



**QUALIFICATIONS WALES:
HIGHER EDUCATION
ADMISSIONS GUIDE**

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Introduction

Qualifications in the UK are changing, with reforms taking place in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

The aim of this publication is to explain the changes to qualifications in Wales.

What are the main changes to qualifications in Wales?

A level

AS and A level qualifications in Wales have been reformed on a similar timeline to the reforms in England. The new qualifications are being introduced in three waves between 2015 and 2017.

The main points to note about the new qualifications are that:

- The content requirements have been updated and remain very similar to the AS and A levels being reformed in England.
- In Wales, the AS qualification continues to contribute to the overall A level (whereas in England, the AS is now decoupled from the A level).
- The AS level assessments in the reformed qualifications contribute to 40% of the A level.
- Where appropriate for the subject, practical skills will be assessed and will count towards the final grade.
- All A levels continue to be unitised, but assessments are now offered during the summer examination series only. January assessment opportunities have been discontinued in Wales (as in Northern Ireland and England).
- Candidates may re-sit each unit once only prior to certification for the qualification, with the better outcome contributing to the overall grade.
- Candidates may retake the whole qualification more than once.

Information on the reform process and timetable is available from the Qualifications Wales website at www.qualificationswales.org

In subjects where there is no Wales-specific A level, state funded learners will be able to choose from the A levels that have been reformed for England, as long as they have been 'designated' by Qualifications Wales as eligible for use on publicly funded learning programmes in Wales.

QiW, Qualifications Wales's online database for Wales, lists all the qualifications that have been designated.

More information about the reforms in Wales, England and Northern Ireland can be found at www.qualificationswales.org/three-country-statement

TIP FOR HE

- Although there are some differences between A levels in Wales and England, for the purposes of making offers, Higher Education Providers (HEPs) should view them as interchangeable.
- In low take-up subjects, some learners in Wales may be taking A levels developed in England.

The Welsh Baccalaureate

The revised Welsh Baccalaureate was introduced for first teaching from September 2015.

From 2017, universities will see a significant rise in the number of applicants with the Welsh Baccalaureate. The revised Welsh Baccalaureate is considerably different from that previously offered.

The Welsh Baccalaureate is available at three levels: Foundation (level 1), National (level 2), and Advanced (level 3). It includes a Skills Challenge Certificate that assesses skills including literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving, planning and organisation, creativity and innovation and personal effectiveness.

Many applicants from Wales to higher education will be offering the Level 3 Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate, comprising:

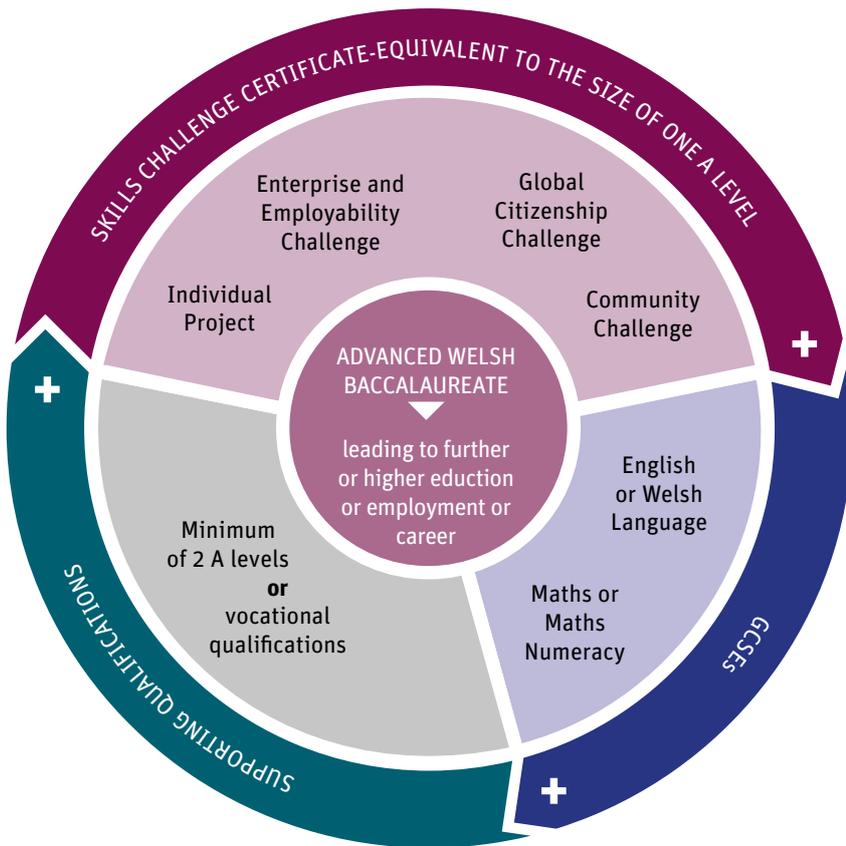
- i) *the Skills Challenge Certificate*, which is the same size as an A level (360 guided learning hours) and is graded A* to E.
- ii) *a minimum of two level 3 qualifications* (e.g. A levels);
- iii) *GCSE English/Welsh Language and GCSE Maths Numeracy/Maths*.

TIP FOR HE

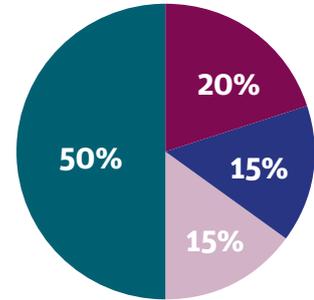
- Most applicants from Wales will be taking the Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate, which includes the Skills Challenge Certificate qualification.
- The Skills Challenge Certificate is the same size as an A level and has the same grading structure.
- It attracts the same number of UCAS tariff points as an A level for each grade.
- It is expected that most learners intending to progress to HE will be taking two or more A levels or equivalent alongside the Skills Challenge Certificate.



BREAKDOWN OF THE NEW ADVANCED WELSH BACCALAUREATE



Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate component weighting



KEY

- Individual Project - 50%
- Enterprise and Employability Challenge - 20%
- Global Citizenship Challenge - 15%
- Community Challenge - 15%



Skills Challenge Certificate

The Skills Challenge Certificate is graded A* to E and is assessed through an Individual Project and three Challenges:

Skills Challenge certificate components				
	Individual project (50%)	Challenges		
		Enterprise and Employability (20%)	Global Citizenship (15%)	Community (15%)
<i>Purpose</i>	To develop learners' research skills	To develop enterprising skills and attributes and enhance employability	To develop knowledge and understanding of world issues	To identify and participate in community-based opportunities
<i>Emphasis</i>	Future educational or careers aspirations	To develop the skills and attributes required for work and higher education	Understanding and responding appropriately to global issues	Encouraging learners to identify, develop and participate in opportunities that will benefit a community
<i>Skills demonstrated</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research skills and knowledge • high level of independent study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numeracy • digital literacy • creativity and innovation • personal effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy • critical thinking • problem-solving • creativity and innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning and organisation • personal effectiveness
<i>Assessment</i>	Extended written account or artefact/ product supported by written evidence	Challenge brief	Challenge brief	Challenge brief



The legacy Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Diploma

The legacy Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Diploma was awarded for the last time in summer 2016. This qualification consisted of a Core which was awarded Pass/Fail and included:

- a Candidate Diary;
- an Individual Investigation;
- 6 Essential Skills Wales/Key Skills qualifications.

A pass in the Core, together with achievement in 2 A levels grade A*-E or equivalent, combined to provide an A*-C grade for the Diploma.

The 'Core' attracted 120 UCAS tariff points irrespective of the grade awarded to candidates, whereas the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate is graded A* to E with each grade attracting the same number of UCAS tariff points as for an A level.





TIP FOR HE

Offer making – Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate

Offers can be framed in terms of the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate (graded A* to E), which will have the same tariff points as an A level (for further information, please see www.ucas.com). A typical offer might include, for example, a grade B in the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate, B in A level French, and C in A level History.

Wherever possible, offers should be framed in terms of the equivalent of a maximum of three A levels so that Welsh-domiciled learners are not disadvantaged by being required to achieve a higher volume of learning than is currently the norm.

Typical offers might be as follows:

Course applied for	Qualifications taken	Offer
Sports Management	A level English Literature A level History A level PE Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate	Grades ABB from 3 A levels or Grades AB from 2 A levels + grade A in Welsh Baccalaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate
International Management	A level Business Studies A level Economics A level Mathematics Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate	Grades AAB from 3 A levels or Grades AA from 2 A levels + grade B in Welsh Baccalaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate or Grades AB from 2 A levels + grade A in Welsh Baccalaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate
International Relations and Politics	A level Biology A level History A level Physical Education Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate	Grades AAB from 3 A levels or Grades ABBB from any combination of 3 A levels + Welsh Baccalaureate-Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate but must include A level Biology and History



GCSE

GCSEs are being reformed in Wales to the same timeline as in England.

The main features of reformed GCSEs in Wales are as follows:

- They continue to be graded A* to G.
- The content is updated, but is generally very similar to the content in England.
- The reformed GCSEs have more exam-based assessment than their predecessors; however, they include non-exam assessment where it is appropriate to assess knowledge, understanding and skills that are intrinsic to the subject.
- Some are linear, others are modular.
- The existing GCSE mathematics qualification has been replaced by two separate mathematics qualifications: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy. The two qualifications are the same size, and offer the same demand, but they assess different content and skills. For information, please see the FAQs on page 14.

In some low take-up subjects, GCSEs are being reformed for England, but not for Wales. In subjects where there is no Wales-specific GCSE, state-funded learners will be able to choose from the GCSEs that have been reformed for England. These qualifications are designed to meet requirements set by Ofqual, the qualifications regulator for England, and, beginning in summer 2017, will be graded on a scale of 9 to 1, not A* to G.

For more information about the GCSEs that have been approved and are currently being revised, please see the Qualifications Wales website at www.qualificationswales.org

GCSE and grading

From 2017, GCSEs in Wales will retain the current grading scale of A* to G. However, GCSEs in England and Northern Ireland will adopt different grading scales, so there will be different grading scales for GCSEs across Wales, England and Northern Ireland:

- GCSEs designed to meet Ofqual requirements for England will be graded 9 to 1 (with 9 being the highest grade);
- From 2019, GCSEs designed to meet CCEA Regulation requirements in Northern Ireland will be graded on a new scale of A* to G, which will include a new grade C*.

No precise comparison can be made between the current alphabetical grading scale and the revised numerical scale in England, as there will be no direct equivalence between the two grading scales. It will not be possible, for example, to say that a grade B is precisely equivalent to a grade 5 or a grade 6 (some broad comparisons can be drawn, however, as we explain below).

Ofqual has been clear that it expects the new GCSEs in England to be accessible to the same range of candidate ability as the current qualifications. It expects broadly the same proportion of learners that achieved a grade C and above in any subject in the old qualifications to achieve a grade 4 and above in the new ones. The proportion of candidates achieving grades 9 to 7 will broadly equate to those who would have achieved grades A* to A. Fewer grade 9s will be awarded than A*s are currently.

For more information, please see www.ofqual.gov.uk

TIP FOR HE

Universities and colleges will need to be mindful of the different GCSE grading scales operating across Wales, England and Northern Ireland when communicating their entry requirements.

Reformed GCSEs are being phased in across different subjects over several years. During this transition period, there will be a mixed economy of A* to G and 9 to 1 grades operating in England.

In Wales, learners studying some subjects will take reformed GCSEs that have been developed for England, which means they will have a mixture of lettered and numerical grades.





Vocational qualifications

There are a wide range of vocational qualifications taken by learners at 14-19 that are just as valuable and challenging as general qualifications.

Many vocational qualifications are, and continue to be, offered on a three-country basis (i.e. Wales, England and Northern Ireland).

Qualifications Wales is adopting a long-term strategic approach to the review and reform of vocational qualifications in Wales through our programme of sector reviews. In July 2016, we reported on our first review of qualifications in the Health and Social Care (including Child care) sector and in 2017 we are turning to Construction and the Built Environment and ICT. In each sector review we engage extensively with employers, learning providers and learners in the sector to assess the effectiveness of the current qualifications and the underpinning system.

Following our Health and Social Care review, we are commissioning a new suite of qualifications – from levels 1 to 5 – to be taught from September 2019; the present qualifications will continue until that time.

In the meantime, we continue to accept qualifications into the Welsh qualification system if there is evidence of employer support, relevance to Welsh learners, learner demand and age appropriateness. Therefore, most vocational qualifications in Wales will be identical to those awarded elsewhere in the UK.

IVETs and CVETs

All vocational qualifications in Wales have been classed as one of the following, in line with European conventions:

- IVETs (introductory qualifications suitable for all ages)
- CVETs (continuing qualifications linked to occupational competence and suitable for those over the age of 16)

All vocational qualifications taken by learners under 16 must be IVETs. This helps to ensure that young people take qualifications appropriate for their age and stage, and that they can gain an introduction to a sector or subject before progressing to competency-based qualifications.

Signposting to specifications and other resources

A full list of qualifications that are eligible for use on publicly funded programmes of learning for 14-19 year olds in Wales can be found on our database, www.qiw.wales

A levels and GCSEs reformed specifically for Wales will only be delivered by WJEC. Specifications and further information on GCSEs and A levels for Wales and on the Welsh Baccalaureate can be found at: www.wjec.co.uk

UCAS have extensive and very useful resources on qualification reform across the UK; for further information, please see www.ucas.com

Working with higher education

Qualifications Wales involves Higher Education Providers in the commissioning and design of qualifications, and consults extensively with higher education, as well as other stakeholders. Given that Higher Education Providers are major consumers of the qualifications that we regulate, we are keen to maintain an active dialogue wherever possible.





Frequently asked questions

A wide range of FAQs is available on the Qualifications Wales site: www.qualificationswales.org

The following FAQs are based on queries from HEPs and will be particularly useful for admissions practitioners:

GCSEs in mathematics

Q: Is GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy a double award?

A: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy are two separate qualifications. They are significantly different from both the previous GCSE Mathematics qualifications, and each other, with each assessing different content and skills. The vast majority of learners in Wales will take both.

Q: Are GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy half GCSEs?

A: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy are both full GCSEs, of the same size and demand.

Q: Can someone who passes GCSE Mathematics be expected to pass GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy easily?

A: Not necessarily; the assessment focus and contexts are different and applicants may do better in GCSE Mathematics than in GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy or vice versa.

Q: Will learners from Wales be expected to achieve both GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy?

A: Most learners are expected to take both GCSEs, especially those who are likely to go on to HE.

Q: Which of the new GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy qualifications should we require for entry to courses?

A: This is likely to vary from course to course. Both new GCSEs will be of equal demand and rigour, but each assesses different content and skills: GCSE in Mathematics-Numeracy will assess the mathematics that learners will need in their everyday lives, in the world of work, and in other general curriculum areas. GCSE Mathematics, on the other hand, will extend to aspects of mathematics needed for progression to scientific, technical or further mathematical study. The differences mean that not every candidate will get the same grade on both qualifications.

Q: We need a pass in GCSE Mathematics to fulfil our general minimum requirement for any degree scheme as evidence of general academic attainment and breadth; which GCSE Mathematics should we stipulate?

A: Our advice is that either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy will be equally acceptable for this general purpose.

Q: We run very competitive courses and look for a certain specified number of very high grades, e.g. A* at GCSE to pre-screen applicants for further consideration. Which GCSE Mathematics should I count?

A: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy are separate GCSEs with their own specifications and focus of assessment. They are comparable in demand and rigour, so either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy should count.

Q: What should be the requirement for applicants for Science, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM subjects)?

A: Currently many courses for STEM subjects require applicants to have gained a grade C or higher in GCSE Mathematics in addition to the required A levels.

Given its specific focus on the mathematics required for progression to scientific, technical or further mathematical study, we suggest that satisfactory completion of the GCSE Mathematics qualification alone would be sufficient, in combination with the appropriate A levels, or other qualifications, to meet course requirements, as is the case at present.

Q: We currently require GCSE Mathematics for progression to Social Sciences, e.g. Accounting, Economics, Psychology. Which GCSE Mathematics should I stipulate for applicants from Wales for these subjects?

A: Our advice is that there would be sufficient knowledge of relevant mathematical techniques and assurance of mathematical skills in either of the new mathematics GCSEs to meet the progression needs of these subjects.

We would urge you to look at the specifications for both GCSEs to assist your decisions, but we recommend that you frame offers to include either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy.

Q: What GCSE Mathematics requirements are needed for Initial Teacher Education and Training in Wales?

A: The Welsh Government has decided that the requirement for a grade B in Mathematics to enter ITET in Wales will continue to apply and will be satisfied by attainment of grade B in either GCSE Mathematics or Mathematics-Numeracy.

Q: Which GCSE will applicants need to fulfil the numeracy requirement of the Nursing and Midwifery Council in Wales for entry to their regulated degree schemes?

A: A grade A* to C in either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy would meet the evidence requirements for numeracy. The regulated degree schemes are:

- Adult Nursing
- Child Nursing
- Mental Health Nursing
- Learning Disability Nursing
- Midwifery

For further details of the content and structure of the new mathematics GCSEs, please see the specifications for both GCSEs on WJEC's website at www.wjec.co.uk

Welsh Baccalaureate

Q: Is the Welsh Baccalaureate the same as the English Baccalaureate or the International Baccalaureate?

A: The Welsh Baccalaureate is entirely different from the English Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, French Baccalaureate or any other Baccalaureate. Please do not bracket them together as similar in your entry requirements.

Q: Is the Welsh Baccalaureate an alternative qualification to A levels in Wales?

A: All learners in Wales are expected to study the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate alongside their A levels or equivalent qualifications. The Welsh Baccalaureate is part of mainstream education in Wales, not an alternative qualification.

Q: Should we view the Welsh Baccalaureate as an international qualification?

A: The Welsh Baccalaureate is a national qualification for Wales, and should therefore not be placed under International Qualifications.

Q: Is the Welsh Baccalaureate only available in Welsh?

A: The Welsh Baccalaureate can be studied through the medium of either English or Welsh.

About Qualifications Wales

Who are we?

Qualifications Wales is the independent regulator of non-degree qualifications in Wales. Established through the Qualifications Wales Act 2015, we are a Welsh Government Sponsored Body but are accountable, through our annual report, to the National Assembly for Wales. This gives us independence from the government.

What do we do, and how?

We work on behalf of learners, to make sure that qualifications, and the qualification system in Wales, are suitable for the needs of learners in Wales, and we promote public confidence in them.

We do this by:

- i) Recognising awarding bodies to offer regulated qualifications;
- ii) Identifying qualifications that are eligible for public funding;
- iii) Monitoring awarding bodies to make sure they operate fairly and consistently and meet our requirements;
- iv) Reviewing qualifications that are already in the system;
- v) Designing new qualification requirements and commissioning awarding bodies to help develop new qualifications for Wales;
- vi) Conducting research to inform our regulatory approach.

More information

For further details on our work, please visit www.qualificationswales.org



Qualifications Wales
Q2 Building
Pencarn Lane
Newport
NP10 8AR

☎ 0333 077 2701
enquiries@qualificationswales.org

🐦 [@quals_wales](https://twitter.com/quals_wales)