

Business Plan 2018-19



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1. Qualifications Wales

1.1. Introduction

Qualifications Wales regulates qualifications, other than degrees, in Wales. We were established in August 2015 through the Qualifications Wales Act and assumed our duties and powers in September of that year.

2018-19 is our third year of operation. We have established our longer-term strategy, incorporating our strategic plans for general and vocational qualifications and for the development of our corporate capability. We are looking forward to continuing with our programmes of work and using our role as the qualifications regulator to support and strengthen the qualifications system in Wales.

This business plan for 2018-19 sets our priorities for the financial year and has been established within the context of the current qualifications landscape and our ongoing work. These priorities have been approved by our Board.

We welcome any feedback you may have.

1.2. Our purpose

As the independent regulator, we have two Principal Aims:

Ensuring that qualifications (and the Welsh qualifications system) are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and

Promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualifications system.

This means that we place the learner at the heart of our activities. It also means that we have responsibilities to look across the qualifications system, to make sure it is working in the interest of learners; taking action or advising others to do so when needed. We understand the difference that good education makes to long-term life chances and the importance of being able to demonstrate skills and knowledge through robust and meaningful qualifications.

Our purpose is met when regulated qualifications taken in Wales are trusted and valued by learners, employers and education providers and are recognised throughout the UK and internationally.

2. Our strategies

Our strategy for the organisation was approved by our Board in October 2017 and runs from 2018-22. The strategy can be viewed [here](#).

To support the overarching Qualifications Wales Strategy, over the last 12 months we have developed three underpinning plans:

2.1 General Qualifications Strategic Plan

This plan sets our priorities for regulating general qualifications (GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate) over the next three years. The plan can be viewed [here](#).

2.2 Vocational Qualifications Strategy

This plan sets out our approach to vocational qualifications over the next three years. The plan can be viewed [here](#).

2.3 Corporate Capability Strategic Plan

This plan is focused on how we operate as a corporate body. The plan can be viewed [here](#).

3. Current environment

This business plan covers our third year of operation, and we enter it with clear priorities and plans. Education remains of high political and public interest, and divergence in education policy between England and Wales grows.

Last year saw learners in Wales taking the first of the newly reformed GCSEs and A levels. Regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland worked together to maintain standards. This year will see more new GCSEs and A level qualifications sat for the first time in Wales.

In Wales, the Welsh Government is continuing to lead work on curriculum reform for learners aged 3-16. We are involved so that we understand the level of change and can advise what changes might be required for qualifications. If this means that most of the qualifications taken by 16-year-olds need to be reformed, this will be a significant programme of work. We are planning well ahead so that we have the resources in place when needed.

In England, delivery of the Skills Plan is underway, with the development of T level programmes. The plans to license one awarding body to deliver the qualifications will have an impact on the qualifications that are available to learners on further education programmes in Wales. Some existing qualifications may cease to be offered in Wales. We are in discussions with the Department of Education in England about the availability of T levels for learners in Wales.

The differences in apprenticeship policy between England and Wales are also creating some uncertainty related to the availability of existing qualifications. We are carefully monitoring the position and discussing the potential impact with the Welsh Government.

In Wales, our first two vocational sector reviews have identified the need for new qualifications in the Health and Social Care (including Childcare) sector and, potentially, in the Construction and the Built Environment sector (subject to the outcomes of our consultation). We look forward to implementing changes, working closely with all stakeholders involved.

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

In terms of legislation, this year we expect to see regulations being considered that, if passed, will confirm the scope of our powers to issue monetary penalties. We also expect to see the Welsh Government transfer the status of 'appropriate regulator' (under the Equalities Act) to us.

We will be finalising actions to ensure our compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) when these are enacted. Although regulations have not yet been passed to apply Welsh Language Standards to us, we have voluntarily adopted many of these in advance. Similarly, we have voluntarily adopted the approach outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We will continue to deliver against our Equalities and our Well-being objectives and to embed our Welsh language policies, as well as ensure our work is closely aligned to the government strategy Prosperity for All.

4. Operational priorities (2018-19)

4.1. Introduction and context

The 2018-19 operational priorities build on last year's plan. There are five areas of operational priority for 2018-19:

1. Deliver the general qualifications aspects of our work;
2. Deliver the vocational qualifications aspects of our work;
3. Deliver the core regulatory aspects of our work;
4. Engage with and support the Welsh qualifications system;
5. Continue to develop our corporate capabilities and capacity.

4.2. Priority 1 – Deliver the general qualifications aspects of our work

Our priority is to ensure that reformed Wales-only GCSE, AS, A level qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate are fit for purpose and valued, and that the public has confidence in results. Our monitoring is focused on ensuring that learners are assessed fairly, are rewarded accurately and that there is consistency from one exam series to the next.

In 2018-19 we will:

Oversee the setting and maintenance of appropriate standards in general qualifications

We will oversee the process that awarding bodies use to secure fair and appropriate standards from one exam series to the next. We will continue to work closely with other regulators to agree a common approach to setting standards in GCSE and A level qualifications.

Monitor general qualifications

We will continue to closely monitor the reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate to ensure they are effectively implemented, fairly assessed and awarded at the appropriate standard.

Take forward the recommendations from the review of the Welsh Baccalaureate

In April 2018, we published a review of the Skills Challenge Certificate and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate. In response to the recommendations in the report, we will establish a working group to develop areas for improvement.

4.3. Priority 2 - Deliver the vocational qualifications aspects of our work:

We consider vocational qualifications to be those that assess knowledge, understanding and/or skills that relate explicitly to the world of work. Vocational qualifications should therefore reflect the needs of employers, whether they lead to employment or to the next stage of learning. On a day-to-day basis, we designate vocational qualifications as eligible for use on publicly funded courses. However, because there are many thousands of vocational qualifications, we need to focus our other activities on carefully targeted areas of work. We focus our monitoring of vocational qualifications on areas that make a difference and we conduct sector reviews in priority economic sectors. Where a sector review identifies it to be necessary, we commission new qualifications for Wales.

In 2018-19, we will:

Deliver the vocational qualifications monitoring programme for 2018-19

In 2017-18 we successfully monitored First Aid qualifications. This year our focus will move to Food Safety qualifications.

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

Our Health and Social Care and Childcare review, published in 2016, identified the need for a reformed suite of qualifications. Following a competitive process, we have commissioned a consortium of City & Guilds and WJEC to develop this new suite. The new qualifications will be developed and, subject to meeting our criteria, be approved by the end of this financial year for first teaching in September 2019.

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

In February 2018, we published our review of the Construction and Built Environment and our consultation on proposals for reform of the qualifications in this sector. We will consider responses to this consultation when planning and implementing our next actions.

Complete and publish the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) review

In 2018-19 we will draw together the findings of our ICT review, publish our report and consult on our proposed actions. By the end of the 2018-19, we will determine our strategy for action in the light of responses to our consultation.

Prepare for the Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Sector Review

We know that there is a need to review the engineering and advanced manufacturing sector. This review will be spread over two years, and in 2018, we will scope and plan this review and start to gather views from learners and stakeholders.

Manage the actions arising from the Essential Skills Review

In December 2017, we published an evaluation of the implementation of the Essential Skills suite of qualifications, to identify the extent to which they are meeting learner needs. Our report included an action plan. Throughout 2018-19 we will work with awarding bodies to implement this plan, including a potential revision of the assessment model.

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

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

4.4. Priority 3 - Deliver the core regulatory aspects of our work

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

In 2018-19 we will:

Review our Standard Conditions of Recognition

Our Standard Conditions of Recognition are the rules that awarding bodies are required to comply with to maintain their recognition as bodies able to offer regulated qualifications in Wales. This is our principal regulatory document. During 2018-19 we will complete work to review these conditions to make sure they are clear and effective as possible. If required, we will consult on, and publish, revised conditions. Supplementary guidance for awarding bodies will be produced should the conditions be revised.

Monitor awarding body compliance

Awarding bodies must provide us with an annual statement of compliance. We will review evidence submitted against our lines of inquiry and will monitor non-compliant awarding bodies to ensure they take appropriate action to return to full compliance.

Embed and keep under review our regulatory policies and procedures

We have a rolling programme of regulatory policy reviews and in 2018-19 we will review a selection of existing policies in line with the published review date. We will also review our approach to conducting impact assessments. This year we will be establishing arrangements with the First Tier Tribunal so that once Welsh Government have passed regulations that enable us to issue monetary penalties, awarding bodies will have a clear appeal route.

Process applications for recognition, surrender and designation

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

4.5. Priority 4 – Engage with and support the Welsh qualifications system

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

In 2018-19 we will:

Support the sustainability and further development of Welsh and bilingual qualifications

We will continue to encourage more awarding bodies to offer Welsh-medium qualifications and assessment. During 2018-19 we will work with them on this agenda and we will also work with stakeholders, (including schools and colleges), to identify demand. We will continue to offer grants to develop Welsh-medium qualifications and will be taking the time to further consider the best way to operate the scheme. As part of our timetable for policy reviews, we will also be reviewing our Welsh-medium and bilingual policy.

Continue to develop our external engagement

We will continue to enhance and strengthen our communication channels. Our centre support team play a vital role in supporting schools and colleges ensuring that they deliver examinations to their standards effectively, fairly and securely. We will continue to liaise with staff in schools to understand the challenges they face in relation to qualifications, and to offer support where we are able.

Inform forward planning for qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales

We undertake research to provide an evidence base for our decisions, (and on occasions the decisions of others), and to inform our longer-term planning. During 2018-19 we will:

- Complete research on the rigour and reliability of non-examined assessment;
- Explore options for a new set of Welsh language qualifications for learners aged 14-19;
- Publish a report on the fees charged by awarding bodies offering general qualifications in Wales;
- Measure and understand public confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system.

Continue to support the curriculum reform programme and consider implications for qualifications

The development of a new national curriculum for Wales is likely to bring about significant change in qualifications for 14-16-year-olds. We will develop our approach and capability to support the programme, and we will be taking the time to consider the implications for qualifications and the qualifications system. To prepare for the new curriculum we will plan research activities, as well as identify lessons learned from the recent general qualifications reform programme to help support changes to qualifications. We will also continue to engage with the Welsh Government and others on the reform process.

Continue to build effective working relationships with fellow regulators on shared strategic priorities

We value our relationships with other regulators. It's important that we build effective relationships to enable us to identify efficiencies and share good practice. We also need to be mindful of the impact of our actions on awarding bodies that are regulated by more than one regulator. In 2018-19 we will seek to enhance our relationships further by developing information sharing agreements with other regulators.

4.6. Priority 5 – Continue to develop our own corporate capabilities and capacity

As a young organisation, we recognise that we need to continue to strengthen our corporate capabilities and our reputation with stakeholders. We strive to take decisions that are balanced, and evidence-based. We listen to stakeholders and give out clear information. We want to continue to earn trust through robust management of our resources that are effective and compliant corporate practices.

In 2018-19, we will:

Continue to develop the maturity of each of the finance and corporate services functions, to support and challenge the organisation to maximise use of its resources while maintaining compliance and safeguarding our reputation in the areas of:

- Communications and External Relations;
- Corporate Governance;
- Facilities;
- Finance;
- Human Resources;
- IT;
- Procurement.

Deliver the workforce strategy

In 2017-18, we developed our approach for our workforce strategy, which outlines how we will build, develop and enhance our organisational capability to deliver the principal aims and our strategic priorities. This year we will focus on the delivery of the strategy in the following areas: Shaping the workforce; Building our capability/skills; Well-being; Being a bilingual organisation; Culture and values.

Develop and deliver our health, safety and well-being action plan

We will be developing our health, safety and well-being action plan. This will include achieving the Corporate Health Standard, recognising the importance we place on health and well-being in the workplace.

Fully establish the capability to collect and publish data about examinations

In 2017-18 we began a project to enable us to start collecting data about qualifications awarded in Wales directly from awarding bodies. We use this data to support our monitoring activities and our work on research and statistical publications. We published our first general qualification data in November 2017. The focus for 2018-19 is to produce our first statistical publication for vocational qualifications.

Implement our Welsh language action plan

Although Welsh Language Standards regulations for our organisation have not yet been passed, we have chosen to voluntarily work towards many of them. We have an action plan and our focus will be on embedding the Standards throughout the organisation, with an emphasis on our engagement with the general public.

5. Funding and planned expenditure (2018-19)

Qualifications Wales is funded by Welsh Government. Our funding allocation for 2018-19 is £8.042m.

We have a Medium-Term Finance Plan, last updated in March 2018, for the period 2018-19 to 2020-21. This demonstrates how our anticipated activities and associated costs can be managed within anticipated funding levels over this period.

At a summary level, our 2018-19 budget is shown below:

Budget Area	2018-19 Budget £'000
Pay	4,761
Grants	1,020
Programme Costs	899
Running Costs	1,362
Total	8,042

We also have a £500k earmarked reserve on our balance sheet, set up to cover the costs associated with our ICT renewals programme and our data collection project, and we will use this as necessary in 2018-19 as we develop our plans in these areas.

In 2018-19, we will also start providing ICT support services to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission, for which we expect to generate a modest level of income. We will incorporate this into our budget assumptions as we become clearer on the level of service to be provided.

As we increase our involvement in the general qualifications curriculum reform programme during 2018-19, it is likely that we will start to incur additional costs. Our understanding is that the Welsh Government expects to provide additional funding should we not be able to absorb the costs of these additional activities within our core funding.

The diagram below further illustrates how we plan to spend our £8.042m budget:



6. Monitoring and review

We monitor progress against our plans regularly, with monthly reports provided to our internal Management Board and quarterly reports to our Board. We will publish a summary of the year's achievements in our end of year accounts. We will also provide a fuller account of our activities and achievements in our annual report (covering the academic year September 2017 to August 2018). We present our annual report to the National Assembly Children and Young People's Education Committee for their scrutiny; this forms part of our legal requirements under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015.

7. Useful links

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

- [Qualifications Wales Website](#)
- [Annual Accounts 2016-17](#)
- [Annual Report 2017](#)
- [Qualifications Wales Board Structure](#)
- [Qualifications Wales Executive Structure](#)