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Minister for Education
By email – DSME@gov.wales

4 June 2020

Dear Minister

Advice on how Qualifications Wales will determine the future range of qualifications for 16-year-olds.

We have recently consulted on our approach to reshaping the future range of qualifications for 16-year-olds in Wales to support the new curriculum and respond to future needs.

In this letter, we confirm the main aspects of our approach and discuss some of the main challenges we will face. The challenges, opportunities, dependencies and assumptions are explored in further detail in the annex which accompanies this letter. We also identify where our work touches on the key aspects of Welsh Government’s wider reforms and discuss where further clarity or decisions will be required to support our work.

Our aim in preparing this advice is to inform the work of implementing Welsh Government’s National Mission for Wales and to ensure that we proceed on a clear and agreed basis.

We are publishing this advice to help explain the basis on which we are taking forward this important area of work and how we will approach the crucial decisions that lie ahead.

In preparing this advice, we are conscious of the additional pressures that the current Covid-19 pandemic has placed on the education sector in Wales and also on Welsh Government officials.

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Background

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

Schools and other publicly funded providers should be able to choose from a range of qualifications that:

- command public confidence, with currency in Wales, the UK and globally;
- secure an equitable, coherent, and bilingual choice for centres and learners;
- make the most of the digital technology available to centres;
- can be introduced in a managed and sustainable way.

In November 2019, we launched a consultation on proposals for how we should approach this work. We have published a summary of our decisions based on the responses to the consultation separately¹, along with a report on the responses we received².

Our decisions

1. We will apply the following guiding principles to determining the qualifications that will be eligible for funding at the age of 16.

Publicly funded qualifications for 16-year-olds should:

- i. relate to, and support, the aims and purposes of the Curriculum for Wales;
- ii. be available in Welsh and English;
- iii. contribute to a coherent and inclusive offer.

2. We will keep the GCSE name and update the content and assessment of individual GCSEs to meet future needs.

We will consider how GCSEs should be designed in future. This will include looking at the content assessed in GCSEs, their assessment arrangements, and the range of subject areas in which they are available.

¹<https://qualificationswales.org/media/6020/summary-of-findings.pdf>

² <https://qualificationswales.org/media/6015/analysis-of-consultation-responses.pdf>

In doing so, we will consider how GCSEs can most effectively support the aims and purposes of the curriculum, while commanding public confidence in Wales and internationally.

As we said in our consultation, other qualifications across a range of levels will be required alongside GCSEs to ensure the needs of all learners are catered for. Responses to the consultation also emphasised a need for a choice of qualifications that cover different assessment approaches and support progression to vocational and technical, as well as academic pathways.

3. We will realign our work on reforming the current National/Foundation Skills Challenge Certificate with our wider review of qualifications for 16-year-olds.

Views were divided on our proposal to press ahead with work on developing a new qualification that assesses 16-year-olds' wider skills.

We want to make sure that any future changes to the National/Foundation Skills Challenge Certificate (the version that's taken at 16) will be coherent with other qualifications taken at the age of 16. So, we will not consult on reforms to this qualification until after we have decided what the full range of qualifications for 16-year-olds will look like.

We will continue as planned with our reforms to the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate, which is typically taken alongside A levels and other level 3 qualifications.

Next steps

Having decided on the key aspects of our approach, our next task is to consider the full range of qualifications that should be available for 16-year-olds.

At the end of this year, we plan to consult on proposals for:

- the qualifications that should form part of the future offer for 16-year-olds. This will include proposals for the whole range, including GCSEs and other qualifications. We will also ask about when any necessary changes should be made and in what order of priority.
- what future GCSEs should look like, which subject areas they can be offered in, as well as the type of content and assessments they should include. We will also ask about when and in what order to make any changes.

- the qualifications required to support the single continuum for teaching and learning Welsh. Here again, our proposals will cover what changes may be required as well as how and when those changes should be made.

Over the coming months, we will continue to work with stakeholders to develop and refine a set of clear proposals for consultation.

We currently intend that the consultation on the proposals listed above will close in early 2021, and that we will confirm our decisions in summer 2021, before launching a further round of consultations in autumn 2021 to agree the detailed design of any new or updated qualifications. However, given the current public health emergency and its possible long-term implications, we will keep our plans for consultation under review to ensure that we only consult when it is appropriate to do so.

Alongside this work, we will look at how best to use our statutory powers to secure the proposed future range of qualifications. We will also consider how regulatory requirements and processes may need to change to reflect the guiding principles. As we do so, we will carefully consider the potential impact of any changes and test these with stakeholders, including awarding bodies, learning providers and learners.

Challenges, opportunities, dependencies and assumptions

Determining which qualifications will be required in future and how they should be designed will not be easy. There are several important considerations for us to consider as we develop and implement our approach.

In the enclosed annex, we discuss in more detail the main challenges, opportunities, dependencies, and assumptions related to our work going forward. These build on many of the points raised in response to our consultation and on the themes discussed in our summary of decisions.

The key points discussed in the annex are summarised below.

Curriculum and qualification content

There is a natural tension between qualifications designed and delivered at a national level and curriculum content that is determined at a local level.

Schools will be expected to use the national curriculum framework as a starting point for designing their own local curricula. We will expect awarding bodies to explain how their qualifications relate to and support the new curriculum.

Where we have a high degree of control over qualification design, we will do what we can to increase the flexibility that qualifications allow centres to tailor the content of qualifications to suit their local curriculum. And centres will continue to be able to

choose which qualifications to offer according to the needs of their curriculum and learners.

However, there are other factors we must consider that will naturally constrain this flexibility and choice. Whatever the future qualifications offer looks like, the content assessed in qualifications will inevitably influence the way centres shape their curriculum for 14 to 16-year-olds.

School accountability arrangements

There is a direct link between Welsh Government's arrangements for school accountability and the requirements we set for how qualifications are designed and delivered.

We welcome Welsh Government's plans for developing new school accountability arrangements that will reduce the extent to which qualification outcomes are the main source of data for judging a school's performance.

Using qualifications outcomes as the primary measure of school performance places substantial pressure on qualifications. This would require us to specify rigid controls for how they are assessed, for example by limiting the range of assessment methods they can use. Reducing the reliance on qualification outcomes to measure school performance would allow us to set more flexible design requirements for qualifications and give schools more freedom to select the right qualifications for their learners.

We are aware of the research project Welsh Government is conducting to gather evidence to support the development of future arrangements. We are eager to continue working closely with your officials to help consider how future qualifications can best support the new arrangements. The more we know about the future approach to school accountability, the more we can ensure that qualifications are designed to be fit for their intended purpose.

Managing the scale, pace and impact of changes

In developing our approach and proposals, we will carefully consider the potential impact of any changes and the capacity of the system to manage them.

We must make sure that we allow enough time to prepare for delivering new or updated qualifications. To help us do that, we will seek views on when changes should be introduced. Where appropriate, we will consider adopting a phased approach, and prioritise making those changes that are most needed first.

As we take this work forward, we will also need to consider the effect that the current national response to the coronavirus epidemic could have on the capacity of the education system to respond to an extensive programme of change.

Continuity, standards and fairness

While the content and assessment methods included in future GCSEs will be different, we must ensure that GCSEs continue to represent attainment that is broadly comparable to current GCSEs. This will ensure a degree of continuity and confidence in the qualifications system, and secure fairness for past, present and future learners.

Qualifications to support Welsh language learning

We are fully supportive of the Welsh Government's policy of removing the terminology and concept of Welsh Second Language and establishing a single continuum for teaching and learning Welsh. Developing an appropriate range of qualifications to support this new approach presents several challenges and opportunities.

Our proposals for this area of the curriculum will:

- state how Welsh-language qualifications relate to each other and to the common expectations set out in the curriculum (that is, how they relate back to a single common continuum of teaching and learning language);
- ensure the qualifications available can meet the needs of all learners, in all settings, and support them as far as possible to become confident Welsh speakers by the time they are 16³;
- have clear links to post-16 pathways for all learners, to encourage them to continue to use and further develop their Welsh-language proficiency;
- take into account the resources and teaching capability that will be available to schools as they introduce the new curriculum.

As we develop options for how Welsh-language qualifications will need to change to support a single language continuum for all learners, we will consider whether to make those changes all at once or in stages. Taking an incremental approach would require us to set out a longer-term vision for change, aligned to Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy, along with a clear set of milestones for achieving it.

³ <https://gov.wales/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy>

Making best use of digital technology

Digital technology plays an ever more prominent role in young people's learning and lives. To remain relevant, engaging, and valid, it is important that qualifications adapt to reflect this trend.

As with any change, making more use of technology in assessment will bring challenges, but also opportunities. Used appropriately, technology can help to improve the assessment experience for learners and help to make the delivery of assessments more efficient and resilient, with less impact on the environment.

The changes that we have all had to make in response to the coronavirus pandemic have shown how digital technology offers new and alternative ways of doing things. This experience is likely to strengthen the case for making more innovative and effective use of digital technology in many areas, including education. It may also help identify where there are gains to be made from making better use of technology, as well as increasing the general appetite and acceptance for doing things digitally.

In developing proposals and requirements for future qualifications, we will encourage awarding bodies to make more effective use of digital technology to support the delivery and assessment of their qualifications. In doing so, we will want to be sure that the benefits are clear and that the changes would be manageable for centres and learners.

Teaching and learning resources to support qualifications

The resources and materials available to centres and learners to support the teaching and study of courses leading to qualifications come from a range of different sources and providers. These include awarding bodies, commercial publishers and others responding either to market demand or to Welsh Government commissions. A wide range of contributors play an important part, including regional education consortia, subject associations, and resources on Hwb developed by teachers.

From our research looking at teacher perceptions of reformed GCSEs, we know that many in the system are unclear about what resources they can expect to be available, or who is responsible for providing them. We also know that the appetite for a wide range of bilingual resources to support teaching and learning is high.

When developing proposals for future qualifications we will identify the potential implications for teaching and learning resources. For those qualifications specifically developed for Wales, we can set detailed requirements for the teaching and learning support and resources that awarding bodies should provide to support those

qualifications and when they should be available. We cannot undertake this same task for contributions by other parties that we do not regulate.

It is important to remember, however, that the main function of awarding bodies is to deliver qualifications. There is only so much that we can reasonably require them to produce in terms of teaching and learning resources. Other providers will continue to have an important part to play in providing supplementary teaching and learning resources.

As the content and assessment of future qualifications becomes clearer, we will work closely with your officials and other partners to help identify where additional teaching and learning resources may be required. This will support a more strategic approach to commissioning bilingual, timely and relevant resources.

Shaping the future

We are under no illusions about importance and the scale of the work that lies ahead. The future range of qualifications taken at the age of 16 will play a big part in how the new curriculum is introduced.

We are committed to do everything we can to ensure that everyone has their say in the decisions that will shape the qualifications 16-year-olds take in Wales.

We look forward to working collaboratively with your officials to design qualifications for Wales that will support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum and prepare young people for life, learning and work.

Yours sincerely



David Jones
Chair



Philip Blaker
Chief Executive Officer



Annex to advice on how Qualifications Wales will determine future range of qualifications for 16-year-olds (June 2020)

A closer look at the challenges, opportunities, dependencies and assumptions

There are several important considerations for us to consider as we develop proposals for the qualifications that will be required in future and how they should be designed.

Many of the points discussed below were raised in response to our *Qualified for the Future* consultation. We have already discussed some of them in our summary of decisions document. In this document, we expand further on those points that relate specifically to Welsh Government policies and to other parts of the education system.

Curriculum and qualification content

The first of our guiding principles is that qualifications taken at the age of 16 should relate to and support the curriculum.

In practice, this raises several questions about the relationship between qualifications and the curriculum. There is a natural tension between qualifications designed and delivered at a national level and curriculum content that is determined at a local level. This was a clear theme from the responses to our consultation.

Schools and other providers will be expected to use the national curriculum framework as a starting point for designing their own local curricula. We will expect awarding bodies to explain how their qualifications relate to and support the new curriculum.

Schools will want to make sure that they prepare learners as well as possible for the qualifications they will be taking. To make sure qualifications are fair, we require awarding bodies to make clear what learners will be assessed on in terms of what they know, understand and can do. There would be a fundamental fairness issue if learners were confronted by questions that assess content that they have not been taught. So, it's inevitable that the content covered in the specifications for qualifications will influence what and how schools teach 14 to 16-year-olds.

Some respondents to our consultation expressed concerns about the potential for qualification content to disproportionately influence a school's decisions about the focus of its curriculum, not just for Year 10 and 11 learners, but for younger learners as well. There is a risk that schools may feel unduly constrained by the need to

prepare learners for qualifications and not take full advantage of the flexibility that the new curriculum framework offers. While it is important to acknowledge this, there are controls that can be applied to mitigate this outcome. For example, the proposed draft legislation to introduce the new curriculum proposes a requirement on schools for all learners to experience the full curriculum up to the age of 14. It's also worth noting that while it is desirable for schools to have the freedom to set their own curriculum, qualifications can play a useful role in articulating and benchmarking the level of attainment that learners and schools should be aiming for by the time the learners reach the age of 16.

Many responses to our consultation emphasised the need for qualifications, and qualification content, to be sufficiently detailed and demanding to support successful progress to post-16 courses. This was felt to be particularly important for those learners aiming for more specialist routes post-16. Supporting effective progression is one of the fundamental purposes of qualifications at the age of 16, for all learners and at all levels. Fulfilling that purpose requires qualifications to continue to specify the content that learners are assessed on, and for that content to provide sufficient basis for progression.

When it comes to the focus and content of qualifications, there are features that could allow some flexibility for centres and learners to tailor the content that's taught and assessed. There will be some opportunities, for example, to include tasks or projects that are learner-led, or determined by the centre, and assessed by coursework or controlled assessment.

In some subject areas, it may be possible to focus more than has previously been the case on learners' ability to demonstrate and apply their knowledge of concepts and procedures to unseen or unfamiliar contexts and scenarios. However, there is likely to be a limit to how far such a shift in emphasis can be achieved without substantially increasing the overall difficulty of assessments and thereby shifting the accepted standards for qualifications at the age of 16.

The extent to which we can dictate or influence the content of qualifications will vary across the range. For the qualifications over which we have most control, such as GCSEs, we can set out the specific content and assessment arrangements using requirements we call 'approval criteria'. This is the case for qualifications that we commission or approve. However, it wouldn't be feasible, nor indeed desirable, for us to set detailed design requirements for all the qualifications available to 16-year-olds. We can have common expectations for all qualifications offered to 16-year-olds, but we will not be able to prescribe the detailed content they must all cover.

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A key challenge when deciding on the availability and design of future qualifications will be how to secure the right balance of content: balance in terms of the relative emphasis on different types of knowledge, skills and experiences, and balance between tightly defined content and content that offers more flexibility.

How we strike that balance will depend on whether and to what extent a qualification is expected to:

- give a fair, reliable and trusted measure of learner attainment to colleges, employers, universities and training providers to support selection decisions, and therefore learner progress;
- secure comparability and fairness over time with previous qualifications and other similar qualifications;
- support high-stakes judgements about school performance as part of accountability arrangements.

School accountability arrangements

Welsh Government is responsible for the school accountability system. In particular, Welsh Government determines which qualifications can contribute to the existing regime of performance measures. It does this by allocating performance points to individual qualifications and by setting the rules for how each performance measure is calculated.

As several responses to our consultation pointed out, there is a direct link between the school accountability system and the way in which qualifications are designed and delivered.

The role that qualifications play in the accountability system drives decisions and behaviours taken by schools and other providers in terms of:

- the qualifications they make available to their learners, including whether they are mandatory or optional for learners to take;
- the qualifications that individual learners can take;
- when and how often learners are entered for assessment;
- the total number of qualifications that learners take;
- the relative teaching time spent preparing learners for qualifications (including when learners start on their courses);
- the way in which courses leading to qualifications are taught and how learners are prepared for their assessments.

Accountability arrangements have a direct impact on how we require qualifications to be designed and assessed. Continuing to use qualification outcomes as the primary measure of school performance would lead us to limit the available

assessment methods to those that can be tightly controlled. To secure reliability and fairness for all learners, our requirements would be more likely to:

- focus on knowledge and skills that can be reliably assessed, with other content less likely to feature or to contribute to the overall grade;
- tightly define and prescribe in precise detail the content to be assessed, with limited opportunity for flexible content;
- insist on assessment methods that are taken in tightly controlled conditions, such as written exams and other forms of controlled assessments.

Reducing the reliance on qualification outcomes to measure school performance would allow us to set more flexible design requirements for qualifications and give schools more freedom to select the right qualifications for their learners. The more we know about whether and how qualifications outcomes are likely to be used to measure or report on school performance, the more we can ensure that qualifications are designed to be fit for their intended purpose.

For example, it would be useful to know whether in future Welsh Government intends for qualifications to continue to have performance points ascribed to them in the way they do now. If so, consideration should be given to whether most publicly funded qualifications should continue to carry performance points – as they do now. An alternative approach would be to reduce substantially the number of qualifications that can be used in this way. If performance measures continue to feature in future accountability arrangements, we would support a move away from allocating performance points to most qualifications, so that the number of qualifications that contribute directly to such measures is kept to a minimum. Such a move would need to be thought through carefully to minimise the risk of unintended consequences. Done considerately, it could have the potential to free up more qualifications from the pressures of accountability and allow for greater flexibility and variety in the way those qualifications are designed and assessed to meet the aims of the new curriculum.

We know your policy intention is to develop new school accountability arrangements that will reduce the extent to which qualification outcomes are the main source of data for judging a school's performance. The proposed new approach will use a wider and more varied set of data and evidence to support school accountability. We very much welcome this approach. It will reduce some of the pressure on qualification design and delivery, which would enable qualifications to function as intended and play a less dominant part in school approaches and learner experiences. This is likely to have a beneficial effect on the wellbeing of learners and teachers, reducing the pressure on them and the negative effects that come with that pressure.

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The proposed Curriculum and Assessment Bill⁴ includes provision for Welsh Ministers to make regulations which specify additional requirements that a school's curriculum must meet for the 14 to 16 age range in relation to:

- courses of study and/or other learning;
- a minimum number of courses of study that learners are entitled to undertake.

As we understand it, such a provision could allow Welsh Ministers to set requirements on the number, range and type of qualifications offered by schools. While the detail of any such requirements would of course require careful thought, they could provide a more transparent and straightforward way of clarifying the choice of qualifications that schools are expected to offer to their learners.

At the moment, expectations about which qualifications schools should offer are indicated, sometimes indirectly, through school performance measures. The high-stakes nature of performance points for schools means that this approach can have unintended and undesirable consequences. In the current system, school performance measures do more than simply indicate which qualifications schools should offer. They directly influence schools' decisions about which qualifications to enter learners for. This can lead to a narrowing of choice for learners about the qualification they take. They can also encourage a narrow approach to teaching the courses of learning leading to a qualification: a practice sometimes referred to as 'teaching to the test'.

We appreciate that it will take time for Welsh Government to fully develop and implement its new approach to school accountability. The changes envisaged will help to drive, but also require, a substantial shift in culture and expectations right across the system. It is a bold step and one that should be planned carefully. We know work is underway on a research project to gather evidence to help develop the detail of future arrangements, and we appreciate that some decisions will be dependent on its findings. Nevertheless, any clarification and assurance that Welsh Government can give at this stage about its policy aims and proposed approach will be invaluable to inform our decisions about the availability and design of future qualifications.

Managing the scale, pace and impact of change

In developing our approach and proposals, we will carefully consider the potential impact of any changes and the capacity of the system to manage them.

From previous qualification reforms, we know that there needs to be enough time between finalising the specifications and sample assessment materials for new

⁴ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/summary-of-proposed-legislation/>

qualifications and the point at which they start to be taught in schools. As we plan the next round of reforms, we are conscious that schools and other providers will be embarking on an almost unprecedented period of change as they work on designing and implement their own curricula.

We know that schools and others will need as much clarity as possible, as early as possible, on which qualifications will be available in 2025, when the first national cohort of learners to experience the new curriculum will be starting in Year 10. In practical terms, there will need to be clarity and certainty about the qualification offer (and school accountability arrangements) much earlier than 2025. Among other things, this will help schools and other providers to:

- implement and refine their curricula;
- prepare and organise their resources, including staffing and timetabling considerations;
- structure the choices they will offer 14-year-olds and to offer learners and their families advice to help make those choices with confidence;
- access the necessary professional development and training to prepare teaching staff for any changes to qualifications;
- to obtain and familiarise themselves with any new teaching and learning resources required to support courses leading to qualifications.

Another key lesson from recent reforms is that changes to many different qualifications at once can have a cumulative effect on providers and the wider system. This overall effect can be missed if the focus is too much on the impact of specific changes to individual qualifications. Our plans for consulting initially on the overall range of qualifications that should be available, before moving on to look at the detail of how individual qualifications will be designed, should help to mitigate this.

When considering which changes may be needed to qualifications to support the new curriculum, we will need to bear in mind that there is only so much change that the system can cope with at once. We must also remember that the new curriculum framework is a basis for schools to refine and evolve their own curricula over time. The new curriculum framework will take time to become fully established. So, when we consult on changes, we will set out proposals for when and how changes need to happen, as well as on what kind of change will be required. This will allow us to structure and plan how we introduce changes once we have agreed what's required. We will prioritise those that are most essential for supporting schools to develop curricula and approaches that meet the requirements and aspirations of the new curriculum. For example, we will want to make sure from the outset that any aspects of current provision which are directly at odds with the new curriculum will be

removed or replaced. However, we may want to take a more phased approach to introducing changes which, although supportive of the new curriculum, are less critical to its successful implementation.

Any changes we introduce to qualifications will divert time and resources away from work on other aspects of the new curriculum and wider education reforms. We must therefore be sure that there is a clear case for any changes we propose, including how they will help schools and others to introduce the new curriculum framework and benefit learners.

Continuity, standards and fairness

As the regulator, we have a responsibility to make sure that qualifications meet the reasonable needs of learners. This includes past, present and future learners. The 16-year-olds who achieve their qualifications in summer 2027 will go on to study and work alongside others who achieved their qualifications under the current or earlier systems. They will also be competing with learners from outside of Wales when they apply for courses, apprenticeships and jobs.

We are clear that there will need to be changes to qualifications to support the introduction of the new curriculum. In doing so, we must make sure that the qualifications taken at the age of 16 continue to be accessible to, and achievable by, the same broad range of learners as they are now. And they must retain the same high level of credibility and trust as is currently the case.

This is a fundamental consideration for us as we consider the future range of qualifications and within that, how GCSE qualifications will need to change. We are working on the basis that although GCSEs will include different content and mix of assessment methods, the achievement they represent should be broadly comparable to current GCSEs.

While this still affords us considerable flexibility in the design of these qualifications, it will limit the extent to which we can significantly shift expectations in terms of the higher-order, conceptual learning that they assess.

Qualifications to support Welsh-language learning

We already know one way in which the new curriculum for Wales will have a direct and visible impact on the range of available qualifications. You have been clear that the expectations set out in the new curriculum will bring an end to the terminology and the concept of Welsh as a second language.

The difficulties associated with how Welsh Second Language is perceived and delivered are well documented. We are fully supportive of the policy intention to

remove it from the curriculum and to introduce a single continuum for teaching and learning Welsh.

The Curriculum for Wales uses two sets of 'descriptions of learning' to describe progression for learners studying Welsh in Welsh-medium settings and progression for learners studying Welsh in English-medium settings. In this way, the new curriculum makes clearer what the relationship is between the progression learners are expected to make in all settings. This gives an opportunity to develop a set of qualifications that relate much more clearly to each other than is currently the case.

The grouping together of Welsh, English and international languages in a single area of learning and experience provides a further opportunity to bring coherence and clarity to the range of qualifications available to support languages, literacy and communication. As with all our work, we will want to consider what range of qualifications will best meet the needs of all learners, irrespective of the educational setting they are in, or the level of language proficiency at which they are operating. To maximise the range of languages available, we will also need to consider the viability of future qualifications as part of our thinking.

Qualifications have an important part to play in making languages appealing and relevant to learners, they can help to engage and motivate learners, and encourage them to continue to develop their language proficiency and to acquire new languages post-16 and later in life.

When it comes to agreeing an appropriate range of qualifications to support Welsh-language learning, there are several challenges and opportunities to consider. As we develop our proposals, we will be mindful of the need to:

- remove the terminology and concept of a Welsh Second Language qualification;
- sustain and build on the standard and level of language proficiency currently achieved in Welsh, Welsh Literature and Welsh Second Language GCSEs;
- ensure the qualifications available can meet the needs of all learners, in all settings and support them as far as possible to become confident Welsh speakers by the time they are 16⁵;
- make clear how Welsh-language qualifications relate to each other and to the common expectations set out in the curriculum (that is, how they relate to a single common continuum of teaching and learning language);
- Improve levels of engagement with the Welsh language, in all settings, and to encourage more post-16 learners to study Welsh and through the medium of Welsh;

⁵ <https://gov.wales/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy>

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- make clear how Welsh language qualifications taken at 16 can link to post-16 pathways to encourage all learners to continue using and improving their Welsh beyond the age of 16;
- allow schools to enter learners for the most appropriate qualification given their progress and level of proficiency;
- ensure Welsh-language qualifications are accessible and achievable for learners and lead to fair outcomes that are widely understood as valuable measures of attainment;
- consider the resources and teaching capability that will be available to schools as they introduce the new curriculum.

This is an area of the curriculum on which it will be particularly important for us to engage with stakeholders as we develop our proposals for qualifications. It is essential that we get as much information as possible about what any changes are likely to mean in practice on the ground.

As we develop options for how Welsh-language qualifications will need to change to support a single language continuum for all learners, we will consider whether to make those changes all at once or in stages. Taking an incremental approach would require us to set out a longer-term vision for change, aligned to Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy, along with a clear set of milestones for achieving it.

Making best use of digital technology

In developing proposals and requirements for future qualifications, we will encourage awarding bodies to make more effective use of digital technology to support the delivery and assessment of their qualifications.

We know that some schools are concerned about whether they will have the necessary resources to deliver qualifications that make more use of digital technology. As with any changes we proposed, we will look carefully at their potential impact, both in terms of equity and the practicality of proposals.

However, we know that to remain relevant, engaging and valid, qualifications must adapt and evolve to reflect how young people use technology in their day-to-day lives.

There are several benefits that could result from more widespread, varied and creative use of digital technology. On-screen, on-demand and adaptive testing may hold the key to a reduced assessment burden for learners and centres, with shorter assessments that learners can take when they are ready, and quicker turnaround of results. Using digital methods of capturing and presenting naturally occurring assessment evidence could mean that project-based activities become more manageable, valid, reliable and engaging forms of assessment, all of which could

have positive impacts on learner motivation and outcomes, as well as reducing exam-related stress and anxiety.

Digital technology can also offer benefits in the delivery of assessment. Digital assessment can be more efficient because it removes the reliance on paper, thus removing the need to physically store and move large amounts of sensitive documents around the country.

We are also seeing advances in what is sometimes referred to as 'digital proctoring'. This is where an online assessment platform creates a secure environment on the device being used to take the test, which can help to prevent or detect malpractice. Such technology can allow learners to use the devices they would normally use as part of their learning to take their exam. This can improve learners' confidence and make it easier to apply any reasonable adjustments they would normally use. It could also help reduce the need for whole cohorts of learners taking their exams at the same time, in the same place. It would also allow learners to access a test from alternative locations – an option that could have offered us some alternative ways of responding to the cancellation of exams this summer.

The changes that we have all had to make in response to the coronavirus pandemic have shown how digital technology offers new and alternative ways of doing things. This experience is likely to strengthen the case for making more innovative and effective use of digital technology in many areas, including education. It may also help identify where there are gains to be made from making better use of technology, as well as increasing the general appetite and acceptance for doing things digitally.

We believe that now is the time to start increasing expectations and to encourage more innovation in how digital technology is used to support and enhance the way qualifications are assessed. It will still take time for any changes to feed through the system, so it's important that we start planning now to help make the most of the potential benefits.

Teaching and learning resources to support qualifications

Another key lesson we learned from the last reforms to GCSEs and A levels was the need to plan effectively for developing essential and supplementary resources to accompany new qualifications. As new, made-for-Wales qualifications were put in place, the need for a different approach to identifying and securing the additional resources required became clear.

There are several steps we can take to help ensure that this need is met. We can clarify from the outset what supporting resources we would require an awarding

body to make available to support new qualifications. The extent to which we can do this will vary. For example, we have more scope to do this as part of a competitive procurement process for a new qualification than we do when setting general expectations for existing qualifications seeking eligibility for public funding.

It won't be possible or reasonable to expect awarding bodies to provide extensive, supplementary teaching and learning resources for all qualifications. However, we can plan changes so that the requirements arising from changes to qualifications are identified as early as possible and fed into the new strategic approach being put in place by Welsh Government to commission new bilingual resources to support the curriculum in Wales.

There are some advantages that we have in Wales which we would want to build on. One of the strengths we have in Wales is the online learning platform Hwb, that is accessible to all teaching staff and learners. It may be possible for your officials to work with awarding bodies and other partners, possibly through the strategic resources forum, to do more with the teacher-developed resources already on Hwb. For example, by signposting the best and most relevant resources on there and to identify where there may be gaps.

June 2020