

# Qualified for the future

## Summary of findings

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Presented to Qualifications Wales by Arad Research and NFER

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# 1. About the consultation and analysis

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This is a short summary of the analysis of the responses received to Qualifications Wales' public consultation, 'Qualified for the Future', which ran between 18 November 2019 and 7 February 2020. The proposals it made aim to underpin Qualifications Wales' work of reshaping qualifications to complement the new curriculum for Wales.<sup>1</sup>

The full consultation document 'Qualified for the future' and the associated Integrated Impact Assessment are [available online on Qualifications Wales' website](#).<sup>2</sup>

Qualifications Wales received 667 responses to the consultation, though not all the respondents answered every consultation question.

Arad and NFER undertook the analysis of all responses on behalf of Qualifications Wales. This included:

- analysing responses to the 8 'closed questions', requiring respondents to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposals, or the impact they expect the proposals to have; and
- reviewing responses to the 15 open-ended questions (questions which allowed respondents to freely write comments) and categorising this information into overarching themes.

This report is a short summary of the findings from this analysis. Detailed findings are available in the full consultation analysis report.

**Throughout the report the themes and points presented are drawn from comments made by respondents and do not represent the views of the report authors or Qualifications Wales.** The report therefore represents respondent views regardless of how accurately respondents have interpreted Qualifications Wales' proposals or whether their views accurately reflect the current qualifications landscape.

This report is intended to provide a consolidation of the wide range of themes identified by respondents, presented as a variety of key messages for Qualifications Wales to consider. As such, the report does not present the numbers or proportions of respondents who raised each theme.

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<sup>1</sup> Background information about [the new curriculum can be viewed online](#).

<sup>2</sup> <https://qualificationswales.org/english/qualified-for-the-future/phase-1---shaping-our-approach/>

## 2. Summary of overarching themes

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Although the consultation questions focused on different topics, the analysis identified overarching themes which respondents raised across multiple questions.

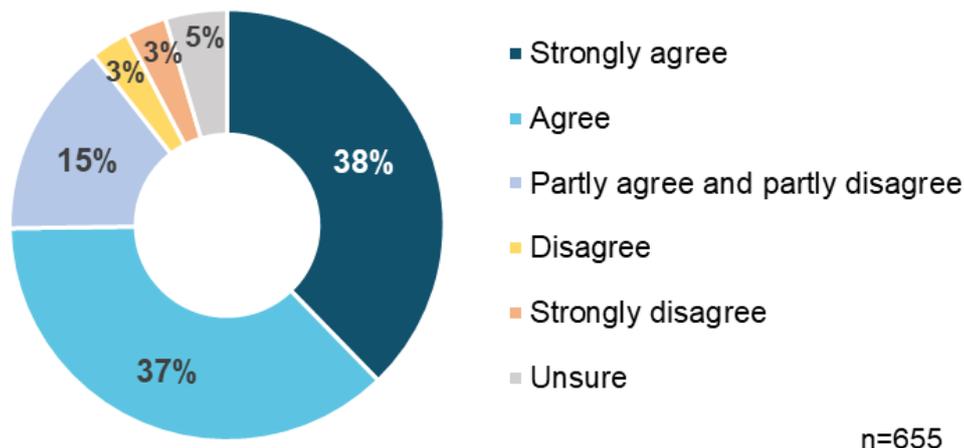
Throughout the consultation, respondents frequently said that:

- It is important to achieve an appropriate balance between qualifications that **reflect the ethos** of the new curriculum, and qualifications that support a **smooth progression** into post-16 education.
- It is important that any new qualifications retain **currency and comparability** with other qualifications in Wales and beyond.
- Qualifications and the curriculum are intertwined, and **reform must happen concurrently**. However, the education system is facing a period of significant change, with education professionals already dealing with **increased workloads**.
- A variety of **assessment methods** should be used across the suite of available qualifications.
- There is a need to maintain **an appropriate choice of qualifications**, to ensure that qualifications meet the needs of a variety of different learners.

### 3. Principles to shape the future qualification offer

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?



3

A total of 655 respondents answered this question and over 70% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal. A total of 363 respondents provided written comments.

Respondents supported the principle because they felt that:

- Qualifications and the curriculum should relate closely to one another to **ensure a coherent and integrated education system**. This is important to ensure:
  - that the aims of the new curriculum are fully realised, as unrelated qualifications might have a negative impact on the education profession’s engagement with the new curriculum;
  - continuous teaching and learning approaches across Key Stages; and
  - that qualifications reflect the principles which underpin the design of the new curriculum, such as the four purposes.
- Relating qualifications directly to the new curriculum would be **helpful and clear for learners**.
- This principle would ensure qualifications help to **prepare learners to progress to further or higher education and to future careers**.

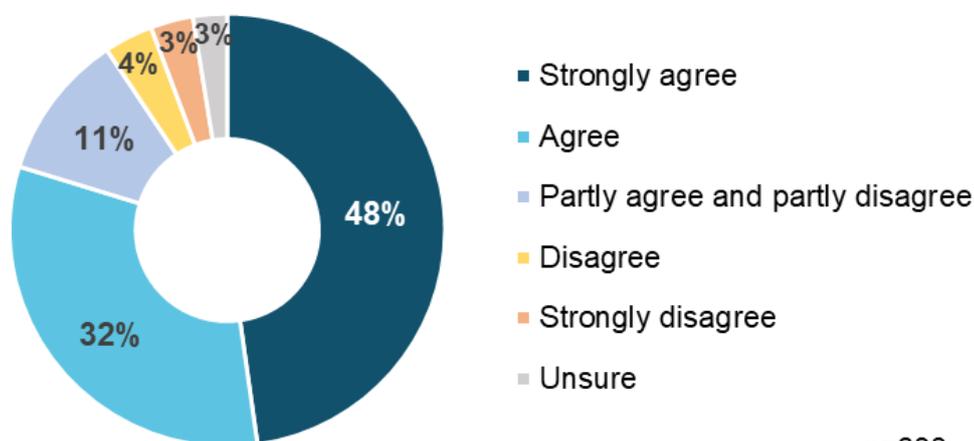
<sup>3</sup> Percentages presented in this graph do not total exactly 100% due to percentages being rounded up or down for presentational purposes.

Respondents also identified ideas or issues to consider regarding this principle, such as:

- Difficulty in ensuring qualifications support the aims of the new curriculum, because the current **accountability system** places too much emphasis on qualifications taken at 16.
- **Practical issues**, such as suitable training for practitioners and concerns regarding the capacity of the education sector to adapt to concurrent large-scale reforms.
- The need to take **care to ensure a broad and balanced suite of qualifications** is available to learners of all backgrounds, interests and abilities.
- That core elements of the current qualifications structure should be maintained, such as qualifications which assess **subject-specific knowledge**.
- That qualifications must be **comparable** with those offered outside Wales and **accepted** by further and higher education institutions and employers.
- That there are key educational topics – such as the Health and Wellbeing area of learning and experience – which must be given **sufficient weight** within the qualifications offer.

**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?**



n=633

4

A total of 633 respondents answered this question and 80% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal. A total of 341 respondents provided written comments.

Respondents supported the principle because they felt that:

- Learners should have the **opportunity to choose** the language in which they undertake their qualifications.
- Learners have a right to access qualifications in Welsh and English, as a core principle of **equality and inclusiveness**. Unless qualifications are available in Welsh, Welsh-speaking learners **might be disadvantaged**.
- Providing qualifications in Welsh and English aligns with **key national strategies and policies** and could also **support and raise the profile of the Welsh language** more generally.
- Qualifications in Welsh and English would improve **career opportunities** and **Welsh language skills**.

Respondents also identified ideas or issues to consider regarding this principle, such as:

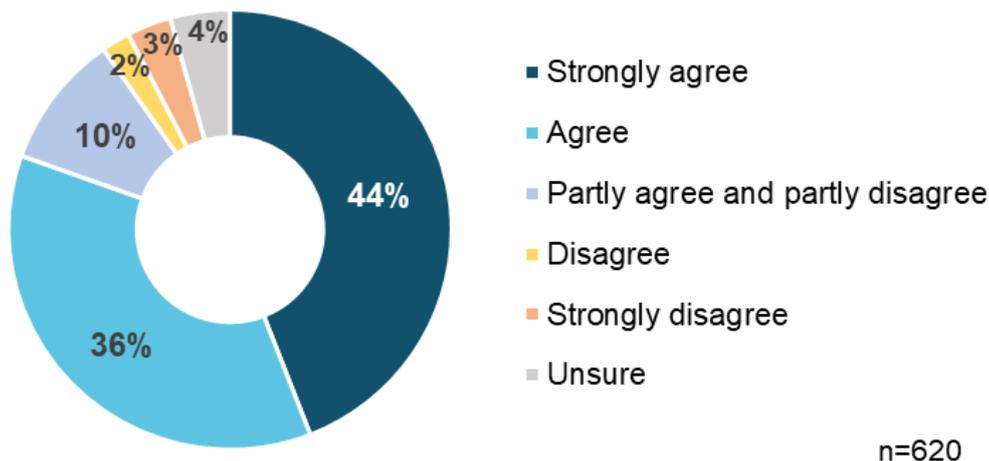
- The need to maintain a **suitable breadth of qualifications** would be vital if this principle is adopted.
  - Respondents believed there would be challenges associated with requiring **awarding bodies located outside Wales** to make qualifications taken at 16 available in Welsh and English.
  - Respondents felt this principle could **disadvantage learners by limiting their choices** if English-only qualifications are withdrawn from the offer.

<sup>4</sup> Percentages presented in this graph do not total exactly 100% due to percentages being rounded up or down for presentational purposes.

- A concern that requiring awarding bodies to adhere to this principle is likely to be **prohibitively expensive** and limited by insufficient **Welsh language expertise** – such as subject-specific expertise – within awarding bodies.
- **Practical issues**, particularly how to manage exceptions to this principle.
- **The need to ensure that supporting materials** would also be available in Welsh and English.

**Qualifications Wales should more closely manage the range of publicly funded qualifications made available to 16-year-olds to make sure it is equitable and coherent.**

**To what extent do you agree with this proposal?**



5

A total of 620 respondents answered this question and 80% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal. A total of 308 provided written comments.

Respondents supported the principle because they felt that:

- It is important to maintain an **appropriate choice of qualifications** that **suit the diverse needs of learners** in an equitable way.
  - Respondents considered it important to **maintain and expand the availability of vocational qualifications**.
  - Respondents felt a **variety of assessment methods** would be needed alongside exams to ensure inclusivity for all learners.
- **Qualifications at 16 should align with earlier educational stages and post-16 learning** in a coherent manner to enable a smooth progression for learners.
- The perceived value or '**currency**' of **qualifications for learners, employers and post-16 learning providers** is important.
- The suite of **qualifications should be quality assured, managed or overseen** by a central organisation.
  - Respondents felt this would help **avoid duplication** in the suite of qualifications on offer.
- There is a need to consider how **school accountability measures** can be used to reduce the incentive for centres to choose qualifications that are perceived to be 'easier'.

<sup>5</sup> Percentages presented in this graph do not total exactly 100% due to percentages being rounded up or down for presentational purposes.

Respondents also identified ideas or issues to consider regarding this principle, such as:

- **Centres are best placed to make decisions about what qualifications** they make available to their learners.
- That the **choice of qualifications available to learners shouldn't be curtailed** as this could disadvantage some learners, particularly those who have additional learning needs or who are less able.
- A perceived risk that reforms **could lead to qualifications losing their 'currency'**, particularly with further and higher education providers and employers outside Wales.

**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.**

A total of 235 respondents provided comments relating to this question.

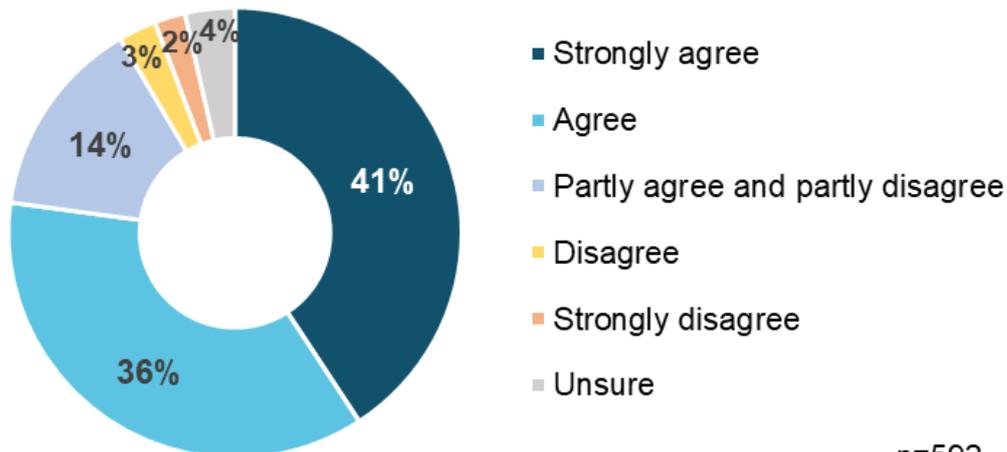
Respondents identified further principles or considerations, including the importance of:

- Maintaining and expanding **the availability of vocational qualifications**.
- Ensuring that qualifications offered in Wales are understood, recognised and respected by employers and post-16 education providers outside Wales.
- Ensuring that qualifications taken at 16 are part of **a smooth progression pathway** between Key Stage 3 and post-16 education.
- Maintaining an appropriate **variety of approaches to assessment**.
  - This was often mentioned as a principle by respondents who noted that different assessment methods are suited to different subjects.
- Ensuring that qualifications taken at 16 equip learners with **wider skills**.
- Considering **financial pressures** and **value for money** when making decisions on funding qualifications.
- **Other principles** including the need to consider learner wellbeing, children's rights, local labour market needs, school accountability and performance measures and avoiding duplication.

## 4. GCSEs fit for the future

**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?**



n=592

A total of 592 respondents answered this question and 77% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal. A total of 294 provided written comments.

Respondents who were in favour of keeping the GCSE name said that GCSEs are **recognised qualifications** which have **currency** among learners, employers, education institutions, and parents and carers. They believed:

- any change could cause confusion and **unnecessary instability** for these stakeholders;
- the **standards and rigour** associated with GCSEs should be maintained and this would be best achieved through retaining the GCSE name; and
- that it is important the **portability** of GCSEs is retained and that the qualification is recognised outside Wales, noting that previous efforts to develop Wales-specific brands (such as the Welsh Baccalaureate) had proved challenging.

Other respondents who believed the GCSE name should be retained **recognised the case for reform**. They believed:

- the **format** of GCSEs should be reformed to make use of a range of different **assessment methods**;
- the **content** should also be changed to **reflect changes in the curriculum** and there should be closer alignment between course content and **future economic needs**; and
- qualifications should be taken at the most **appropriate age** for learners.

Respondents in favour of changing the name maintained that qualifications should be **reformed to reflect the new curriculum**, which is a radical new departure for Wales.

- They felt that retaining GCSEs could give the wrong impression that the curriculum changes **only apply up until the age of 14**.
- It could also **perpetuate the habit of comparing Wales primarily with England**.
  - This, they believed, was unhelpful in view of their concerns about approaches which had been introduced in England.
  - They argued that GCSEs have **already diverged** to some extent.

**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.**

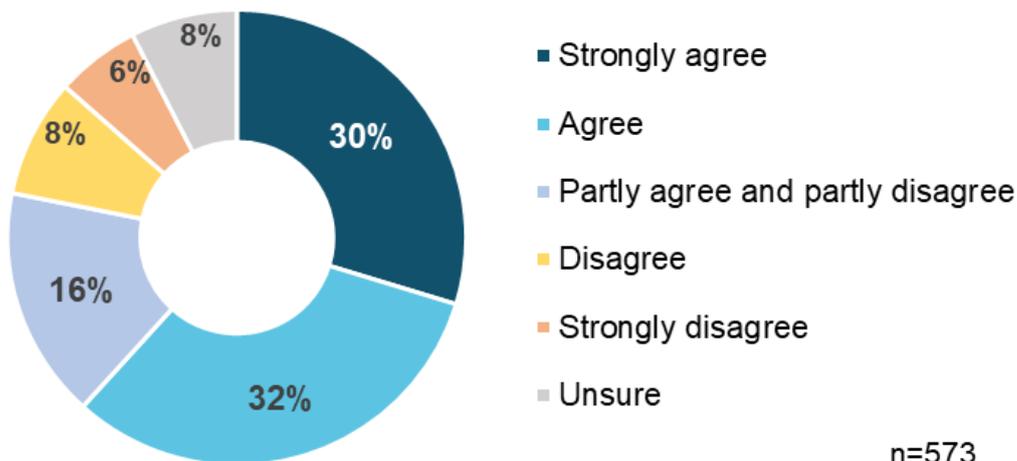
A total of 354 respondents provided written comments relating to this question.

- Some respondents advocated the status quo because they felt **the case for change had not been made**.
  - They were **concerned about the use of alternatives to externally-marked end of course exams**, mainly on grounds of rigour and the need for external perspectives to ensure standardisation and impartiality.
  - They emphasised the need to continue to **assess learners' knowledge**.
  - They believed that any new or reformed GCSEs should **prepare learners** sufficiently to progress to study subjects at 16-18 and also in higher education.
- However, other respondents believed that **change was required because**:
  - it would enable **a range of methods** to be used to assess learners;
  - the amount of **high stakes assessment** via exams could be **reduced**;
  - exams should focus more on **assessing learners' skills** (as opposed to knowledge); and
  - **good practice** in assessing **vocational learning** could be used more widely.
- Respondents highlighted the need to **take account of disabled learners and those with additional learning needs** by ensuring qualifications are inclusive.
- Respondents were **divided** on whether exams should continue to assess learners **in individual subjects**, or on the basis of **curriculum areas of learning and experience**, or through a **combination** of both approaches.
- Respondents believed there was a need to **increase the status of vocational qualifications** and to secure parity of esteem with traditional academic qualifications.

## 5. A qualification to assess wider skills

**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?**



A total of 573 respondents answered this question and 62% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal. A total of 297 provided written comments.

- Respondents said that any assessment of wider skills needs to be carefully considered in terms of the **skills to be demonstrated** and how they should be **assessed**. Respondents emphasised that:
  - it is important that a skills-based assessment has **currency** among all stakeholders and that it is clear how it **adds value** to the curriculum;
  - any skills qualification should be **promoted effectively** with a clear rationale about its value, purpose, content and how it is assessed;
  - there is a need to **learn from the experience of the Welsh Baccalaureate**, which some believed had not gained currency; and
  - the skills-based qualification **should not be regarded as less important** or less rigorous than subject qualifications.
- Respondents commented that a skills-based qualification should enable learners to develop and demonstrate **the skills they need for future life, study and employment**. It should not be structured too rigidly and there should be sufficient **flexibility** in how it is delivered and assessed.
- There were differing views about whether wider skills should be assessed **within curriculum subjects** or as a **discrete qualification**.
- Other comments raised concerns about the **portability and status** (especially in England) of any skills-based qualification that only learners in Wales undertake.

**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.**

A total of 221 respondents provided written comments relating to this question.

Respondents emphasised that **high-quality implementation** and clarity about **content** is essential for the successful delivery of a skills-based qualification. To do so effectively, respondents believed that:

- practitioners need high-quality initial and on-going **professional development** opportunities;
- elements such as **soft skills, problem solving, skills for adult life and practical skills**, should feature prominently in a skills-based qualification; and
- the **cross-curricular approach** that underpins the new curriculum should be reflected in the way a skills-based qualification is approached.

## 6. Views on the Integrated Impact Assessment

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### Regulatory impacts

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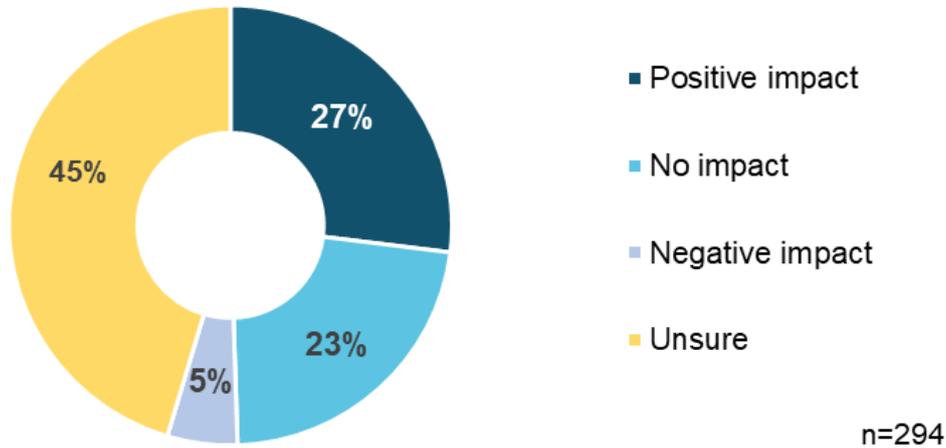
- a) Are there any further regulatory impacts that may arise from any of our proposals? If so, please explain your answer.
- b) Are there any additional steps we could take to reduce the regulatory impact of any of our proposals? If so, please explain your answer.
- c) Do you have any other comments on the regulatory impact of these proposals? If so, please explain your answer.

A total of 45 respondents provided written comments in relation to question a), 35 in relation to question b) and 18 in relation to question c). Therefore, it is important to note that the following themes were raised by a very limited number of respondents and responses to all three questions have been combined for presentation below.

- Respondents noted it is important to consider the impact of the proposals on **under-represented groups of learners** (such as disabled learners).
- A concern was raised that **gaps in provision** could potentially appear if qualifications are removed, with no alternative available.
- Respondents emphasised that centres should be able to access GCSE qualifications from a number of **different awarding bodies**.
- **Effective communication** throughout the process was considered important, to ensure that **everyone is aware of the changes** and the qualification options available.
  - **Consultation with key groups**, including practitioners, parents and carers, learners and other key stakeholders, should be undertaken alongside the development of detailed proposals.
- Respondents commented that **sufficient time and funding** must be available in order for the necessary preparations to be undertaken.
- A concern was raised about the **added workload** that the implementation of the proposals would create for practitioners.
- Incorporating **Welsh as a skill in all new or reformed qualifications** was seen as important.
  - However, respondents noted that ensuring **competency in the delivery of Welsh-medium qualifications** could be challenging (respondents did not provide further detail on the competency required).
- Respondents felt that if centres were **trusted to accurately assess** and record marks, the amount of **moderation required would be minimal**.

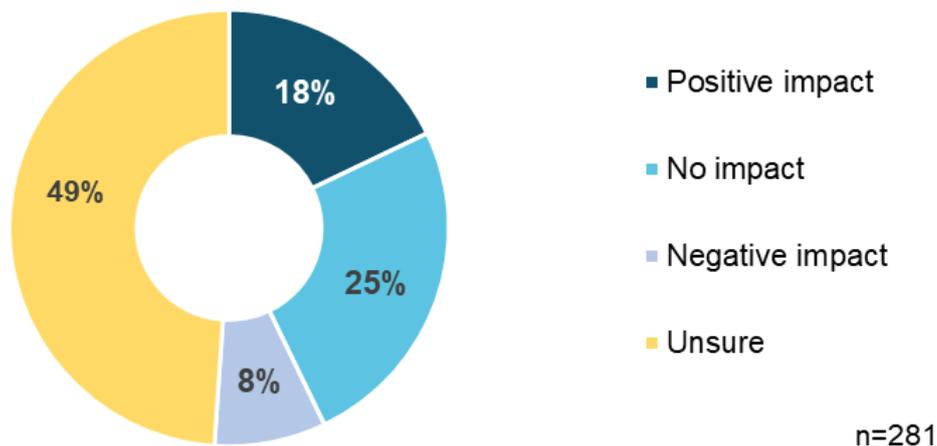
## Impacts on the Welsh Language

**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?**



A total of 294 respondents answered this question; 45% said they were unsure, 27% said there would be a positive impact and 23% said there would be a negative impact.

**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?**



A total of 281 respondents answered this question; 49% said they were unsure, 18% said there would be a positive impact and 25% said there would be a negative impact.

A total of 80 respondents provided written comments in response to the first of these questions and 50 respondents provided written comments in response to the second question. The following were the most frequently raised themes across both these questions.

Respondents commented that qualifications in Welsh and English would:

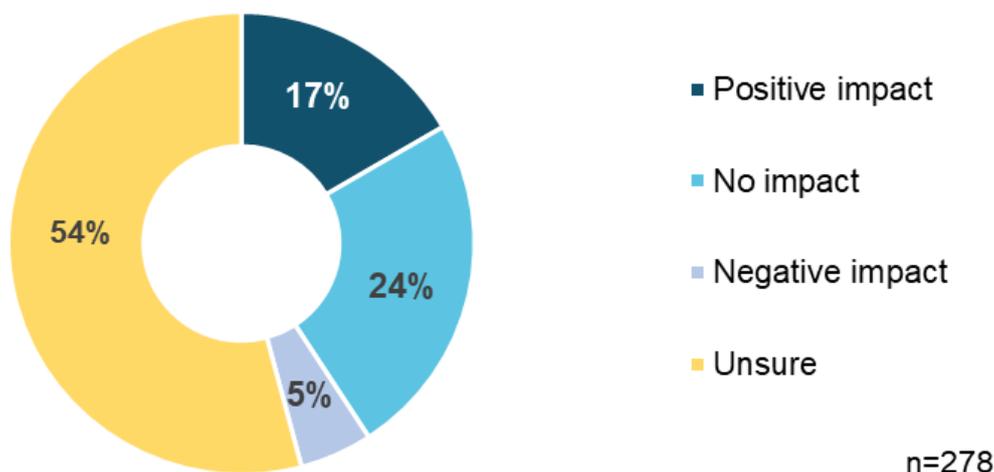
- Ensure all learners have:
  - a **broader educational experience**;
  - **access to a wide range of qualifications**;
  - the right to be assessed in their **language of choice**; and
  - opportunities for **improved progression** after completing compulsory education.
- Secure the future of the Welsh language.
- Guarantee more effective production of resources if bilingual qualifications were **established from the outset**.

Respondents also identified ideas or issues to consider, such as:

- Learners could be disadvantaged if **Welsh language resources are lacking** in availability and quality.
- Until **more practitioners** are able to teach through the medium of Welsh, the impact on the growth of the Welsh language would be minimal.
- The need to ensure **inclusivity** by not limiting learners to a single language.
  - A lack of Welsh language capacity in awarding bodies may result in them not offering bilingual qualifications. As a result, learners may not be able to access some Welsh-medium qualifications in particular **specialist areas**.
- A potential **lack of Welsh-medium opportunities** at further and higher education institutions.
- The need to ensure **parity of funding** for English and Welsh-medium qualifications.

## Impacts on individuals or groups who share protected characteristics

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?



A total of 278 respondents answered this question; 54% said they were unsure, 17% said there would be a positive impact and 24% said there would be a negative impact. A total of 39 respondents provided written comments to explain their views.

Therefore, it is important to note that the following themes were raised most frequently by a very limited number of respondents.

Respondents commented that:

- Learners from different backgrounds would be able to exercise their **freedom of choice and realise their full potential**.

Respondents also identified ideas or issues to consider, such as:

- The need to offer a **broad choice of qualifications which are achievable** for different learners at 16 to ensure equal access for all.
- Their belief that effective inclusivity requires **active engagement** with all key stakeholders, including learners.
- The need to ensure provision for **learners with additional learning needs**.
- A low take-up for a qualification should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of need.
- The need to consider **Human Rights Education** to ensure Wales fulfils its international and domestic human rights obligations.

## 7. Further comments

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**If you have anything else you would like to say about the information outlined in this consultation document, please use the space below.**

A total of 109 respondents provided comments in relation to this question.

- Respondents expressed generally **positive views on the consultation** process or content, though a smaller number also expressed some criticism.
- During the ongoing consultation and reform process, respondents re-emphasised the importance of **engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders**.
- Respondents identified an **opportunity to make significant changes** to the education system in Wales, particularly by addressing existing shortcomings.
- They also felt that qualifications reform must not lose sight of the ultimate objective of achieving the **best possible outcome for learners**.
- Respondents raised the importance of addressing the development of **wider skills** amongst learners and provided some suggestions as to how this could be achieved.
- Respondents also **reiterated themes** raised elsewhere in the consultation.