



**Qualified for the future**



# Qualified for the future

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## Foreword by Chair and Chief Executive

This is the first in a series of consultations called 'Qualified for the future' that we are running over the next two years. The proposals we make aim to underpin our work of reshaping qualifications to complement the new curriculum for Wales.

GCSEs have only recently been reformed, but the new curriculum provides an exciting opportunity to re-think what we want exams for 16-year-olds to look like. This consultation is an important first step where we set out principles to guide our work and present important proposals to shape the range of qualifications available to schools and learners.

Overall, we believe there is a strong case to look at the range of qualifications and subjects so that we can be sure they relate directly to the curriculum and its aims. We expect to slim down the number of qualifications so that there is a coherent and comprehensive range that is simple to navigate and understand. We want to ensure this range has something for everyone, whatever their abilities, across academic disciplines and vocational contexts.

In this consultation, we describe the current range of qualifications available to schools and set out our vision for the future. We are seeking views on the principles we intend to apply, including a much stronger position on our requirements for qualifications to be available through the medium of Welsh and English. We also want your views on what we will call qualifications taken at 16, and our proposal for a specific qualification to assess skills.

Our work over the coming years will culminate in new qualifications ready for first teaching for 14-year-olds in September 2025. Achieving this will require continued involvement from a wide range of stakeholders. We welcome your views and urge you to respond to this important consultation. We will publish a report summarising your responses and our advice to Welsh Ministers next spring. Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us.

# 1. Introduction

## Our role

- 1.1. Qualifications Wales is the independent regulator of awarding bodies offering qualifications in Wales, including GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications.
- 1.2. One of our functions is to decide which qualifications can be made eligible for public funding. We list all qualifications that are eligible for public funding in Wales on our website<sup>1</sup>.

## Focus of this consultation

- 1.3. Education in Wales is embarking on a significant period of change. At the centre of these changes is a new and innovative curriculum for learners aged 3 to 16. In this consultation, we look at how future qualifications can best support the introduction of the new curriculum and help to realise its ambition.
- 1.4. We are also looking ahead at how the qualifications taken at 16 can continue to adapt and respond to future needs, including greater use of digital technology and the growth of Welsh medium and bilingual provision.

**Our vision is that 16-year-olds take globally respected qualifications that inspire and prepare them for life, learning and work.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.qiw.wales/>

1.5. Achieving our vision and developing our approach to future qualifications will require a collective effort with input from all stakeholders with an interest in the education system. We will seek the views of these stakeholders through a series of engagement, research and consultation activities.

1.6. This consultation is about working together so that everyone can play their part in shaping the future qualification offer. We want to hear from:

- learners
- parents and carers
- education professionals
- schools and other pre-16 learning providers
- further education colleges
- training and work-based learning providers
- universities
- initial teacher training providers
- employers and their representative bodies
- local authorities
- regional education consortia
- teaching unions
- awarding bodies, and
- any other organisations or individuals operating in, or with an interest in the education sector.

## **Proposals at a glance**

1.7. In this consultation, we are seeking views on key aspects of our approach to determining the qualifications that will be made available to 16-year-old learners to support the new curriculum for Wales. In particular, we outline our proposals to:

- establish a set of principles to shape how we will decide which qualifications taken at 16 are eligible for public funding;
- redesign GCSEs so that they form a central part of the qualification offer for 16-year-old learners in Wales; and

- include a specific qualification that supports the development and assessment of the wider skills defined in the new curriculum as part of the qualification offer.
- 1.8. Our approach to developing these proposals is in line with the sustainable development principle<sup>2</sup> outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and our objectives in relation to this Act<sup>3</sup>.
  - 1.9. For example, we have spoken to a wide range of stakeholders through a comprehensive programme of engagement and research and have considered the potential impact of our proposals for people living in Wales, both now and in the future. We will continue to monitor our progress against our objectives as any new qualifications are developed.
  - 1.10. Further information on who we have engaged with to date and the working assumptions we have adopted when developing the proposals is outlined in Annex A.
  - 1.11. For each proposal, we ask if you agree or disagree with the proposal and offer you an opportunity to explain your views. In relation to our proposals to redesign GCSEs and to include a specific qualification that supports the development and assessment of wider skills, we also ask you to provide suggestions for how these qualifications could be designed to meet our vision, and the aims and purposes of the new curriculum. We have included the relevant consultation questions following each proposal in this document.
  - 1.12. We have separately published an [Integrated Impact Assessment](#). In section 8 of this document, we ask for your views on the impact of our proposals, including any impact on the Welsh Language and individuals or groups with protected characteristics<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The sustainable development principle outlines five ways of working that public bodies should follow to achieve the well-being goals of the Act. These are **long-term** (balancing short and long-term needs), **prevention** (prevent problems occurring or getting worse to help public bodies achieve their goals), **integration** (considering the impact of our objectives on the well-being goals and the objectives of other public bodies), **collaboration** (working with other relevant people) and **involvement** (involving others with an interest in the well-being goals).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/media/3337/wellbeing-future-generations-objectives-2018-e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> As defined in the Equality Act 2010.

1.13. We will publish a report summarising the responses we receive, alongside a commentary outlining our decisions and the reasons for these, in spring 2020.

## How to respond

1.14. We encourage you to respond to this consultation using the online survey. This is available to complete [in Welsh and in English](#), or by visiting our website.

1.15. To help you consider the questions alongside the consultation, or discuss them with others, we've made [a copy of the questions](#) available on our website.

1.16. Where possible, please submit your answers using the online survey. If you need to provide your response via a different format, please send it to:

Arad Research at <a href="mailto:post@arad.wales">post@arad.wales</a> , or: 8 Columbus Walk, Brigantine Place, Cardiff, CF10 4SD. <sup>5</sup>
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1.17. We have published a [privacy notice](#) that outlines how we will collect and store any personal information you provide in your response. This can be accessed on our website.

1.18. If you have any questions about the consultation itself, please contact [reform@qualificationswales.org](mailto:reform@qualificationswales.org)

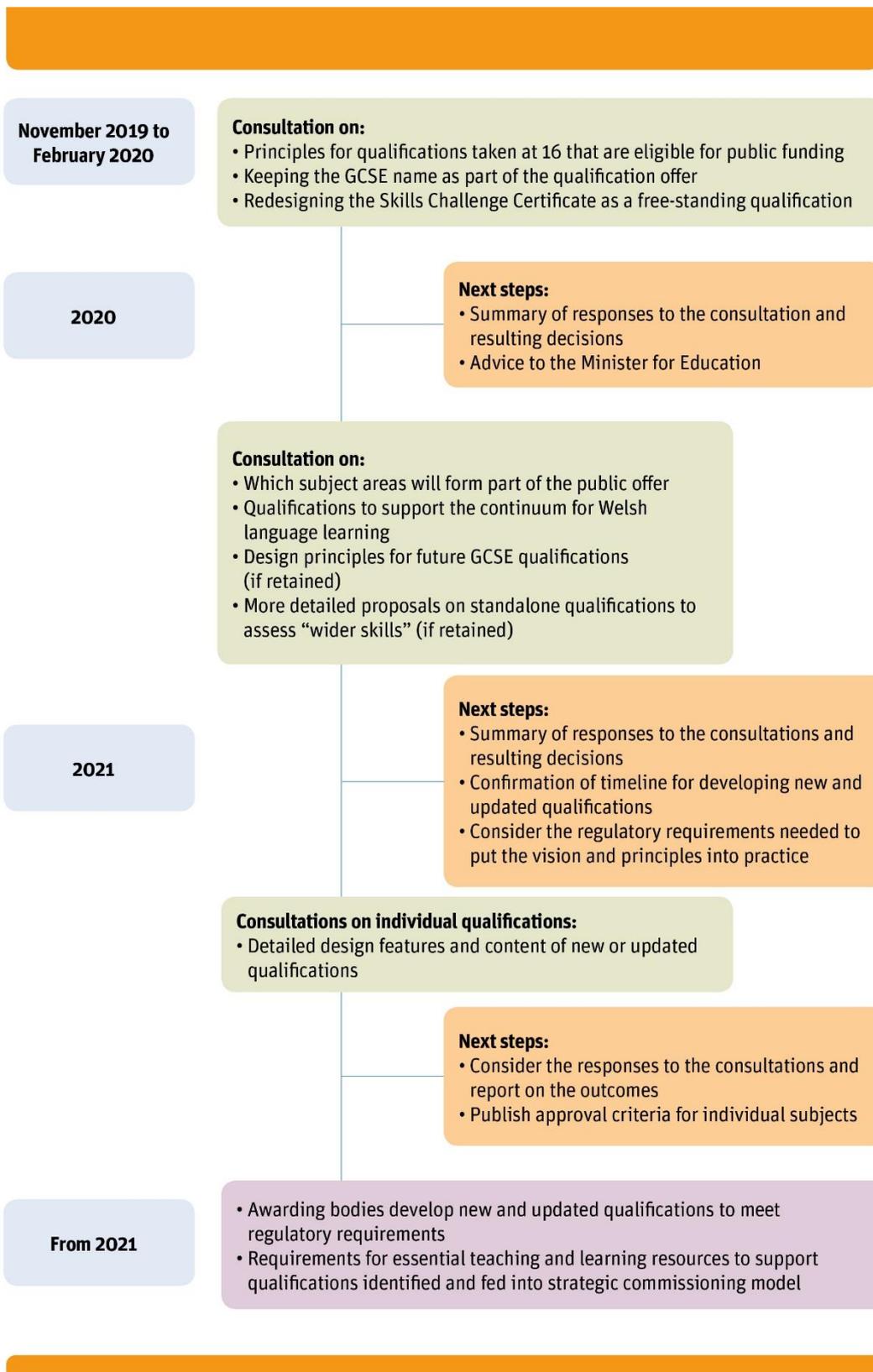
1.19. This consultation will close at 5pm on Friday 7 February 2020. We will not consider any responses submitted after the consultation has closed.

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<sup>5</sup> Any responses to the online survey, or submitted directly to Arad, may be shared with Qualifications Wales in full to help develop our thinking about these matters.

## **Future consultations**

1.20. This document is the first in a series of consultations that will help to shape the qualifications we need to support the new curriculum for Wales. The diagram below outlines the different consultation activities that we plan to conduct and the anticipated outputs from each of these.



## 2. Background

2.1. In this section we describe the key features of the new curriculum for Wales, outline the reasons for having qualifications at 16, and give a brief analysis of the current range of qualifications eligible for public funding that can be offered to 16-year-olds.

### The new curriculum for Wales

2.2. The new curriculum has four purposes at its heart. It aims to provide all learners with the knowledge, skills and experiences they need to make progress towards these four purposes.

The four purposes of the new curriculum are that all children and young people will be:

- **ambitious, capable learners** who are ready to learn throughout their lives,
- **enterprising, creative contributors** who are ready to play a full part in life and work
- **ethical, informed citizens** who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.
- **healthy, confident individuals** who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

2.3. The new curriculum is organised around six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). Existing subjects and disciplines are still referred to within these areas, but there is more emphasis on the connections between them.



2.4. The new curriculum also sets out expectations for literacy, numeracy and digital competence (cross-curricular responsibilities), along with the wider skills of critical thinking and problem solving, planning and organising, creativity and innovation, and personal effectiveness. Full details of the draft version of the new curriculum are available on the Welsh Government website<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government: Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022 - <https://hwb.gov.wales/draft-curriculum-for-wales-2022>

## Continued need for qualifications at 16

2.5. There is some debate around the need for learners to take qualifications at the age of 16. Having discussed this with a range of stakeholders, we conclude that there's still a strong case for having qualifications at 16.

- Turning 16 is an important milestone in a young person's life, when they complete their compulsory education and take different routes to further study, training and work.
- Most learners in Wales (over 90%<sup>7</sup>) will continue in either full time education or some form of work-based learning beyond the age of 16, but for some learners, the qualifications they take at 16 may be the only qualifications that they take.
- At 16, young people make important decisions about where they go next and qualifications give information that helps them decide which path to take.
- Qualifications taken at 16 play an important role in supporting access to further and higher education, training, and work; qualifications help learners compete with peers across the UK and globally.
- Qualifications taken at 16 help learners to evidence the broad and balanced education they've received up to that point, giving them a firm foundation to progress to, and move between, more specialised areas of learning in future.

2.6. While acknowledging that this would ultimately be a matter for Welsh Government, we believe that 16-year-olds should continue to have the opportunity to study for qualifications. In this consultation we are looking at how we can make sure that these qualifications can adapt to the demands of the new curriculum and the evolving needs of learners, the economy and society.

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<sup>7</sup> Careers Wales Destinations 2018 Year 11 – Overall figures  
<http://destinations.careerswales.com/2018/year11.html>

## The qualifications landscape in Wales

- 2.7. The current qualifications landscape for 16-year-olds in Wales is complex, with many qualifications overlapping with or duplicating each other. In September 2019, centres in Wales could choose from over 1,600 qualifications. However, a significant number of these qualifications are not actually taken by 16-year-old learners. In the 2017/2018 academic year, almost 70% of all available qualifications had no entries at all, and fewer than 10% attracted more than 50 entries.
- 2.8. Although GCSEs are the most well-known qualifications taken by 16-year-olds, they account for less than 5% of the total number of qualifications available for learners of this age. The vast majority are therefore qualifications other than GCSEs. These include qualifications such as the Skills Challenge Certificate<sup>8</sup>, BTECs, OCR Nationals, and graded music exams.
- 2.9. In 2017/2018, the average number of qualifications a learner had entered by the end of Year 11 was 12.1<sup>9</sup>. On average, this consisted of 9.5 GCSE qualifications and 2.6 other qualifications. Most learners (79%) entered between 10 and 14 qualifications.
- 2.10. Further information on the qualifications landscape in Wales, including how qualification entries have changed over time and the subject areas that learners typically choose qualifications in, is available in Annex B.

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<sup>8</sup> The Skills Challenge Certificate assesses seven essential and employability skills; literacy, numeracy, digital competency, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, planning and organising, and personal effectiveness. It is a stand-alone qualification that sits at the heart of the Welsh Baccalaureate.

<sup>9</sup> This refers to the number of distinct qualifications each learner entered. It does not include multiple entries for the same qualification.

### 3. Our vision for future qualifications

3.1. We have developed a vision to guide our work on how qualifications taken at 16 will need to change to support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum and meet the future needs of learners.

**Our vision is that 16-year-olds take globally respected qualifications that inspire and prepare them for life, learning and work.**

3.2. Learners are at the heart of our vision. We see the primary purpose of qualifications taken by 16-year-olds as helping them show what they are capable of, and to progress on the next stage in their journey.

3.3. To achieve our vision, we need to make sure qualifications can enable learners to embody the four purposes of the new curriculum. This means that qualifications taken by 16-year-olds will need to change.

3.4. We will make these changes in such a way that:

- commands public confidence, with currency in Wales, the UK and globally;
- secures an equitable, coherent, and bilingual choice;
- makes the most of digital technology; and
- ensures they are delivered in a sustainable and managed way.

#### **Commanding public confidence, with currency in Wales, the UK and globally**

3.5. To support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum, we want all learners to have access to the best and most relevant qualifications.

3.6. We know that the value and currency of qualifications are largely dependent on the extent to which they are recognised and understood in Wales and further afield.

- 3.7. We will ensure that qualifications are both credible and reliable, while also allowing the flexibility to develop new approaches to assessment that can better meet the needs of learners, both now and in the future.
- 3.8. We want to see assessment arrangements for future qualifications that are sufficiently robust without unduly limiting the range of assessment methods available. We will keep in mind the need for appropriate and proportionate external controls. The precise level of control is likely to vary by qualification type, level and subject area. Some qualifications are likely to require more external controls than others.
- 3.9. When making any changes we will be clear about the reasons for the change and what it will mean in practice. This will help build public understanding, confidence and trust in these qualifications, giving them currency in Wales and beyond.

## **Securing an equitable, coherent, and bilingual choice**

- 3.10. The new curriculum promotes equity, equality of opportunity and inclusiveness, presenting good practice which supports all learners to achieve their potential.
- 3.11. Qualifications are an important means of recognising attainment and giving all learners the foundation and confidence to progress to the next step that's right for them. Every learner should have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement through the assessment process, with no group or individual disadvantaged. It's important we ensure that there's a wide variety of qualifications available so that there is something for everyone.
- 3.12. In delivering our vision, we will secure an appropriate choice of qualifications, across different levels and in Welsh and English, to meet the reasonable needs of all learners. Our approach is intended to make the range of qualifications for 16-year-olds more streamlined and coherent.

## **Making the most of digital technology**

- 3.13. To better reflect how young people learn and interact with the world around them, and to prepare them for future learning and work, we want qualifications to be forward looking and to incorporate more digitally enhanced approaches to assessment.
- 3.14. We recognise the importance of developing digitally confident, capable and creative young people, and preparing them for an increasingly technological world. So, we want to ensure that future qualifications and assessments continue to innovate in this key area.

## **Delivering a sustainable and managed change**

- 3.15. Making sure that qualifications taken at 16 are effective in supporting the aims and purposes of the new curriculum and meeting the future needs of learners will require changes. However, there is a balance to strike.
- 3.16. With so many different aspects of the education system changing at the same time, we need to get the scale and speed of change right. On the one hand, making rapid and sweeping changes to qualifications could divert attention and resources away from implementing the new curriculum and constrain its benefits. On the other hand, making little or no change to qualifications could perpetuate current thinking and practice and inhibit centres from taking full advantage of the flexibility offered by the new curriculum.
- 3.17. As we identify what changes are required, we will consider when they should be made and prioritise those required to meet the needs of the first wave of learners to experience the new curriculum. We'll develop a planned programme of focussed and timely changes to qualifications to help centres prepare for and implement the changes, while they continue to introduce and embed the new curriculum.
- 3.18. In taking this approach, we believe we are striking the right balance between the imminent, short-term needs with the need to safeguard our ability to also meet longer-term needs.

## 4. Principles to shape the future qualification offer

- 4.1. We have worked with stakeholders to develop a set of proposed guiding principles aimed at shaping the future qualification offer for 16-year-olds.
- 4.2. We intend for all these principles to be applied when deciding which qualifications taken at 16 are eligible for public funding.

### Proposal

- 4.3. We propose that qualifications for 16-year-olds that are eligible for public funding should:
  - Relate to, and support, the aims and purposes of the new curriculum for Wales;
  - Be available bilingually; and
  - Form part of an equitable and coherent range that meets the needs of all learners.
- 4.4. We outline these principles in more detail below and ask for your feedback on each one.

## **Principle 1: Qualifications that relate to and support the new curriculum for Wales**

**Proposal: Publicly funded qualifications taken at 16 should relate to and support the new curriculum for Wales.**

### **Rationale for our proposal**

- 4.5. To achieve our vision of inspiring future learners and preparing them for life, learning and work, qualifications at all levels will need to be relevant to the new curriculum.
- 4.6. If this proposed principle is adopted, we would require awarding bodies to clearly demonstrate how a qualification relates to and supports the aims and purposes of the new curriculum when seeking eligibility for public funding.
- 4.7. Evidence of how a qualification supports positive teaching and learning experiences could include:
  - how the content relates to the curriculum in a way that is:
    - appropriate
    - current
    - of sufficient depth and breadth, and
    - relevant and engaging for learners.
  - how the assessment is designed to:
    - be reliable, valid and appropriate to the targeted content;
    - be manageable for centres and learners;
    - make the best use of technology; and
    - build on the assessment approach being developed for the new curriculum.
- 4.8. Adopting this principle should ensure that all qualifications available to 16-year-olds not only effectively support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum, but also secure alignment between intended learning

outcomes, teaching strategies, methods of assessment and assessment criteria.

- 4.9. This in turn could have positive impacts for how centres put the new curriculum into practice. Centres will have more freedom to innovate their teaching approach if the qualifications they are preparing young people for are more flexible in their assessment arrangements.
- 4.10. Similarly, it will ensure that there is continuity in assessment arrangements as learners progress along their own learning journey towards the four purposes of the curriculum.
- 4.11. Adopting this principle could lead to the removal of qualifications that are less relevant from the offer. We recognise that there may be potential negative impacts on some learners if some qualifications cannot sufficiently demonstrate their relationship to the new curriculum, and therefore no longer form part of the qualification offer for 16-year-olds. That said, if a qualification cannot meet this key principle, then it may not be the most relevant and appropriate qualification for 16-year-old learners to study.

## Consultation Question

- Qualifications Wales should take steps to ensure that publicly funded qualifications taken at 16 relate to, and support, the new curriculum for Wales.

To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Partly agree and partly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

Please explain your answer. *(In your response you may want to consider a) The benefits and challenges for you or your organisation and b) Any specific circumstances when this principle should not be applied).*

## Principle 2: Qualifications that are available bilingually

**Proposal: Publicly funded qualifications taken at 16 should be available bilingually.**

### Rationale for our proposal

- 4.12. Reviewing how qualifications will need to evolve to support our vision, and the aims and purposes of the new curriculum is an opportunity to secure a more equitable balance of Welsh language and English language provision for 16-year-olds in Wales, It also allows us to look at how we can respond to future needs, including the growth of Welsh medium and bilingual schools.
- 4.13. Our policy currently requires all qualifications that are developed specifically for Wales to be made available in both Welsh and English. Where qualifications have been developed elsewhere, but are eligible for public funding in Wales, we strongly encourage awarding bodies to offer them in both languages. To help maintain and increase the availability of bilingual qualifications and assessments, we also provide grant funding to awarding bodies.
- 4.14. This approach means that most GCSE qualifications are available in both Welsh and English<sup>10</sup>. The same is true for all qualifications we have commissioned, for example, in Health and Social Care, and Childcare, and the Construction and Built Environment sectors. However, many other publicly funded qualifications are only available through the medium of English (62.1% of the overall qualification offer<sup>11</sup>).
- 4.15. The new curriculum and wider education reforms are central to Welsh Government's policy to increase the number of Welsh speakers in Wales by

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<sup>10</sup> 99.8% of all publicly funded GCSE entries (excluding English and Welsh qualifications) were for qualifications available in both Welsh and English. All GCSE qualifications designed for Wales are available in Welsh and English. However, some GCSE qualifications in low take-up subjects and designed to meet requirements elsewhere are only available in English.

<sup>11</sup> The percentage of publicly funded qualifications that are listed on QiW as available to pre-16 learners that are only available in English.

2050<sup>12</sup>. Welsh Government recognises that one of the main means of realising this ambition is to *'develop and maintain skills through education and training, from early years through to Welsh language provision for adults.'*<sup>13</sup> It also expects that the *'qualification system for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales ensures that there is a choice of qualifications available through the medium of Welsh, and clear progression routes.'*

- 4.16. Increasing the number of qualifications available through the medium of Welsh is a key policy priority for us and for Welsh Government. Adopting the proposed principle will help to achieve our vision and contribute to this wider national objective.
- 4.17. As is the case now, we will continue to require all future qualifications developed specifically for Wales to be available through the medium of Welsh and English. Our proposal would see us strengthening our expectations for other publicly funded qualifications taken at 16, to maximise their availability in both Welsh and English.
- 4.18. In practice this means, as a regulator, that we will move from the current permissive approach of encouragement to a more proactive one that requires these qualifications to be available bilingually in future.
- 4.19. We believe that adopting this principle will lead to a more equitable balance of Welsh and English medium provision than is currently the case. It could also give awarding bodies the opportunity to increase their market share in Wales by offering their qualifications in both languages.
- 4.20. We are mindful of the fact that in some cases this could impact on the availability of certain qualifications where, for whatever reason, an awarding body is unable to make its qualifications available through the medium of Welsh.
- 4.21. We will need to consider carefully how we ensure that essential or particularly desirable qualifications are not lost from the overall offer when adopting this principle. These may include qualifications that are relevant to specific groups of learners or ones in specific subject areas. In such

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<sup>12</sup> Welsh Government: Welsh in education: action plan 2017 to 2021 - <https://gov.wales/welsh-education-action-plan-2017-2021>

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Government: Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers - <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy.pdf>

cases, we will use all options available to us to secure bilingual provision. For example, we could restrict the number of qualifications that can attract public funding in a specified area. Or we could offer grant funding to support the initial costs to an awarding body of making a qualification available through the medium of Welsh.

4.22. It is important to acknowledge that, having exhausted all possible options, there may be limited circumstances where we would need to apply exceptions to this principle.

4.23. We welcome views on the possible circumstances where exceptions to this principle may be required.

## Consultation Question

- Qualifications Wales should require awarding bodies to make all publicly funded qualifications taken at 16 available in both Welsh and English.

To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Partly agree and partly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

Please explain your answer. *(In your response you may want to consider a) The benefits and challenges for you or your organisation and b) Any specific circumstances when this principle should not be applied).*

## Principle 3: Qualifications that form part of an equitable and coherent offer

**Proposal: Publicly funded qualifications taken at 16 should form part of an equitable and coherent range that meets the needs of all learners and supports a broad and balanced education.**

### Rationale for our proposal

- 4.24. The range of publicly funded qualifications that can be taken at 16 should offer something for everyone.
- 4.25. The new curriculum focuses on supporting progression for all learners across a continuum of learning from ages 3 to 16, while acknowledging that the pace at which learners progress along the continuum may differ<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, we believe that qualifications taken at 16 should cater for the needs of all learners. This is central to our vision of a qualification offer that prepares 16-year-olds for life, learning and work.
- 4.26. Whatever level a learner is working at, qualifications can be a useful means of recognising attainment, and providing them with the foundation and confidence to progress to further learning or work. All learners should be able to study qualifications that will engage them in their learning, help them make meaningful progress, evidence their achievements and show what they're ready to tackle next.
- 4.27. Currently 16-year-olds take qualifications across a range of levels. Learners have a wide variety of different needs, interests and aspirations. We want centres to continue to be able to choose from a range of qualifications across these different levels.
- 4.28. Many of the qualifications currently available to centres are not taken by learners. Many qualifications also overlap substantially or duplicate each other. Where this is the case, it is not always clear if a qualification is intended to be taken alongside other similar qualifications, or as an alternative.

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<sup>14</sup> Welsh Government: A Guide to Curriculum for Wales 2022 <https://hwb.gov.wales/draft-curriculum-for-wales-2022/a-guide-to-curriculum-for-wales-2022/#the-four-purposes-of-the-curriculum>

4.29. We intend to manage more closely the overall range of qualifications that centres can offer to their learners. This is to help centres make sure that the qualifications they make available to their learners meet their needs and helps them to realise the purposes of the curriculum.

4.30. Centres will be able to tell how the qualifications they offer to their learners:

- Facilitate personal growth, confidence and engagement in learning;
- Encourage them to develop their curiosity and creativity;
- Give a clear measure of attainment that shows what a learner knows, understands and can do; and
- Support them to make decisions on their next steps.

4.31. If we adopt this principle, we will consider the design of a qualification when deciding whether to make it eligible for public funding. Aspects of a qualification's design that we could consider include:

- Its main purpose or purposes, including the learners it is intended for;
- The progression outcomes it supports, including any opportunities for future learning or work;
- Potential overlap with other qualifications, including whether it is intended as an alternative or an addition to any other qualifications;
- How straightforwardly it can be delivered and studied alongside other qualifications as part of a broad and balanced course of study; this could include, for example, the teaching time it requires and the manageability of its assessment arrangements.

4.32. These considerations will help us to make sure that the overall qualifications offer is more coherent. This in turn will help centres to offer their learners a more relevant choice of qualifications and give all learners an equal opportunity to gain a broad and balanced education.

4.33. Having clearer information about the intended purpose and design of qualifications for 16-year-olds will help centres to determine which

qualifications to offer their learners. Learners will also be more informed when making decisions about which combinations of qualifications to take.

4.34. As is the case for the other two principles we propose, adopting this principle could lead to the removal of some qualifications from the current offer.

## Consultation Questions

- Qualifications Wales should more closely manage the range of publicly funded qualifications that centres can offer to 16-year-olds to make sure it is equitable and coherent.

To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Partly agree and partly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

Please explain your answer. *(In your response you may want to consider a) The benefits and challenges for you or your organisation and b) Any specific circumstances when this principle should not be applied).*

- Are there any other principles you think we should consider when deciding which qualifications to make eligible for public funding for 16-year-olds in Wales? Please explain your answer.

## 5. GCSEs fit for the future

**Proposal: Redesigned GCSEs should form a central part of the qualification offer for 16-year-old learners in Wales.**

### Rationale for proposal

#### Background:

- 5.1. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the name given to the most well-known type of qualification taken by 16-year-old learners in Wales. To enable qualifications to meet our vision, and to support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum, GCSEs will need to change. We have therefore taken this opportunity to consider if the qualifications that form a central part of the qualification offer for 16-year-old learners should continue to be called GCSEs.
- 5.2. The GCSE name is well-established and offers a considerable degree of flexibility. We believe that keeping the GCSE name enables us to make all the necessary changes to the design of qualifications, while also reaping the benefits of retaining a name that is valued and widely recognised.

### The advantages of retaining the GCSE name

- 5.3. We consider there are many **advantages** to keeping the GCSE name to describe qualifications. These include:

**GCSE qualifications have existed for over thirty years and are valued, understood and recognised by many stakeholders, including learners, teachers, employers, post-16 providers and universities.**

- 5.4. GCSEs are also taken by 16-year-old learners in England and Northern Ireland. Achievement of a GCSE therefore indicates that an individual has completed a meaningful course of study that is comparable in terms of

breadth, depth and challenge to qualifications taken in other parts of the UK. Stakeholders understand the level of knowledge, skill and experience that can be expected of an individual that has achieved a GCSE, and entry requirements for further study and work are often described in these terms. The GCSE name clearly indicates that the qualification is aligned with secondary education. This can aid understanding of the expected level of knowledge, skills and experience, particularly outside of Wales.

- 5.5. GCSE qualifications are widely recognised by further education colleges, training providers, universities and employers in Wales, across the UK and internationally. Learners taking GCSEs can therefore be assured that their achievements will be recognised later in life, both in Wales and further afield.
- 5.6. We have recently published two reports exploring public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system in Wales which support these views. In our annual survey of public perceptions, 80% of respondents felt that GCSEs were trusted qualifications and 69% agreed that GCSEs are well understood<sup>15</sup>. A further report summarising the findings from qualitative engagement with key stakeholders reported that GCSEs retained strong support in Wales. These stakeholders felt that they were a reliable indication of a learner's knowledge, skills and understanding<sup>16</sup>.

## **Retaining the GCSE name will allow for some continuity in the education system at a time of significant change**

- 5.7. Implementing the new curriculum will mean a significant and prolonged period of change and adjustment for centres. Retaining the GCSE name will allow for some continuity and stability in the system while allowing room for the new curriculum to become established. The development of an entirely new qualification title could detract attention and resources away from the new curriculum and hinder its ability to evolve as intended. Over time, as centres adapt and refine their approach to delivering the new

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<sup>15</sup> Qualifications Wales: Survey of Public Opinions of Non-Degree Qualifications in Wales 2018 - <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/measuring-public-confidence-and-perceptions-of-qualifications-wave-2-may-2019/>

<sup>16</sup> Qualifications Wales: Exploring Confidence in Qualifications and the Qualifications System in Wales - <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/exploring-confidence-in-qualifications-and-the-qualification-system-in-wales/>

curriculum, its wider implications and demands will become clearer. Keeping the GCSE name means we will be able to respond quickly to identify and make specific changes to qualifications when they're needed.

## **There is considerable flexibility and potential afforded by the GCSE name**

- 5.8. The GCSE name is used across Wales, England and Northern Ireland to describe qualifications that are suitable for 14 to 16-year-old learners. There are some differences in the design of GCSE qualifications taken in each jurisdiction<sup>17</sup>. We are committed to ensuring that GCSEs taken in Wales continue to be trusted, reliable and comparable to those taken by learners in England and Northern Ireland.
- 5.9. We believe the GCSE name offers plenty of flexibility to maintain their reliability and comparability, while also adapting and responding to changing needs in Wales. For example, we could extend the use of e-assessment, or make more use of project-based assessments to test a wider range of skills and give learners more say in the specific topics they choose to study.
- 5.10. The following examples help to illustrate the flexibility and potential offered by the GCSE name.
- Since GCSEs were established over thirty years ago, they have undergone several reforms. Most recently, GCSEs specifically designed for Wales were introduced for first teaching from 2015. Some of the changes made during this phase of reform included introducing a greater focus on the Welsh dimension and changing the weighting and design of non-examination assessment.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://qualificationswales.org/english/qualifications/gcses-and-a-levels/gcses/>

- When considering what changes to make, we will keep in mind the importance of securing comparability with qualifications taken by learners in England and Northern Ireland. There are already some differences in the GCSEs taken by learners in each of these UK jurisdictions. For example, GCSEs in Wales are graded A\*-G, in England they are graded 9-1, and in Northern Ireland there is an adapted A\*-G grade scale that includes an additional C\* grade.
- GCSEs can be adapted to assess different kinds of content, including a mix of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills. They can therefore cater to the needs of both theoretical and practical learners. We don't have a fixed view on which subjects can be developed as GCSEs, provided they are based on content that is coherent, engaging and can be appropriately assessed.

5.11. The new Built Environment GCSE currently being developed for Wales offers some examples of how a GCSE can be designed to support the new curriculum. This is the first time a GCSE has been developed in this subject area. It will be assessed through a combination of on-screen and non-examination assessment and will include options so that centres can tailor the course to suit the resources available to them. The qualification content will support an individualised approach to learning by requiring learners to explore buildings in their own communities, and by encouraging centres to work with relevant local organisations<sup>18</sup>.

5.12. It's important to note that although we will be exploring ways in which GCSEs can be made accessible to learners in a range of different subject areas, we don't intend that GCSEs should be the only type of qualification available to learners. We will be reviewing all qualifications available to 16-year-old learners when shaping the future qualification offer to support the new curriculum.

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<sup>18</sup>GCSE Approval Criteria Built Environment <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/approval-criteria-for-gcse-built-environment-aug-2019/>

- GCSE qualifications are designed to be accessible to the majority of 16-year-old learners because they include learning and assessment that is appropriate for learners at both levels one and two. While this mitigates some of the potential downsides of a two-tier system, having a single grading scale that spans such a wide range of attainment can have a demoralising effect on some learners. As part of the next stage of work, we will consider how GCSEs in Wales can be made more engaging for learners of all abilities, including looking again at how they are graded.

## The potential challenges of retaining the GCSE name

5.13. In developing this proposal, we have also considered the **challenges** of retaining the GCSE name. These include:

- Creating a perception that there will be little or no change to qualifications to complement the new curriculum. This could perpetuate current thinking and practice, which could hinder the full implementation and evolution of the new curriculum.
- The GCSE name brings with it many assumptions and behaviours related to how these qualifications currently operate and the role they play in the wider education system. These could inhibit centres from making full use of the flexibility offered by the new curriculum.

## An alternative approach

5.14. As an alternative to this proposal, we have considered the option of developing a bespoke suite of qualifications for Wales, which would have a different qualification title. This could offer the potential to more radically consider some of the fundamentals of the qualification system, including:

- how learners' achievements and experiences are reported;
- when learners start studying for these qualifications;
- the length of teaching and study time typically required to complete the qualification; and
- the possibility of combining modules from different subject areas to form one qualification.

5.15. A change this significant would have far-reaching consequences across the education system and beyond. At this stage, we see no indication of a need for such a radical overhaul of all the main qualifications taken by 16-year-old learners in Wales. It will take time for the new curriculum to become embedded in centres and for teaching and learning to evolve. We do not believe it is appropriate to consider such a radical change until the implications of the new curriculum are further understood.

5.16. Developing a bespoke suite of qualifications for Wales also carries some significant risks. These can be viewed as the counter arguments of the advantages of retaining GCSE qualifications, as outlined above. For example, it would take many years and a sustained large-scale communication effort before stakeholders become familiar with the new qualifications and trust them.

## Summary

- 5.17. In summary, retaining the GCSE name means we can redesign these qualifications to ensure that they support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum, and meet our vision, without losing the advantages of the name. At this stage, we believe that moving away from the valued and recognised GCSE name would be an unnecessary distraction from the important work of ensuring that the qualifications themselves are fit for the future.
- 5.18. If we adopt this proposal, we will continue to engage with key stakeholders, through both research and engagement events, to inform future proposals on how aspects such as the subject areas, content, structure and assessment methods used in current GCSEs may change.
- 5.19. In developing these proposals, we will have regard to the importance of ensuring that these qualifications retain comparability and portability with other UK jurisdictions, and will work closely with fellow regulators and stakeholders from across the UK to understand the impact of any proposed changes.
- 5.20. By working closely with key stakeholders to formulate these proposals, we will help to generate support and recognition for the new GCSE qualifications. We will consult on the proposed high-level changes in 2020, and more detailed proposals in 2021.

## Consultation Questions

- On balance, we think that the GCSE name should be retained for the redesigned qualifications that will form a central part of the qualification offer for 16-year-olds in Wales.

To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Partly agree and partly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

Please explain your answer.

- Do you have any specific suggestions for how GCSE qualifications could change to meet our vision and to support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum? Please explain your answer.

## 6. A qualification to assess wider skills

**Proposal: The qualification offer for 16-year-olds should include a specific qualification that supports the development and assessment of the wider skills defined in the new curriculum.**

### Rationale for proposal

6.1 The new curriculum recognises that it is crucial for learners to develop a range of skills that are necessary to prepare them for modern life and the workplace. As a result, the following skills will be integral to the new curriculum:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Planning and organisation
- Creativity and innovation
- Personal effectiveness

6.2 The new curriculum refers to these as ‘wider skills’ and notes that they are essential for learners to become more resilient and better able to respond to the challenges that they face, both now and in the future<sup>19</sup>.

6.3 To ensure that young people have appropriate opportunities to develop these skills up to the age of 16, we believe a specific qualification that supports the development and assessment of these skills should form part of the qualification offer.

6.4 These skills are currently assessed in the Skills Challenge Certificate, which nearly all 16-year-old learners in Wales study. This qualification requires learners to demonstrate these skills through three challenges and an individual project<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Welsh Government: A Guide to Curriculum for Wales 2022 <https://hwb.gov.wales/draft-curriculum-for-wales-2022/a-guide-to-curriculum-for-wales-2022#other-cross-cutting-elements-and-considerations>

<sup>20</sup> Further information about the current Skills Challenge Certificate is available here: [https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/welsh-baccalaureate/welsh-bacc-from-2015/ks4-national-foundation/Welsh%20Bacc%20Specification%20KS4%2028%2010%2014%20-%20Branded..pdf?language\\_id=1](https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/welsh-baccalaureate/welsh-bacc-from-2015/ks4-national-foundation/Welsh%20Bacc%20Specification%20KS4%2028%2010%2014%20-%20Branded..pdf?language_id=1)

- 6.5 We recently reviewed the Skills Challenge Certificate and found that it is a worthwhile qualification that gives learners valuable opportunities to gain real-life skills and to develop their interests by choosing areas of study which are relevant to them<sup>21</sup>. Learners and teachers were positive about the principles of the Skills Challenge Certificate and the opportunities to develop these skills, which they felt were helpful for future employability or further study.
- 6.6 Another identified strength of the Skills Challenge Certificate is that the content can be tailored by both centres and individual learners to enable a focus on topics and issues that are personally relevant. This helps ensure that the qualification is accessible for learners of all abilities. This feature of the qualification aligns well with the new curriculum's aim for centres to be more flexible, creative and innovative in their approach to teaching and learning<sup>22</sup>.
- 6.7 A recent report by the National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee also identified several areas in which the Skills Challenge Certificate qualification was valued, including opportunities for young people to develop skills that employers are asking for<sup>23</sup>.
- 6.8 Both our review of the Skills Challenge Certificate and the report by the CYPE committee identified aspects of the current qualification that could benefit from further development. We therefore propose a redesigned version of this qualification forms part of the qualification offer for 16-year-olds. We're currently working with stakeholders to consider how its structure and assessment model could be redesigned to be simpler, more reliable, and support the new curriculum. Our aim is to have a skills-based qualification that prepares learners for life, learning and work. A qualification which is engaging, manageable and clear to understand, and relevant for current and future learners.

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<sup>21</sup> A Review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/review-of-the-skills-challenge-certificate--wales-baccalaureate-report/>

<sup>22</sup>Welsh Government: A Guide to Curriculum for Wales 2022 <https://hwb.gov.wales/draft-curriculum-for-wales-2022/a-guide-to-curriculum-for-wales-2022#overview>

<sup>23</sup>National Assembly for Wales: Bacc to the Future: The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld12487/cr-ld12487-e.pdf>

- 6.9 We propose that the redesigned qualification is made available to 16-year-old learners as a specific qualification. Any decision on whether this qualification will be compulsory, or how it fits into a wider framework, such as the Welsh Baccalaureate, is a matter for Welsh Government.
- 6.10 An alternative option would be to embed the development and assessment of wider skills into other qualifications, and not have a specific qualification that focuses on them. There is a potential risk that having a specific qualification that develops and assesses wider skills could result in these skills only being developed through this qualification, and not across the curriculum. However, the availability of such a qualification does not stop these skills from being included in other qualifications and learning programmes where they are relevant.
- 6.11 A specific qualification will aid the development of these skills by giving teachers and learners an opportunity to focus on them in a context that is personally relevant and engaging. It will help to ensure that all learners have the same opportunity to develop these skills, rather than it being dependent on the other qualifications that they choose to study. It will also provide learners, employers and education providers with an indication of an individual's level of competence in these wider skills.
- 6.12 In developing this proposal, we have also considered the potential impacts on a range of stakeholders, including teachers, learners, awarding bodies, employers, post-16 providers and universities.

## Summary

- 6.13 A specific qualification that develops and assesses wider skills will help support the aims and purposes of the curriculum, whilst also supporting learners of all abilities to develop skills that are valued by employers, post-16 providers and universities.
- 6.14 The Skills Challenge Certificate provides a good basis on which to develop this qualification. We propose that we continue to work with stakeholders to develop and test ideas for how the qualification could be further developed. We will consult on proposals for change to the Skills Challenge Certificate in 2020.

## Consultation Questions

- On balance, we think that a specific qualification that supports the development and assessment of the wider skills (as defined in the new curriculum) should be part of the qualification offer for 16-year-olds in Wales

To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Partly agree and partly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure

Please explain your answer.

- Do you have any specific suggestions for how the Skills Challenge Certificate at key stage 4 could change to meet our vision and support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum? Please explain your answer.

## 7. Integrated Impact Assessment

7.1 We have completed an Integrated Impact Assessment which includes:

- A Regulatory Impact Assessment outlining the potential impact of our proposals on our regulatory arrangements
- A Welsh Language Impact Assessment considering the potential impacts of our proposals on the Welsh Language
- An Equalities Impact Assessment exploring the potential impacts of our proposals on individual or groups who share protected characteristics, as outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

7.2 This document can be viewed [here](#).

### Consultation Questions

As part of this consultation, we would like to hear your views on the following:

- In our Integrated Impact Assessment, we have set out the regulatory impacts we anticipate from these proposals. *When responding to the following questions, please make it clear which proposal(s) you are referring to.*
  - Are there any further regulatory impacts that may arise from any of our proposals? If so, please explain your answer.
  - Are there any additional steps we could take to reduce the regulatory impact of any of our proposals? If so, please explain your answer.
  - Do you have any other comments on the regulatory impact of these proposals? If so, please explain your answer.

➤ In our Integrated Impact Assessment, we have considered the potential impacts on the Welsh Language and Equalities. *When responding to the following questions, please make it clear which proposal(s) you are referring to.*

- Would any of our proposals result in any other positive or negative impacts (intended or unintended) on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language?

- positive impact
- no impact
- negative impact
- unsure

Please explain your answer.

- Would any of our proposals result in any other positive or negative impacts (intended or unintended) in relation to treating the Welsh Language no less favourably than the English Language?

- positive impact
- no impact
- negative impact
- unsure

Please explain your answer.

- Would any of our proposals result in any other positive or negative impacts (intended or unintended) for individuals or groups who share protected characteristics outlined within the Equality Act 2010?

- positive impact
- no impact
- negative impact
- unsure

Please explain your answer.

## 8. Future work

- 8.1 This document is the first in a series of consultations. It is an important starting point for developing globally respected qualifications that inspire and prepare 16-year-old learners for life, learning and work.
- 8.2 The feedback from this consultation will help us to refine the principles for developing the future qualification offer, confirm if we should keep the GCSE name in Wales, and develop our approach to assessing the 'wider skills' defined in the new curriculum.
- 8.3 Once we have done this, our next steps will be to develop:
- proposals for the subject areas that should form part of the qualification offer for 16-year-old learners in Wales;
  - overarching design requirements for future qualifications that are in line with our vision and principles;
  - proposals for qualifications to support a single continuum for Welsh language teaching and learning; and
  - more detailed proposals on how to assess the 'wider skills' defined in the new curriculum.
- 8.4 We have already started to engage with stakeholders to identify and discuss ideas, through both our research activities and early engagement work. Over the coming months, we will continue to work with a wide range of stakeholders to develop clear proposals, which we will consult on in 2020 and 2021. If the agreed changes in qualifications result in significant changes being required to our regulatory arrangements, we will also consult on these in due course.
- 8.5 During this time, we will also be working with stakeholders to develop our thinking in other areas, including options for supporting literacy, numeracy and digital competence through qualifications, and what advice we could provide to the Minister on the possible future design and use of the Welsh Baccalaureate.
- 8.6 We will continue to have regard to the sustainable development principle as outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and our relevant objectives in relation to this Act.

## **Annexes**

### **Annex A: How we have developed this consultation**

- 1.1 We have undertaken an extensive range of activities to develop the proposals outlined in this document and to assess their potential impacts (both positive and negative). This section summarises these activities.

#### **Early engagement with stakeholders**

- 1.2 From the outset, we have taken a close interest in the Welsh Government's work to developing the new curriculum. From observing the workshops with curriculum pioneer schools over the past three years we have gained a strong understanding of the new curriculum and its aims. This formed the basis of our engagement activities with stakeholders.
- 1.3 Early engagement with a range of stakeholders has been key to help us develop the proposals outlined in this consultation document. Engagement has helped us to understand stakeholder views and expectations, and to test and refine our thinking.

1.4 Over the course of 2019, we have engaged with a wide range of stakeholders through a combination of one-to-one meetings, briefing events and workshops.

These include:

- Academic assessment experts
- Assembly Members
- Association of Directors of Education (ADEW)
- Awarding bodies
- Children's Commissioner for Wales
- ColegauCymru
- Education Workforce Council (EWC)
- Employers
- Estyn
- Further education colleges and universities
- Future Generations Commissioner for Wales
- Initial teacher training providers
- Learners
- Other qualifications regulators.
- Regional education consortia
- Schools and other pre-16 learning providers
- Teaching Unions
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Government sponsored bodies and third sector organisations
- Welsh Language Commissioner
- Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)

1.5 These activities have helped us to formulate firm proposals around future qualifications. For example, in relation to the GCSE name and the guiding principles that all publicly funded qualifications taken by 16-year-olds should adhere to.

1.6 Our engagement has also helped us to define key areas of future work, as described in section 8 of this document.

## Assessing the impact of our proposals

- 1.7 We have used data and information from the following activities to help assess the potential impacts of the proposals outlined in this consultation:
- data collected from engagement events for the new curriculum, including sessions with stakeholders across Wales i.e. practitioners, regional consortia, Welsh Government, Estyn and more widely;
  - data collection and analysis on the provision of pre-16 qualifications and the entry numbers for Approved or Designated qualifications for learners in Year 11 in 2017-18;
  - meetings with stakeholders including Welsh Government officials working on their impact assessment of the curriculum;
  - desk-based research including a literature review; and
  - internal workshops to develop and refine thinking.
- 1.8 Where appropriate, we have integrated the potential impacts of our proposals into the main body of this consultation. The questions we pose about our proposals are designed to gather evidence about those impacts. For transparency, we have also published our impact assessment as a standalone document.

## Working assumptions

- 1.9 We have based our proposals on some key assumptions and constraints. It's important to note that these are not static and will change over time. As our thinking and our work progresses, we will work with stakeholders to review and update these assumptions.
- 1.10 The assumptions and constraints we are working to are detailed below.

## **Future evaluation and improvement arrangements will place a more proportionate reliance on qualification outcomes**

- 1.11 Welsh Government's stated policy aim is to move away from a high-stakes accountability culture, which places undue emphasis and pressure on qualification outcomes, towards a higher-trust system centred on robust self-evaluation by centres<sup>24</sup>.
- 1.12 The proposed approach will place greater emphasis on self-evaluation by centres<sup>25</sup>. Centres will be able to evaluate their own effectiveness using a much broader and richer set of contextual data and intelligence than the current system allows.
- 1.13 If this policy is enacted, we are assuming that qualification outcomes will be one aspect of a wider suite of performance measures used to evaluate centres, rather than the primary focus as is currently the case. Qualifications and their assessments will need to be sufficiently reliable and robust to contribute towards and facilitate centre evaluation, but the difference in emphasis will allow greater freedom in developing appropriate assessment arrangements.

## **Changes to qualifications at 16 will not necessarily result in major changes to post-16 qualifications**

- 1.14 The new curriculum has been developed for learners aged 3 to 16. Post-16 teaching and learning is out of scope of the new curriculum. In this consultation and our subsequent work, we will focus on qualifications taken by learners at 16.
- 1.15 When proposing changes to qualifications at 16, we will be mindful of any implications these changes have for progression into post-16 education and training. Where necessary, we will look at changes that might need to be made to specific post-16 qualifications. However, we are assuming

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<sup>24</sup>Welsh Government: Draft evaluation and improvement (accountability) arrangements for Wales <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/draft-evaluation-and-improvement-accountability-arrangements-for-wales.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Welsh Government proposals for how schools should be held to account under the new curriculum, published April 2019 (<https://gov.wales/school-evaluation-and-improvement-accountability-arrangements>).

that our work is not likely to lead to large-scale changes to post-16 qualifications.

## **Not all aspects of the curriculum should lead to qualifications at 16**

- 1.16 Everyone, regardless of their background or needs, should be able to achieve their potential, gaining the skills, experience and knowledge they need for life, learning and work. For most, gaining qualifications will be key, but it is only one element of their studies.
- 1.17 We are assuming that not all aspects of the new curriculum will lead to qualifications. For example, experiences are an important feature of learning within the new curriculum and it is unlikely that all these experiences will be able to be assessed directly. We are assuming that the final years of secondary school will comprise of more than just preparing for qualifications.

## **Qualification outcomes at 16 will be used by multiple stakeholders for different purposes**

- 1.18 Qualification outcomes will not just be used by the learners taking the qualifications, but by a range of stakeholders such as further education colleges and universities, parents and carers, employers, Estyn, local authorities and Welsh Government. Therefore, it is important that each of these stakeholders (and others) are given the opportunity to have their say on the future range of qualifications.
- 1.19 The way in which qualification outcomes are reported need to be clear, easy to understand and sufficiently accurate to generate confidence and trust from those who rely on them.

## Annex B: The qualifications landscape in Wales

- 1.1 Below we offer an overview of the range of qualifications that are currently eligible for public funding, including how many are typically taken by learners.

### What qualifications are currently available for 16-year-old learners in Wales?

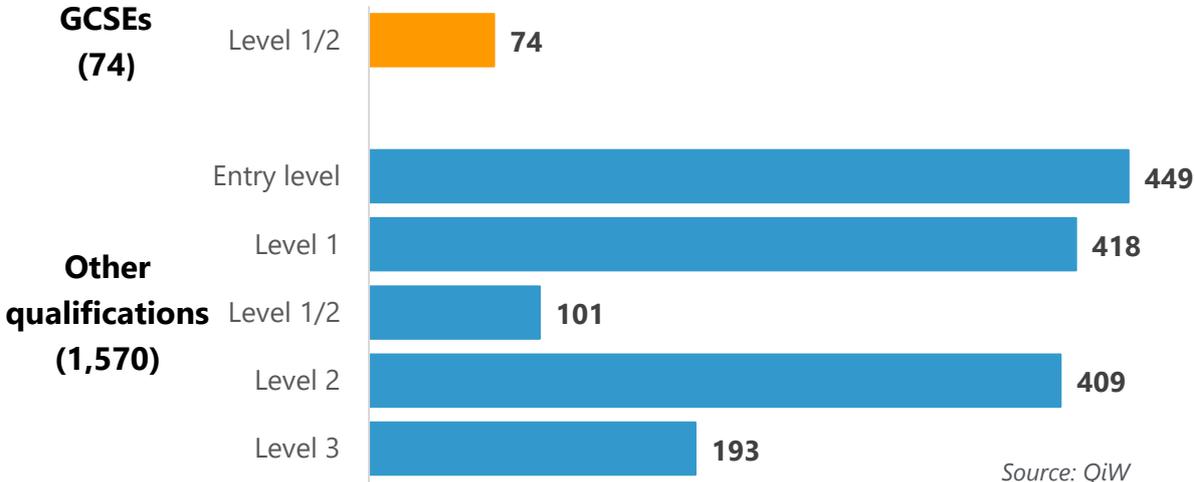
- 1.2 The current qualification landscape for 16-year-olds in Wales is complex, with many qualifications overlapping or duplicating each other. In September 2019, centres in Wales could choose from over 1,600 qualifications, mostly ranging from entry level to level three<sup>26&27</sup>. As a guide, GCSE qualifications span levels one and two, and A levels are at level three.
- 1.3 Although GCSEs are the most well-known qualifications taken by 16-year-olds, they account for less than 5% of the total number of qualifications available for learners of this age. As the chart below shows, the majority of qualifications available are other qualifications at entry level, level one, and level two. These include qualifications such as the Skills Challenge Certificate, BTECs, OCR Nationals and graded music exams.

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<sup>26</sup> These qualification levels are defined in the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) - <https://gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw>

<sup>27</sup> A very small number of specialist performing arts qualifications above level three are available to 16-year-old learners. They have been removed from all analysis in this section as they had no take-up in publicly funded centres between 2014/15 and 2017/18, and because they are not representative of the level of qualifications typically offered to 16-year-olds in Wales.

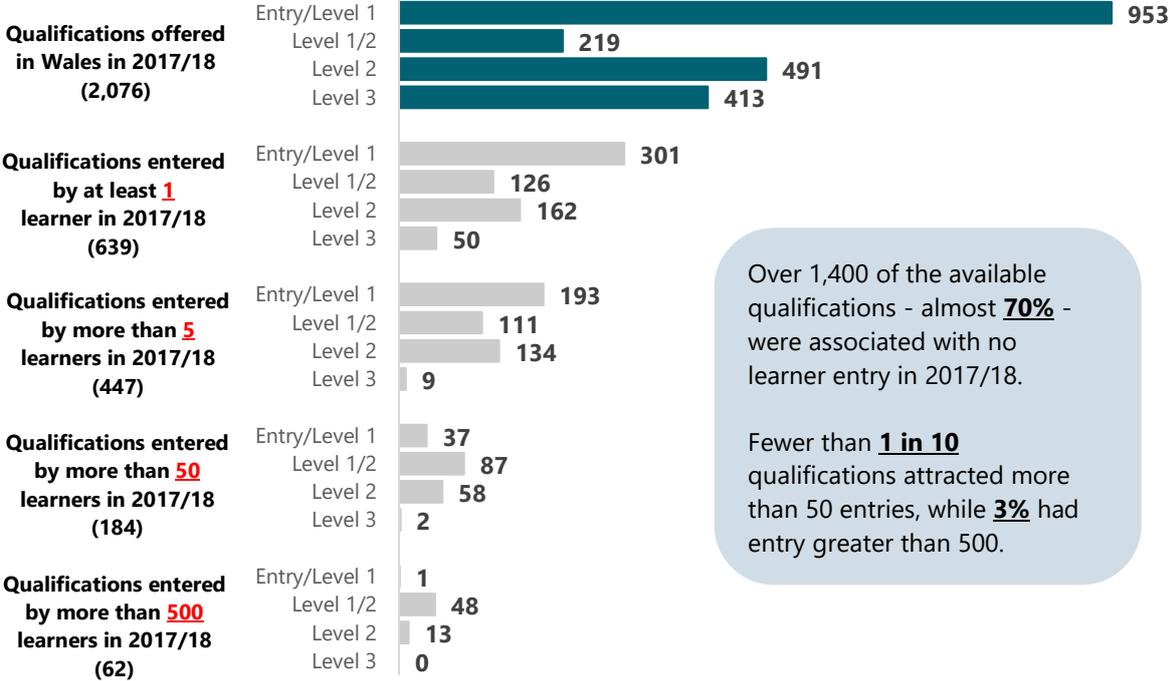
**Figure 1: Number of GCSEs and other qualifications available to 16-year-old learners in Wales in September 2019, by qualification level**



**What qualifications are 16-year-old learners in Wales entering?**

1.4 To enable us to explore which qualifications 16-year-old learners in Wales are entering, we must revert to using data from the 2017/18 academic year, which is the most recent data available. In this year, there were over 2,000 qualifications eligible for public funding for 16-year-olds. Of these qualifications, almost 70% (over 1,400) were not entered by any learners, just over 20% (447) had more than 5 entries, and only 3% (62) attracted more than 500 entries. Figure 2 below illustrates the number of qualifications that were available in the 2017/2018 academic year, and how many learners were entering qualifications across the different levels.

**Figure 2: Number of publicly funded pre-16 qualifications available and those achieving various entry benchmarks in Wales, 2017/18**



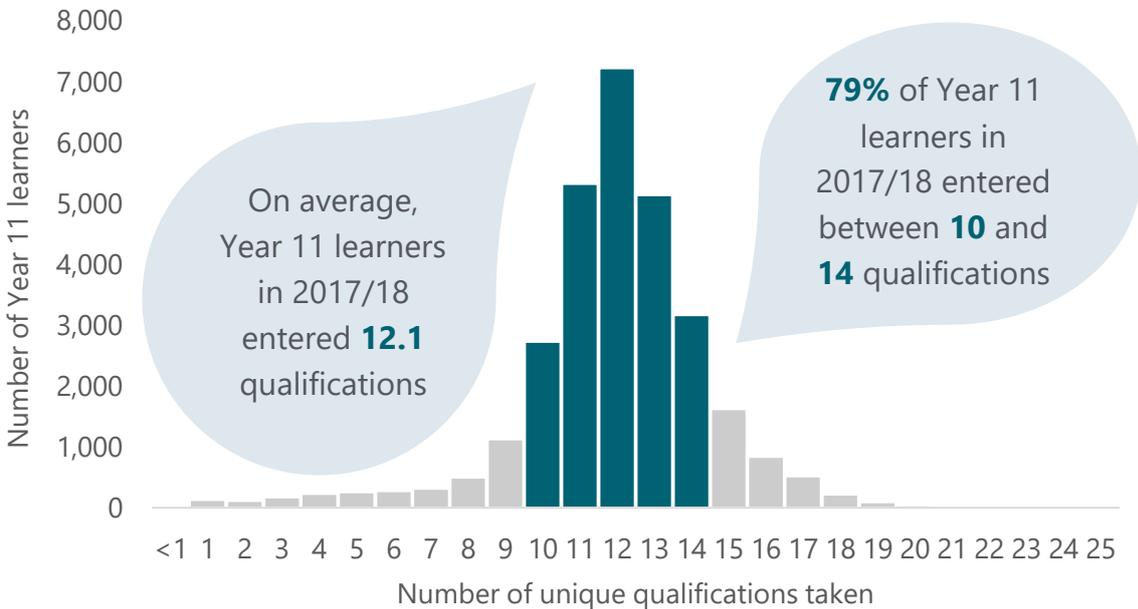
Sources: QiW, Welsh Examinations Database (WED)

1.5 It is pertinent to note that although GCSE qualifications form only a small part of the qualification offer for 16-year-old learners in Wales, they are by far the most widely entered. As an example, 29,000 learners entered the WJEC GCSE in mathematics in the 2017/18 academic year. This is compared to fewer than 5,000 learners who entered the LIBF Level 2 Certificate in Financial Capability and Careers Development; the most popular qualification in the area of mathematics that isn't a GCSE.

## How many qualifications does each 16-year-old learner enter?

1.6 As shown in Figure 3 below, in the 2017/18 academic year, the average number of unique qualifications entered by the end of Year 11 was 12.1<sup>28</sup>. On average, this consisted of 9.5 GCSE qualifications and 2.6 other qualifications. Most learners (79%) entered between 10 and 14 qualifications.

**Figure 3: Number of unique qualifications entered by each learner by the end of Year 11 in 2017/18<sup>29</sup>**



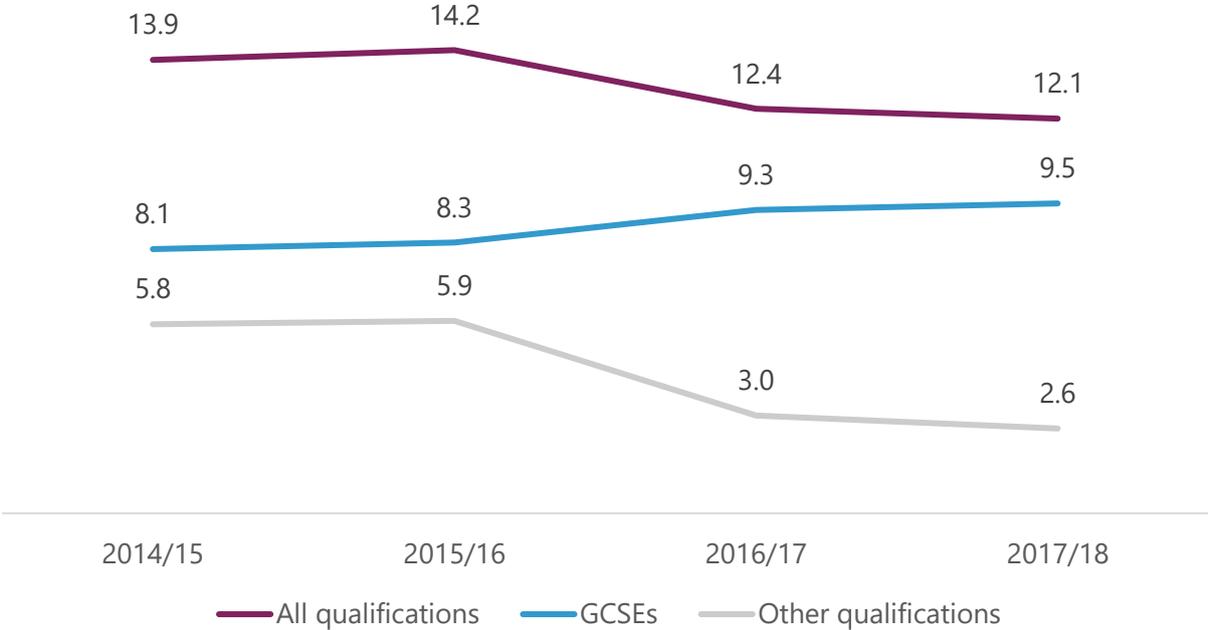
Source: Welsh Examinations Database (WED)

1.7 Figure 4 below shows how the average number of qualifications a learner enters by the end of Year 11 has changed over time. While the average number of qualifications entered by each learner has gone down from 13.9 to 12.1 since 2014/15, the average number of GCSEs has risen from 8.1 to 9.5 over the same timeframe. The number of other qualifications entered by learners by the end of Year 11 fell from 5.8 in 2014/15 to 2.6 in 2017/18.

<sup>28</sup> This refers to the number of different qualifications each learner entered. It does not include multiple entries for the same qualification.

<sup>29</sup> Data in Figures 3 and 4 includes all Year 11 learners who were entered for at least one qualification, as recorded in the Welsh Examinations Database. Short Course GCSEs are counted as 0.5 qualifications, Double Award GCSEs are counted as two qualifications, and all other qualifications are counted as one qualification.

**Figure 4: Average number of unique qualifications entered by each learner by the end of Year 11, by qualification type**



Source: Welsh Examinations Database (WED)

**What subject areas are 16-year-old learners in Wales entering qualifications in?**

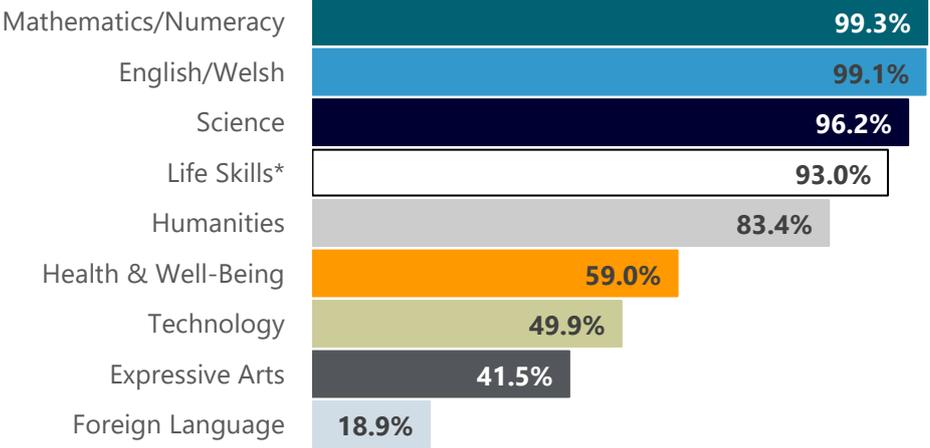
1.8 As shown in Figure 5 below, the number of qualification entries varies substantially by subject area. The core subject areas of mathematics, English/Welsh and science were all entered by over 95% of all 16-year-old learners in publicly funded centres in Wales who entered at least one qualification. In comparison, fewer than one in five learners were entered for a qualification in a foreign language, and just over 40% of learners entered a qualification in expressive arts<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> The data presented in this section is intended as a measure of how many learners are entering these qualifications and should not be interpreted as a measure of how important or valued each qualification/ related subject is. In developing any future proposals on which qualifications should be available, we will consider a wide range of factors.

**Figure 5: Number of 16-year-old learners in publicly funded centres in Wales who entered at least one qualification in 2017/18, and the proportion that entered at least one qualification**

Total Year 11 learners in 2017/18 **30,028\*\***

**Proportion that entered a qualification in...**



\* includes Skills Challenge Certificate and Essential Skills Wales

\*\* represents the number entering at least 1 qualification

Source: Welsh Examinations Database (WED)