and viability which could impact staffing”*

*Other*

#### 5.3.4. Staffing

Many respondents raised concerns about the proposed qualification being taught by non-specialist teachers who may lack the breadth and depth of skills and knowledge needed to cover all subjects within the Humanities Area. They felt that this could devalue these subjects and reduce learners' enjoyment of them.

The risk that the proposed GCSE Humanities could be interpreted inconsistently by teachers due to its integrated nature was also highlighted by some respondents. Moreover, the additional staff time (and associated costs) required to teach the proposed GCSE Humanities concerned some, who felt that it would be a particular challenge for smaller schools. It may also, it was felt, be difficult to recruit teachers who want to deliver such a wide-ranging subject.

*"It is difficult for non-specialists...for small schools it simply wouldn't be possible to offer this in addition to unique subjects - and most teachers would prefer their unique subjects, I suspect"*  
Education professional

#### 5.3.5. Take-up, interest, and value

Some respondents referred to the previous integrated GCSE in Humanities which was available to learners in Wales. Most noted that it lacked depth and rigour and had low uptake, expressing concerns that fewer learners would want to study the proposed GCSE. Others noted that a new integrated GCSE in Humanities would need to be more fit for purpose than the previous integrated GCSE in Humanities. It was also said that some learners may be discouraged by having to study content from subjects within the Humanities Area that they are not interested in. In addition, some felt that adding the proposed qualification as an option may make it hard for learners to choose between the disciplines.

*"As we are only allowed to pick 3 GCSEs it can sometimes be hard to pick between similar ones"*  
Learner

There is a risk that the proposed integrated GCSE in Humanities could be treated as a *"secondary"* GCSE or an easier option for lower ability learners, according to some respondents. To avoid this, they suggested that a new integrated GCSE in Humanities would need to be given the same recognition as existing GCSEs within the Humanities Area. Conversely, a few said that they would welcome a qualification that is similar to the previous GCSE Humanities because of its good subject coverage and suitability for a wide range of learners.

The comparatively smaller proportion of respondents who were in favour of introducing the proposed GCSE Humanities tended to note the ambitious and challenging nature of the proposal alongside the need to develop a new approach to teaching and learning to reflect the new Curriculum for Wales.

Some of these respondents felt that a thematic or integrated approach would help learners develop a broader understanding of subjects within the Humanities Area, helping them to appreciate the inter-relationships between them. There was also some

feeling that a new GCSE Humanities may appeal to learners who wish to study multiple aspects of humanities as it would create opportunities for them to work in an interdisciplinary way.

Other respondents who were in favour of the proposed GCSE Humanities said that the qualification would fit in with the holistic approach for humanities experienced at “*Key Stage 3*” or noted that an integrated humanities approach works well at “*Key Stage 3*”, making for an easier transition to GCSE. They felt that learners would enjoy the opportunity presented by a new integrated GCSE in Humanities and would be better prepared to continue with more integrated humanities learning at GCSE level, building on their experiences of this approach and the knowledge and skills gained at “*Key Stage 3*”.

*“I can see some value in a humanities GCSE - in terms of integrating topics and skills, linking up with humanities at KS3. And making connections across subject areas to develop a deeper understanding of different themes and issues”*  
*Education professional*

#### 5.3.6. Meeting the needs of all learners

In contrast to some of the views already outlined, some respondents felt that the proposed integrated GCSE in Humanities should be offered as a “*vocational*” and/or more accessible qualification for lower ability learners, those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), or those who struggle with the “*academic*” nature of the existing qualifications in the Humanities Area. The proposed GCSE Humanities should, it was said, focus more on skills development rather than content, and could be offered alongside a series of smaller qualifications.

*“This would be useful for lower ability pupils who may find studying one humanity too difficult and gives them a chance”*  
*Education professional*

#### 5.3.7. Qualification design

A few respondents raised concerns about the length of time before a proposed GCSE Humanities would become available, emphasising that it would need to be rolled out in parallel with other reforms.

*“If you are going to create a new integrated GCSE, then this means that it should be ready for 2025. Put more finance and manpower into creating this GCSE. What is the point of having a new curriculum if everything isn't ready at the same time?”*  
*Not stated*

Others noted that the new GCSE Humanities would need to be well-designed, carefully planned, and include input from subject experts. Schools would also need resources and dedicated time to support its roll-out.

*“Whilst this approach has the potential to provide too much room for interpretation, perhaps modelled resources / training sessions could be released at the start of the course to support the transition to a new type of GCSE”*  
*Education professional*

Some respondents noted that learners should be able to choose different modules or subject areas within the proposed integrated GCSE in Humanities, in line with their interests. This could take the format of a *“university-style module catalogue”* where learners choose modules they wish to study.

Others suggested that supplementary smaller qualifications should be available alongside the proposed qualification to encourage learners to specialise and to meet the needs of all learners. It was also suggested that the ability to select modules of different sizes in different topics or subject areas could also help make the learning and assessment of the proposed integrated GCSE in Humanities qualification more manageable for learners.

Some respondents made specific suggestions regarding the content of a new GCSE Humanities qualification. These included:

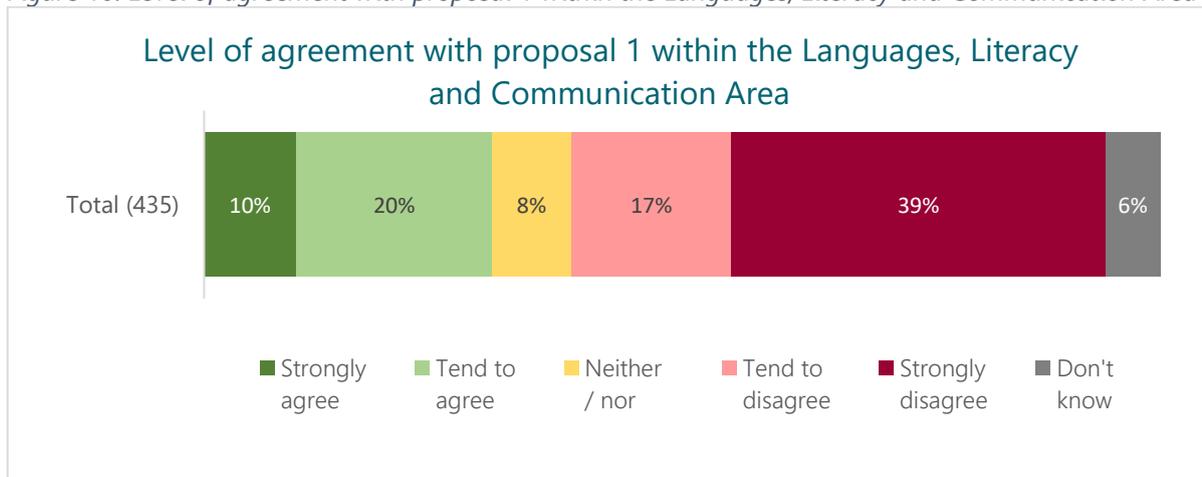
- Human rights, social issues, and citizenship.
- The history, cultural heritage and ethnic diversity of Wales and the world.
- Literature.
- Politics, values/ethics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and aesthetics.
- Greek and Roman civilisations.

## 6. Languages, Literacy and Communication

### 6.1. Proposal 1

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create new combined language and literature GCSEs in English and Welsh to replace the existing separate GCSE qualifications? These new combined GCSEs would each be roughly the size of 1½ GCSEs.

Figure 10: Level of agreement with proposal 1 within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area



A total of 435 people answered this question, the largest single group being education professionals (251). More than half (56%) of respondents disagreed with the proposal, with around two in five (39%) strongly disagreeing. Less than a third (30%) agreed. When we consider the data by different stakeholder groups, learners were much more supportive of the proposal, with half agreeing (50%) compared with just under a quarter (24%) of education professionals. Of the 435 people who responded to the proposal, 67% (292 people) also provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

#### 6.1.1. The size of the proposed qualifications

The most common concern among those who commented on this proposal is that the proposed combined language and literature GCSEs would devalue both English and Welsh as subjects due to their decreased size in comparison to the current qualifications in these subjects. A combined language and literature qualification in Welsh and English was of significant concern to many respondents as they believed it may not provide parity with equivalent qualifications elsewhere in the UK, particularly in England, potentially putting learners in Wales at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts elsewhere. It was suggested that half GCSEs are not widely valued, understood, or recognised, and therefore any changes should be provided in the format of a single or double GCSE. There were also concerns that this proposal could negatively impact literacy levels, which are already at a lower level in Wales.

*"I appreciate the idea of the language continuum but given the poor literacy skills in Wales this proposal will not help this. Reference to other countries which have a combined language and literature qualification and claiming that these countries have a strong PISA results confuses two very different issues. Wales has weak literacy, and we need to take this seriously if we are to really give the children in Wales the best opportunity to succeed nationally and internationally"*  
*Not stated*

For parents and carers, particularly those with children in English-medium schools, there was concern around the impact on their child's literacy skills, a concern that employers would look at them less favourably than their English peers and worry that an increased focus on the Welsh language would be at the expense of the teaching of English.

Many respondents felt that higher education institutions would not recognise half GCSEs at present and would instead specifically ask for a grade to be achieved in a literature-specific qualification for entry to some degree courses. Moreover, many respondents felt the size of the proposed qualifications would not be favourable to employers, potentially placing learners at further disadvantage when competing for jobs.

*"Reducing the GCSEs to 1 ½ GCSEs devalues the qualifications, and employers will simply consider them as one GCSE"*  
*Education professional*

In a practical sense, some respondents were concerned that combining the subjects and offering them as one and a half GCSEs would have a negative impact on school resources. These respondents noted that, in some cases where both subjects are offered to all learners, teaching time could be reduced, and staffing levels negatively impacted. Another practical concern was around how re-sits could be accommodated with increased demands on learner and staff resources in schools and in further education.

Those in support of the proposal stated that as there are some overlapping themes between the current language and literature qualifications, the proposal could reduce duplication and improve the overall balance of qualification content. Moving to one and a half GCSEs could also mean that there is more capacity and time to allow learners to focus on other subjects that interest them at GCSE level.

*"It should allow more time for other subjects to balance out the overall curriculum better. There appears to be an overlap and duplication of learning in these subject areas that this combining will address"*  
*Parent/carer*

### 6.1.2. Meeting the needs of all learners

Many respondents who commented on this proposal suggested that learners who are less able to engage with literature currently have the option to focus on language. The potential increased workload for this group of learners having to study more literature, coupled with, potentially, a less focused approach on language and grammar skills,

could, it was felt, negatively affect lower ability learners, and further erode literacy skills across the board.

*“Language is a creative discipline that allows pupils the opportunity to write and understand language. Many lower ability pupils are able to understand the practical nature of language but not the analytical skills associated with literature”*

*Not stated*

Some respondents were concerned that higher ability learners could also be disadvantaged by *“watered down”* qualifications that do not adequately prepare them for progression to A level and beyond.

*“These proposals may prevent learners studying English/Welsh in sufficient breadth and depth to support future study, particularly at A level”*

*Other*

The proposal to remove tiers was also a concern as it was considered difficult to select literary content that is both accessible to lower ability learners and challenging enough for higher ability learners.

Among learners, there was an openness to the possibility of studying more literature and a valuing of its importance. However, there were concerns about increased workloads and questions around potential difficulty.

*“I disagree with this proposal as many students are significantly better at either language or literature. By combining the two, instead of someone receiving an A\* and a D, they would receive a C. In addition to this, many people struggle with literature more than language; by combining the two subjects it drastically reduces the chances that people who already struggle with the separate qualification would pass the combined sections”*

*Learner*

Some other respondents emphasised the importance of providing access to literature to as wide a range of learners at *“Key Stage 4”* as possible and felt that this option could increase this exposure. A combined language and literature qualification, to them, has the potential to be more inclusive. Among these respondents, many also stated that literature provides useful context when developing literacy skills and improving grammar and can encourage more interest in studying English or Welsh literature at post-16 and beyond.

### 6.1.3. Combining language and literature

At a more fundamental level, many of those who commented on this proposal argued that language and literature are two distinct subjects and should remain so, with an element of choice for schools in terms of their delivery. For example, should a school decide that a learner is not capable of taking both GCSE Language and GCSE Literature, they should have the option of entering that learner for GCSE Language only.

Although there was acceptance that the current qualifications’ contents should be revised, this, it was felt, should be done separately with significant input from within the education sector. Although a few respondents felt that combining language and literature GCSEs would be logical due to the links between the two, several

respondents who were against the proposal felt that the training teachers receive negates the need for combining these qualifications as they are encouraged to teach in a way that makes the links between language and literature while keeping the two disciplines discrete.

*“To reduce what was 2 GCSEs to ‘roughly 1.5 GCSEs’ suggests a devaluing of each subject. They are distinct and discrete subjects, and to combine them implies a lack of clarity and importance as different (though connected) subjects”*

*Education professional*

Combining language and literature qualifications could, it was said, decrease the diversity of literature they experience. Many respondents were keen to point out the importance of being exposed to a wide range of literature and were worried that this proposal undermines this.

Conversely, those in support of this proposal felt that combining language and literature qualifications is logical as they complement and inform each other well. In addition, a few learners noted that combining the qualifications could help to reduce their workload and allow them to study other qualifications.

*“I think that combining English literature and language would be beneficial for learners because it could possibly make the subjects quicker and easier to learn. I also think that combining it to allow learners to get other qualifications would be helpful”*

*Learner*

By combining the qualifications, a few respondents noted that learners have the potential to better appreciate how language and literature are connected and develop transferable skills as a result.

*“You cannot really study one without the other. It makes sense to look at a language as a whole, its mechanics and how it impacts on literary texts”*

*Education professional*

A common suggestion among respondents was that the revised content of GCSEs, whether language and literature are combined or kept separate, should be interesting, and reflective of important and current literature and texts from within Wales and further afield. It was suggested that these should have more coursework elements and less of a focus on exam technique than is currently the case.

#### 6.1.4. Alignment with Welsh language policy

Some respondents were concerned that these proposals were prioritising Welsh Government (WG)'s policies relating to the promotion of the Welsh language at the expense of English literacy levels. It was also said that lower take-up of literature qualifications is related to indecision by WG on whether they contribute to school performance measures. Within this group of respondents, there was a suggestion that making literature qualifications compulsory for all and included within performance measures would combat this issue.

In addition, some respondents felt that this approach is not well-aligned with the purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales, particularly in terms of creating informed citizens of the world.

*“Pupils from Wales will not be able to compete with other citizens of the world if we reduce their qualifications in (for most) their first language”*

*Education professional*

There were concerns among some respondents that if the Welsh qualification is to be made more prominent in English-medium schools, this will be at the expense of the teaching of English and was considered inappropriate. Representatives of schools near the border expressed concerns that this approach would not benefit its learners, many of whom will seek further education and employment in England. Essentially, it was said that if their literacy skills in the English language are negatively impacted by this proposal, they will be at a disadvantage<sup>31</sup>.

*“To reduce English literature and English language to a combined GCSE is a disservice. The idea that a Welsh GCSE in English speaking schools would become the equivalent of English language and English literature as combined GCSE is not acceptable and does not stand learners in good stead for their future”*

*Education professional*

On the other hand, some respondents were concerned that this option could negatively affect the status of the Welsh language and WG’s aims of increasing the number of Welsh speakers and widen the language skills gap between those in Welsh-medium education and those in English-medium settings. A specific concern was that in Welsh-medium schools located in areas with low levels of Welsh speakers, maximising teaching time through the medium of Welsh is essential for linguistic development, and that this option could erode the teaching time available.

#### 6.1.5. Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg’s response to proposal 1

As noted in the introduction to this report, 253 members of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg submitted responses to the consultation. All responses made almost identical points. Those who submitted responses stated that they strongly disagreed with this proposal. They made the following points.

These respondents said that the proposal *“represents a continuation of the current position [which] will not lead to an increase in standards of achievement in Welsh for 80% of pupils in Wales”*<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> To clarify, Qualifications Wales proposes to increase the size of GCSE Welsh for English medium schools only. This is covered by proposal 2 within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area. Learners in Welsh medium and bilingual schools currently study two GCSEs in Welsh. Qualifications Wales is proposing that a new combined qualification is created which would be roughly the size of 1 ½ GCSEs.

<sup>32</sup> *“yn golygu parhad o’r sefyllfa bresennol. Ni fydd hyn yn arwain at gynnydd yn y safonau cyrhaeddiad Cymraeg i 80% o ddisgyblion Cymru”*

The members felt that there is a need to ensure that learning Welsh along one continuum leads to one holistic assessment and equal opportunities for all learners to achieve the highest standards in Welsh. This would act as a catalyst to add time and resources to teaching and learning Welsh in every school in Wales, according to the organisation.

In addition, it was noted that language should be placed in the context of culture and contemporary life to make learning Welsh relevant and interesting to young people. The members suggested that the curriculum for Welsh language should incorporate topics such as personal and social rights and justice, climate change, and community democracy. They also stated that *"...instead, a Language, Literature and contemporary Wales' qualification should be created - equivalent to 2 GCSEs to replace the current qualification"*<sup>33</sup>. It is likely that this suggestion relates to the Welsh language and Welsh literature GCSEs, but this is not explicitly stated.

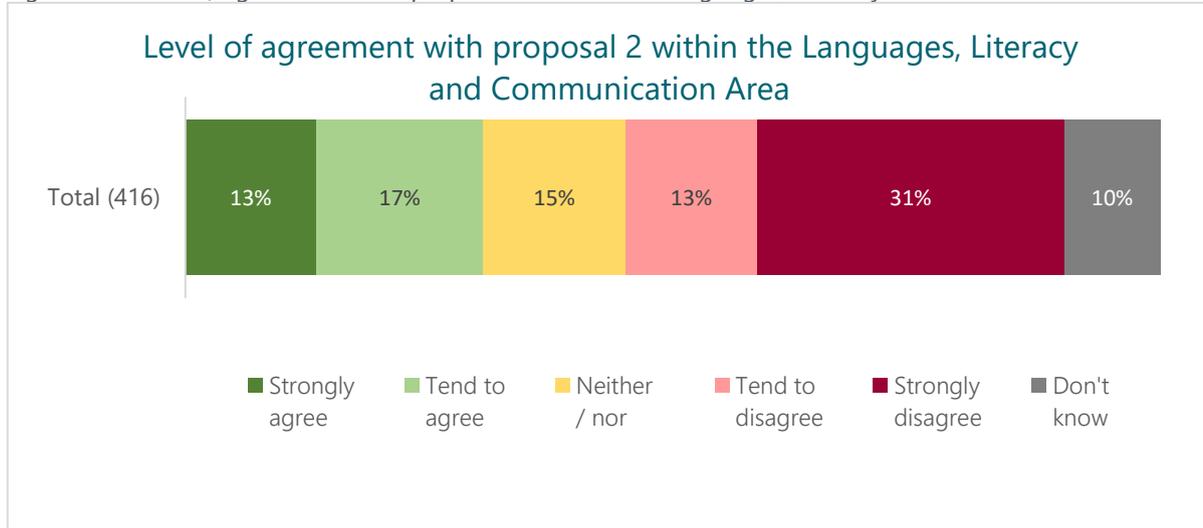
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<sup>33</sup> *"...yn lle dylid creu cymhwyster 'laith, Llenyddiaeth a'r Gymru gyfoes' – cyfwerth a 2 TGAU i ddisodli'r cymhwyster presennol"*

## 6.2. Proposal 2

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to discontinue GCSE Welsh Second Language and create a new, bigger GCSE designed for learners in English-medium contexts? The new qualification would be roughly the size of 1½ GCSEs.

Figure 11: Level of agreement with proposal 2 within the languages, Literacy and Communication Area



A total of 416 people answered this question with 30% agreeing and 44% disagreeing. Overall, three in ten (31%) respondents disagreed strongly with the proposal. Among education professionals, 47% disagreed; among parents and carers, and members of the public, this rose to 59%; while among learners it fell to 31%. 54% (226 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

### 6.2.1. Subject popularity and relevance

While most respondents were generally positive about the teaching of GCSE Welsh in English-medium schools, there were mixed views about its popularity and success. Many respondents felt that there is negative feeling from learners, parents and carers, and schools around the fact that learning Welsh is compulsory up to age 16. It was suggested that the drivers to learn a language come from positive personal and external motivations and therefore the fact that learners are perceived to be “forced” to undertake the qualification promotes negative feelings towards it.

Many shared the view that parents and carers have chosen English-medium schools for their children for a specific reason and that if they wanted their children to be fluent Welsh speakers, they would have opted to send them to Welsh-medium or bilingual schools. These respondents did not value the current GCSE Welsh Second Language qualification, a view that respondents said was particularly prevalent among parents and carers in areas with low numbers of Welsh speakers. There was a suggestion that the changes proposed could drive further negative views on the teaching of Welsh and

the language more broadly due to Welsh being prioritised over international languages.

*"If I wanted my children to have a better Welsh education, I'd have considered a Welsh school. I appreciate and respect they should learn some Welsh, but I'd not want other lessons being reduced in order to increase Welsh lessons"*

*Parent/carer*

A few respondents suggested that a change of pedagogy would be more appropriate at this stage to develop positive motivations for learning Welsh. They felt that there could be more of a focus on speaking and listening as well as more elements that widen learner understanding of the culture and heritage surrounding the language.

*"This needs to be a main focus, so that pupils can appreciate and find value within Welsh if they do go to an English medium school. There is so much negativity around the Welsh language by those who don't go to Welsh medium schools, the language is devalued and unappreciated. Welsh is such a big part of us, our heritage and culture and should be shown and valued in school"*

*Not stated*

Linked to the above, many respondents felt that the proposed increased focus on learning Welsh in English-medium schools would not be appropriate due to a perceived lack of relevance outside Wales. These respondents said that learning Welsh will only be of value to those wishing to stay in Wales after their schooling and that increasing the size of the qualification will narrow their future options and experiences, which in themselves will not be reflective of the world that they live in.

This was again considered a particular challenge for those living in border areas where learners attend school in Wales but live in England. Some expressed concerns that a *"two-tier system"* is being created where Welsh learners will lag behind their English counterparts in terms of skillsets in the event of an increased focus on the teaching of Welsh at the expense of English.

*"We cannot afford to take time away from the study of English, which is the global language of business and industry. Curriculum time devoted to Welsh does not equip pupils to operate in a global way. We cannot afford to hinder our pupils' literacy development"*

*Not stated*

Views from learners responding to the consultation largely echo the above. Many stated that they do not enjoy learning Welsh and would not wish for an increase in the amount of teaching they receive. Although they generally accept the need for learning Welsh within the curriculum, they *"resent"* the fact it is compulsory and would welcome changes that mean they find learning the language easier.

Conversely, a few learners felt that the qualification is adequate in its current form, with a small number stating that they enjoy learning Welsh at GCSE and would find a more comprehensive qualification a welcome challenge.

*"I think that what is currently taught in Welsh needs to be looked at instead of making it more difficult. Throughout my time doing Welsh many people have said to me they find it very hard and so do I. We do not feel that the things we learn from it are helpful and do not know how to have a proper conversation in the language."*

*Learner*

Many respondents discussed the decision to not call the proposed new qualification "*Welsh Second Language*". This was considered a positive change in principle as the term can devalue Welsh and contribute to a lack of confidence among learners, particularly as they come to use the language in later life. However, there was some scepticism over whether this proposal would bring about change in anything more than name.

### 6.2.2. Qualification size and content

As with the previous proposal, some respondents expressed concern at the introduction of a qualification the size of one and a half GCSEs. It was felt that a half GCSE may not be recognised by employers or within the higher education sector, thus putting learners at a disadvantage when compared with their peers elsewhere in the UK. Most of these respondents felt that the qualification should remain as one GCSE for learners in English-medium schools.

*"1.5 GCSEs, even if combined with other mini qualifications, would have a negative effect in the future. Would employers look at the qualification as one GCSE instead of 1.5? When listing GCSE qualifications how would pupils communicate that the qualification is worth more than one GCSE? Surely it would be better for the qualification to be worth two or one GCSE?"*

*Education professional*

Some other respondents felt that the current qualification size is sufficient and should not be changed, or stated that more detail is required to provide an informed response. Those providing suggestions to change the qualification's size and content stated that it needs to be contemporary and imaginative to spark learner interest and reduce further "*resentment*". They also said there is scope to explore the many technological advances supporting adults to learn Welsh to improve the overall fluency of learners in schools.

*"There needs to be a better-quality course that allows pupils to develop their Welsh language skills when in English medium settings"*

*Education professional*

Another key concern among respondents was around the additional resource required to facilitate an increase to one and a half GCSEs. Schools across Wales report facing difficulty when trying to recruit Welsh teachers to English-medium schools and there was worry that this change would exacerbate these issues.

It was felt that the proposal is too ambitious for the resource pool available as well as the current capacity available within schools. As noted, some respondents felt that there are not enough teaching staff with the required skills available at present and it was feared that the additional half GCSE, requiring additional teaching time, would stretch those resources even further. A few respondents questioned whether additional

resource would be provided to support the upscaling of Welsh teaching in English-medium schools as they felt it would be needed to meet the scale of ambition.

*“Will schools be provided funding to support the additional teaching time necessary to grow this subject/course? Welsh teachers are difficult to recruit and retain currently, how does Qualifications Wales intend to address this or mitigate for this fact when designing and awarding this qualification”*

*Education professional*

### 6.2.3. Suitability for all learners, and impact on English teaching time

Respondents expressed concern that an increased workload linked to an extra half GCSE would overload learners, particularly those who already struggle with the subject. Most felt that increasing the size of the qualification would not address the challenges associated with it at present.

A few suggestions were offered to make the proposed qualification suitable for all learners. Among those who expressed the misconception that taking GCSE Welsh is compulsory for all, it was felt that it should be optional, with some kind of alternative offered to develop skills in the Welsh language without the need for an examination.

This, it was felt, would provide a more practical option for those with low levels of understanding. Another suggestion was to offer *“further Welsh”* on top of a pared-down qualification for those who are more advanced and wish to increase their skills further.

*“The students in my school have difficulties with basic literacy. Trying to get them to engage with literature in another language will not be beneficial for them at all”*

*Education professional*

Many respondents mentioned that this increased workload and potentially increased difficulty could impact negatively on already low literacy levels across the board as the proposed larger qualification may take away teaching time from other subjects. These respondents did not consider Welsh to be as important as English and therefore did not feel it should be given parity in the curriculum. It was feared this change could have a detrimental effect on grades across the board.

*“The idea that a Welsh GCSE in English speaking schools would become the equivalent of English language and English literature as combined GCSEs is not acceptable and does not stand learners in good stead for their future. The skills and knowledge developed in English literature and English language are not equal to those in Welsh where they are learning to speak a language as they would French or German”*

*Education professional*

#### 6.2.4. Progression

A key challenge to moving away from essentially teaching Welsh as a “foreign language” was said to be the inconsistency of teaching at primary school level. Some respondents noted that some learners leave primary school with little or no Welsh, whilst others have a better understanding, which is dependent on the resource available at each school. There was also concern that the current format means children learn by rote and do not build on learning from “Key Stage 2”. For some, the proposed changes do not go far enough to address these challenges.

*“Every primary school in Wales needs to insist that all pupils have as many hours a week as English and maths if they are to be able to cope with even higher demands of Welsh in secondary school”*

*Education professional*

Some respondents felt that the most effective way to address the challenge of learners having vastly different levels of fluency in Welsh after primary school is to introduce a continuum of learning using an assessment framework based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR<sup>34</sup>). Although the proposal for this option references the creation of a continuum, it was not felt that the detail of the plans truly reflect this currently.

*“The concept of a linguistic continuum did not mean mapping two different qualifications onto one common continuum, but rather that one continuum be developed as a framework upon which to move gradually to one teaching program and one common (or at least more common) qualification). The basic point was how a continuum would be used to improve the skills of pupils in the English-medium sector over time. These commitments have been made in the context of the Government’s vision and targets to ensure that there is a significant increase in the number of English medium sector learners leaving compulsory education as Welsh speakers<sup>35</sup>”*

*Other*

#### 6.2.5. Alignment with the new Curriculum for Wales and wider political aims

Some respondents did not consider this proposal to be well aligned to the aims of the new curriculum, particularly in terms of creating globally aware citizens. They argued that if an increased focus on Welsh leads to less curriculum time being available for English and the study of other languages, learners may be less globally aware.

A small number of respondents suggested that taking away the compulsory learning of Welsh would encourage learners to study other languages, fostering more global

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<sup>34</sup> The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is a tool which is used to describe learners’ level of fluency in languages.

<sup>35</sup> *“Nid ystyr cysyniad continwwm ieithyddol oedd mapio dau gymhwyster gwahanol ar un continwwm cyffredin, ond yn hytrach bod un continwwm yn cael ei ddatblygu fel fframwaith fyddai’n sail ar gyfer symud yn raddol at un rhaglen addysgu ac un cymhwyster cyffredin (neu o leiaf mwy cyffredin). Y pwynt sylfaenol oedd sut y byddid yn defnyddio continwwm er mwyn gwella sgiliau disgyblion y sector cyfrwng Saesneg dros gyfnod o amser. Gwnaed yr ymrwymadau hyn yng nghyd-destun gweledigaeth a thargedau’r Llywodraeth i sicrhau bod cynnydd sylweddol yn nifer dysgwyr y sector cyfrwng Saesneg sy’n gadael addysg orfodol fel siaradwyr Cymraeg”*

awareness. Conversely, a few others felt that increasing the cultural content of the Welsh qualification could improve awareness of the benefits of bilingualism and in turn develop a sense of identity and belonging to Wales and the wider world.

Some respondents felt strongly that the changes proposed are more reflective of political agenda than educational need. The notion that an increased profile of Welsh teaching in English-medium schools is being “*forced upon*” learners by WG further exacerbates resentment as opposed to encouraging interest.

*“This seems to be about nationalism and attempting to revive a language rather than the needs of learners. It goes against the purpose of education and simply seems to be about political agenda”*

*Education professional*

However, there was general support for the continued teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools, as mentioned. Some felt there is merit in further raising the profile of Welsh and work to be done to share the benefits of having another language apart from English. It was also said that improving the qualification in English-medium schools will support the WG’s aim of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050, and that including more literary texts could improve general interest in the subject.

#### 6.2.6. Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg’s response to proposal 2

Members of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg who submitted responses in relation to the proposals within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area stated that they strongly disagreed with proposal 2.

Although they agreed with the decision to replace the existing Welsh Second Language qualification, they stated that one holistic Welsh GCSE qualification should be created in its place. This qualification would be created instead of the qualifications outlined in proposals 1 and 2. The holistic Welsh GCSE would comprise two examination papers, leading to a dual award / two GCSEs:

1. A general examination paper in Welsh / Advanced Welsh (with grades ranging from grade B Advanced Welsh to grade F Welsh), and either:
2. Advanced Welsh Examination Paper, Advanced Welsh standard grades ranging from A\* to F; or
3. Welsh examination paper for Welsh with standard grades ranging from A\* to F.

The final grade awarded would be based on the outcome of both papers. The papers would be graded in line with the following overlapping system, where a B in Advanced Welsh is equivalent to an A\* in Welsh:

A\* A B C D E F Advanced Welsh

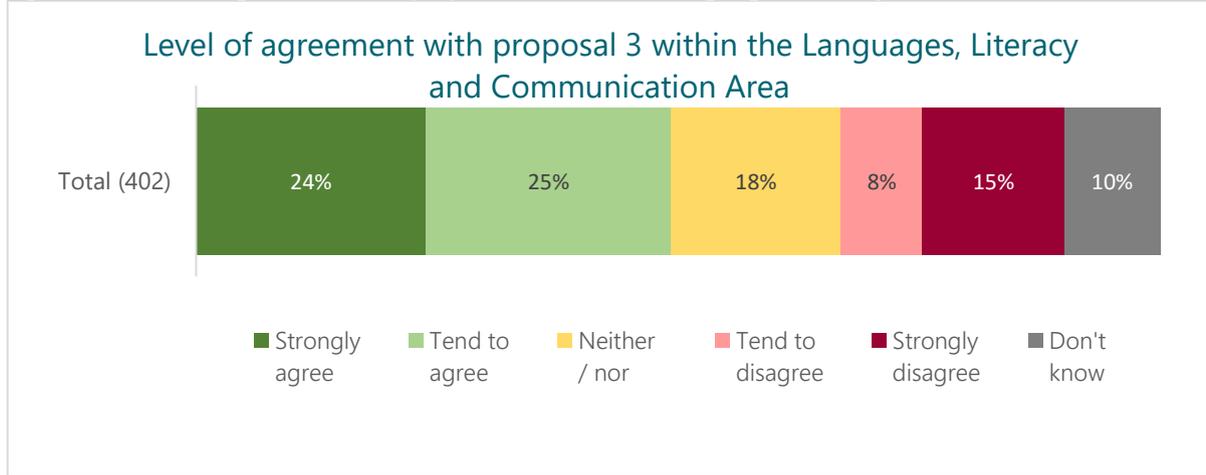
A\* A B C D E F Welsh.

This approach would, it was said, reflect the principle of a continuum of Welsh language learning and would provide a consistent way of measuring progress and attainment, treating Welsh qualifications equally to those in all other Areas. Members of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg stated that the expectations for each paper would be clear and overlapping, offering higher ability learners that take the Welsh paper to also have an equivalent grade in Advanced Welsh. gain a B grade in Advanced Welsh. It was also said that this approach would ensure that Welsh is given more teaching and learning time in all schools and would set higher expectations and attainment goals for all learners.

### 6.3. Proposal 3

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a set of small Welsh language skills qualifications that can be taken in addition to a GCSE to support progression along the Welsh language continuum?

Figure 12: Level of agreement with proposal 3 within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area



A total of 402 people responded to this proposal. Almost half (49%) agreed, whilst just under a quarter disagreed. When looking at sub-groups, a relatively small proportion of learners (7%) strongly disagreed compared with a much higher 22% of parents and carers, and members of the public. Educational professionals fell between the two, with 14% strongly disagreeing. 48% (194 people) of those who answered this question provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

#### 6.3.1. Options for learners

Those who agreed with this proposal felt that the format suggested would provide a wider pool of options and choice for learners, which was welcomed. They also said that offering Welsh qualifications in smaller “*chunks*” would enable those who have a keen interest and are more able to expand their knowledge and raise standards.

Offering more opportunities to practise spoken Welsh through the small qualifications could, it was said, improve learner confidence and provide a bridge to further study, particularly among those who wish to study Welsh at A level and beyond.

*“This will ensure the accuracy of our learners’ language and extend the more able and talented children as they study the GCSE course. It will also complement the A-level course and beyond with further education in the subject”<sup>36</sup>*

*Education professional*

<sup>36</sup> *“Bydd hyn yn sicrhau cywirdeb iaith ein dysgwyr ac yn ymestyn y plant mwy abl a thalentog wrth iddynt astudio'r cwrs TGAU. Bydd hefyd yn ategu at y cwrs Safon Uwch a thu hwnt gydag addysg bellach yn y pwnc”*

The proposal was also considered by some to offer potential alternatives<sup>37</sup> for learners who might find a full Welsh language GCSE daunting, ensuring that all learners had access to appropriate Welsh qualifications, and improving self-motivation to engage with learning Welsh.

*“Less pressure for some students who may have an interest in a specific aspect of Welsh but are daunted by a full Welsh language curriculum”*

*Education professional*

However, these views were all dependent on receiving further clarification on how these small qualifications would work alongside the main GCSE.

Several respondents suggested that these small qualifications should cover practical life skills, particularly in relation to using Welsh in the workplace. This would cover office settings but also the tourism and hospitality sector, sport and youth activities and the skills needed to go on to teach Welsh in English-medium settings. It was felt that there should be a strong focus on spoken Welsh and less of a focus on exams to ensure these qualifications are *“needed, contextual, [and] business linked”* (*Education professional*).

### 6.3.2. Meeting the needs of all learners

Many respondents also felt that the small qualifications could be particularly useful for lower ability learners or those with very low levels of Welsh having moved to Wales at a later age. It was said that this demonstrates a move away from the *“one size fits all”* approach that has been adopted to date and takes away an element of *“forcing”* learning Welsh on learners, which drives negative feelings.

It was thought that offering Welsh in smaller chunks to lower ability learners could make the experience more appealing, fun, and accessible. It would also allow these learners to develop life skills and was described as a *“step in the right direction”* in being innovative in the way Welsh is taught, particularly to learners in English-medium settings.

*“There needs to be some provision for the lower end of the ability range and for those new to Wales, as well as those wishing to extend their ‘portfolio’ of languages. The qualifications must have some worth in the eyes of employers/ further education/ higher education”*

*Member of the public*

On the other hand, some respondents felt that this offering would not be suitable for all learners. They felt that there is *“too much”* Welsh already on offer in the curriculum and said it is not generally valued. The additional small qualifications could, it was felt, be overwhelming for learners on top of the newly proposed one and a half GCSE Welsh qualification – and some respondents did not understand why it would be needed alongside a more robust qualification which was aimed at learners in English-medium settings.

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<sup>37</sup> This feedback suggests that some respondents may have misunderstood that the proposal was to create small Welsh qualifications that were to be offered alongside GCSE Welsh, not instead of it.

*“Why have extras if the reform gives an adequate/good GCSE? It confuses the qualification - do they need the extras to be worthy of extra points/additional skills? In which case they should remain in the GCSE. It would be very difficult to teach added extras”*

*Parent/carer*

Respondents who expressed this opinion tended to express more support for the small qualifications as an alternative to the one and a half GCSE Welsh qualification for lower ability learners, but tended to express little support for offering them in addition. They felt that adding more qualifications does not address the issues around teaching Welsh in English-medium settings and doubted that there would be a great deal of interest in them.

Some of these respondents suggested that if the small qualifications were to be offered as an alternative to GCSE Welsh, they should include an *“introduction to Welsh”* or *“introduction to Welsh literature”* option to support those with very low levels of the language<sup>38</sup>.

Positively, the plans were seen to show innovation and openness to change, particularly in the proposal to include digital assessment. However, care was thought to be needed to ensure this does not disadvantage some learners and schools due to schools’ ability to finance digital equipment.

### 6.3.3. Potential impact on other qualifications and relationship with GCSE Welsh

There was concern among some respondents that these proposals place more of a focus on the teaching of Welsh than English, with a small minority describing the plans as *“discriminatory”* or linked to a political agenda. There was concern that the approach could lead to an imbalance in terms of the study of other subjects including English and Mathematics. As with the other options, a few respondents felt this could have a negative impact on already low levels of literacy in English.

*“More value and time needs to be dedicated to developing pupils’ English skills not Welsh. We have amongst the lowest literacy levels in the world! We should be dedicating time to developing English literacy skills to give Welsh pupils a chance in life and in the world against pupils whose English literacy skills are priority”*

*Education professional*

While some respondents felt that the small qualifications should be offered instead of the full GCSE, there was concern among others that offering the small qualifications represents a *“watering down”* of WG’s commitment to Welsh teaching, particularly in English-medium settings (indicating that they had misunderstood the proposal). These respondents did not feel that the small qualifications should replace the full GCSE Welsh or provide an opportunity for schools to *“opt out”* of offering it.

Many respondents who expressed this view felt that instead of developing the qualifications in this proposal, it would be better to develop a qualification or qualifications that provide parity for all learners and have better quality content than is

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<sup>38</sup> Again, this feedback suggests that some respondents may have misunderstood that the proposal was to create small Welsh qualifications that were to be offered alongside GCSE Welsh, not instead of it.

offered currently. Many were supportive of alternative qualification(s) to follow a language continuum based on CEFR assessments.

*"Having a wide range of units at different levels might be a way of creating a qualification that would allow a continuum compatible award (avoiding the creation of unnecessary barriers and ceilings), particularly if it were linked to the CEFR framework"*<sup>39</sup>

*Other*

Others commented on a lack of clarity as to who exactly these qualifications are geared towards and the extent to which they will complement or replace other options. A few suggested that the introduction of small qualifications infers that the proposed new GCSE would not be fit for purpose, stating that they would not be necessary if the full qualification was effectively redesigned. Furthermore, one respondent stated that the skills being offered through the small qualifications should not be isolated and that teaching them in this way goes against language acquisition theory.

*"The exact intent and purpose of these small qualifications is not clear from the description in the consultation document, or the relationship with the full GCSEs...we see a danger that the small qualifications could undermine GCSEs in some cases if there was not a sufficiently clear requirement in terms of following and sitting the Welsh GCSE"*<sup>40</sup>

*Other*

#### 6.3.4. Practicalities of delivery

Although there was general support for the notion of small qualifications in Welsh, respondents identified several practical concerns or challenges to their delivery. The first was how much value would be attached to each of the small qualifications to ensure they work in practice and do not become *"messy"*. More clarity was thought to be needed on whether they could be *"cashed in"* to make a larger qualification.

A few respondents felt that, if carefully designed and targeted, the small qualifications could be effectively delivered, increase learner motivation, and be valuable to employers.

*"It could give the qualification and the language more kudos as employers would see it as a more valuable qualification. It could provide further opportunities to learn Welsh, including cultural understanding and literature but only in addition to Welsh language learning, not instead of"*  
*Education professional*

It was also felt that the suite of small qualifications would have to be comprehensive to cater to a wide range of learners – and that this could be problematic in English-medium schools that already have resourcing issues related to Welsh language teaching. It was considered unclear how the small qualifications would be timetabled

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<sup>39</sup> *"Byddai cael amrediad eang o unedau ar wahanol lefelau o bosib yn ffordd o greu cymhwyster fyddai'n caniatáu dyfarniad fyddai'n gydnaws â chontinwwm (gan osgoi creu rhwystrau a nenfydau diangen), yn arbennig felly petai'n gysylltiedig â'r Fframwaith CEFR"*

<sup>40</sup> *"Nid yw union fwriad a phwrpas y cymwysterau bach hyn yn glir o'r disgrifiad yn y ddogfen ymgynghorol, na'r cydberthynas gyda'r TGAU llawn...Gwelwn berygl y gallai'r cymwysterau bach danseilio'r TGAU mewn rhai achosion pe na bai gofyniad digon clir o ran dilyn a sefyll y TGAU Cymraeg"*

and whether there would be enough staff available to support the change – an issue across the sector, as noted in relation to the previous proposal.

*"If there should be additional time allocated this will be a nightmare for schools to implement, if not then you would risk having to squeeze the qualifications into the existing 'Welsh' slot on the timetable at the expense of the teaching time"*

*Education professional*

From a learner perspective, there was concern among a few that these changes would mean a heavier workload and overload. However, many others were supportive of the idea and felt the small qualifications would offer a *"top up"* for those keen to progress to further study and boost their ability.

### 6.3.5. Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg's response to proposal 3

As with proposals 1 and 2 in this Area, the members of Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg who submitted the responses stated that they strongly disagreed with proposal 3. Instead, they recommended developing additional modules and a set of qualifications as a bridge between GCSE and AS level.

They felt that schools would view the small qualifications as an alternative to the GCSE Welsh short course that was previously available in schools in Wales, and that the proposal would restrict the teaching and learning time allocated to Welsh.

Making similar points to those made for proposal 2, the members also stated that,

*"By limiting the opportunity to express views on the full range of possible options, Qualifications Wales is guilty of limiting the argument and demonstrates lack of ambition and lack of leadership. Without switching to a holistic GCSE examination, the system of learning Welsh will continue to mislead the 80% of pupils in English-medium schools"<sup>41</sup>*

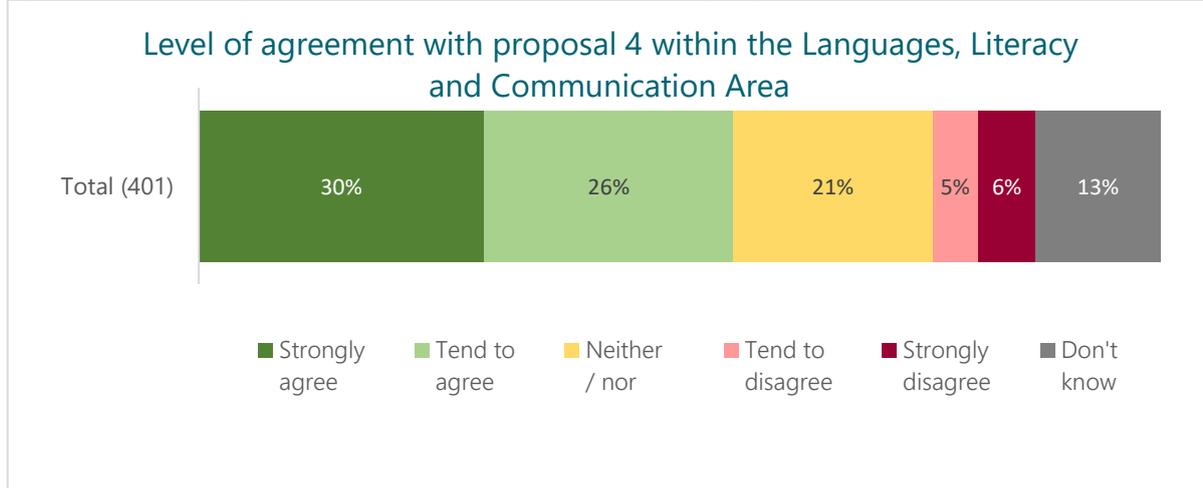
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<sup>41</sup> *"Trwy gyfyngu ar y cyfle i fynegi barn am yr holl ystod o opsiynau posibl, mae Cymwysterau Cymru yn euog o gyfyngu ar y ddadl ac yn dangos diffyg uchelgais a diffyg arweiniad. Heb newid i arholiad TGAU cyfannol bydd y drefn dysgu Cymraeg yn parhau i wneud cam â'r 80% o ddisgyblion mewn ysgolion cyfrwng Saesneg"*

## 6.4. Proposal 4

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review and reform made-for-Wales GCSEs in French, German, and Spanish?

Figure 13: Level of agreement with proposal 4 within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area



A total of 401 people commented on this proposal, with over half (56%) agreeing and only just over a tenth (11%) disagreeing. Looked at by respondent type, learners were most likely to strongly agree, whereas the strongest disagreement came from parents and carers, and members of the public. Twelve per cent of this group disagreed, 10% of them strongly. Learners and education professionals showed similar levels of overall disagreement (14% and 10% respectively) but were more likely to tend to disagree than strongly disagree.

36% (143 people) of those who responded to this proposal also provided a written comment. The main themes identified in respondents' comments are outlined below.

### 6.4.1. Tackling the decline in uptake

Respondents were largely supportive of reforming the three international language qualifications, particularly in terms of the content covered. It was felt that change is needed to tackle the steep decline in the take-up of these qualifications over the past few years.

It was said that, at present, the qualifications were not considered fit for purpose because they include too much content and have a heavy workload, particularly in comparison to other GCSEs. It is felt that the content demonstrates "box ticking" as opposed to creating good communicators, which is what the goal should be, it was said. Many respondents agreed that qualification content should be overhauled to focus on communication, with some elements of grammar set in the context of the language's culture, people, and setting.

It was also said that the content of the proposed reformed qualifications should increase learners' confidence in speaking the language and be appealing to employers.

Some respondents felt that there is too much of a focus on achieving fluency at this level, which is an unrealistic goal and off putting for learners. The general view was that the *"traditional"* textbook-heavy style of teaching is not conducive to good language acquisition or attractive to learners. It was suggested that an element of immersion is required, with some also emphasising that teaching in the target language is essential. Some respondents suggested that an important focus should be developing translingual skills.

*"I feel that these French, German and Spanish qualifications should enable students to demonstrate their plurilingual communicative skills in their 'real-life' context...it would also be good to see a focus on creative mediation reflecting the real-life context of language learning whereby in a language classroom, students learning languages mediate between their first language etc. And the language that they are learning. Given that the new curriculum is promoting plurilingualism, multilingualism, translanguaging and mediation, I think it is key to reflect and award such learning in French, German and Spanish qualifications in order to have the crucial alignment of learning, teaching and assessment as noted in the curriculum for Wales 2022"*

*Education professional*

Some respondents said that they would welcome GCSE Italian being offered as another option for learners.

There was general support among respondents to increase the use of digital technology to support learning. This, it was felt, would begin to modernise international language qualifications and improve interest. It was also said that technology can widen opportunity in terms of what is taught and could mean offering more languages at GCSE level, potentially delivered from anywhere in the world.

#### 6.4.2. Meeting the needs of all learners

Linked to the above, is a widespread feeling among respondents that international language GCSEs do not meet the needs of most learners in their current format. Respondents who expressed this opinion said that these GCSEs are only currently suitable for higher ability learners, and even they become demoralised as they struggle with these qualifications and find them more challenging than many of their other subject choices. Moreover, it was said that these qualifications depend on learners having a sound linguistic foundation in place before starting them, which is not the case for the majority.

*"The effort needed to gain a language GCSE is not replicated in other subjects... language acquisition requires a far greater dedication"*

*Education professional*

The current international language GCSEs are also examination-heavy and marked more harshly than other subjects, according to several respondents. It was therefore felt that these qualifications must be more accessible to learners of all abilities, have less of a focus on examination and assessment and become more enjoyable and contemporary in nature.

*"Only the most able and talented succeed in GCSE MFL as it currently stands. We have to try to attract pupils who are perhaps less talented, but who still deserve the opportunity to be able to achieve some kind of qualification after KS3"*<sup>42</sup>

*Education professional*

Conversely, a few respondents were of the view that the current GCSEs are suitable and appropriate but suffer from poor reputation and a widespread failure to understand the benefits of their study, leading to dwindling take-up. It was felt that a stronger marketing effort is needed to combat these negative views.

#### 6.4.3. The Welsh context for international languages and alignment with the new curriculum

A few respondents highlighted that Wales is in a unique position (from a UK perspective) as many learners are already bilingual. As a result, an appropriate model of teaching and learning international languages that capitalises on existing skills could, it was felt, lead to good progression.

*"The 'providing a good foundation' is essential ... Wales' unique bilingualism should be a natural bridge to realization, not a barrier ... Disaster is the immediate withdrawal from the study of languages in Wales. Hopefully the new provisions will make a real contribution to stopping the ebb"*<sup>43</sup>

*Member of the public*

However, there were some concerns that fewer international language GCSEs would be available to learners in Wales compared to learners in England, potentially leading to Welsh learners' qualifications not being held in high regard by employers and the further and higher education sectors.

*"I am concerned with the made-for-Wales approach which seems narrow and inward looking. We should be encouraging looking beyond our borders to the wider world so that our young people are on an equal footing with others outside Wales and have comparable qualifications"*

*Education professional*

Others, though, viewed the made-for-Wales element positively, as there has been some criticism of changes proposed to international language GCSEs in England, meaning Wales could develop a better offer. It was also felt that this would mean better alignment with the 'Cynefin'<sup>44</sup> element of the new curriculum.

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<sup>42</sup> *"Mae'r cwrs TGAU yn yr ieithoedd yma ar hyn o bryd llawer rhy anodd i'r rhan fwyaf o ddisgyblion. Dim ond wir y rhai mwyaf abl a thalentog sydd yn llwyddo yn TGAU ITM fel y mae'n sefyll ar hyn o bryd. Mae'n rhaid ceisio denu disgyblion sydd efallai llai talentog, ond sydd o hyd yn haeddu'r cyfle i allu llwyddo mewn rhyw fath o gymhwyster ar ôl CA3"*

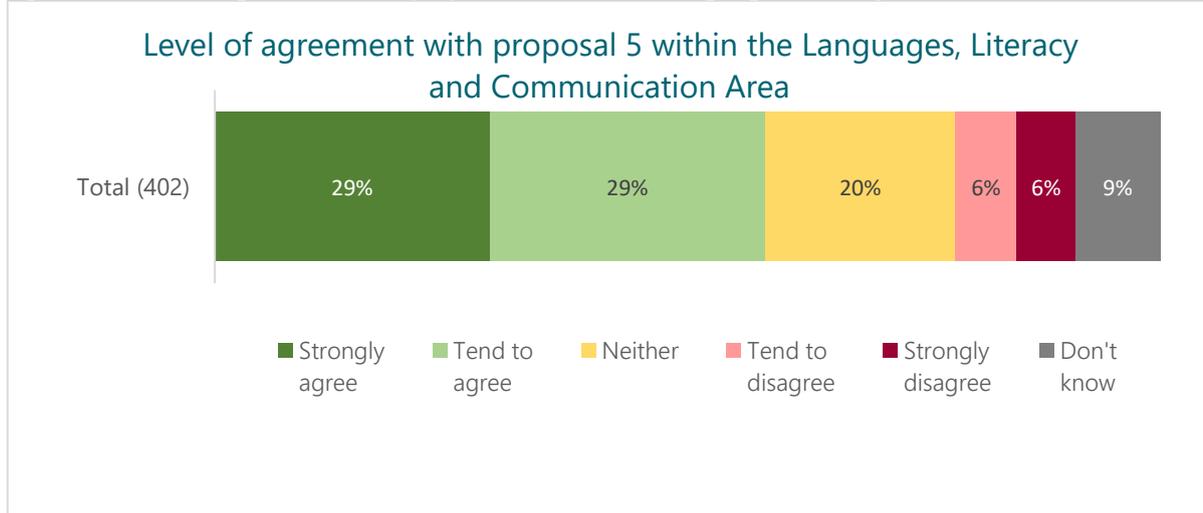
<sup>43</sup> *"Y 'darparu sylfaen dda' sy'n hanfodol...Dylai dwyieithrwydd unigryw Cymru fod yn bont naturiol at sylweddoli hynny, nid yn rhwystr...Trychineb yw'r cilio enbyd oddi wrth astudio ieithoedd yng Nghymru ar hyn o bryd. Gobeithio y bydd y darpariaethau newydd yn gyfraniad real at atal y trai llai na thrychineb"*

<sup>44</sup> 'Cynefin' is defined in the new Curriculum for Wales as the local area: the historic, cultural, and social place which shapes the communities that inhabit it.

## 6.5. Proposal 5

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a set of small, made-for-Wales qualifications in a range of international languages to support engagement and progression in language learning?

Figure 14: Level of agreement with proposal 5 within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area



A total of 402 people gave an opinion on this proposal. Nearly three in five (58%) supported it, with the remainder largely neutral or unsure. Just 12% of respondents disagreed, half strongly. Looked at by sub-group, 57% of education professionals agreed whilst 14% disagreed, including 8% who disagreed strongly. Among learners, there was higher support with 71% agreeing and just 5% disagreeing.

Around two in five (39%, 155 people) of those who responded to the proposal also provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

### 6.5.1. Purposes of the qualifications

Respondents offered several suggestions for how the small qualifications could be used. There was strong feeling that the proposed small qualifications should prepare all learners for further study of languages, although a few respondents felt that they could only equip learners with basic language skills for use, say, on holiday rather than providing the depth of knowledge and proficiency needed to progress to further study or the world of work.

Some respondents felt that the small qualifications could be made available to learners at “Key Stage 3” as a “stepping stone” towards international language GCSEs, rather than offering them at GCSE level.

*“Acknowledging language learning through a smaller qualification can help give learners the confidence to progress to learning a different language or further study of that language. given that learners will be progressing in a third language by the end of primary school, could these be available for younger learners at progression step 3 as stepping stone towards GCSE?”*

*Education professional*

An alternative view was that the qualifications should be offered from “*Key Stage 3*” and throughout secondary school to enable learners to complete them when ready. There was also some feeling that French, German, and Spanish should also be offered as small qualifications to provide appropriate progression routes.

*“...I feel they should also be available in French/German and Spanish as well for students post-16 or to prepare as support for GCSE like the proposed Welsh shorter units”*  
*Education professional*

A few respondents referred to the CEFR in their feedback. One emphasised that referencing the small qualifications and the international language GCSEs against the CEFR should emphasise and illustrate the progression between both sets of qualifications so that they are seen both as standalone qualifications and as a progression route for language learning from primary school through to secondary school and beyond.

There was some feeling that the small qualifications could also support progression in other areas for those who do not wish to study international languages at GCSE or A level. For example, they could be combined with other subjects or Areas, such as Latin and science, or Spanish with leisure and tourism.

Many respondents felt that the small qualifications would boost learners’ language skills and confidence and be of especial benefit to those wanting to work abroad in future. They were also seen as an asset to learners’ CVs more broadly, with the potential to open up a wide range of future opportunities.

Some of those who agreed with the proposal felt it would help develop cultural awareness, equality, and understanding within society, promoting global citizenship. Others noted that it would help learners develop wider skills, such as reasoning and pattern recognition. A few, though, cautioned that the small qualifications should ensure learners have opportunities to develop the full range of language skills, including an understanding of language acquisition.

As noted elsewhere, there was strong feeling that the small qualifications (and in some cases, GCSEs) should be made available in a wide range of international languages to reflect the diversity of communities throughout Wales. The languages mentioned by respondents were Somali, Czech, Slovak, Romanian, Pashto, Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Farsi, Hindi, Urdu, and Hindko. Some respondents stated that a GCSE should be offered in Italian, to ensure that it is available to learners to the same extent as French, German, and Spanish.

### 6.5.2. Take-up, interest, and value

Many respondents felt that the proposal would increase uptake and interest in international languages, both at GCSE and beyond.

*"It sounds like an interesting scheme that opens doors to other languages and cultures for those pupils who have an interest in the field. They may continue to study these languages independently in the future or continue in education"<sup>45</sup>*

*Education professional*

Emphasising the strong need for these qualifications, some felt they would offer more choice and help to *"revamp"* international languages, raising their profile among learners.

Some respondents felt that the proposal would encourage learners to take pride in their community and home languages and become more interested in studying them. Many emphasised that the small qualifications must be offered in a diverse range of community languages beyond the *"big three"* of French, German, and Spanish.

Some respondents who disagreed with the proposal felt that, instead of introducing small qualifications, GCSE qualifications should be offered in a wider range of languages to reflect the value of those spoken by all learners in Wales. Others said that the small qualifications should also be available in minority languages which are spoken in communities in Wales.

*"These cannot be 'small' qualifications. They should reflect all Welsh learners, including over 50 languages that are spoken amongst the school population of Wales. They should also be high quality qualifications that reflect the value of the languages spoken by all learners in Wales, not a series of small, add-ons that undermine their Welsh identity. The concept of small and additions will not enable global citizens. We feel there is bias in this question and a complete lack of understanding of the marginalising of our pupils when you belittle the language that they speak by not including them as equally valid qualifications alongside English, Welsh, French, German and Spanish"*

*Education professional*

There was some feeling that more learners would be interested in studying a range of small qualifications in different languages than they would be in studying a single language (although a few respondents stressed that the opposite was true). This was thought to be because the small qualifications would provide a *"lighter option"* or a *"less onerous"* way to introduce languages relative to having to study a full GCSE.

Some respondents felt that the proposal would help address the apparent decline in the numbers of learners choosing to study international languages at GCSE. However, there was also some concern that the proposal is not radical enough.

Further concerns were raised about how the small qualifications would be recognised, and whether further and higher education institutions and employers would see them

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<sup>45</sup> *"Mae'n swnio'n gynllun diddorol sy'n agor drysau i ieithoedd a diwylliannau eraill i'r disgyblion hynny sydd a diddordeb yn y maes. Gallent barhau i astudio'r ieithoedd hyn yn annibynnol yn y dyfodol neu barhau ym myd addysg"*

as equal in value to other qualifications. A few respondents linked this to the terminology of “*small qualifications*”, which implies that they are of lesser value relative to more established ones. Again, the recognition of small qualifications was seen to be a particular issue for learners who wish to study, live, and work outside Wales.

Other respondents felt that the small qualifications are unnecessary, suggesting that offering them would devalue the curriculum offer for learners in Wales, disadvantaging them relative to those in other UK nations because they are not perceived to be equal to the qualifications available elsewhere in the UK. A few felt that the proposal would over-complicate the curriculum offer and restrict progression pathways.

*“I don't see this as a benefit to the average GCSE student. I think it would cause complications and confuse the pupils if there was too much choice. I also think a qualification that is worth less than a GCSE would be pretty pointless if wanting to go into languages in higher education”*  
Learner

### 6.5.3. Staffing, resourcing, and timetabling

Emphasising the scarcity of international language teachers and the difficulties schools experience with recruiting and retaining them, some respondents felt that more detailed consideration is needed of how the small qualifications would be staffed. Indeed, some concern was expressed that learners in schools that have struggled to recruit specialist staff would have an unequal curriculum offer, creating skills gaps relative to those in schools with enough language specialists. A few also noted that staff would need initial and ongoing training to prepare them to deliver the small qualifications if the proposal was adopted.

*“How would these be staffed, surely this would depend on the teachers' linguistic skills in individual centres, what happens if they leave?”*  
Education professional

Some of those who disagreed with the proposal felt that the small qualifications would increase teacher workloads. Others noted that the small qualifications would also cause extra work and assessment for learners. Referring to existing small qualifications in other Areas, another respondent stated that they are associated with a high level of administration which is difficult for smaller schools to accommodate, and this, it was said, led to fewer schools offering them. To mitigate staffing pressures, one respondent suggested that specialist staff could be shared between schools to ensure all learners could study and be assessed in the small qualifications.

Some respondents questioned how schools could accommodate the small qualifications within their timetables.

*“As with the Welsh mini qualifications, how would these fit into a timetable? If we assigned four lessons per week for GCSE French should schools be giving an additional lesson per week or would these small qualifications be taught within the 'normal' assigned teaching time? If there should be additional time allocated this will be a nightmare for schools to implement, if not then you would risk having to squeeze the qualifications into the existing slot on the timetable at the expense of the teaching time”*  
Education professional

Others who discussed timetabling emphasised that schools would need to allocate sufficient teaching time to all aspects of language learning for the small qualifications to be successful, linking the recent decline in international language take-up to the marginalisation of international languages within school curriculums and timetables.

#### 6.5.4. Competition with existing international language qualifications

Respondents felt strongly that the small qualifications should not replace GCSE international language qualifications and that they must instead be available alongside them, reflecting Qualifications Wales' proposal. A few felt that schools may be tempted to offer the small qualifications instead of GCSEs, and others noted that suitable qualifications already exist. Moreover, a few felt that more clarity is needed about the purpose and nature of the qualifications and their relationship to the proposed GCSEs.

#### 6.5.5. Content, design, and assessment

Several suggestions for the content and design of the small qualifications were offered by respondents. A few respondents noted that the small qualifications would need to be designed in an innovative way, moving away from techniques like translation, which they considered outdated, ineffective, and uninteresting for learners.

To enable learners to specialise in their preferred aspects of the languages, a few respondents noted that the qualifications should be modular, allowing learners to build up credits to put towards a larger qualification. Using curriculum models such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) would be a good way to deliver the qualifications, according to one respondent.

Another said that the small qualifications could be studied as part of a *"language profile"* like the European Language Passport, which allows learners to build evidence of linguistic skill and culminates in them gaining a GCSE in plurilingualism. Another suggested creating a *"mixed"* language qualification that teaches the basics of several languages to assist learners when they travel.

There was some feeling that the proposal has the potential for schools to create and develop existing links with international schools to enrich language learning. For example, digital exchange programmes could offer valuable opportunities for co-delivery. A few respondents suggested that the qualifications could be delivered via digital or blended learning, increasing choice and flexibility for learners.

A few respondents questioned the need for a distinct Welsh approach to the qualifications' design, stating that this would incur additional costs and complicate the qualifications.

*"Stop wasting time and money making unnecessary specific Welsh resources! We should be using and sharing our abilities and resources and knowledge across the whole of the UK, not making ourselves ever more insular and cut off from the world!"*

*Education professional*

A few respondents commented on aspects of assessing the small qualifications:

- One said that assessment should avoid using rote learning at the expense of independence.
- Another felt that the small qualifications should be linked with specific international language assessments such as DSD<sup>46</sup> (German language diploma), DSH<sup>47</sup> (German language examination for entrance into higher education institutions), TestDaF<sup>48</sup> (test of German as a foreign language), SIELE<sup>49</sup> (International evaluation and certification for Spanish language) and TELC (The European Language Certificates).

#### 6.5.6. Meeting the needs of all learners

The small qualifications would enable lower ability learners, less confident learners, and those who struggle with certain aspects of language learning to access international languages, according to some respondents.

*“Made-for-Wales qualifications in international languages would be advantageous for us as it sounds like they focus on highlighting individual pupil strengths. Currently all pupils that sit an international language using an English board need to be able to listen, speak, read and write in that language. This limits the number of pupils that can gain a qualification in an international language. We have a number of pupils that are unable to read or write but can understand and speak fluently. This is particularly the case where a language uses a different alphabet. Made-in-Wales qualifications for these languages would allow those pupils to gain formal certification of these skills which will help them when applying for jobs”*

*Education professional*

Others suggested that the small qualifications should be optional and offered to higher ability learners, those with an interest in languages, and those with English as an Additional Language (EAL).

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<sup>46</sup> Deutsches Sprachdiplom der Kultusministerkonferenz

<sup>47</sup> Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang

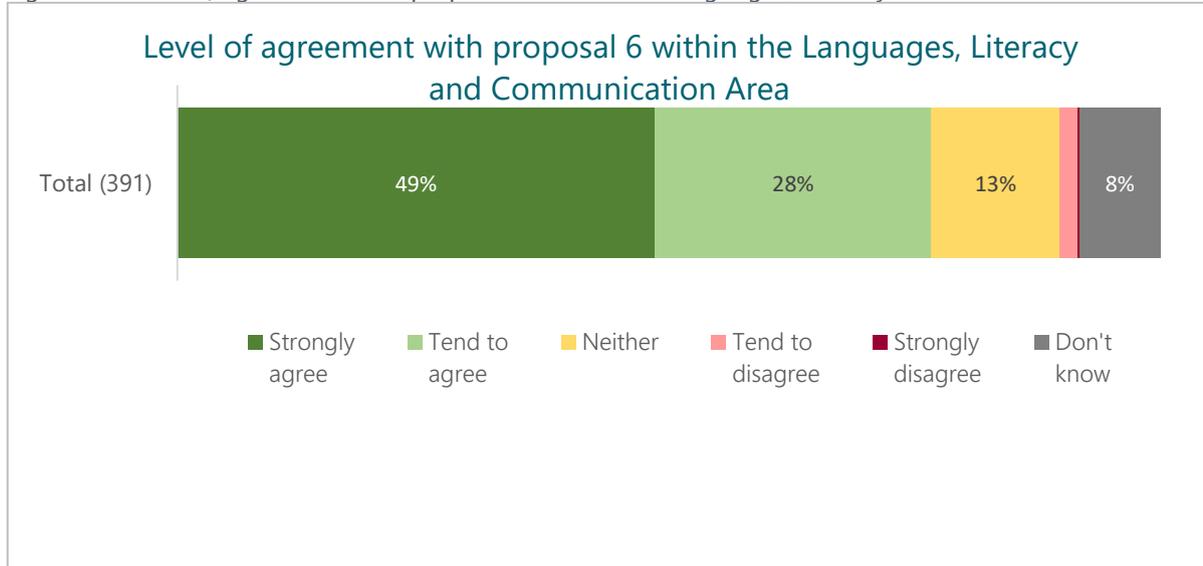
<sup>48</sup> Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache

<sup>49</sup> Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española

## 6.6. Proposal 6

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to make sure learners and schools can continue to access a range of British Sign Language qualifications, including any new GCSE developed for learners in England?

Figure 15: Level of agreement with proposal 6 within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area



391 people responded to this proposal. Just 2% said that they tended to disagree with it. A quarter (25%, 97 people) of those who responded also provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their feedback are outlined below.

### 6.6.1. Promoting inclusion and meeting the needs of all learners

By far the strongest theme arising from respondents' feedback was that continuing to offer learners and schools a range of BSL qualifications would help promote the inclusion of D/deaf<sup>50</sup> learners. Respondents who expressed this opinion said that it would also raise wider awareness of the challenges they face and of deaf culture, helping create a more inclusive and caring society.

*"Learners would be given the opportunity to reflect on their responsibility towards each other and the need to accept everyone and ensure everyone's rights and dignity are preserved and put to the fore, no matter their disability"*

*Other*

There was also strong feeling that the proposal would help to ensure that the new Curriculum for Wales meets the needs of all learners, ensuring that D/deaf learners can access it fully, and providing *"fair play"*<sup>51</sup> for all learners.

However, to meet the needs of all learners in Wales, many respondents emphasised that BSL qualifications must be available in Welsh as well as English. Some of those

<sup>50</sup> "D/deaf" describes those who are Deaf (sign language users) and deaf (who are hard of hearing but who have Welsh or English as their first language and may lipread and/or use hearing aids).

<sup>51</sup> "Chwarae teg"

who expressed this opinion noted that the BSL has specific signs or gestures for Welsh letters, and that it contains regional variations akin to accents in Wales that must be considered in the development of any new qualification(s).

*"The BSL needs to be bilingual and should be taught bilingually too, not just in English. This is how we help languages. Don't silo languages into their own language classes and sphere. Teach geography through Welsh, PE through Spanish, history through English etc. So that it's a more holistic approach towards language"*

*Education professional*

Others felt that offering English-only BSL qualifications does not reflect the unique ethos of the new Curriculum for Wales.

*"Again, how can qualifications developed for learners in England fulfil the very different Curriculum for Wales? ... There is no mention of it being a bilingual offer"*

*Other*

Another emphasised that Qualifications Wales should remain closely engaged with the development of BSL qualifications in England to ensure that they are also appropriate for use in Wales and are available at the same time.

Respondents expressed different opinions around whether BSL qualifications should be compulsory for all learners. A few felt that it should be offered to all learners so that they understand *"the basics"*, whereas others felt it should be optional.

### 6.6.2. Staffing and timetabling

Some respondents were concerned that there would not be enough staff with the right skills profile to implement this proposal. Others noted that staff would need training to deliver BSL qualifications and ensure equality of access across all schools in Wales. The demand for BSL teachers with Welsh language skills was also noted.

*"There is a great demand for practitioners with appropriate Welsh language skills as well as the necessary BSL skills. Teaching assistants, teachers and specialist teachers qualified in BSL and Welsh are needed to ensure that deaf or hard of hearing children and young people can attend Welsh medium education and care settings"<sup>52</sup>*

*Other*

One respondent noted that any new GCSE BSL being developed in England would not be available until September 2023 at the earliest. They therefore urged Qualifications Wales and Welsh Government to ensure the infrastructure of teachers with the appropriate BSL skillset is in place prior to this date so that Wales can introduce a GCSE BSL at the same time as England.

A few suggested that BSL qualifications should be offered as a module of Welsh and/or English at *"Key Stage 3"* rather than *"Key Stage 4"* because they would be difficult to accommodate within the *"Key Stage 4"* timetable. One respondent also suggested that

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<sup>52</sup> *"Mae galw mawr am ymarferwyr sy'n meddu ar sgiliau Cymraeg priodol yn ogystal â'r sgiliau BSL angenrheidiol. Mae angen cynorthwyrwyr dysgu, athrawon ac athrawon arbenigol sydd yn gymwys mewn BSL a'r Gymraeg er mwyn sicrhau y gall plant a phobl ifanc byddar neu trwm eu clyw fynychu lleoliadau addysg a gofal cyfrwng Cymraeg"*

BSL should be offered as a small qualification rather than a full GCSE, possibly as part of the Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum. Another emphasised that BSL must not be offered instead of other languages.

### 6.6.3. Take-up, interest, and progression

Many respondents highlighted that the qualifications would be interesting, attractive, and useful to learners and staff. This would help raise the profile of BSL, placing it on an equal footing with other languages. Conversely, a few respondents predicted that take-up of BSL qualifications would be low, linking this to its narrower relevance to most learners compared to other languages.

*“The problem with BSL, according to a deaf family friend of mine, is that you need to use it regularly or you will swiftly forget it. This sort of qualification would only be of use to those who either know deaf people or who wish to pursue a career that requires BSL. It's a nice idea, but I really can't see it being of long-term benefit to the majority”*

*Learner*

Some respondents felt that BSL is a valuable skill for learners, both in and out of school, and in their future careers. Others noted that BSL would be especially valuable to those wishing to pursue careers in the social care sector.

A few emphasised that BSL would boost learners' communication skills and would help develop other related skills and knowledge such as phonics and understanding of how languages work.

One respondent noted that the BSL qualifications made available to learners in Wales should support progression in BSL for all learners.

*“While BSL qualifications may be available currently, progression in BSL is not sufficiently supported. How can QW and Welsh government support schools and settings with progression in learning BSL which is accredited, not only for D/deaf and hard of hearing children and young people but also for those with friends and family who are D/deaf or hard of hearing and others, especially those interested in working in education or health and social care?”*

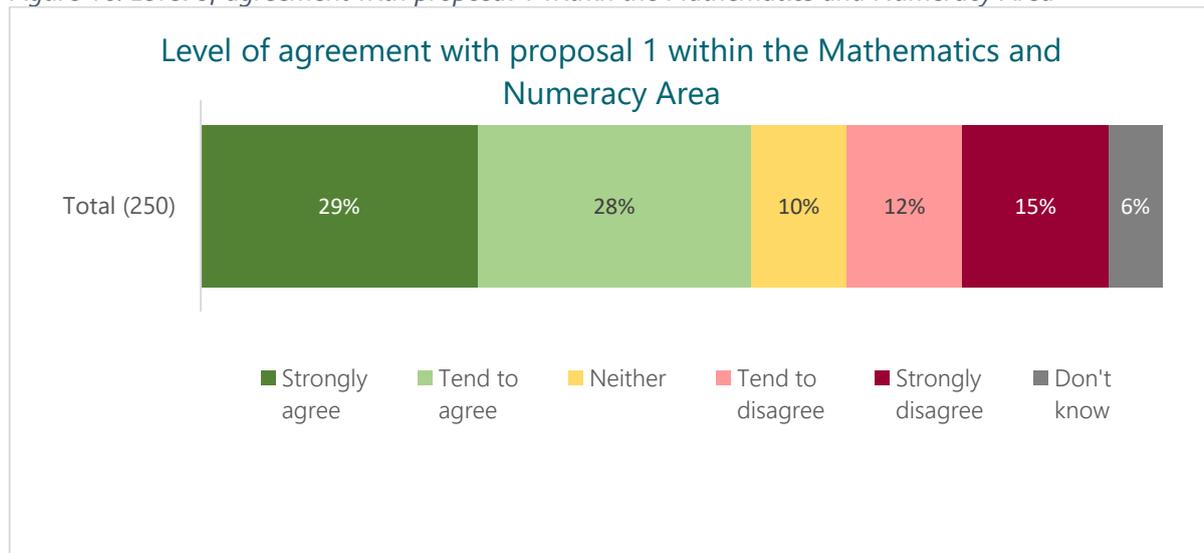
*Education professional*

## 7. Mathematics and Numeracy

### 7.1. Proposal 1

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new combined GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy qualification to replace the two existing GCSEs in Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy? The new GCSE would be roughly the size of 1½ GCSEs.

Figure 16: Level of agreement with proposal 1 within the Mathematics and Numeracy Area



A total of 250 respondents gave their opinion on this proposal. More than half (57%) of those responding to this proposal were in favour whilst just over a quarter (27%) were against it. Among education professionals, the level of support remained the same (57%) although there was a slightly higher proportion against the proposal (32%). This group were less likely to be neutral or to answer don't know than the overall sample.

Of the 250 people who responded, just over half (54% or 134 people) chose to comment further. The main themes from their feedback are outlined below.

#### 7.1.1. Combining GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Numeracy

As would be expected from the closed question results, there was considerable support for the idea of combining mathematics and numeracy, with several respondents commenting that it was a sensible solution.

*"Combining the two GCSEs makes complete sense in that we teach the skills that are tested in Maths to allow pupils to apply these skills in real life context. The current situation of where they are separate suggests to the pupils that they are separate, which they shouldn't be"*  
*Education professional*

Supportive comments often highlighted that mathematics and numeracy skills were interlinked and frequently taught by the same teacher. There was some feeling that the

current separation between the two qualifications created an artificial divide within the subject that could be detrimental to overall understanding.

*"This would help improve maths teaching to ensure the reasoning and procedural skills become more integrated in lessons"*

*Education professional*

Within these supportive comments there was an acknowledgement of the current overlapping content which might be taught more effectively by combining the qualification.

*"It would seem sensible to integrate these two disciplines. The current amount of cross-over content between the two would seem to support the 1½ GCSE proposal"*

*Education professional*

A concern raised by some respondents reflected on whether the proposal would result in a reduction of teaching time. Demands on the timetable would encourage schools to give less time to the subject if it resulted in a smaller qualification than the previous two GCSEs, it was said.

*"These proposals are the biggest threat to mathematics education in Wales in a generation. Having built up capacity to teach two GCSEs in this subject, a reduction to one and a half would give the green light to schools across Wales to reduce provision in this subject. [...] This would inevitably lead to less contact time for teaching mathematics in schools, and therefore poorer outcomes"*

*Education professional*

In many cases, these comments came from respondents who were supportive of combining the subject but were concerned that the proposal was reducing the overall importance of mathematics in the curriculum and as a life skill. These comments reflected on overall skill levels and in some cases suggested that the time given with two GCSEs had had a positive impact on skills.

*"A reduction in the value of maths and numeracy qualifications is likely to result in reduced curriculum time for a very important subject. I believe that it is no coincidence that since the introduction of the two GCSEs, Wales' Pisa scores have improved substantially. For this reason, and the fact that employers will want pupils who are confident in dealing with numbers, maths and numeracy should continue to be worth two full GCSEs"*

*Member of the public*

### 7.1.2. The size of the proposed qualification

One of the key themes raised was confusion around the idea that the new GCSE would be roughly the size of one and a half GCSEs. This was the biggest single concern and was mentioned by around a quarter of those commented. These comments were equally likely to come from those who agreed or disagreed with the proposal and featured in most of the comments from those who said they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Some of these concerns suggested a lack of clarity but others expressed a real concern about how this would be understood by future employers or higher education institutions. This included confusion about how a half GCSE could be recognised.

*The idea of combining both is good, the suggestion of it being worth 1½ GCSEs is ridiculous. How would you be able to tell that it is worth that? "I have 12½ GCSEs"?*

*Learner*

This sometimes incorporated a concern that learners from Wales would be disadvantaged against learners from elsewhere in the UK when applying for jobs or places at higher education institutions.

*"One and a half GCSE will not be recognised by employers/educational institutions so learners might as well just take one"*

*Education professional*

There was also some expectation that the qualification might only be seen as a single qualification despite its larger size.

*"So, if it's 1½ times the size, will it still only equal one GCSE? How fair is that? Will it be two GCSEs?"*

*Education professional*

### 7.1.3. Meeting the needs of all learners

Another key area of comment was around the impact of the proposed changes on learners and their subsequent opportunities. This incorporates a number of different concerns such as whether it will prepare higher ability learners for A levels and beyond; and whether it will make maths less accessible for lower ability learners, leaving more without any qualifications.

Some respondents highlighted the importance of the qualification in preparing higher ability learners for further study, reflecting concerns that a reduced maths specification could leave out topics required for A levels.

*"My only concern though is does this mean that some Maths content will be removed, which may disadvantage pupils who want to pursue a career in Maths"*

*Education professional*

Others were concerned that this approach would not suit either higher ability or lower ability learners.

*"Would there also be a pure maths option for higher ability pupils? Having a 1½ GCSE option could also make it inaccessible to lower ability pupils"*

*Education professional*

The more detailed concerns often included some criticism of the current GCSE Numeracy's suitability for all learners. This centred around the idea that the GCSE Numeracy presented maths as real-life problems but required higher literacy skills to understand the questions.

*"Many learners already struggle with the numeracy GCSE due to extracting the correct information from the questions. If you were to create a new GCSE that was entirely based on this type of question, you would be putting learners who struggled with English and extracting information at a significant disadvantage"*

*Learner*

#### 7.1.4. Re-sits

More than a few concerns were raised around the issue of re-sits. Currently, learners who achieve lower grades are encouraged to take GCSE Numeracy which is a single award, and this is built into timetables in further education institutions. According to some respondents, the larger qualification could be seen to require more teaching time as well as be a bigger challenge for less able learners.

*"Our final concern in relation to this proposal is for post-16 learners aiming to re-take GCSE Mathematics alongside work or other post-16 studies. These learners are currently able to take GCSE Numeracy but under the new proposals would have to take a broader and more challenging qualification, less suited to demonstrating numeracy for the purposes of progression or employment. The size and range of the new qualification would make re-takes more challenging for schools, colleges and learners and could impact on the opportunities for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain this important qualification"*

*Other*

However, whilst clearly raising some practical issues, there was still support for the proposal from within the further education sector.

*"As an FE college that delivers a substantial amount of GCSE maths-numeracy, there will be some staff development needs for us to address in terms of the mathematics content. However, this is outweighed by the benefits to learners who currently have to sit four exams, if undertaking both qualifications. I agree that there is significant overlap and as long as the qualification assessment can retain the feel of practical, everyday scenarios in which to engage, I am supportive of the move to one qualification"*

*Education professional*

#### 7.1.5. The need for review

Among the other concerns and comments raised was a frustration with the idea of changing the qualifications so soon after the current system was adopted.

*After a fairly recent change to the structure of GCSE with the addition of the numeracy qualification, I am not confident that changing this again is going to benefit us as staff or the children<sup>53</sup>*

*Not stated*

These comments were primarily made by people who disagreed with the proposal.

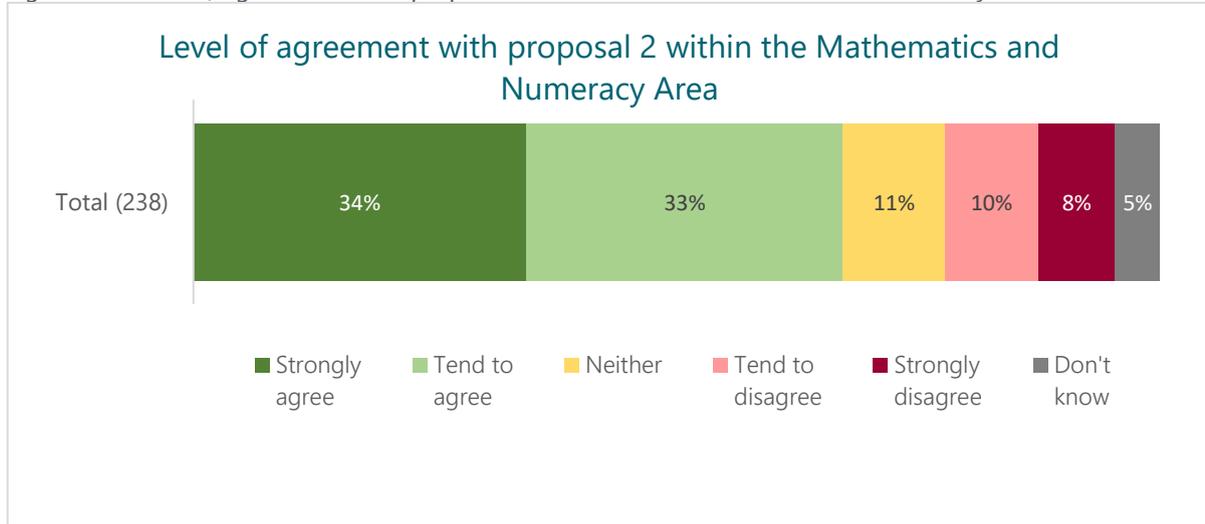
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<sup>53</sup> *"Ar ôl newid yn weddol ddiweddar i strwythyr TGAU gyda'r ychwanegiad o'r gymhwyster Rhifedd, nid wyf yn hyderus bod newid hwn eto yn mynd i fod yn fuddiol i ni fel staff na'r plant"*

## 7.2. Proposal 2

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new small qualification that can be taken in addition to the GCSE to assess a learner’s numerical proficiency, using an on-screen assessment method?

Figure 17: Level of agreement with proposal 2 within the Mathematics and Numeracy Area



A total of 238 people responded to this proposal. Two in three (67%) agreed with this proposal compared with just 18% who disagreed. Looked at by sub-groups, support was even higher among parents and carers, and members of the public, whilst learners were the least likely to agree.

Just over half (51% or 121 people) of those who responded to this proposal also provided a written comment to explain their answer. The main themes from their feedback are outlined below.

### 7.2.1. Meeting the needs of all learners

The most common theme raised was that the small qualification would allow all learners to gain skills, confidence, and a qualification in maths, especially those who struggled with the subject, or had Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Some added that the proposed qualification may also appeal to learners who needed to show their numeracy skills as opposed to requiring an in-depth understanding of maths.

There was some disagreement over the qualification’s suitability for higher ability learners. A few respondents felt that it would be appropriate for those who wanted additional learning in maths, whilst others disagreed that the qualification would be suitable for this cohort.

Some respondents suggested that the qualification should be offered to all learners to prevent creating a “two-tier system”.

*"This should be mandatory for all or not at all. Curriculum for Wales is a curriculum for equity. If you continue with this proposal, you will be compliant in continuing the practice of setting. Research proves that all learners benefit from working with others of different abilities. Therefore, this test can be taken by all and, a bit like a language continuum, learners will come out with numeracy skills somewhere along that continuum"*

*Education professional*

One of those who expressed this opinion stated that an equality impact assessment should be conducted prior to the qualification's introduction to ensure that it did not disadvantage specific groups.

*"It would be better to retain a GCSE-branded numeracy qualification for learners not wishing to continue with mathematical or scientific studies, to avoid the possibility of specific groups being disproportionately steered towards the new non-GCSE qualification. An equality impact assessment will be required before reaching a decision on this proposal. If a qualification is created and includes on-screen assessment, it will be essential to ensure accessibility and fairness for disabled learners"*

*Other*

Others pointed out that the qualification would need to be carefully designed to ensure that it enabled learners with low literacy skills to demonstrate their numerical proficiency, as many such learners struggled to access existing maths qualifications.

*Just because something is online does not make it easier to show numerical understanding. In fact when low ability pupils are given multiple choice they tend not to read question properly and just randomly guess answers. I don't think there should be multiple choice. And I also think the questions should be read to the students as one of the biggest problems for showing mathematical ability is a pupil's inability to read the question correctly"*

*Education professional*

### 7.2.2. Value and recognition

Another main theme in respondents' feedback was concern over whether the small qualification would be recognised by further and higher education institutions and employers. This was mainly linked to the qualification's size. Some respondents felt that institutions and employers would prefer learners to have a full GCSE over a small qualification, fearing that learners with the small qualification could end up being disadvantaged relative to those with a GCSE<sup>54</sup>.

Considerable engagement and marketing work would need to be done with further and higher education institutions and employers to ensure that they recognise and value the small qualification, according to some respondents.

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<sup>54</sup> This point seems to reflect some respondents' misunderstanding that the small qualification would be studied instead of a full GCSE in the Mathematics and Numeracy Area. To clarify, Qualifications Wales' proposal is that the small qualification would be studied alongside the full GCSE in this Area rather than instead of it.

*“Whilst we can see the merit of providing a qualification for learners who have not achieved a grade C in GCSE to progress to education, training and employment, more information is needed in order to agree with this proposal. Is there an assurance that the qualification will be recognised by employers and what work will be done in order to improve employer's understanding of this qualification?”*

*Other*

Others said that the qualification was confusing and unnecessary. Some who expressed this opinion questioned the need for the small qualification, provided that the reformed GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy was well-designed and suitable for all learners.

*“We tend to disagree because there should be no need for an additional qualification of this kind if the new GCSE in mathematics and numeracy is well designed with regards to its content and assessment. Realistically, it would [be] unlikely that the new small qualifications would be valued by key stakeholders such as colleges and employers. We would prefer to see that the new GCSE is more accessible to all learners rather than create a separate additional qualification for some that would not have real value”*

*Other*

Some of those who expressed this opinion felt that good teaching and existing qualifications should be sufficient to enable and demonstrate progression in maths. In line with this, a few respondents noted that the qualification would not equip learners with the maths skills they needed for further study in related subjects and the world of work. There was also some concern that the small qualification could devalue GCSEs in Mathematics and reduce learners' interest in related subjects and careers in future.

### 7.2.3. On-screen assessment

A range of opinions were expressed about teaching and assessing the qualification on-screen. Some respondents felt that an on-screen assessment method would allow an up-to-date qualification to be developed. Others noted that this would provide flexibility in terms of when learners could complete their assessments. A few learners said that they would welcome the opportunity to complete the assessment before Year 11.

*“It will be a change from having to wait until the end of Year 11 to do the qualification”*

*Learner*

Others pointed out that some learners struggle with on-screen assessment methods and would need substantial support to prevent them from being disadvantaged by this approach. There was also some concern that on-screen assessment was not appropriate for learning maths, and that learners who did not have access to a computer at home may not have the same opportunity to practise maths on-screen relative to those who did, disadvantaging them. On-screen assessment could also reduce learners' ability to show their workings, which was said by a few to be an important way of demonstrating understanding in maths. Accordingly, some respondents suggested that learners and schools should be able to choose whether the qualification is assessed on screen or on paper.

Some respondents expressed concern that the proposal could encourage teachers to train learners to pass assessments rather than to understand maths. Others felt that this type of assessment approach could enable or encourage cheating, stating that assessment must be completed under exam conditions with invigilators to prevent this.

#### 7.2.4. Re-sits

While there was some feeling that allowing re-sits was important as it could increase learners' chances of passing the qualification, some respondents noted that the proposal could result in some learners having to complete the assessment repeatedly to achieve a pass. They felt that this could affect their well-being, motivation, and enjoyment of maths. They were also concerned that this could affect the value of the qualification, if further and higher education institutions and employers could tell that learners had attempted it multiple times.

*"There should be some limit to the number of times sat, however, as otherwise it will become a measure (whether government say so or not) and will then be something that is gamed and becomes a negative for the students - sit it until you pass meaning constant failure and worsening the hatred of maths"*  
*Education professional*

#### 7.2.5. Qualification design

Further clarity was requested by some respondents regarding how the qualification would incorporate essential skills and how it would sit alongside the new proposed qualifications such as GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy and the revised Skills Challenge Certificate. A few were concerned that it would overlap with the current pathways or entry level maths qualification. Concern was also expressed over the need for learners to study the small qualification alongside the proposed new GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy. There was some feeling that this would pressurise learners and teachers.

A few respondents suggested that the small qualification could be offered as part of a set of numerical proficiency qualifications that could be aggregated into a full GCSE, or that it could form part of a double award in maths and numeracy if started in Year 9. Others felt that learners should study the qualification on its own rather than in addition to existing maths qualifications to maintain their motivation and interest. A few suggested that there should also be a Foundation GCSE in maths which would enable learners to demonstrate "*core*" or "*essential*" maths skills. This could be capped at a grade C, they said. The main GCSE could then assess learners' competence beyond this level, enabling a wider range of topics to be assessed, it was noted.

A few respondents suggested that the qualification should cover financial literacy, making it relevant for all learners. An equivalent small qualification in literacy should also be created, a few others noted.

### 7.2.6. Timetabling

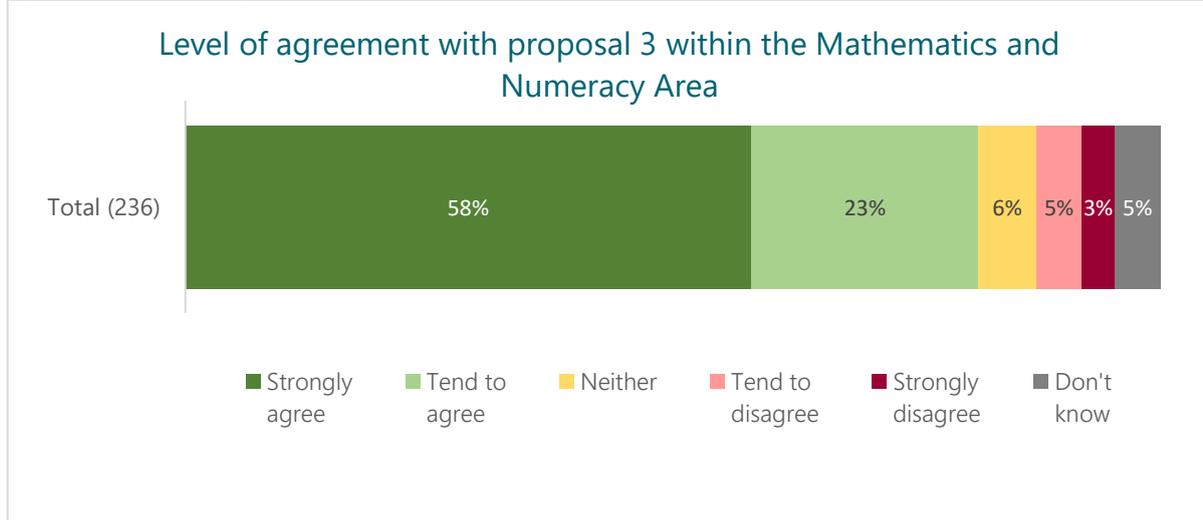
Some respondents were concerned that schools would struggle to deliver the proposed qualification within their timetables. A few noted that timetables were not flexible enough to accommodate small qualifications. Others stated that trying to deliver the proposed qualification within an already full timetable would put teachers and learners under pressure, and that it could also reduce the curriculum offer.

*“By offering a short course the issue of timetabling for different abilities is raised. School timetables don't have the flexibility to offer different sized allocations for core subjects. This means that either teachers are pressured to deliver to all pupils in less time or less able pupils have their curriculum padded out to fill the gaps where core teaching time isn't needed. Also pupils would be pigeonholed into pathways in Year 10 that they won't be able to break out of”*  
Education professional

### 7.3. Proposal 3

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a made-for-Wales Level 2 qualification in Additional Mathematics?

Figure 18: Level of agreement with proposal 3 within the Mathematics and Numeracy Area



A total of 236 people commented on this proposal. Over four in five people (81%) agreed with the proposal including 58% who strongly agreed. Agreement was broadly similar across the three main sub-groups. Among education professionals, a tenth disagreed overall, with 5% disagreeing strongly.

Four in ten (41%, 97 people) of those who responded to this proposal also provided a written comment to explain their answer. The main themes from their feedback are outlined below.

#### 7.3.1. Learners' progression, specialism, and skills

Most of those who commented on this proposal expressed that a Level 2 qualification in Additional Mathematics would be beneficial for learners who enjoyed and excelled at maths. They felt that the qualification would help learners to transition from GCSE to A level.

*"I believe that it is extremely important to offer a qualification that appeals to more able pupils in mathematics. There is a good jump in work level from GCSE to A level, the qualification gives pupils a taste and gives them a good foundation for the A level course"<sup>55</sup>*  
*Education professional*

Some respondents felt that the qualification would extend learners' abilities and skills in maths, encouraging them to aspire and progress into maths-related careers.

<sup>55</sup> "Credaf ei bod hi'n hynod bwysig i gynnig cymhwyster sy'n apelio at ddisgyblion mwy abl ym Mathemateg. Mae yna dipyn o naid yn lefel gwaith o TGAU i Lefel A, mae'r cymhwyster yn rhoi blas i ddisgyblion ac yn rhoi sylfaen da iddynt i'r cwrs Lefel A"

However, a few noted that employers would need to be made more aware of the qualification.

There was also some feeling that the qualification would encourage learners to progress in other subjects such as sciences and engineering where maths skills are beneficial.

*"This would be useful for those who are not just taking mathematics at A level but taking science and engineering based subjects who nevertheless do not have the time or inclination to take all mathematics A levels"*

*Education professional*

### 7.3.2. Fairness and parity

Another main theme in respondents' comments was that the qualification would ensure that equivalent qualifications were available to learners in Wales and England to make it fair for learners in both jurisdictions. One respondent felt that this was particularly important for learners living in border areas who may wish to progress on to further education in England. Another emphasised that the qualification should be truly made-for-Wales and not tokenistic.

*"This is an opportunity to create a 'made for Wales' additional mathematics qualification, to call it a GCSE and grade it as such"*

*Education professional*

To ensure fairness, a few respondents suggested that the qualification should be available to all learners who wished to study it. They noted that learners who did not excel in maths yet still wanted to study maths at A level had been disadvantaged through being unable to study additional maths in the past.

*"Everyone should have the opportunity to do it if they enjoy maths. It's unfair for it to only be available to a minority of students"*

*Learner*

Offering the qualification to only the highest ability learners in Year 11 could also make it more difficult to staff and therefore less viable for schools to deliver, according to some respondents. This could mean that the qualification would not be available in all schools, it was said. Another commented that the qualification should not be made too difficult to ensure that learners did not lose confidence in maths.

One respondent suggested that the qualification should be offered to learners who were ready for it in Year 10, although they cautioned that learners should be able to re-sit the qualification if needed without penalising schools.

To ensure that all learners have equal opportunity to demonstrate their attainment, regardless of their specialisms, one respondent felt that equivalent additional qualifications should be created in all Areas.

### 7.3.3. The need for reform

There was quite strong feeling that the new qualification should mirror the existing additional maths qualification which is already offered by some schools. Those who expressed this opinion felt that the existing qualification is fit for purpose and that it is enjoyed by learners who excel in maths. However, most of those who expressed this opinion also felt that there was no need for the new qualification because they are happy with the existing GCSE in Additional Mathematics.

*"I cannot see the sense in duplicating an already appropriate qualification. The one we are using at the moment is doing a perfectly good job"*

*Education professional*

A few also cautioned that the new additional maths qualification should not dilute the existing maths GCSE.

*Any opportunity to provide additional qualifications to bridge the gap between GCSE and AS should be embraced, but not at the expense of the quality of the main GCSE being diluted"*

*Not stated*

### 7.3.4. Timetabling and resources

Some respondents expressed concern that schools would struggle to accommodate this qualification within their timetables. As a result, it may end up being taught at lunch and break times or after school, as was said to be the case with the existing additional maths qualification being offered at some schools. There was also some concern that the qualification could reduce the time available for teaching the maths GCSE.

*"This offers choice, but it should be clear that the GCSE alone allows progression to AS level - and the GCSE should be designed to achieve that. There is a risk that this squeezes out another subject rather than being fully additional"*

*Parent/carer*

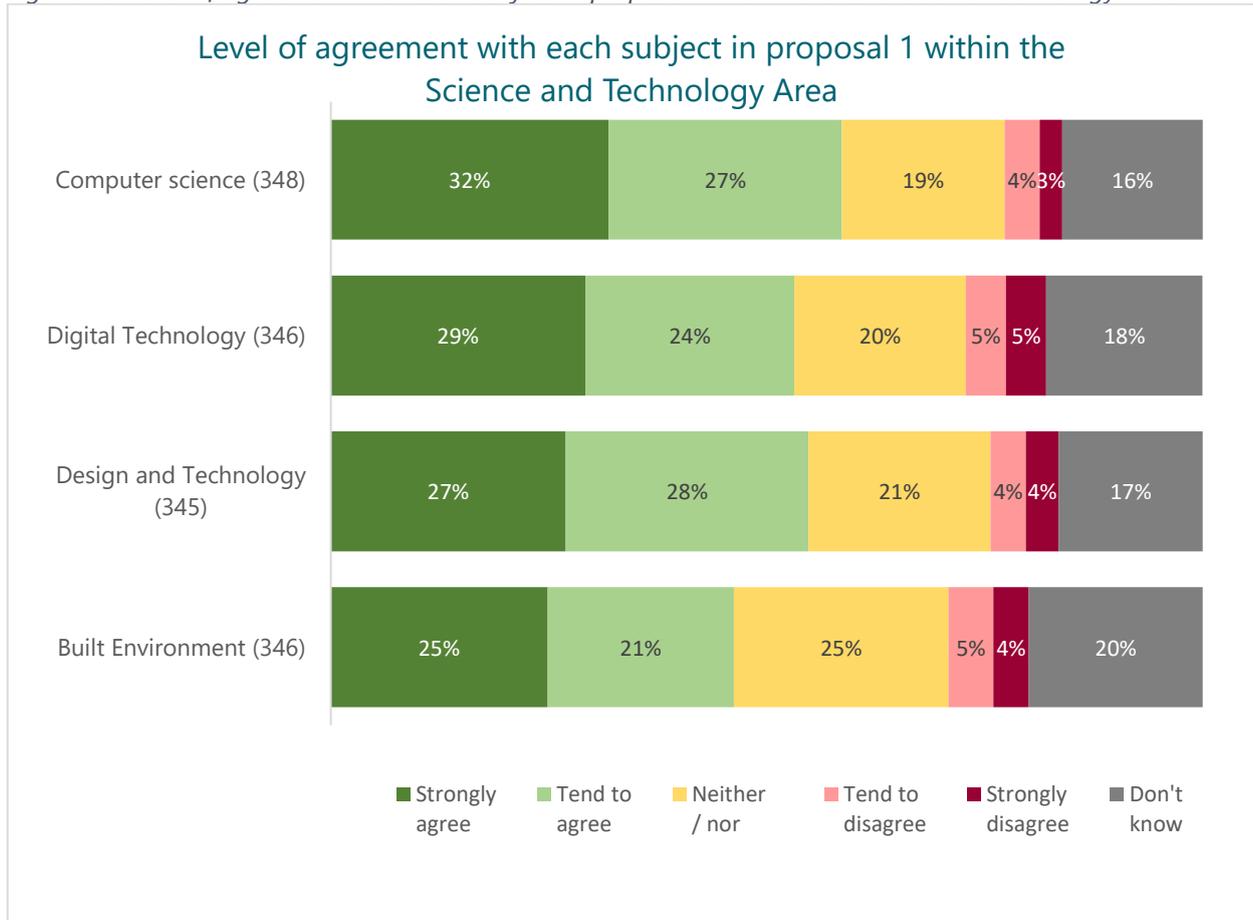
The need to provide appropriate resources to support the roll-out of the new qualification in a timely manner was also highlighted by a few respondents.

## 8. Science and Technology

### 8.1. Proposal 1

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review and reform GCSEs in Computer Science, Built Environment, Design and Technology, and Digital Technology?

Figure 19: Level of agreement with each subject in proposal 1 within the Science and Technology Area



Just under 350 people responded to this proposal for each of the four qualifications being considered for review. The overall picture is one of support, although fairly large numbers gave a neutral 'neither agree nor disagree' response or said they 'didn't know'. The lowest level of agreement but also highest level of neutral scores was for the Built Environment GCSE. This could be due to lower levels of familiarity with the subject. A tenth disagreed with the proposal for Digital Technology and slightly fewer for Computer science (7%), Design and Technology (8%), and Built Environment (9%).

Almost four in ten (39%, 137 people) of those who responded also provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their feedback are outlined below.

### 8.1.1. The need for reform

The topic most frequently discussed by respondents was the need to reform the GCSEs covered by the proposal. Many respondents stated that these qualifications needed to be reformed to provide a flexible, tailored, and balanced offer to learners. There was strong feeling that the current GCSEs are outdated (although a few disagreed), especially Computer Science. Respondents therefore emphasised the need to make the qualifications more up-to-date, relevant, interesting, and suitable for all learners<sup>56</sup> to encourage more learners to study them and to pursue further study and careers in these areas in future.

*"[The qualifications] need to be as relevant as possibly to modern life and adaptable to move with times in order to prepare pupils for their future"*

*Education professional*

Updating the qualifications so that they are more closely aligned with the new curriculum was said to be a priority by some respondents. Some conveyed that the proposals lacked detail, imagination, and ambition. They felt that more radical reform was needed over and above what was proposed to fully achieve the ambitions of the new curriculum.

*"I think an opportunity has been lost to really take on the ethos of the new curriculum and changes are about adapting an historical qualification [sic.] rather than creating a truly inspiring qualification that fits the ethos of the new curriculum"*

*Education professional*

A few respondents acknowledged that some of the qualifications would require more in-depth review and reform than others. Some questioned the need to reform these GCSEs, either because they had only recently been developed (Digital Technology, Design and Technology, and Built Environment) or reformed (Design and Technology, and Computer Science). Most of those who expressed this opinion noted that these qualifications were already fit-for-purpose.

### 8.1.2. Qualification content and assessment

There was strong feeling among respondents that the proposed GCSEs' content should be updated regularly to accommodate the fast-paced evolution of their disciplines. The qualifications should also be relatively easy and quick to update rather than being subject to a lengthy review process to ensure that they stayed relevant to learners, it was said. Similarly, some noted that the qualifications should incorporate and reflect current, future, and emerging technologies.

Respondents also noted that the qualifications should:

- Reflect the needs and practices of industry, and
- Not duplicate existing post-16 vocational qualifications, *"nor give rise to the impression of any element of occupational competency"*.

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<sup>56</sup>Suitability for all learners is discussed in more detail under the separate sub-section of the commentary on this proposal.

Some commented specifically on the content of the proposed Computer Science GCSE, suggesting that it should:

- Incorporate data science.
- Focus on non-textual programming, e.g., Scratch<sup>57</sup>, and then text, e.g., Python<sup>58</sup> or JavaScript<sup>59</sup> to make the qualification more accessible and interesting to learners.
- Include coding, real-time control, and automation.
- Include a more balanced range of tasks, be modernised, and made more interesting.
- Be offered alongside GCSE ICT. GCSE ICT should focus on the broader ICT skills that are required in the workplace (e.g. business use of Microsoft Office), whereas GCSE Computer Science should be more technical, focusing on programming, computational thinking, and how computers work.
- Include more practical skills and less theory.

A few respondents felt that a new GCSE Design and Technology should incorporate craft, design, and manufacturing skills to a greater extent. These included woodwork, metalwork, textiles, and home economics.

Echoing some of the comments made about the content of these qualifications, some respondents reflected that assessment should focus on practical skills to a greater extent, although a few cautioned that the practical assessments should not take up excessive amounts of time.

Some felt that current assessment approaches for GCSEs in Computer Science and Design and Technology involved *“regurgitating facts”*, relying too heavily on learners’ memory skills.

Others noted that the revised qualification should include a greater coursework component. They felt that too much weight was placed on exams, especially in Design and Technology, which discouraged lower ability learners.

One respondent suggested that GCSE Design and Technology should have a closer assessment structure to GCSE Art and Design, with a 60% weighting on coursework with more time to complete it, plus a 20% weighting on a design exam, and 20% on a written exam. They suggested that the GCSE should assess learners’ knowledge and skills and ability to communicate. Other suggestions for the assessment of Design and Technology included using software to demonstrate understanding through computer-based tasks and using a database or table of information to find and use data when looking at properties of materials for specific purposes.

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<sup>57</sup> Scratch is a free computer programming language and online community where learners can create their own interactive stories, games, and animations.

<sup>58</sup> Python is a high-level, interpreted, general purpose computer programming language.

<sup>59</sup> JavaScript is a scripting computer programming language.

The current GCSE Computer Science assessment was also felt to rely too heavily on exams by a few respondents. The assessments were said to need updating in line with the content to ensure that they were fit for purpose and reflected industry practice and the needs of employers. One respondent suggested that this qualification should incorporate an on-screen assessment instead of a written exam. Another felt that the Non-Examination Assessment (NEA) for GCSE Computer Science should be reviewed because it currently takes far more time than its 20% weighting warrants.

### 8.1.3. Learners' progression and skills

Some respondents noted that the range of qualifications offered within this proposal would appeal to learners with different interests and facilitate the development of wide-ranging skills which were seen as essential for learners' future lives and careers. Specifically, a few felt that the new GCSE Digital Technology (first teaching September 2021) looks relevant, interesting, and would encourage the development of skills for a wide range of abilities and future career pathways. A few respondents also noted that links to post-16 learning need to be explicit within the reformed qualifications.

### 8.1.4. The relationship between GCSEs in this Area

When reviewing and reforming these GCSEs, some respondents noted that the links between the subjects should be made explicit to maximise the benefits that learners could gain from studying them.

According to some respondents, elements of the current GCSEs in Computer Science and Digital Technology overlap too much. This should be addressed when reviewing and reforming them to ensure that their purposes are clear and that they are attractive to learners.

*"It would be beneficial for separate qualification specifications to highlight clear overlaps between disciplines within the AoLE where they exist. Qualifications Wales may wish to consider the approach to digital technology and computer science to ensure that learners are functionally digitally competent but also have opportunities to control and programme technology. This may help to exploit the connections between the two qualifications such as coding, data and communication elements"*

*Other*

One respondent suggested that the proposed GCSE Manufacturing and Engineering would most likely cover a lot of the content of GCSE Design and Technology, questioning the need for the latter qualification.

### 8.1.5. Retaining separate GCSEs in Computer Science, Built Environment, Design and Technology, and Digital Technology

Some respondents' comments related to the need to keep these GCSEs as separate qualifications and not combine them into a single general qualification within this Area, supporting Qualifications Wales' proposal.

*“Overall we agree with the proposal to review content and assessment of these qualifications. Furthermore, we understand the discrete nature of these subjects and that any combined qualification would be detrimental to learners”*

*Other*

Respondents who expressed this opinion noted that keeping these GCSEs separate would help to preserve the subjects’ integrity and provide learners with the depth of subject knowledge that they needed to prepare them for further study. Some noted that keeping individual qualifications would allow learners to specialise in their preferred subjects. Conversely, one respondent said that not offering a combined qualification was a missed opportunity.

*“If science and technology are to be an AoLE then treating the two separately is a fallacy. Be more creative - you are missing an opportunity here. A combined science and technology qualification is needed and appears not to be part of the thinking process”*

*Education professional*

#### 8.1.6. Meeting the needs of all learners

The current GCSE Computer Science was felt by many respondents to be too difficult, especially for lower ability learners. It was also said to be more difficult than the other GCSEs in this Area. This was said to be discouraging learners from studying the qualification and had instead led to some schools discontinuing the qualification at GCSE in favour of more *“accessible”* qualifications. A few said that they would welcome a return to the previous iteration of GCSE Computer Science which they felt was more suitable for learners with varying abilities.

Also, a few noted that all of the GCSEs covered by this proposal should be of a manageable difficulty level and have equivalent assessment approaches to ensure fairness for all learners and to encourage more learners to study them.

*“Set the level of knowledge correctly, don't be 'over-ambitious' with core knowledge, GCSEs and A levels are the first steps on pupils' journeys, give them the confidence to progress”*

*Education professional*

A few respondents felt that the reduction in the practical content of the recently reformed GCSE Built Environment is likely to make it less attractive to learners and less suitable for all learners, especially for lower ability learners, highlighting that the practical focus of other qualifications in this Area was key to learners’ success.

Another suggested that BTECs should be reintroduced as a viable option for schools, especially in construction and textiles, although it was unclear from their response whether they felt that this was instead of, or as well as the GCSEs discussed under this proposal.

#### 8.1.7. Staffing, equipment, and technology

Some respondents emphasised the need to ensure that schools have access to the required technology, software, and equipment to enable all learners to access the same qualifications. Unequal access would disadvantage learners in less well-funded schools,

it was said. Others said that teaching staff would need training to keep them up to date with developments across the subjects.

*"In reviewing and reforming these existing GCSEs, the WJEC and Qualifications Wales need to consider the financial impact on schools of making such changes; the existing resources that schools may have at their disposal and this includes staff as well as appropriate hardware to deliver the qualifications to learners"*

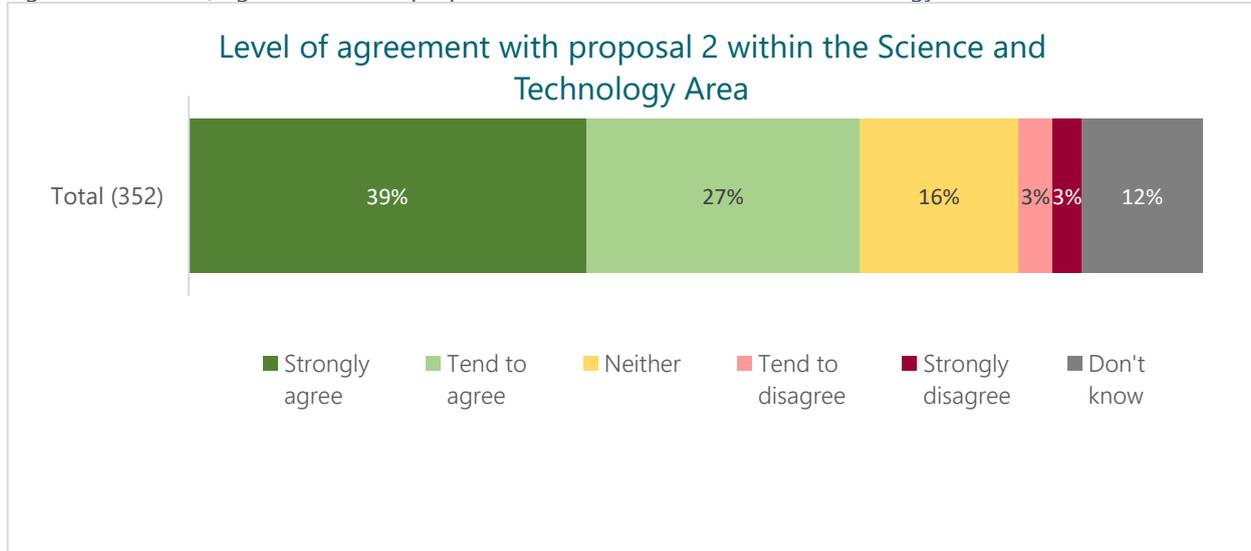
*Education professional*

One respondent also felt that the qualifications should not rely on connections and partnerships with external professionals or organisations. This could disadvantage some learners, it was said.

## 8.2. Proposal 2

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new GCSE in Engineering and Manufacturing?

Figure 20: Level of agreement with proposal 2 within the Science and Technology Area



A total of 352 people commented on this proposal. Two in three people (66%) agreed with this proposal whilst just 6% disagreed. Looked at by sub-groups, support was even higher among learners and parents and carers, and members of the public. Among education professionals, 62% agreed with the proposal whilst 7% disagreed. A relatively high proportion (15%) of education professionals answered 'don't know' to this proposal.

Over a third (36%, 126 people) of those who responded also provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their feedback are outlined below.

### 8.2.1. Relevance and importance

Most of those who commented on the proposal emphasised the relevance and importance of offering the proposed qualification. Many of those who expressed this opinion felt that it would give learners the skills they need to progress to further learning and careers in engineering and manufacturing. Some noted that the qualification would give learners practical skills which would be valuable in everyday life, such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It would also provide the opportunity to apply the skills that they have learned in other qualifications, it was said.

There was strong agreement that introducing a qualification in engineering and manufacturing at an earlier age would encourage more learners to consider skilled careers in these industries in future. This was seen to be particularly important because of the increasing emphasis on promoting the growth of and addressing skills shortages in these sectors in Wales.

*“The future prosperity of the nation and long-term career prospects depend on stimulating an early interest in both these fields”*

*Other*

Some respondents said that the proposed qualification was closely aligned with the new Curriculum for Wales, especially in comparison to the existing qualifications on offer.

*“The title of the qualification falls in line with the what matters statement. It is also more relevant to Wales. Having worked in manufacturing and engineering before going into teaching I can see the links. I've found it a little harder to explain the links of D&T to engineering. A rebrand with content focussed on engineering and manufacturing would provide clear pathways to careers in engineering”*

*Education professional*

Others noted that the qualification would help to break down *“unhelpful perceptions of academic versus vocational”*.

### 8.2.2. Staffing, equipment, and technology

Some of those who commented on this proposal were concerned that schools would struggle to provide the staffing, equipment and technology needed to deliver the qualification.

*“Issue for me is resources at school, the breadth of technology options means schools can offer what resources allows them to do. One GCSE means budgets will be stretched to max to acquire lathes, 3D printers and the like”*

*Education professional*

This was often linked to the need to upgrade the facilities that is likely to be required for any practical and digital elements of the qualification. For example, there was some feeling that schools would need to invest in developing and upgrading their workshops to accommodate Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM). The cost of purchasing materials was also emphasised. A few stated that requirements for the resources required to deliver the qualification, if adopted, must be clearly set out in advance to ensure equality of access.

Some emphasised that teachers would need highly specific training to deliver the qualification, suggesting that professionals should be recruited from engineering and manufacturing industries to meet the demand for specialist teaching. A few respondents noted that small schools in particular may struggle to provide the teaching staff to deliver the qualification.

A few respondents highlighted the staffing and resourcing needs associated with providing experiences outside the classroom in line with the potential content of the qualification (e.g., ship building, or small business manufacturing based in local units).

### 8.2.3. Progression

Some respondents felt that a new GCSE in Engineering and Manufacturing would enable learners to progress smoothly on to further qualifications in the Area (although a few disagreed). One felt that the existing GCSEs in physics and mathematics would better prepare learners for careers in engineering than the proposed GCSE.

A few respondents emphasised that progression routes and links to other qualifications must be considered carefully when designing the qualification, due to the need for specialist staff and facilities.

Some respondents felt that schools and further education institutions should collaborate more closely to ensure that the qualifications offered at GCSE and post-16 enabled smooth progression for learners. One suggested that closer collaboration could also provide co-teaching opportunities and support teachers' and lecturers' CPD.

### 8.2.4. Meeting the needs of all learners

There was quite strong feeling that the proposed qualification should be suitable for all learners, offering an appropriate level of challenge to both lower ability and higher ability learners. A few respondents suggested that this could mean delivering a flexible qualification that offered higher ability learners a more theoretical approach and gave lower ability learners more practical experience.

*"This will allow pupils with a more practical bent to thrive in a less academic (but ultimately more useful!) subject area"*

*Education professional*

Another respondent suggested creating two GCSEs in engineering and manufacturing, one which focused more on developing practical skills, and another which was a combination of the GCSEs in digital technology and engineering. The latter qualification would be more *"academic"* or *"technical"* in focus and would be more appropriate for learners who wished to study related subjects in higher education.

One respondent noted that the qualification would need to be carefully designed to ensure that it is not viewed as a *"drop out course"* and would remain attractive to higher ability learners. It was also believed to be important to promote it as equal to any other *"academic"* qualification to ensure good take-up among all learners.

Another respondent felt that the qualification could offer an alternative to GCSE Physics for learners who struggle with the high-level concepts in physics, or for those who are *"mechanically-minded"*, but struggle with some aspects of the sciences.

A few highlighted the need to offer an appropriate level 1/2 qualification in addition to the GCSE to accommodate lower ability learners and/or those who would struggle to meet the examination requirements or study a full GCSE. They said that the current Level 1/2 WJEC Engineering Award is inadequate and does not equip learners with the skills they needed to progress in the field.

### 8.2.5. Competition with and duplication of other qualifications

Respondents made a range of different points in relation to the proposed qualification's competition with, and potential duplication of, other, similar qualifications. A few noted that offering a GCSE in Engineering and Manufacturing would bring these disciplines on a par to qualifications offered in other Areas.

Some felt that the qualification would overlap too much with existing qualifications in this Area, meaning that schools would not be able to offer the full suite of qualifications to learners, and that existing qualifications would be overshadowed. The existing qualifications mentioned were GCSEs in built environment, mathematics and physics.

Pointing to the existing GCSE Design and Technology, one respondent felt that the proposed qualification was unnecessary because it would duplicate much of the engineering design content within this qualification whilst removing the opportunities for engineering design which many learners enjoyed.

A few respondents said that the qualification would overlap considerably with GCSE Design and Technology. Conversely, another felt that it should not replace GCSE Design and Technology, as the elements of each qualification appeal to learners with different skill sets.

There was some feeling that the qualification should be an additional option rather than replacing other qualifications in the Area. Some respondents who expressed this opinion said that existing qualifications, such as NVQs<sup>60</sup> and BTECs in engineering and manufacturing were already appropriate and appealed to learners. A few also questioned the need for the new qualification on this basis.

One respondent was doubtful about the success of the qualification, citing the creation and subsequent withdrawal of similar qualifications in the past. They felt that these qualifications did not provide learners with the experiences they wanted or needed and feared that the proposed qualification would be the same.

*"The problem with these qualifications is that there is a history of failed attempts - GNVQ<sup>61</sup> engineering, GNVQ manufacturing, intermediate and advanced. Another set of bureaucratic qualifications that had pupils spending more time filling out paperwork and providing evidence for performance criteria that did not enhance their experience. Don't fall into this trap"*  
*Education professional*

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<sup>60</sup> NVQ = National Vocational Qualification. NVQs are work-related qualifications which can be studied in schools, further education institutions, or workplaces. They are based on national occupational standards which describe what competent people in certain occupations should be able to do.

<sup>61</sup> The General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) was a certificate of vocational education in the United Kingdom. The last GNVQs were awarded in 2007.

### 8.2.6. Qualification design

Respondents commented on various aspects of how the proposed qualification could be designed.

As already noted, some respondents emphasised that the qualification would need to have a practical, *“hands-on”* emphasis, in line with most learners’ preferences. Others noted that learners should be given opportunities to observe and practice engineering and manufacturing in workshop and production settings rather than in classrooms.

When designing the qualification, there was some feeling that Qualifications Wales should consult with industry stakeholders and teachers across Wales to ensure that the qualification is based on the views of a representative sample of stakeholders.

Some felt that the qualification’s content should incorporate new developments in engineering and manufacturing to ensure that it reflects current industry practice, and that it should be flexible enough to be updated regularly to reflect progress made in these fields.

*“I totally agree with the need for more practical application of theory and engineering is a 4th industrial revolution area. It would, however, need to focus on the new developments in these fields in order to future proof learners’ skill/perception development”*

*Education professional*

One respondent was concerned that the proposed qualification would become too broad by attempting to cover all the different branches of engineering, making it *“far too broad to be meaningful”*. Making a similar point, another suggested that two or three qualifications should be created in this area rather than just one. They felt that the qualification could be similar to the existing NVQ in Performing Engineering Operations which is already offered in some schools and is popular with learners.

GCSE Design and Technology could be remodelled to incorporate a manufacturing specialism that could create an alternative pathway, according to one respondent. Many of the manufacturing skills could be integrated into a *“Design Technology GCSE learning experience”*, it was said.

Respondents also suggested that the proposed qualification should:

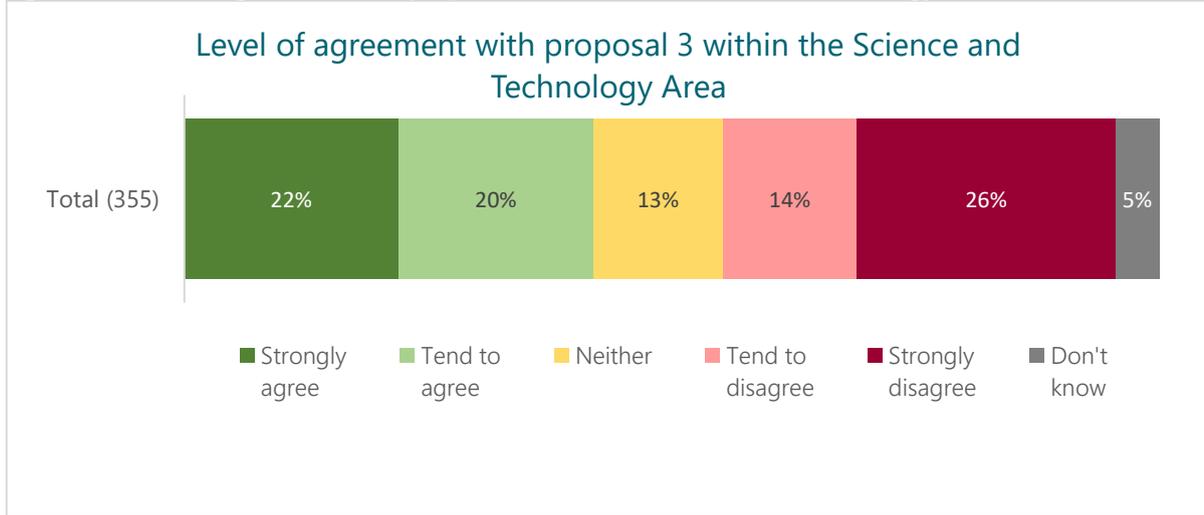
- Include advanced design content using mathematical modelling to accommodate more able learners and those who planned to pursue engineering in higher education.
- Enable learners to apply knowledge to real-life scenarios. This would maximise learner engagement, but would require careful consideration.
- Equip learners with the knowledge and skills to perform basic manufacturing operations, and to know tool names and uses.
- Explore how working drawings are created using 3D computerised design.
- Interrogate data or information for specific material properties.

- Apply physics to engineering, e.g., using formulae to work out bending movements and mechanical advantage.
- Be clearly set out, making links between the Mathematics and Numeracy and Science and Technology Areas.

### 8.3. Proposal 3

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a new GCSE Science qualification to replace the existing set of science GCSEs? This qualification is likely to be roughly the size of two GCSEs.

Figure 21: Level of agreement with proposal 3 within the Science and Technology Area



A total of 355 people responded to this proposal. Among all respondents, 42% agreed with the proposal and 40% disagreed, providing a fairly equal split in reactions. Disagreement was twice as likely among education professionals (49%) than among learners (22%), with parents and carers, and members of the public, falling between the two other groups.

Just 16% (57 people) of those who responded to this proposal provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below<sup>62</sup>.

#### 8.3.1. A common route through science

There was some support for reforming the existing science offer at GCSE - which was described as confusing and overly complex - as well as acknowledgement that not all learners across Wales have equal opportunities in science currently.

*"... We are aware that 20% of schools ... do not currently offer [an existing separate science qualification] across Wales. We, therefore, agree that there is no necessity for this suite of qualifications to be offered ..."*

*Other*

In light of this, the proposed new GCSE Science was viewed by some as a qualification that would benefit most learners while enabling those who wish to study additional qualifications to do so via the additional small science qualifications as discussed later in this section. It would also, it was said, ensure *"greater equality and consistency"* of

<sup>62</sup> Please note that some respondents made comments in reference to Proposal 4 in response to the question asking for their views on Proposal 3. These comments have been reported in the Proposal 3 section.

offer across Wales, and be simpler for schools to offer and for parents and carers, and future employers to understand.

*"I strongly agree with the proposal to hold one universal science qualification to make access to science qualifications fair for all pupils in all schools ..."*

*Education professional*

However, many concerns were expressed around the implications of the proposed changes. The main concern was that it has the potential to reduce learners' options and therefore could diminish their choice and schools' opportunities to offer qualifications that are tailored to learners' abilities and interests reflecting the ethos of the new Curriculum for Wales.

*"The different qualifications help students. Schools can choose what is best for their learners and personalise the curriculum which is the philosophy of the Curriculum for Wales"*

*Parent/carer*

### 8.3.2. Learners' progression, specialism, and skills

A particular worry was that a single GCSE Science would not allow learners to specialise and challenge themselves in a particular discipline.

Indeed, it was argued that separating the three science disciplines at GCSE (as per the current situation) allows learners and their teachers to identify and focus on their strengths and helps guide their A level choices.

*"... I think it would be better for the 3 sciences to be separate. Some people are brilliant at one science, but bad at the other two. I would much prefer to have the option to take my best science and do really well in it, than get a mediocre score in all 3"*

*Learner*

Conversely, a few respondents supported the introduction of the proposed GCSE Science because they felt a single route would ensure that all learners could access the same progression opportunities in science. Offering multiple science routes at GCSE level could narrow future study and work opportunities, it was said.

As alluded to above, some respondents were of the view that combining the sciences would disadvantage those with an aptitude for one or two of the sciences and not the other(s), and that an overall grade could mask academic excellence in particular disciplines. Respondents noted if a learner was to achieve an A, C and a D grade in the separate sciences they would currently be accepted onto an A level qualification in their A grade subject, whereas if their results were averaged (to BC or CC), they may not be.

*"... Some students may perform really well in a particular discipline, but badly in another; their qualification will show that they are an average student of science, when in reality they could be phenomenally brilliant at one subject, and terrible at another ..."*

*Education professional*

Some respondents suggested that separate GCSEs in the sciences provide the strongest foundation not only for further and higher education study, but also future

career opportunities – and that any move away from this will have the effect of dampening the enthusiasm of those seeking to work in scientific roles.

In particular, it was suggested that the proposed changes could be detrimental to Welsh learners by placing them at a competitive disadvantage (for both places in higher education and job opportunities) in comparison to their English and Scottish counterparts.

In relation to this, some respondents argued against the supposition that higher education institutions prefer breadth of knowledge to depth of knowledge and have no objection to accepting those who have not studied triple science at GCSE. Moreover, it was said that even were this to be true, some further education institutions are not so flexible.

*“... while it may (possibly) be true that universities don't mind accepting students who haven't studied triple science at school, some colleges and sixth forms are not so forgiving”  
Education professional*

A few respondents, though, agreed that breadth of knowledge is most important at GCSE level. The significant “*jump*” between GCSE and A level was raised, with some arguing that the proposed GCSE Science could exacerbate this and could lead to lower grades and/or “*drop-outs*” at A level as a result of a lack of depth at GCSE. Moreover, the fact the three science subjects are taught separately at A level was often given as a reason for maintaining the same distinctions at GCSE.

Indeed, even those who were supportive of the proposal urged careful consideration of - and consultation with relevant stakeholders on - the content of any new qualification to ensure it is sufficiently rigorous to enable the transition to A level, yet not too content-heavy that it becomes overly onerous to both teach and learn.

*“We applaud the proposal to replace the current diversity and inequality with a common approach. However, there are concerns about the level of expertise and progression to further post-16 qualifications<sup>63</sup>”  
Other*

### 8.3.3. Meeting the needs of all learners

Some respondents felt that the proposed GCSE Science would disadvantage learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), many of whom currently study single applied science at this level and could struggle with the demands of, and thus be excluded from, the proposed qualification in future.

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<sup>63</sup> “Rydym yn cymeradwyo'r bwriad i gyflwyno dull cyffredin yn lle'r amrywiaeth ac anghyfartaledd presennol. Fodd bynnag, mae pryderon ynghylch lefel yr arbenigedd a'r dilyniant i gymwysterau pellach ôl-16”

*"I do fear for the pupils who struggle with the demands of double award, they may get lost again, currently the single applied we utilise allows those learners in alternative provision and STF<sup>64</sup> to get a GCSE in science that opens more doors for them than a U grade in double"*  
*Education professional*

The exclusion of an applied science qualification from the proposal was a significant worry for some, who noted that it has become increasingly popular in schools and felt that it is of great benefit to those learners who tend to struggle with the demands of double science.

*"... We are currently in a position where many of our less able learners have been effectively disenfranchised by the GCSE double award science course because some topics are too difficult for them to understand and they are being completely demoralised by the style of questions they are having to face ..."*  
*Education professional*

All this has implications not only for ensuring that the proposed qualification meets the needs of all learners, but also for school's overall GCSE pass rates, according to some respondents. Learners with ALN, who could have achieved a grade in GCSE Applied Science (single award), are unlikely to do so in *"double award"*, some respondents felt.

With regard to *"single award"*, this (or a similarly accessible qualification) was again considered especially important for learners with ALN – as was the option for more content-focused learning and more varied assessment routes, traditional exams and/or BTEC-style portfolios.

*"... In essence we would have 1 or 2 GCSE sized qualifications, both either content or applied in nature and both assessed via exams or portfolio. This would allow pupils to follow a science-based qualification that they are interested in where the assessment model is not stacked against them"*  
*Education professional*

Learners in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were also mentioned by one respondent, who argued that they too see better results by focusing on one subject and would thus be disenfranchised by the introduction of the proposed GCSE Science.

Higher ability learners were also thought to be disadvantaged by not being able to specialise sufficiently in their chosen science discipline/s. To highlight this, one respondent noted the message from the PISA 2018 results, which was that, while Wales's middle and lower ability learners compare reasonably well with other countries for the sciences, its highest performing 10% of science learners underachieve compared with similar learners across countries which are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Specialist Teaching Facility = a unit which is usually attached to a mainstream primary or secondary school which provides specialist resources and staff to cater for learners with specific additional learning needs.

<sup>65</sup> The OECD is an international organisation that works to build better policies for better lives. 36 countries are currently members of the OECD, including the UK. Further details can be found at [OECD.org - OECD](https://www.oecd.org).

In essence, it was argued that:

*... How is one qualification that must be challenging enough to be suitable for those who will continue to study science post-16 going to also be accessible to students with a lower ability who do not wish to study science? I fear that, in an effort to be suitable for all, this qualification will neither prepare students enough for the challenges of a level or allow lower ability students to succeed ..."*

*Education professional*

Conversely, a few respondents felt that the proposed GCSE Science would help to make sure that all learners were able to study the same qualification, giving them equal opportunities. This included lower ability and higher ability learners, and those from both more and less affluent backgrounds, who do not currently have access to the same pathways and qualifications in science, it was said.

#### 8.3.4. "Dilution" of science

The fact that biology, chemistry, and physics are three separate (albeit related) disciplines that are quite different from each other was noted by some respondents, and their proposed combination at GCSE was viewed as something of a "dilution" or "devaluation" that would be disadvantageous to Wales' future scientists.

*"... Biology, chemistry and physics are all very different from each other at GCSE ... this proposal seems to be 'watering down' science as a whole, which will only be detrimental to the quality of scientists being produced by Wales"*

*Education professional*

One respondent, while agreeing on the importance of retaining the discreteness of the three disciplines as 'building blocks' within the curriculum and a means of judging learners' progress, was positive that the proposed GCSE Science would allow this. Another felt it would offer learners a valuable opportunity to see how each of the individual disciplines integrate to paint a wider picture.

*"... it is very important that subjects are ... assessed as discrete disciplines and not as Areas, which in my opinion have been poorly thought through ... I therefore very much welcome and support the proposal of a science GCSE, which incorporates the separate disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics ..."*

*Education professional*

A few other respondents who advocated the proposed qualification also cautioned that the individual science subjects should not lose their unique identities. Retaining the sciences' distinct identities would be essential to enable learners to make informed choices post-16, it was said.

### 8.3.5. Focus on science

Some respondents felt there is currently too much focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects at the expense of other subjects that are just as important. Indeed, a few respondents questioned the need for a compulsory science GCSE at all given some learners have no interest in it. This, it was said, would free up more options for these learners to study subjects in their spheres of interest.

*"Many pupils have no interest in science, and it is farcical that they're still being forced to do a '2 GCSE equivalent' course ... offer a smaller course to be completed in Yr 10, thus opening up the possibility of focusing on other (chosen) subjects (or work placements/apprenticeships) in Yr 11 ..."*  
Education professional

Others disagreed, suggesting that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that focusing on science in particular - as well as encouraging and nurturing those with an aptitude for it - is more important than ever.

*"... science has never been so highly valued as it has in 2020/2021. This is not the time to de-value its role in society or the curriculum with a single GCSE science qualification"*  
Other

For some, this can only be ensured through specialisation – and the fact that the number of learners studying triple science has increased in recent years was thought to indicate the success of this and the need to continue it as an option for those seeking careers in STEM. Moreover, one education professional said that increasing the number of learners undertaking triple award science has allowed their school to raise its overall performance standards.

*"... We have found that by using the science suite for our learners we have been able to maximise the pupils' attainment and the school's overall performance. We are now one of the highest achieving schools in our group in Wales. Surprisingly we have found that this has been achieved by increasing the numbers of triple students and reducing the proportion doing double ... "*  
Education professional

### 8.3.6. Implications for teachers and schools

It was suggested that proposed double award science would require fewer teaching hours than triple award, with the implication that fewer teachers may be needed in future. Moreover, some questioned whether the proposal would result in recruitment and retention issues as science teachers seeking to teach triple award may look toward schools in England – or leave the profession entirely.

*"... This proposal will impact recruitment and retention. Recruitment is already extremely difficult in science. Dumbing down and not enabling teachers to deliver what they have studied will have a detrimental effect ... many will leave the profession if these proposals are realised ..."*  
Education professional

One respondent was concerned whether teachers from Wales seeking posts in England would be at a disadvantage through a lack of recent teaching experience of the

separate sciences at GCSE level. The loss of learners on the Welsh borders to English schools with wider and more accessible specifications was also raised as a possibility.

*"We strongly disagree with this proposal because removal of the separate sciences is going to have an impact on intake and transfers between schools - especially schools on the border where nearby schools in England are offering the separate science qualifications ..."*

*Other*

A couple of respondents questioned whether schools would be able to choose alternative examination boards, suggesting that many would do so if it would allow them to retain the ability to teach the three sciences separately. This, it was said, would create a disparity between state and public schools as the latter are much more easily able to do so.

Other respondents noted that the proposed changes are neither required nor desirable at this time. This was largely because the existing qualifications are relatively new and take time to embed; and was linked to the amount of work involved with producing resources and materials.

More positively, there was some feeling that the proposed GCSE Science would be far easier for schools to administer, reduce reliance on specialist teachers, who can be hard to recruit, and reduce content, which was said to be too large for available teaching time in many schools.

The instability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was noted by one respondent, who suggested that significant changes such as those proposed should not be considered until schools are on a steadier footing.

*"... Has anybody actually considered the impact of bulldozing this through after 12+months of instability? It makes a mockery of all the time and effort for resources we have had to create to teach in this new era and is too much pressure in the current climate ..."*

*Education professional*

### 8.3.7. The need for further information and clarification

A few respondents were keen to understand more about the details and implications of the proposed changes, suggesting that they felt unable to properly comment on a proposal with so many unknown elements.

Most commonly, Qualifications Wales' phrase *"roughly the size of two GCSEs"* was questioned by those seeking to understand exactly what this would mean in practice and whether it would be understood by future employers. One respondent commented that any new qualification would have to be equivalent to at least two GCSEs given its likely breadth.

Some others also sought to understand the difference between the proposed GCSE Science and the current double award qualification, with some concern expressed that the proposal represents an unnecessary re-branding of a qualification that is no longer fit-for-purpose.

*"We are ... concerned that the content will ... just [be] a rebranding of the current double award science GCSE and not reflecting 21st century learning and pupil needs. The current specification ... really is dated, and content heavy with no real application or purposeful links to learners' lives, the world around them or society ... "*

*Other*

Other desired information was around how learning time would be split and delivered; and exactly what would be available to lower ability learners.

*" ... I feel the proposal is suitable for the ability range intended. However, it would have been nice to see initial thoughts on the type of level 1 qualification that will be proposed for science, in order to be able comment on suitability of assessment across the entire ability range ... "*

*Education professional*

### 8.3.8. Alternative suggestions

In terms of suggestions, some respondents said that they would only support the proposed GCSE Science if learners were also able to pursue *"triple award"* and *"single award"* alongside it. This, it was felt, would ensure higher ability and lower ability learners are able to follow a pathway that suits their abilities.

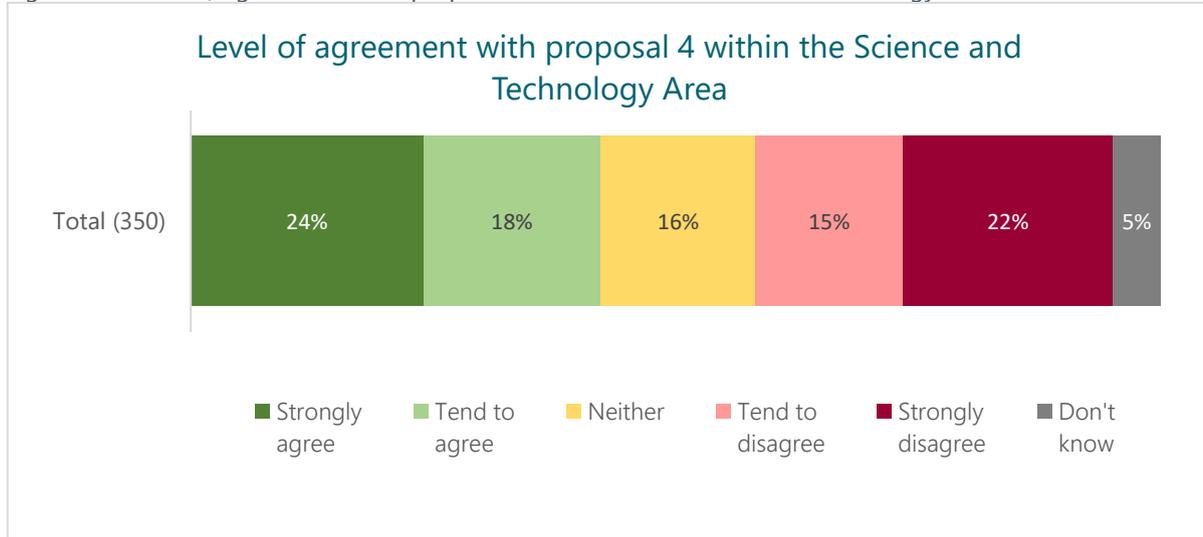
*"I think there should still be an option for learners to complete the more traditional separate science route. However, combining the existing suite of double/applied would be beneficial"*  
*Learner*

Other suggestions were: the inclusion of geology within the curriculum as a stand-alone discipline; a single GCSE Science equivalent to three GCSEs for higher ability learners; and introducing the option to undertake AS level science early for those with the appetite and aptitude for it.

## 8.4. Proposal 4

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to create a set of small science qualifications that can be taken in addition to the proposed new GCSE Science qualification? These units are likely to be equivalent in size to either one-third or two-thirds of a GCSE.

Figure 22: Level of agreement with proposal 4 within the Science and Technology Area



A total of 350 people commented on this proposal. Overall, 42% agreed with the proposal whilst 37% disagreed. Education professionals were less likely to agree (34%) and more likely to disagree (45%) than other sub-groups.

Just over half (51%, 180 people) of those who responded to this proposal provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

### 8.4.1. Timetabling and resources

The most prevalent concern raised in relation to the proposal for additional small science qualifications was that it would represent significant timetabling and staffing issues for schools. Indeed, even those who supported the proposal in principle shared this worry.

*"... No school in the country is equipped to run all of those courses so the students can choose their own program of study which is what I assume this is aimed at. It is impractical ... "*  
*Education professional*

With specific regard to timetabling, the accommodation of the proposed additional qualifications was frequently described as *"impossible"* – and some suggested that headteachers would be disinclined to offer much, if any, timetable space given they will not have GCSE status.

*"I do not see how this is possible in most state schools. Timetable allocations are tight and there is no opportunity to offer a full range of topics ... "*  
*Parent/carer*

Resourcing implications for schools in relation to the possible need for new equipment and staff development/training was also thought to be a consideration in introducing the proposed qualifications. Indeed, one respondent was keen to understand whether there would be a central bank of resources/guidance available to teachers to prevent them from having to *“reinvent the wheel”* in lesson planning.

On a related note, another respondent was particularly concerned that additional subjects that might require travel, equipment, additional time, or specialist teaching knowledge might not be offered to all learners, risking loss of outdoor learning and fieldwork opportunities and the ability to develop STEM skills in the context of the real world.

This, the respondent suggested, could have the unintended consequence of shutting down routes into green jobs and ecological careers for substantial numbers of learners. A few respondents anticipated that, as a compromise to overcome timetable difficulties to a degree, schools might select a set of additional small science qualifications to be aggregated into a whole GCSE to *“top up”* the proposed new single science qualification – a prospect welcomed by some in offering a manageable level of choice to learners, but not others who considered this to be triple award science by another name.

*“These units provide the potential for students to develop a much broader range of scientific interests. In reality, I expect that schools will select a set of qualifications that can be aggregated to give one GCSE grade and offer this as an option. If this aggregation is not possible, then I expect that uptake will be extremely low as schools will not offer the curriculum time ... ”*  
*Education professional*

#### 8.4.2. The size of the qualifications

There was some feeling that the idea of small qualifications would be confusing to learners, parents and carers, and employers, as well as scepticism that learners would value qualifications that yield only a third of a GCSE.

*“ ... Students won't choose a subject that is equivalent to half/two thirds of a GCSE over a subject that offers a qualification of a whole GCSE ... ”*  
*Education professional*

This, one respondent said, would make it difficult for any awarding body to offer the additional qualifications due to the small number of learners wishing to take them in Wales at any given time.

A further concern was that the proposed small science qualifications would not be recognised or viewed as credible by educational institutions and future employers. Again, the issue of learners from Wales being at a competitive disadvantage to their counterparts across the UK was raised in this context and it was considered essential that learners in Wales should have qualifications of equal value to their peers elsewhere in the UK.

*"Again, I am concerned that children from Wales competing for university spaces with children from England will be disadvantaged by an overly complex fragmentation of qualifications whose size and value are unclear"*

*Parent/carer*

#### 8.4.3. Meeting the needs of all learners

Another frequently raised issue was that this proposal would favour larger state and independent schools while disadvantaging smaller and/or rural schools with fewer teachers (especially specialists), leading to greater inequity of provision across Wales.

*"... School leaders in some settings, particularly small schools and those schools that lack specialist teachers, would find it impossible to offer the flexibility. It would also be difficult to ensure that units offered were tailored to the choice and interests of the learners and not driven by the teachers"*

*Other*

Moreover, the fact that different schools will have staff members specialising in different areas was thought to raise the risk of perpetuating the current inequality of offer across Wales that the proposed new GCSE Science is intended to overcome.

*"... With your previous proposal you want to remove the fact that many schools cannot offer the full suite of qualifications ... this will bring all that back ... "*

*Other*

Some respondents raised concerns that the proposed qualifications would simply replicate the inequalities currently associated with multiple GCSE pathways if, for example, completion of one or more additional qualifications becomes a pre-requisite of progression to post-16 study, and schools limit access to the qualifications based on attainment level. However, one of the respondents who expressed this opinion also said that:

*"... If the small set of qualifications can be designed and implemented in such a way that mitigates the problems outlined above, with the necessary support from the system, then we are not opposed to the principle of the proposals ... "*

*Other*

In terms of meeting the needs of all learners, a few respondents felt that the proposed qualifications would, in combination, be attractive and beneficial to lower ability learners if offered as an alternative to the proposed new GCSE Science. They worried, though, that the small qualifications would only be offered as additional qualifications to higher ability learners rather than as a substitute to traditional qualifications for lower ability learners.

*"... Could there be smaller units available for the weaker candidates so that they can reach a single GCSE award in science. This would bridge that gap for the lower achievers and give them a more impactful qualification rather than a double E grade or similar"*

*Education professional*

In the event that the proposed small qualifications would only be available as an add-on (rather than an alternative) to the new GCSE Science, a couple of respondents

suggested they should only be marketed at those wishing to proceed to A level in the sciences to prevent them being pursued by those who will likely struggle with their demands.

#### 8.4.4. Choice for learners

There was some support for the proposed additional small science qualifications on the grounds that they would offer learners more choice, flexibility, and a chance to further nurture their enjoyment and skills in particular (and non-traditional) areas of science, as well as better bridging the gap between GCSE and AS level.

*"I like the idea of smaller GCSEs in different subjects and gives people the chance to further their skills in a smaller section of that subject"*

*Learner*

Indeed, it was said that having the choice of additional qualifications would enable schools to tailor their curriculums, allowing learners to construct their own pathways into GCSE level and beyond based on their interests and ambitions.

Others, though, suggested that the proposal may in fact limit learner choice, as such a high proportion of science lessons within the overall timetables will impact other subjects.

*"A student taking this proposal, will have potentially 8/25 lessons of science in the week, with 15 lessons for Eng/Lit, Welsh and Maths. That will leave 2 lessons for other subjects, limiting flexibility and choice"*

*Other*

It was felt that issues around timetabling would restrict learner choice, particularly in light of the anticipated reluctance among headteachers to offer curriculum time to subjects worth less than a full GCSE. Some respondents were particularly worried that even if schools did offer the proposed additional small science qualifications, their teaching would simply be *"tagged onto"* combined science time, compressing timetables and not allowing learners sufficient time to immerse themselves in their chosen topics.

There was also some concern that this proposal would result in learners choosing their specialist options far too early, potentially adversely impacting their future educational and career opportunities.

*"... The smaller add ons ask pupils to know what they want to do in life already - they're 14, they don't, thus closing down options ... "*

*Education professional*

To mitigate against at least some of these issues, a few respondents suggested that the proposed additional small qualifications should be available to those who wish to pursue them, but not as formal options that limit choice elsewhere.

*" ... Shouldn't be an option in option choices as it takes away choice. The choices are so limited in schools anyway, that we need to give more choice instead of being so STEM focused in the option blocks"*

*Education professional*

#### 8.4.5. More information

Some respondents desired more information on this proposal. Without this, they felt unable to make a firm judgement on its merits. In particular, questions were asked around: expected teaching hours; exactly what the proposed additional small science qualifications would be worth; whether they could be aggregated to form a whole GCSE; and whether they will be nationally and internationally recognised qualifications.

*"More clarity is needed on the content structure. Are these qualifications stand alone or can they be combined for form a general science GCSE level qualification ... ? Will these qualifications actually be accredited and accepted by universities internationally?"*

*Education professional*

#### 8.4.6. The science "package"

Some respondents stressed the importance of the proposed additional small science qualifications if the proposal for the new GCSE Science is taken forward, particularly for those seeking to progress to A level and beyond. In fact, a few respondents were very enthusiastic about this aspect of the science "package".

*" ... if the units could be designed to be highly theoretical or highly practical / investigative then it would [outweigh] the narrowing of introducing a single science GCSE qualification. This area excites me and in my view should be the one explored and developed as much as possible ..."*

*Education professional*

Some respondents, though, again took the opportunity to criticise the proposed removal of the separate sciences option from the curriculum and urge the retention of the current suite of qualifications.

#### 8.4.7. Qualification design

A few respondents were of the view that the subjects proposed as "add-ons" - geology, climate change, natural history, and environmental science for example - should form part of the GCSE Science offer.

*"... The thematic examples stated are not actually themes but are either important science disciplines in themselves (geology and natural history ... ) and should be part of the main GCSE, or are topics that every learner in Wales should have an understanding of (e.g. space) ... "*

*Education professional*

Indeed, a few were of the view that if the proposed new GCSE Science is sufficiently robust and properly designed, the additional "add-ons" should not be required.

One respondent stressed that scientific thinking and experimenting should be covered in the new GCSE Science and not only in the small set of qualifications, as suggested by Qualifications Wales in its consultation – and that any assessment programme should

include assessment of understanding of, and ability in, practical work and appreciation of the impacts of chemistry on society.

#### 8.4.8. Additional/alternative suggestions

As alluded to earlier, some respondents suggested that schools should be permitted to combine the additional small science qualifications into whole GCSE “*packages*” or “*units*” for learners depending on available staff specialisms.

A few others again suggested that the ‘*add-ons*’ should form a compulsory rather than optional part of the GCSE Science offer - as follows, for example.

*Have you considered the possibility of offering a GCSE science qualification that is the equivalent of 1 GCSE and allowing schools to offer this as an option for their second ... I know my pupils in a rural area would love an option for an agriculture science aspect but instead of the second GCSE in science as that doesn't interest them ... making it an alternate option for ... pupils to engage in science is something schools will really want”*

*Education professional*

Other specific suggestions were: offering an optional extra GCSE comprising three choices from six modules; and the inclusion of further chemistry, physics and biology options for reasons of choice and consistency (i.e. every school being able to offer and teach them) – again possibly forming a stand-alone “*further or additional science*” qualification worth a whole GCSE for the most able learners.

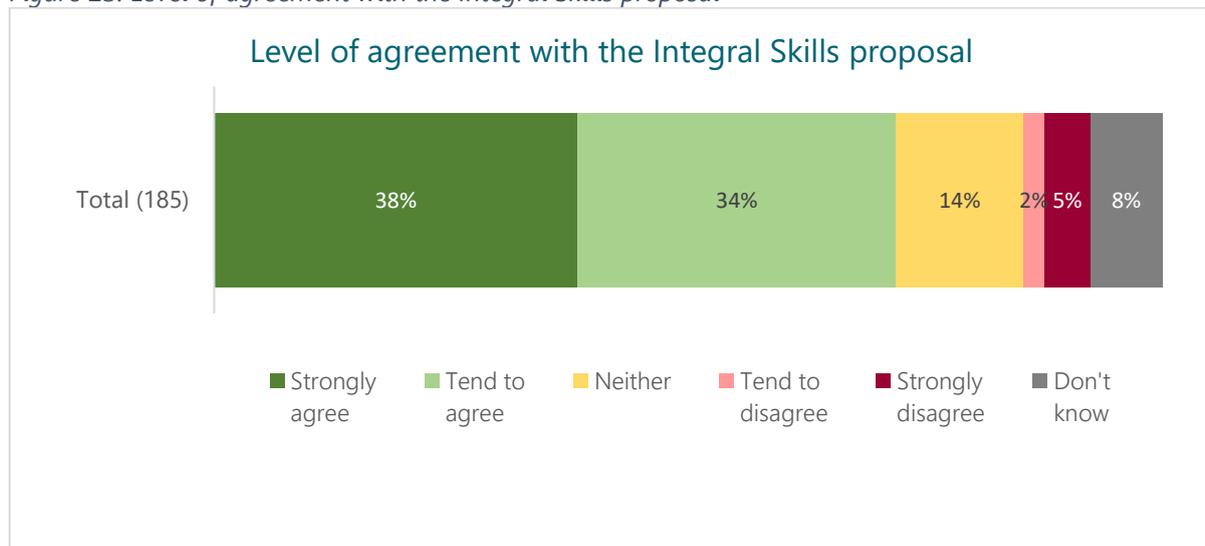
One respondent questioned whether the additional small science qualifications could be converted into a range of qualifications focused in specific areas, such as farming, laboratory/technician skills, medical science, astronomy, geology etc. This, they felt, would better cater to those not suited to a traditional GCSE Science.

## 9. Integral Skills

### 9.1. Proposal 1

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reform the Skills Challenge Certificate to make it simpler and more manageable, with a focus on assessing the Integral Skills of Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Personal Effectiveness and Planning and Organising?

Figure 23: Level of agreement with the Integral Skills proposal



A total of 185 people responded to this proposal. Among all respondents, over seven in ten (72%) agreed with the proposal. This rose to 75% among education professionals and to 92% among the parent / carer sub-group. It should be noted that overall responses to this proposal were lower than for most other proposals, with just 25 responses from parents and carers, and members of the public.

Four in ten (40%, 74 people) of those who responded to this proposal provided a written comment. The main themes identified in their comments are outlined below.

#### 9.1.1. The need to retain the Skills Challenge Certificate

Most of the written responses supported the proposal. Respondents supported the focus on and inclusion of these skills in the curriculum, considered the qualification to be valued by employers, and suggested that it is useful in highlighting the four purposes and their importance throughout the whole curriculum.

*“The focus on the integral skills supports young people’s ability for learning during compulsory education and helps to better prepare them for a smoother transition into post 16 learning / training / world of work and beyond. Integral skills readily map across to employability skills which employers have identified for many years as what they are looking for in their employees alongside any necessary academic qualifications for the job role / industry”*

*Other*

As well as lauding the qualification for its ability to meet the needs of all learners and for allowing transition to the new Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales, respondents felt that the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) promotes choice and supports learners to *“create their own paths”*. The SCC was also praised for giving learners the opportunity to practice research skills in their *“individual projects”*<sup>66</sup>.

Among those who agreed with the proposal, several explicitly stated the importance of maintaining the SCC as a qualification in its own right, seeing value in the focus on skills and because schools have recently invested in its delivery. A few respondents pointed out that this proposal represents the outcome of a recent consultation specifically about the Advanced SCC.

The arguments for reform largely focused on the perceived shortcomings of the current SCC, as follows.

### 9.1.2. Simplification

Several respondents felt that the current SCC needs to be simplified and made more manageable for learners and teachers alike, making it suitable for all learners but without losing the element of challenge. Some described it as *“onerous”*, for a variety of reasons; its size, being *“paperwork-heavy”* or *“bureaucratic”* and due to specific practical and safeguarding issues involved in meeting the Community Challenge component.

*“KS4 Pupils find it hard to find volunteering opportunities as they are legally underage and for larger schools this places extra stress and strain on school resources and time”*

*Education professional*

Some suggested that the Community Challenge should be dropped, others that it could be evidenced differently, for example with the use of time logs for hours spent supporting community activities. A few suggested replacing the Community Challenge with work experience.

*“Take out community and replace with work experience. Global and enterprise too much paperwork and not enough hands on. Make it more practical. Review the project, make it more realistic to life at their age”*

*Education professional*

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<sup>66</sup> The individual project is one of the components of the Skills Challenge Certificate qualification. Further information about the qualification and its components can be found here: [Qualifications Wales / Skills Challenge Certificate](#)

### 9.1.3. Repetition

A few respondents described elements of the current SCC as “*repetitive*” with duplication of skills and tasks meaning that learners lose interest in an otherwise useful qualification.

*“The qualification is a repetitive one which leads to a loss of motivation. We agree with the proposal to continue to revise and modify the qualification with an increased focus on the skills pupils acquire as they complete the learning and teaching program. The repetitive challenges lead to pupils losing focus on what is important, transferable and fit-for-purpose skills in preparation for further, higher education and the world of work”<sup>67</sup>*  
Education professional

### 9.1.4. Rebranding

Several respondents stated that the SCC needs “*rebranding*” although there were varied views on how this should be done. Some felt that learners, parents and carers, and employers do not currently understand the status or relevance of the SCC or the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc). One respondent argued that it needs to be seen as an equivalent qualification to GCSEs. One respondent felt that a re-branding should also involve a change of name, as the Welsh Bacc is poorly understood. Conversely, another voiced concern that the Welsh Bacc brand should not be lost.

*“This proposal does not appear to have been sufficiently developed to provide clarity on the status of the certificate within the wider system. In contrast to the decision to retain the GCSE brand, we are concerned that there is a danger of losing the Welsh Baccalaureate ‘brand’, without any specific consultation on the issue. We believe it could be a valuable name and model in the creation of a progressive qualifications system for Wales”<sup>68</sup>*  
Other

One respondent felt that the SCC is not currently taken seriously enough by schools, and not given sufficient time within the curriculum.

*“The skills challenge is a worthwhile qualification – it is just not given enough curriculum time and is therefore treated as a ‘pointless’ subject by parents and pupils. They don’t take it seriously because the schools don’t”*  
Education professional

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<sup>67</sup> “Mae'r cymhwyster yn un ail-adroddus sy'n arwain at ddisgyblion yn colli cymhelliant. Cytunwn gyda'r cynnig i barhau i ddiwygio ac addasu'r cymhwyster gyda ffocws gynyddol ar y sgiliau mae disgyblion yn meithrin wrth gwblhau'r rhaglen dysgu ac addysgu. Mae'r heriau ail-adroddus yn arwain at ddisgyblion yn colli ffocws o'r hyn sy'n bwysig sef sgiliau trosglwyddadwy sy'n addas i bwrpas wrth baratoi am addysg pellach, uwch a byd gwaith”

<sup>68</sup> “Nid yw'n ymddangos fel petai'r cynnig hwn wedi'i ddatblygu'n ddigonol i allu rhoi eglurder ynghylch statws y Dystysgrif o fewn y system ehangach. Mewn gwrthgyferbyniad â'r penderfyniad i gadw'r brand TGAU, pryderwn bod yna beryg o gollu 'brand' Bagloriaeth Cymru, a hynny heb unrhyw ymgynghori penodol ar y mater. Rydym o'r farn y gallai fod yn enw a model gwerthfawr wrth fynd ati i greu system gymwysterau flaengar i Gymru”

### 9.1.5. Assessment

Some respondents mentioned assessment as being the aspect of the SCC most in need of reform, as it contributes to the perception of the qualification being “onerous”. One respondent suggested that it could be assessed purely through digital work.

A few others also petitioned for a complete rethink of both content and assessment, in order to refresh the qualification.

*“Please come up with something that is fresh and new and exciting and that is fit for the real world. You could design 6 assessments that are about communicating, using digital tools to interpret data to make decisions based on scenarios. We do not need to keep having antiquated written test papers – the real world is rapidly changing, youngsters will need to be adaptable, to be able to communicate globally and to interpret data. Please be forward thinking to support all learners to realise the four purposes”*

*Education professional*

### 9.1.6. Other suggested revisions

Those who supported the proposal made several other suggestions as to how the qualification could be reformed. A few suggested that the SCC could be combined with the Health and Well-being Area, or with human rights education.

*“I think the SCC subject should have useful working skills and Health and Wellbeing combined”*  
*Learner*

Others suggested that it should be made optional, claiming that Welsh Government’s current universal adoption policy makes the subject unpopular. Conversely though, one respondent aired their concern that the subject might be treated as a ‘bolt-on’ and that schools would not deliver it in a way that promotes creativity.

One respondent suggested that the pre-GCSE curriculum could be developed to support the recognition and understanding of the skills assessed in the SCC.

*“Creativity and innovation as an integral skill could be incorporated into a pre-GCSE foundation for every child based on communicating effectively, listening, applying creativity to solve challenges. There is scope to develop a framework similar to the Duke of Edinburgh Award, tailored to these skills and introduced at the right stage in a learner’s journey it could present a chance to equip our young people with these skills early in life, to help fulfil their potential so that Wales can shape a citizenship model which supports the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act”*

*Other*

### 9.1.7. Disagreement with assessing skills as a separate qualification

Some respondents disagreed with the proposal, either suggesting that the SCC be dropped altogether, or that the outcomes should be delivered across the other Areas.

*"I would question the need for this certificate now, as the holistic skills should be embedded in all areas across the curriculum. They are skills that need to be developed as a whole school. If there is a separate qualification, it may mean that not all areas fully take on this responsibility."<sup>69</sup>*  
Other

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<sup>69</sup> *"Byddwn i yn cwestiynu yr angen bellach am y tystysgrif hwn, gan y dylsai y Sgiliau Cyfannol gael eu gwreiddio ym mhob Maes ar draws y cwricwlwm. Maent yn sgiliau sydd angen eu datblygu fel ysgol gyfan. Os oes cymhwyster ar wahân, efallai y bydd yn golygu nad yw pob maes yn ymgymryd â'r cyfrifoldeb hwn yn llwyr"*

## 10. Impact Assessment

When developing the proposals in the consultation, Qualifications Wales considered the impacts that each proposal could have. The online survey asked whether there are any additional steps Qualifications Wales could take to reduce the impacts they identified. It also asked questions about the impact of the proposals on individuals or groups with protected characteristics; on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language; and in relation to treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. The online survey also asked whether the proposals could have any other positive or negative impacts.

### 10.1. Impact question 1

In relation to the impacts that we have identified, are there any additional steps that we could take to reduce potential negative effects?

A total of 99 respondents provided written comments in response to this open question. Some of the comments were repeated from earlier sections or did not directly address the question and are not included here. This section presents comments specifically concerning steps that could be taken to reduce the potential impacts.

#### 10.1.1. Ensure that qualifications meet the needs of all learners

Many respondents believed that the proposals should result in qualifications that meet the needs of all learners, including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Specific suggestions included:

- Creating entry level qualifications with appropriate progression pathways for lower ability learners in all subjects, not just in “*core subjects*”.
- Introducing tiered and ongoing assessment to reduce anxiety caused by exams.
- Making more use of practical qualifications and apprenticeships, moving away somewhat from the current focus on written exams.
- Including specific reference to the obligations of schools to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 to increase a learner’s interaction in an inclusive environment within qualification guidance.
- Paying more attention to neurodiversity diagnosis to ensure that learners’ education is properly assessed as, it is argued, a lack of understanding is damaging mental health and future prospects.

*“I think you need to consider that children with neurological differences are different in lots of ways and that many are as intelligent as any other child, however the current set of GCSE[s] would prevent them gaining qualifications that would benefit them or show how good they are”*  
Education professional

### 10.1.2. More consideration of teachers' workloads

Many respondents would like to see a reduction in workload for teachers. In particular, they would like fewer changes to syllabuses, which involve large amounts of work. They also call for greater certainty and early notice of forthcoming changes, allowing staff time to prepare.

*"Allow schools plenty of time to prepare, don't produce draft guidance that is likely to be significantly changed"*  
*Education professional*

### 10.1.3. A greater focus on teacher-based assessments

Some respondents would like to see a system that places less pressure on young people by reducing the impact of exams upon them. A few of those who expressed this opinion believe that teacher-led assessments, as proposed by the Tomlinson report<sup>70</sup>, would be more appropriate, and fear that the current, "archaic" system where teaching is directed at exam success will not change under the current proposals.

*"Wholly absent in these proposals, is the place of teacher assessments and the effect or influence they would have upon the GCSEs as outlined. It would, therefore, appear from these proposals, that once again the examination has primacy in advance of any discussion about what makes good assessment and indeed the very fundamental question of what assessment actually is. In other words, we are starting from the endpoint rather than from exploring the richness of the new curriculum"*  
*Education professional*

### 10.1.4. Wider and more timely engagement and consultation

A few respondents felt that the consultation should not have been undertaken during the pandemic. Others felt that the consultation process did not encourage enough debate and input.

*"A much wider conversation is required before any discussion about qualifications. This consultation is narrow in scope and myopic in range. Indeed, the conscious bias in entitling the proposals as "The Right Choice for Wales" clearly directs the respondent/s to agree with the contents. The very questions do not allow for debate or a conversation other than agreeing or disagreeing"*  
*Other*

Some respondents believed that teaching staff should be more engaged in future consultations relating to qualification reform on an ongoing basis to ensure that the new Curriculum for Wales offers a new approach to delivering qualifications and progress to the four purposes. One respondent also suggested involving higher education institutions.

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<sup>70</sup> The Tomlinson Report (2004) presented the findings of a working group set up by UK government ministers to advise on the reform of curriculum and assessment arrangements for 14-19 year-olds. The full report can be accessed [here](#).

*“Negative impacts from your proposals will be that secondary teachers see no change in the GCSEs, and we will continue with a broken system that is failing most of our youngsters. Therefore, in order to avoid this - it will be necessary to engage with the teachers/people involved in writing Curriculum for Wales ... This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to educate our youngsters for the 21st Century and this must be grasped. The proposals are merely a tweaking round the edges. We need practitioners in school to see that there is a paradigm shift”*  
*Education professional*

#### 10.1.5. Impact assessment and ongoing monitoring for any disproportionate impacts of the proposals on learners with protected characteristics

One respondent observed that the consultation did not present any findings on the impact assessment undertaken and neither had it identified any specific impacts or equality issues. They would like further, detailed equality impact assessments to be carried out before any changes are made. In particular, they would like to see potential impacts of the proposed changes to the GCSEs in English and Welsh language and literature, the Welsh language qualifications, the qualifications in the Mathematics and Numeracy Area, smaller qualifications, GCSEs in international languages, and the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC).

*“Data analysis of patterns of take up and attainment should make it possible to determine whether there is likely to be any disproportionate impact on any ethnic group, sex, religious group, disabled people or learners eligible for free school meals ... The ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the changes is a requirement and Qualifications Wales should continue to consider all relevant information to ensure the impact matches with what was anticipated and take relevant action where this is not the case”*

*Other*

Another respondent highlighted the link between socio-economic status and educational attainment and called for qualifications to be designed to limit adverse impacts upon learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. This respondent wanted to see fair access to the redesigned GCSEs, the SCC and other qualifications. They recommended the production of explicit guidance to ensure that changes to qualifications support the aim of reducing attainment gaps, which may be particularly relevant where assessment is undertaken by staff based in schools.

#### 10.1.6. Ensure appropriate resources, equipment, and software

Some respondents highlighted the need for Welsh-medium and English-medium guidance and teaching resources to be released simultaneously. A particular need identified by one respondent was equality of access to computer equipment and software in schools, particularly for qualifications in the Expressive Arts Area. They believe, however, that investment in expensive software should not be a requirement for new qualifications or for learners to succeed in a subject.

*“The software pupils use on Hwb (which is already impressive and a go-to place for pupils) should be enough for pupils to achieve the very best marks at GCSE. This negates heavy investment from schools and individuals ... a heavy investment made by a school for software may become useless if viable numbers two or three years later are not met. Also, pupils need KS2 & 3 time to learn the software ... updating software can be costly too. These are all valid considerations which can often prevent a school offering a specific option or pupils taking them”*  
Education professional

#### 10.1.7. Suggestions in relation to GCSEs

A few respondents criticised the consultation because they felt that it promoted the existing suite of GCSEs, and that the proposals outlined would not adequately achieve the ambitions of the new curriculum. A respondent referred to the independent review of the summer 2020 arrangements to award grades and considerations for summer 2021 (as defined previously) in which the opportunity to *“rethink assessment and examinations”* was highlighted, to *“meet the needs of all learners in Wales”*. One respondent felt that fewer GCSEs should be offered.

#### 10.1.8. Ensure that the proposals promote equity in access to qualifications across Wales

A few respondents highlighted issues of inequality of access across Wales which they would like to see addressed. Specifically, they noted that the proposed small qualifications risk being offered in some areas and not others, or even in place of GCSEs.

The proposal not to develop a made-for-Wales GCSE Dance could *“close down an option that could have a positive impact for disabled learners and those from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds”*, it was said.

One respondent called for fair competition between WJEC and other awarding bodies to enable learners in Wales to access the same choice of qualifications as their peers in England, so that they are not disadvantaged compared with them. A few felt that requiring all qualifications to be available in Welsh limits access to qualifications outside Wales, especially for subjects with low take-up. They stated that this is disadvantageous to Welsh learners.

A few respondents wanted to see the same availability of qualifications for Welsh learners studying through the medium of Welsh as through the medium of English; therefore, they agreed with Qualifications Wales that all made-for-Wales qualifications should be available in Welsh.

Another respondent feared that learners in smaller schools would not be able to access the same range of qualifications as their peers in larger schools because smaller schools do not have the same numbers of specialist staff to deliver the full range of qualifications.

*"I think that smaller schools will be significantly disadvantaged - and the pupils in them - if you broaden the options too greatly, they simply will not be able to offer wide ranges of subjects"*  
*Education professional*

#### 10.1.9. Consider the implications of the proposals for post-16 education

The impact of the proposals on GCSE resits in mathematics, English or Welsh seems not to have been considered in the proposals, according to one respondent. They expressed concerns over accommodating re-sits within existing further education institutions' timetables, and felt that to accommodate re-sits, they may need to offer other qualifications instead of GCSEs.

*"... they are usually looking for progression onto other courses and it may be that FE would need to look at the suitability of ESW<sup>71</sup> suite of qualifications as the route onto L2 or L3 quals as opposed the 1.5 GCSE route"*

*Education professional*

One respondent working in post-16 education was concerned over the impact that the restructuring of GCSEs will mean for A levels.

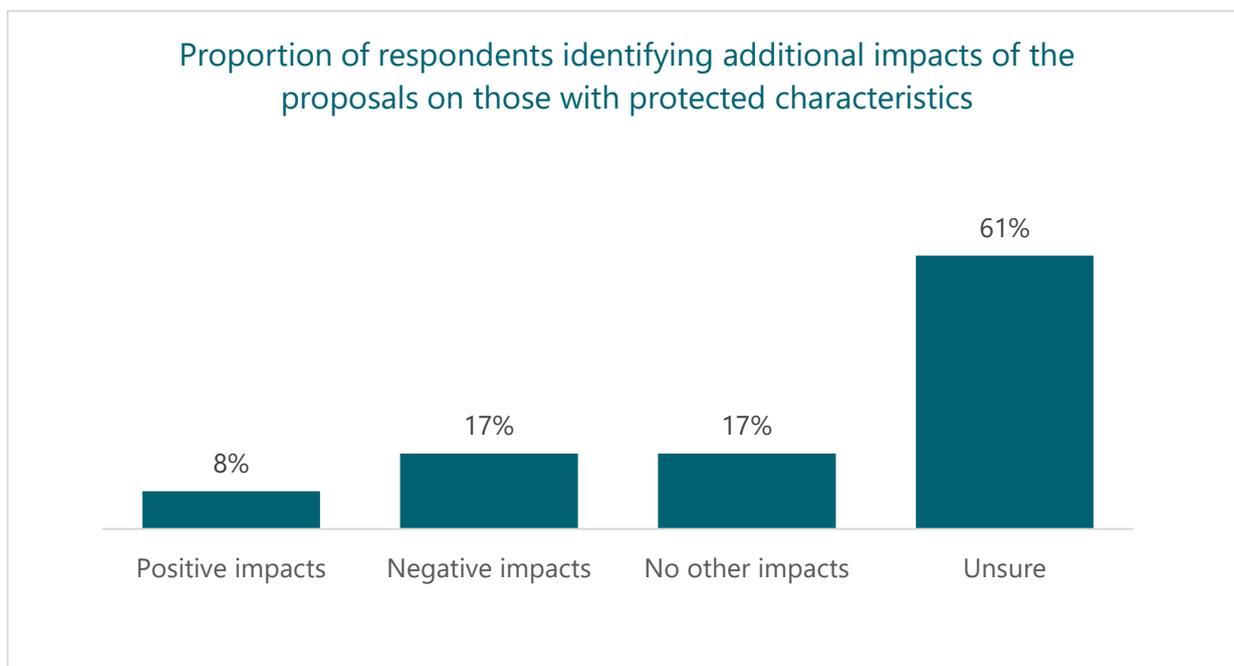
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<sup>71</sup> ESW = Essential Skills Wales. Essential Skills Wales qualifications are offered by the Welsh Joint Education Commission (WJEC), Agored Cymru, Pearson, and City and Guilds to assess the range of skills that learners need for successful learning, employment, and life. More information can be found [here](#) on WJEC's website.

## 10.2. Impact question 2

Are there any other positive or negative impacts for individuals or groups who share protected characteristics that we have not identified?

Figure 24: Proportion of respondents identifying additional impacts of the proposals on those with protected characteristics



A total of 190 respondents answered this question. Eight percent believed there were additional positive impacts, and 17% believed that there were additional negative impacts. It should be noted that respondents could identify both positive and negative impacts. Three in five (61%) said that they were unsure whether there were any other positive or negative impacts, whilst a further 17% said that there were no other impacts.

A total of 30 respondents provided written comments in response to this question. The key themes outlined in their feedback are discussed below.

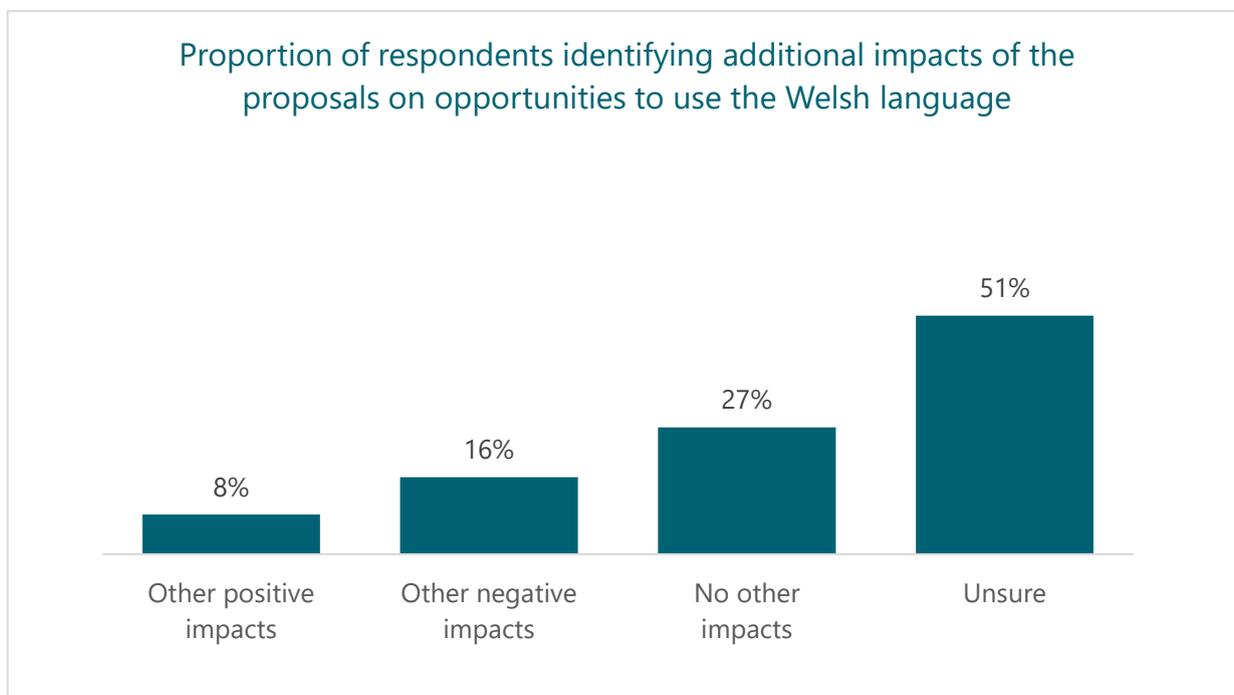
- Many respondents felt that the proposals would disadvantage lower ability learners, most notably through the lack of level 1 or entry level qualifications in English, the larger size of some of the proposed qualifications, the proposed combining of GCSEs in Welsh language and literature and English language and literature, and proposals within the Science and Technology Area.
- It was suggested that learners with impairments or disabilities leading to more absence would find it more difficult to catch up when studying the combined GCSEs. Lower ability learners, it was said, would also struggle with the challenging content of the combined GCSE in Welsh.

- Some respondents felt that the proposals would help to meet the needs of lower ability learners by offering qualifications which are assessed on-line, integrated skills approaches, and a greater breadth of learning afforded by the proposed changes to qualifications within the Science and Technology Area.
- The need to ensure that all qualifications offer appropriate challenge for learners of all abilities was raised, with a wish to avoid the risk that some qualifications are seen to be more *"academic"* than others.
- A few respondents highlighted the need to ensure that the proposals did not create new barriers or fail to remove existing barriers for learners from less affluent backgrounds, especially in relation to qualifications in chemistry and physics, which tended to be studied by learners from more affluent backgrounds, it was said.
- Some respondents felt that the proposals did not go far enough to ensure that qualifications in Wales would achieve positive change and be suitable for learners with protected characteristics, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- As noted elsewhere in this report, GCSE History was again said to lack wider representation of the perspectives of those of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) heritage.

### 10.3. Impact question 3

Are there any positive or negative impacts on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language that we have not identified?

Figure 25: Proportion of respondents identifying additional impacts of the proposals on opportunities to use the Welsh language



A total of 189 respondents answered this question. Sixteen percent said that there were other negative impacts, and 8% said that there were other positive impacts. It should be noted that respondents could identify both positive and negative impacts. Around half (51%) said that they were unsure whether there were any positive or negative impacts and around one in four (27%) said that there were no other impacts.

Thirty-two respondents provided written comments in response to this question. The key themes from their feedback are outlined below. Some of the comments received did not directly answer the question. These comments have been omitted from the analysis; only those which directly related to the question have been included.

- Some respondents felt that learners from Welsh-medium schools could be disadvantaged by Wales' over-reliance on qualifications designed for England which are not always available through the medium of Welsh. It was therefore suggested that all qualifications should be made available equally in Welsh and English as required.
- Some respondents made suggestions for how the proposals could increase opportunities to use the Welsh language. These included immersing learners in Welsh literature to help with their general development; ensuring that the Welsh language is integrated throughout the entire curriculum; and

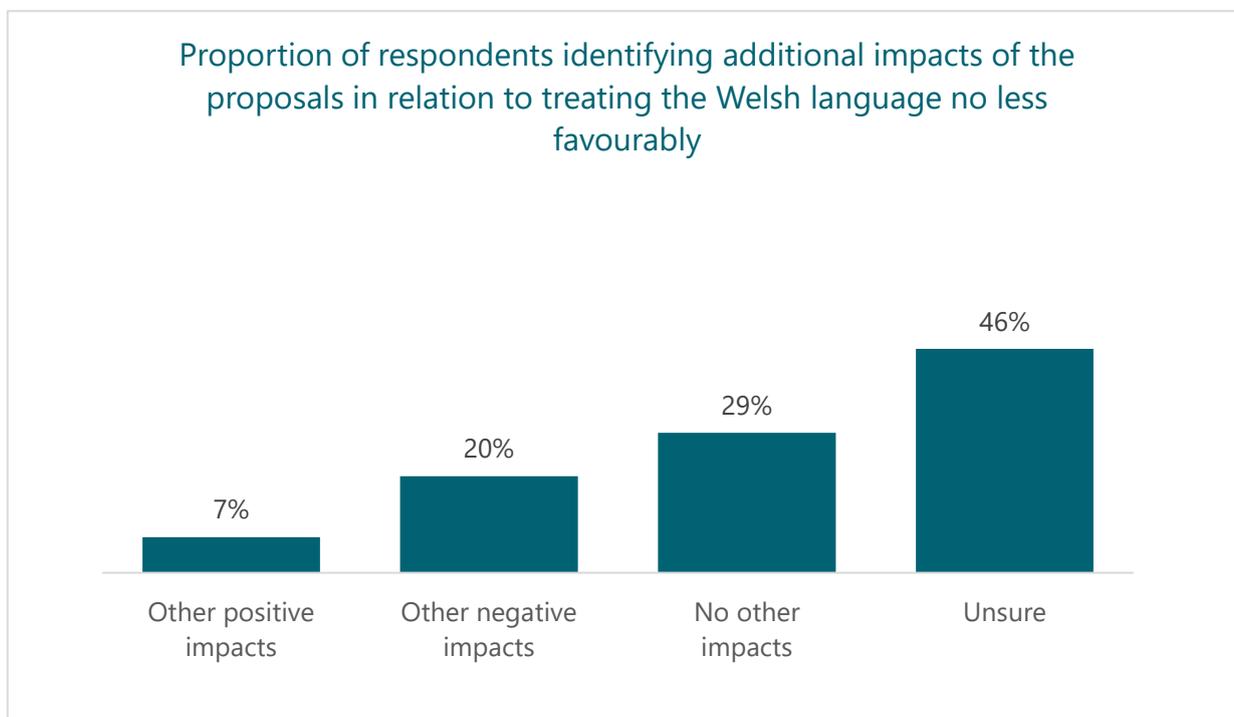
emphasising that the proposed qualifications are designed specifically for Wales.

- A few respondents said that they would welcome the introduction of a Welsh-medium integrated Expressive Arts qualification along with a suite of small Welsh language qualifications for post-16 learners.
- A respondent also questioned whether new language skills would include mediation and translanguaging.

#### 10.4. Impact question 4

Are there any positive or negative impacts in relation to treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language that we have not identified?

Figure 26: Proportion of respondents identifying additional impacts of the proposals in relation to treating the Welsh language no less favourably



A total of 191 respondents answered this question. Seven percent identified additional positive impacts whilst 20% identified additional negative impacts. Just under half (46%) said that they were unsure whether there were any positive or negative impacts whilst a further 29% said that there were no other impacts.

Thirty-five respondents provided written comments in response to this question. The key themes from their feedback are outlined below. Most of the comments received did not directly answer the question. These comments have been omitted from the analysis; only those which directly related to the question have been included.

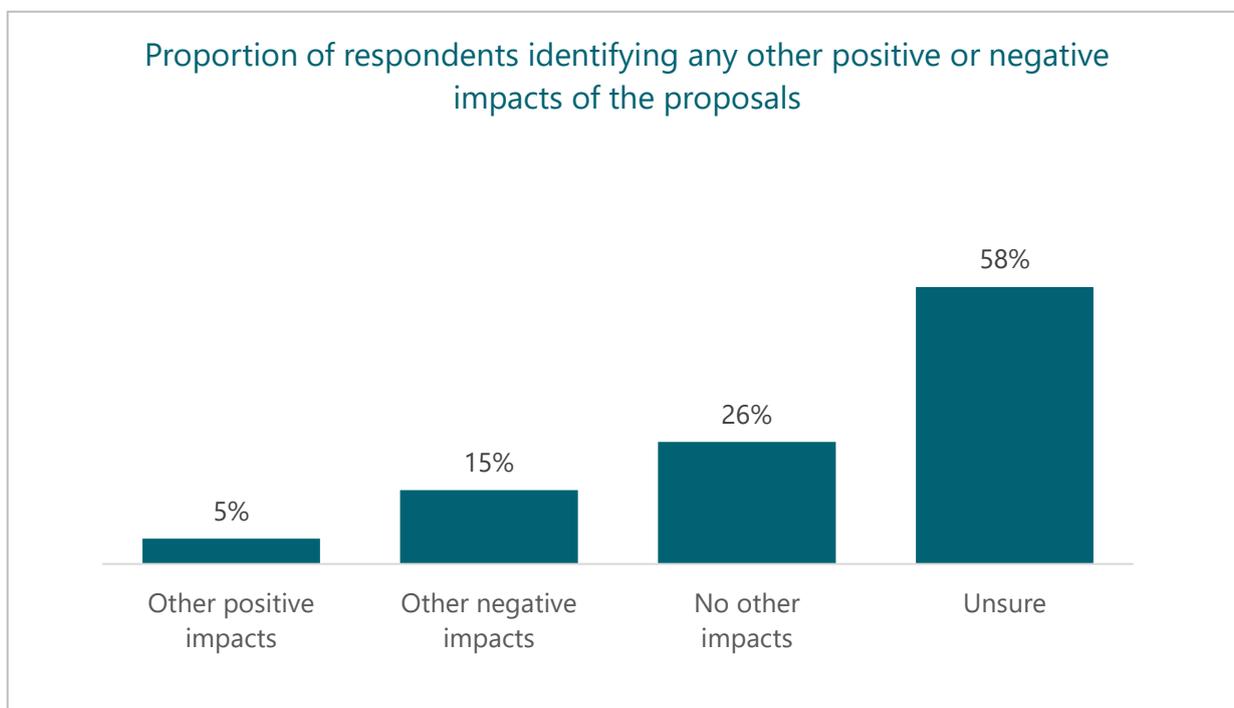
- Two respondents identified additional positive impacts on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. They said that the proposals would positively impact on, and secure respect for the Welsh language by securing an equal, coherent, and bilingual choice of qualifications for 14–16-year-olds.
- As noted in relation to multiple proposals and elsewhere in the impact question responses, there was some feeling that over-reliance on qualifications designed for England would disadvantage learners in Welsh-medium schools.

- Qualifications through the medium of Welsh and English and any supporting teaching and learning resources should be developed alongside each other and be available at the same time, according to a few respondents.
- A few respondents felt that the Welsh language proposals within the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area could lead more learners in Wales to opt for English-medium over Welsh-medium schools.

## 10.5. Impact question 5

Are there any other positive or negative impacts that we have not identified?

Figure 27: Proportion of respondents identifying any other positive or negative impacts of the proposals



A total of 188 respondents answered this question. One in four (26%) did not think there were any other impacts. Five per cent identified other positive impacts and 15% identified other negative impacts. Almost three in five (58%) were unsure whether there were any unidentified impacts.

Twenty-four respondents provided written comments in response to this question. The key themes from their feedback are outlined below.

One respondent highlighted positive impacts: increased collaboration between staff, sharing of good practice, and reinforcement of key skills for learners. All other comments highlighted negative impacts, which are summarised below.

- A few respondents felt that the proposals did not align closely enough with the new Curriculum for Wales. They were concerned that education in Wales will not improve unless all learners can access suitable qualifications and pathways which realise the purposes and principles of the new Curriculum.
- One respondent felt that the proposals would cause *“learning to the test”* rather than learning for enjoyment and context diversity, and that they would create narrow choices that limit options too early rather than fostering broad learning. This respondent argued instead for a system of assessment that allows for a description of attainment across a wider range of skills, knowledge, and

experiences. This could be achieved by implementing a more flexible model, like the Skills Challenge Certificate, that allows learners to study a wide range of subjects whilst at the same time being able to develop specific interests in more detail, it was said.

- Some respondents were concerned that combining subjects would dilute them and cause them to lose their individual identities.
- Some argued that removing GCSEs in separate sciences and replacing them with the proposed GCSE Science would prevent learners from achieving a higher GCSE in one science; limit learner options in science; lead to staff losses; and ultimately lower engagement with science.
- The future of dance provision for learners aged 14 and over was a particular concern for one respondent who highlighted a number of access and equalities-related issues if learners could not access dance at school: limiting opportunities for Welsh learners to study dance post-16; disadvantaging female and economically disadvantaged learners; and favouring learners in south Wales where private dance provision is more accessible than in north Wales.
- A respondent also called for careful consideration of reviewing and reforming GCE/level 3 qualifications, in light of the proposed changes to GCSEs, and a need to fully consider the impact of the proposals on the post-16 sector.
- A few also criticised the consultation approach, stating that the consultation questions did not allow sufficient debate.
- One respondent was concerned that small schools would be unable to offer the full range of qualifications proposed because they have fewer teaching staff.
- One respondent criticised the proposal to secure made-for-England qualifications for Wales in subjects that attract low numbers of learners, such as dance, multi-disciplinary Expressive Arts, BSL, and Health and Well-being. They stated that the financial implications of creating made-for-Wales qualifications in these subjects should not be the most important factor driving their development. Similarly, another respondent emphasised that learners in schools in Wales would be disadvantaged by made-for-England qualifications and that they would overlook local learning experiences.
- The need to ensure that the proposals result in qualifications that meet the needs of all learners was raised by another respondent.
- Finally, one respondent felt that schools should be able to design their own local assessments and qualifications, drawing on current and past good practice (e.g. Agored Cymru and the former Certificate of Secondary Education [CSE]), and involving local communities, stakeholders, and experts in learning.

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