

# GCSE Digital Technology

How the approval  
criteria were  
developed



## Introduction

In December 2018, we published *Delivering Digital*, our review of qualifications and, the qualification system in the information and communication technology sector. In it we set out a number of actions intended to address the findings of the review. One action was to develop approval criteria for new GCSE, AS and A level Digital Technology qualifications. We want to approve the new GCSE by September 2020, so that it's ready for first teaching to Year 10 from September 2021 and first award in summer 2023. We will give a progress update later this summer to confirm this timetable.

In this document, we explain how we developed and sought feedback on the approval criteria for the new GCSE Digital Technology. These are the requirements we set for how the new GCSE should be designed and assessed. We summarise the feedback we received and explain the changes we made as a result.



## How we developed the approval criteria

At the outset of our work to develop the approval criteria, we established the Digital Technology Qualifications Advisory Group (DTQAG) to represent the views of different stakeholders in the sector across Wales. The DTQAG comprised of a teacher representative from each of the regional education consortia, representatives from higher education, further education, employers and the awarding bodies who expressed an interest in developing the new qualification. The group met regularly during the development period to help test and refine our ideas and proposals. We are grateful to all those who supported the work of the group.

We invited all the awarding bodies recognised by us to express an interest in helping to develop requirements for new Digital Technology qualifications. We then met with the two awarding bodies who expressed an interest and invited them to DTQAG meetings. Of those two awarding bodies, only WJEC continues to be actively involved in this work. It has confirmed its intention to develop a new GCSE Digital Technology qualification.

In March 2019, we held a series of Development Days at venues across Wales for teachers and further education lecturers to share their ideas for the new qualification. All sessions were well attended and gave attendees a chance to give their views on the proposed aims and objectives, subject content and assessment arrangements for the new qualification.

We were also grateful for the chance to attend meetings with schools and regional education consortia over the development period. These allowed us further opportunities to share our thinking with teachers and to get their views.

## Seeking feedback on the draft approval criteria

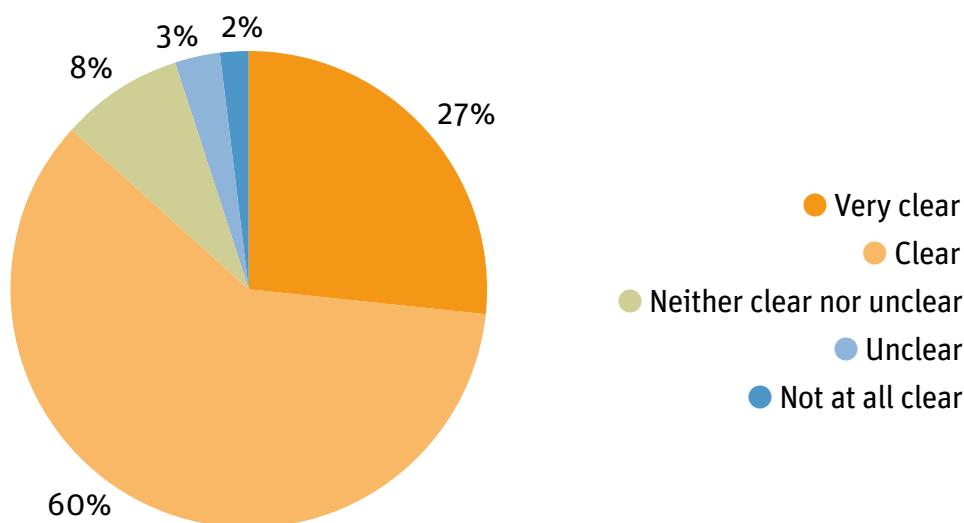
On 23 October 2019, we published draft approval criteria, along with an online survey which ran until 29 November 2019. We invited all interested stakeholders to review the proposed requirements and tell us how well they met the aims we set for the qualification.

We received 60 complete responses and 48 partial responses. Of those partial responses, only those that contained any completed answers were included in our analysis of the engagement. A summary of the responses is presented in the next section alongside an explanation of the changes made to the approval criteria in response to the feedback. We discussed any changes made to our proposals with WJEC as the awarding body who has remained involved in the development of the qualification.

We would like to thank everyone who has engaged in the development of these approval criteria, including those who took the time to provide feedback to our online engagement. Your ideas, feedback and support throughout this process have helped to ensure the approval criteria will lead to a qualification that meets the needs of learners, educators and industry.



## 1. How clear is the purpose of GCSE Digital Technology?



The overall purpose of the qualification was well received by respondents with over three quarters of them agreeing that the purpose of GCSE Digital Technology, as outlined in the approval criteria, was clear. When providing additional comments, respondents noted that they recognised that the purpose of the qualification was to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in a distinct subject area that builds on wider learning across the curriculum and complements computer science.

The few concerns that were raised in response to this question tended to relate to other aspects of the approval criteria and we have considered those in later sections of this document.

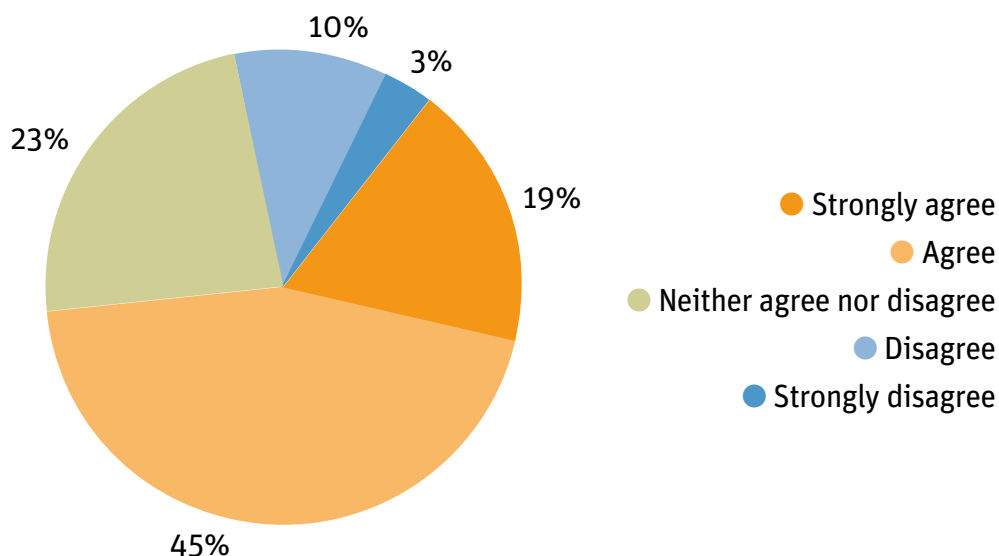
The only changes we have made to the purpose section of the approval criteria have been to remove duplication with the subject aims and objectives section.

*“As technology features heavily in our students’ lives, this qualification will allow students to understand the technology and communications that link all systems. This allows students who are not computer scientists to continue studying the subject area in which they have an interest.”*

**Teacher in secondary school**

<sup>1</sup> For information about this project, as well as the final version of the GCSE approval criteria please see the [Qualifications Wales website](#).

## 2. How far do you agree that the proposed content for GCSE Digital Technology is fit for purpose?



*"I really like it, there is lots of scope to provide interesting 'wow factor' lessons. Students will already have interest/experience in many of the strands."*

**Teacher in secondary school**

Responses to this question were positive overall, with a majority of respondents agreeing that the proposed content for GCSE Digital Technology was fit for purpose. Respondents identified that the draft approval criteria contained up-to-date content and our requirement for an awarding body to keep some areas under review was welcomed.

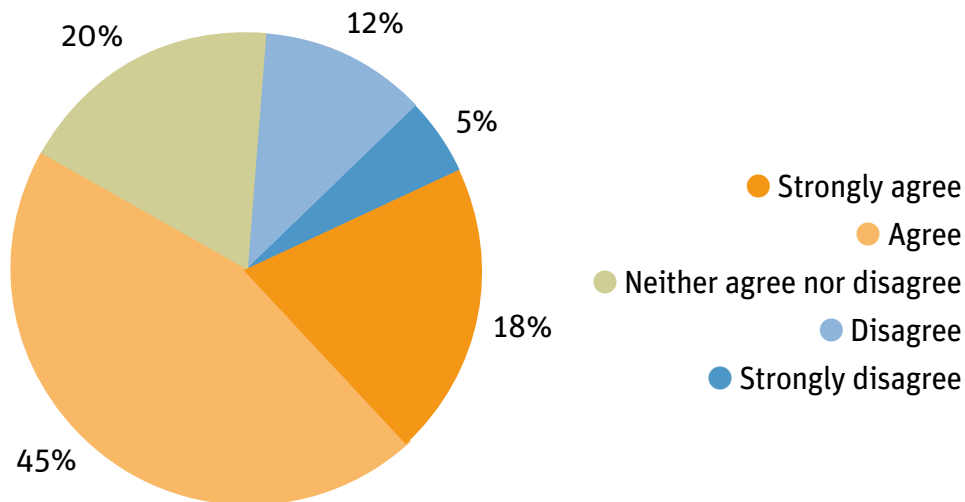
It was highlighted that requiring annual updates to some specific areas of the content could pose challenges to teachers as they would need to regularly update their teaching plans and resources. It was suggested that it may also lead to centres focussing on the updated content to the detriment of other content specified within Unit 1. Therefore, we have amended this requirement in the approval criteria so that the awarding body must explain how it intends to keep the content and assessment arrangements of the qualification under review to ensure currency and fitness for purpose across the qualification. They will also be required to explain to us how they will clearly communicate any changes to centres.

Several respondents noted that aspects of the content overlapped with existing qualifications such as GCSE Computer Science. A few respondents also noted that, more generally, the volume of content may be too much to deliver in a qualification of 120 guided learning hours. To address these concerns, we removed or synthesised some of the content to improve manageability for teachers and learners and to minimise overlap with existing qualifications.

A few respondents raised concerns that the link between the content and tasks in Unit 2 needed to be strengthened. Respondents highlighted that the link between the analysis undertaken in Section A and the digital product in Section B could be clearer. We have amended the Unit 2 scheme of assessment to emphasise the link between each stage of the product development process and the outcome of the data analysis.

Respondents suggested that a wide variety of digital products in Unit 2 may be difficult to mark consistently. In addition, it was recognised that it may be difficult for teachers to support learners in the development of a variety of different products within the same cohort. In response to these concerns and after further discussions with key stakeholders it was determined that the product would comprise of a number of web pages, at least one of which must contain a choice of either a short animation or a small video game section that has been developed by the learner. We are confident that this change will make the assessment more manageable to deliver and will allow centres to mark outcomes consistently.

### 3. How far do you agree that the proposed assessment arrangements for GCSE Digital Technology are fit for purpose?



Most respondents agreed that the assessment arrangements for the qualification are fit for purpose, with several commenting that the balance of examination and non-examination assessment (NEA) is appropriate.

## UNIT 1

Respondents welcomed the use of an on-screen examination for the assessment of Unit 1. However, this positive response was often balanced with concerns about the manageability of the assessment, with several respondents highlighting the additional risks and resource considerations involved in its delivery. Respondents also remarked that it would be beneficial for centres to have an opportunity to test the on-screen assessment prior to the live examination date.

*“I do agree with the assessment; however, with the on-screen exam, how do we ensure that the exam will run smoothly?”*

**Teacher in secondary school**

We have engaged in discussions with WJEC in order to explore potential risk mitigations for the on-screen assessment.

These discussions have assured us that suitable processes can be put in place to allow candidates to access the assessment in the event of any failure of an on-screen assessment. Sample assessment materials (SAMs) should be made available alongside the specification in September 2020, allowing centres to familiarise themselves with the qualification content and assessment arrangements. We are currently exploring with key stakeholders how we can best support centres to offer the on-screen assessment in 2023. Centres can also be confident that our regulatory requirements will ensure that suitable risk mitigation measures will be put in place by the awarding body.



## UNIT 2

In the draft approval criteria, we included a requirement for Unit 2 to be externally assessed by the awarding body. It was our intention that having the unit marked externally would provide greater consistency of marking across the range of digital products, support greater differentiation of marks and therefore avoid over-reliance on the exam-based components, and reduce assessment-related workload for teachers.

Feedback from respondents suggested that our actions may not, in all cases, have the intended effect. Respondents told us that having the unit externally assessed may not reduce the burden on teachers and learners as it could necessitate the creation and collection of large volumes of evidence which would need to be uploaded for each candidate.

To allow the outcome of this unit to be marked consistently, with effective moderation, at a centre level, we set out a more specific focus for the development of a digital product (a series of web pages with an either embedded animation or small video game section).

During the feedback, WJEC told us that having this unit externally assessed would lead to operational challenges and an increase in costs to offer the qualification which could impact on entry fees. After considering the feedback to our proposals, alongside the changes that we made to Unit 2, it was unclear whether the proposed requirement for Unit 2 to be externally marked would achieve the desired outcome. Therefore, we have made the decision to remove the requirement that Unit 2 be externally marked. The removal of this requirement will allow an awarding body to decide whether internal or external assessment is most appropriate for Unit 2.

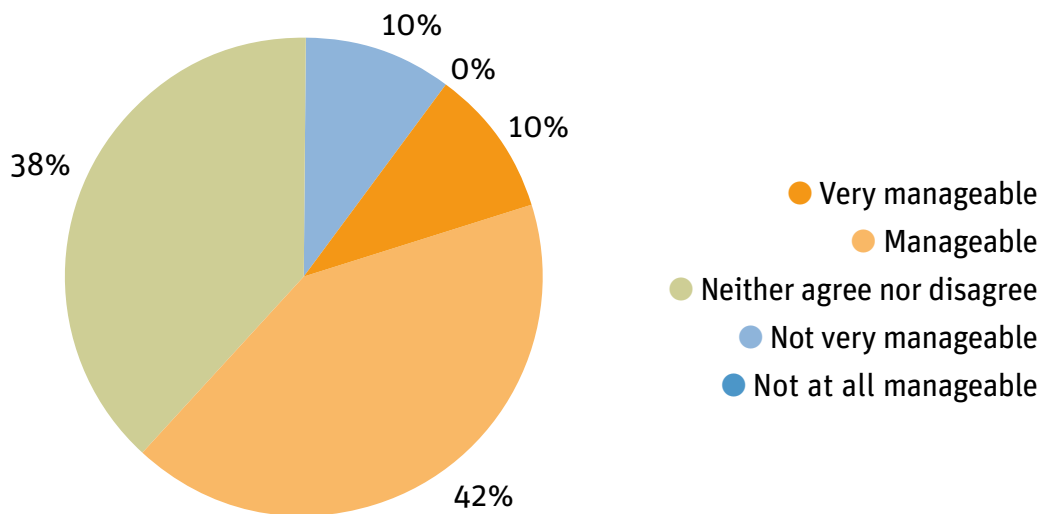
*“If every pupil’s work is to be sent off this will add a considerable amount of time to a teacher’s workload.”*

**Teacher in secondary school**

## UNIT 3

Respondents noted that the assessment arrangements for Unit 3 appeared to be manageable and the weighting of this assessment was appropriate. As no significant concerns were raised about the assessment arrangements for this unit, we did not make any substantial changes.

#### 4. How manageable would it be for centres to offer this qualification, in terms of physical resources?



*“Manageability would depend on the nature and variety of software required.”*

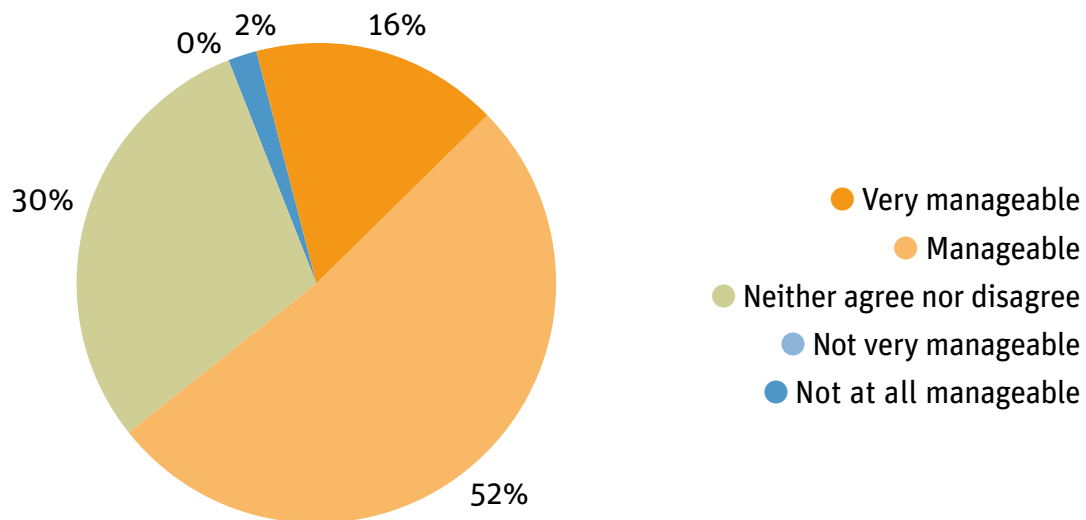
**Teacher in secondary school**

Over half of respondents agreed that the proposals would be manageable for centres, with only a few respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they would be manageable. Some respondents noted the need for more clarity on what the software and hardware requirements would be for centres offering the qualification.

We have amended elements of the approval criteria to further ensure that an awarding body will be able to develop manageable assessment arrangements for each of the NEA units. In Unit 2, we require that an awarding body allows learners to submit their digital products in a format in which the technical skills that have been used can be clearly evidenced. In Unit 3, manageability is supported by the requirement that learners be allowed to present their findings in a variety of digital formats. We are confident that these requirements will give centres the flexibility they need to deliver these assessments in a manageable way.

Other comments highlighted a potential issue for centres seeking to enter large cohorts of learners for the new qualifications, who may not have a sufficient number of computers to facilitate this. In our approval criteria, we require an awarding body to be clear on centre requirements to deliver the on-screen assessment within their specification. Our programme of change management will prioritise support for centres to be able to meet those requirements and effectively deliver the on-screen assessment from summer 2023.

## 5. How manageable would it be for centres to offer this qualification, in terms of staffing?



Most responses to this question were positive with almost three quarters of respondents stating that in terms of staffing, this qualification would be manageable. Some respondents noted that the content and assessment arrangements proposed are not outside of the expertise of existing ICT teachers. Other respondents, while commenting positively, said that continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities would be required in order to ensure that all teachers aiming to deliver the qualification had the necessary knowledge to do so, particularly in the case of new and emerging technologies.

*“Training should be given to support the qualification and be available to teachers of the qualification throughout the lifetime of the qualification. Some additional on-line training would be useful too.”*

**Teacher in secondary school**

In response to this concern, we have begun to explore ways to support practitioners with the delivery of the qualification, such as supporting the development of robust CPD programmes and qualification resources. This will aim to ensure that all teachers delivering the new GCSE have the necessary knowledge and support to do so by first teaching in 2021.

## Next steps

The new GCSE Digital Technology will need to meet the requirements set out by us in the approval criteria document. Currently there is one awarding body actively working to develop a new specification; however, other recognised bodies are able to apply to have their qualifications approved. We are aiming to approve the new GCSE by September 2020, ready for first teaching to Year 10 from September 2021 and first award in summer 2023. We will provide an update on our progress later this summer to confirm this timetable.

