



BUSINESS PLAN 2020-21



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Government

Contents

1. Qualifications Wales	2
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 Our purpose	2
2. Summary	3
3. Operational priorities 2020-21	4
3.1 Introduction and context.....	4
3.2 Priority 1 – Review	4
3.3 Priority 2 – Reform	6
3.4 Priority 3 – Regulate	7
3.5 Priority 4 – Corporate resources	9
4. Funding and planned expenditure 2020-21	11
5. Monitoring and review	12
6. Useful links	12

1. Qualifications Wales

1.1. Introduction

Qualifications Wales regulates awarding bodies offering qualifications in Wales. We are an independent body focused on publicly funded qualifications, including GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications. We work with others to review and reform qualifications.

Degrees are not part of our work, but we work with universities and colleges to make sure they understand qualifications so that learners can progress into higher education. We want qualifications to be the best they can be for learners, teachers and employers, helping people adapt in a rapidly changing world. We work with awarding bodies to extend the availability of qualifications through the Welsh language.

2020-21 is our fifth full financial year of operation. The focus of our work to support and strengthen the qualifications system in Wales is set out in our strategic plans, which will be reviewed over the next 12 months:

[Qualifications Wales Strategy](#)

[General Qualifications Strategic Plan](#)

[Vocational Qualifications Strategy](#)

[Corporate Capability Strategic Plan](#)

This Business Plan for 2020-21 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.

It should be noted that this published Business Plan is a baseline and the planning has been based on a full complement of staff and working at full capacity. The recent outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19), will have an impact on delivery of the operational plan and our priorities. It is envisaged that the plan will be regularly reviewed over the year to respond to changes in our capacity, additional work required and the appropriate timing of some of our planned activities.

1.2. Our purpose

As the independent regulator, we have two principal aims:

- Ensuring that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and
- Promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system.

This means that we place the learner at the heart of our activities.

We also have a responsibility to look across the qualifications system to check that it is working in the interest of learners, and to act or advise others to do the same, if necessary. Part of our

work is to ensure that qualifications within the system are valued. We have powers and duties to regulate awarding bodies, and we can make positive interventions to secure improvements to qualifications or the qualifications system.

At Qualifications Wales, we protect the value of qualifications, overseeing the fair awarding of qualifications and reviewing and developing them as the needs of learners change. As the trusted experts in qualifications, we provide Welsh Government with advice on relevant issues. We also consider the needs of employers, the higher education sector and the professions. Our role supports the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (WFGA); its purpose and its requirements are compatible with how we work, as education necessarily requires a long-term view. We also work collaboratively because we are one part of the whole education system in Wales. We have voluntarily set ourselves objectives to support the WFGA, and will be reporting on our progress during 2020-21.

2. Summary

This Business Plan covers our fifth full financial year of operation. Education and the qualifications system remain of high political and public interest. Our plan delivers reforms where needed, while we continue to regulate and monitor the system so that qualifications are assessed and awarded fairly, with standards maintained, and public confidence secured.

We are well underway with our work to consider how qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds should change to support the new Curriculum for Wales. We will start the year by reporting the conclusions we draw from the response to our first consultation. During the year, we will then bring together research, stakeholder views and expert advice and consult on proposals for the range of qualifications, their design, and when to introduce them.

We will complete our work with stakeholders to consider improvements to the Welsh Baccalaureate and Skills Challenge Certificate. Our focus this year will be on reforming the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate. We will consider changes to the Key Stage 4 Skills Challenge Certificate as part of our wider work on qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds.

We will continue our programme of sector reviews, looking at whether the range of qualifications in an industry sector meet learner and employer needs. Through vocational sector reviews we will ensure that qualifications support the development of the knowledge and skills that employers in Wales require – both now, and in the future. We will publish our report on our engineering and advanced manufacturing and energy review, and we plan to start work to review the travel, tourism, leisure, hospitality and catering sector.

The first wave of the new approved qualifications for health and social care are already being taught. The second wave of qualifications will be available for first teaching this autumn. During the year, we also plan to approve a new GCSE and A level in both Digital Technology and Built Environment, and to approve the new post-16 qualifications in construction and building services for Foundation, Progression and Apprenticeship qualifications.

Where we make changes to qualifications, this is to secure improved assessment, clearer progression routes for learners and a clear focus on what employers and sector bodies tell us they want. This helps Wales to create a workforce appropriate for its needs in the 21st century.

Our work has a clear role in helping learners progress and develop skills for employment, thereby improving overall prosperity and economic growth.

Our work is supported by a programme of research and the collection and analysis of data. This builds our evidence base and understanding to support decision-making.

We will continue our work in encouraging greater use of technology in assessment, recognising change would be dependent on a whole system approach involving Welsh Government, awarding bodies and centres, and a greater allocation of resource for technology across the system.

We recognise that our reforms mean change for those teaching the new qualifications. We are strengthening our focus on change management, working with schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to explain the changes and provide support.

We will continue to closely monitor GCSE and A level awards, and to implement our monitoring programme for the newly reformed qualifications coming from our sector reviews.

We will continue to shape our regulatory approach and, having completed a three-country consultation, will be publishing our new Standard Conditions of Recognition early in the year. This year we will publish our Welsh-medium Qualifications Strategy. This will explain how our work will support the Welsh Government's ambition of one million Welsh-speakers by 2050. We will continue to offer grants to awarding bodies that help to increase the availability of qualifications through the medium of Welsh.

Although regulations have not yet been passed to apply Welsh Language Standards to us, we have voluntarily adopted many of these in advance. To demonstrate our commitment, we have published a voluntary Welsh Language Scheme. Similarly, we have voluntarily set well-being objectives and adopted the 'Ways of Working' deriving from the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We will continue to deliver against our equality and our well-being objectives and to embed our Welsh-language policies.

Looking outside Wales, we will continue to monitor developments across the UK. Apart from qualifications developed specifically for Wales, most vocational qualifications are offered across the UK. Education and skills policies in England continue to evolve in different directions from those in Wales. We are keeping a close eye on qualification availability, and engaging with awarding bodies to identify qualifications that can be used to fill any potential gaps, and to identify how we can support them to offer more qualifications through the medium of Welsh,

3. Operational priorities (2020-21)

3.1. Introduction and context

The 2020-21 operational priorities build on last year's plan. There are four operational priorities for 2020-21:

1. Review
2. Reform
3. Regulate
4. Corporate resources

3.2. Priority 1 – Review

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 in Wales and other parts of the UK. We review and evaluate aspects of the qualifications system to strengthen public confidence in qualifications.

In 2020-21, we will:

Project manage the Qualified for the Future project

We will establish a robust project management structure so that our important contribution to the new Curriculum for Wales can be delivered effectively and efficiently.

Determine the future range of qualifications taken at 16

We will publish decisions about our overall approach to this work, based on our first consultation on 'Qualified for the Future'. Drawing from research and stakeholder engagement, we will develop consultation proposals for the future range of qualifications required to support the new curriculum, including the design principles for key qualifications taken at 16. We will consult publicly on our proposals at the end of the year.

Agree the design and assessment parameters of the new suite of GCSEs

Drawing on the design and assessment characteristics of the current suite of approved GCSEs for Wales, and both internal and external research and engagement, we will develop consultation proposals around the key design and assessment parameters for the future suite of GCSEs. We will consult publicly on proposals at the end of the year.

Define the routes to securing key qualifications taken at 16

We will consider and determine how we can most effectively use our statutory powers to secure the future range of qualifications to support the new curriculum. Within our Qualified for the Future project, we will begin to develop the necessary arrangements to put our preferred approach into practice.

Publish the engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy sector review

We will analyse evidence from the sector review before developing and testing proposals for action with stakeholders. We will publish our report, consulting on any proposals. Should we determine that any reforms are needed we will plan and begin to implement these as appropriate. We will maximise interest in the engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy sector review through a public launch of the report.

Begin the travel, tourism, hospitality, leisure and catering sector review

We will plan and scope this sector review and begin to engage with stakeholders from across the sector, including learners.

Consider potential future reform of Essential Skills qualifications

We will determine whether, and how, the Essential Skills qualifications should be reformed. Should we decide to proceed with reforming the qualifications, we will develop and communicate our plans.

Review the future availability of qualifications for post-16 learners

We will engage with awarding bodies, further education institutions and Welsh Government, to develop and implement our policy and approach to securing an effective range of qualifications for learners taking post-16 further education courses and apprenticeships. We will seek to increase the range of qualifications available for assessment through the medium of Welsh – including through our re-prioritised Welsh Language Support Grant.

Inform forward planning for qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales

We will complete our research projects on perceptions of reformed GCSEs and non-examined assessment within those qualifications. We will develop an approach for evaluating our qualification reforms. We will conduct analysis to underpin the 'Qualified for the Future' project, including scoping our ongoing research needs. We will continue to conduct research to measure and understand public confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system. We will also actively continue to consider future use of technology in assessment.

Develop the future strategy for qualifications review and reform

We will review the Qualifications Wales Strategy, General Qualifications Strategic Plan, Vocational Qualifications Strategy and Corporate Capability Strategic Plan, which cover the period 2017-22.

Communicate and engage on Review priorities

We will communicate research to build understanding. We will also focus on 'Qualified for the Future', as well as reviews of engineering, advanced manufacturing and energy and travel, tourism, hospitality leisure and catering.

3.3. Priority 2 – Reform

Our commitment is to review the qualifications offered in Wales and the qualifications system to ensure that they meet the reasonable needs of the learner and promote public confidence. This can lead to changes to qualifications, or to new ones being created. This is an important part of our work and can have a significant impact.

In 2020-21, we will:

Reform the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Bacc

We will consult on changes to the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate. We will promote understanding of the existing Skills Challenge Certificate through targeted communication and engagement.

Continue the delivery of the Digital Reform project

We will review submissions for the GCSE and A level Digital Technology qualifications for approval for first teaching in September 2021 and September 2022 respectively. We will work with others to deliver a programme of change management that will help schools and colleges prepare for the new qualifications.

Conclude the health and social care reform project

We will complete the approval of the remaining Health and Social Care qualifications and support the qualifications system during their implementation.

Continue the construction and built environment reform project

We will oversee the introduction of new Foundation, Progression and Apprenticeship qualifications, as well as GCSE and GCE A level Built Environment qualifications as they move through our approvals process prior to publication. We will work with the awarding bodies to deliver and oversee a change-management programme to ensure that learning providers and employers are ready to deliver the new qualifications from September 2021 onwards.

Continue to manage grants effectively

We will manage the Welsh for Adults, WJEC Welsh-medium General Qualifications and Qualification Reform Grants, and make information more transparent – including alerting stakeholders to qualifications newly available in Welsh.

Strengthen assessment in the qualifications system

Building on our approach to improving quality in qualifications, we will continue to develop our innovative model, 'MERV', as a tool for considering the extent to which assessments and qualifications are Manageable, Engaging, Reliable and Valid. We will consider how this model may be applied across the organisation, including as we develop a plan to strengthen assessment design skills in recognised awarding bodies.

Communicate and engage on Reform priorities

We will develop the way that we communicate and engage with our all of our stakeholders involved in changes to qualifications. We will have a particular focus on engagement with centres so that they are ready for change.

3.4. Priority 3 – Regulate

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 our Standard Conditions of Recognition and use our enforcement and sanctions powers when awarding bodies fail to comply. Where appropriate, we use our enforcement powers to ensure that the system meets the needs of learners.

In 2020-21, we will:

Review and reform our regulatory framework and approach

We will update our regulatory framework and approach and provide on-going support for awarding bodies in complying with our revised Standard Conditions of Recognition. We will launch our Welsh-medium Qualifications Strategy and support awarding bodies to increase the range of qualifications available in both languages.

Regulate awarding bodies

We will continue to review applications from organisations wishing to become recognised awarding bodies, or from recognised awarding bodies seeking additional recognition. We will continue to review awarding bodies' statements of compliance and to undertake scheduled awarding body audits and monitoring activities. We will continue to hold regulatory update meetings, monitor incidents reported by awarding bodies and manage complaints about awarding bodies - including regulatory whistleblowing complaints.

Designate qualifications

We will consider applications from recognised awarding bodies to designate qualifications as eligible for public funding. We will continue to fulfil our role on Welsh Government's Apprenticeship Delivery Partner Steering Groups.

Monitor qualifications

We will monitor the delivery of summer 2020 and winter 2020-21 examination series. We will monitor the development of assessment for future examination series and the implementation and delivery of the new Health & Social Care, and Childcare qualifications.

Oversee the setting and maintenance of appropriate standards for qualifications

We will oversee the maintenance of appropriate standards for GCSE, A level and Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications. We will oversee the setting of appropriate standards for the new Health & Social Care, and Childcare qualifications. We will continue to engage with other regulators in relation to maintenance of standards for three-country qualifications.

Manage QiW

We will ensure that all regulated qualifications are included on the QiW database, continuing to manage all associated processes effectively. We will engage with stakeholders to gather feedback and suggestions on how to continuously enhance the QiW system.

Collect data and produce statistics

We will collect data about qualification entries and awards and produce official statistics and statistical analysis in line with our published schedule.

Communicate and engage on Regulate priorities

We will implement a new strategic approach to engagement to support the qualifications system. We will continue to develop our 'Exams 360' brand to deliver communications to improve understanding of the exams system.

3.5. Priority 4 – Corporate capability and capacity

We know that having strong and effective corporate capabilities supports our ability to deliver and enhances our reputation with stakeholders. We strive to take decisions that are balanced, and evidence-based. We listen to stakeholders and provide clear information. We aim to continue to earn trust through robust and effective management of our resources and compliant corporate practices.

In 2020-21, we will:

Deliver corporate services that support and challenge the organisation to be efficient, effective and compliant in the following areas:

- Corporate Governance

- Finance
- Human Resources
- Procurement
- Facilities
- IT
- Research

Tender for new Finance and HR systems and commence implementation

We will establish long-term arrangements for Finance, HR and expenses system software that delivers value for money and enables our finance, procurement and HR functions to operate efficiently and effectively.

Deliver the revised approach to staff performance and development

We will launch and embed a new policy and organisational approach to performance and development for our staff. We will include feedback training in our learning and development opportunities for staff. We will deliver leadership and management training as part of the Cross-Public Sector group.

Deliver our equality objectives

We will continue to deliver our equality objectives, through both our regulatory and corporate work. We will ensure on-going workforce and Board diversity and continually improve how we operate as an inclusive organisation.

Publish corporate reports on time and to a high standard

Reports included will be:

- 2020-21 Business Plan and Operational Plan
- 2019-20 Annual Accounts
- 2019-20 Annual Equality Report
- 2019-20 Welsh Language Report
- 2019-20 Annual Report

Deliver the actions from our Welsh Language Scheme

We will continue to progress the actions from our Welsh Language Scheme. Our focus this year will be to implement Welsh-language preferences and provide training and information to staff to increase the use of the Welsh language in the workplace. We will review our Welsh Language Scheme to ensure progression towards the Welsh Language Standards.

Support staff well-being and manage our environmental impact

We will work towards achieving the Silver Corporate Health Standard Award by embedding a positive health and well-being culture. We will provide a working environment and support a culture that encourages healthy staff lifestyles and long-term well-being. We will work towards achieving the Green Dragon Environmental Standard. As part of our Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, we will support staff to use the agreed paid day per year to deliver a programme of CSR activities.

Work collaboratively with the Welsh public sector to improve efficiency and effectiveness

We will work with partners across the public sector both to support the qualifications system and to make use of opportunities for greater efficiency or effectiveness. This year, we will work with other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies to procure and manage a learning and development programme for managers, and we will continue to provide IT support to the National Academy for Educational Leadership and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.

Undertake QiW system enhancements

We will complete a programme of change to improve the functionality of our externally facing qualifications database. Changes will include allowing 'Other Regulated' qualifications to be included, and news and alerts to be provided to users.

Continuously improve communications and engagement

We will implement the new Communications & Engagement and Internal Communications strategies. We will review and amend the accessibility of our website to ensure compliance with accessibility legislation. We will also relaunch our website and refresh our corporate brand. We will implement a new approach to key stakeholder engagement and communications.

4. Funding and planned expenditure (2020-21)

Qualifications Wales is primarily funded by Welsh Government. Our core funding allocation for 2020-21 is £8.067m; we are allocated a further £200k to fund the 'Welsh for Adults' qualification, and we have been allocated a further £981k to cover the additional costs we will incur linked to our 'Qualified for the Future' project. We also plan to generate income of approximately £40k through the provision of ICT support services to two other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies and, as at 1 April 2020, held a usable reserve on our balance sheet of £282k.

We have a Medium-Term Finance Plan (last updated in March 2020) for the period 2020-21 to 2022-23. This estimates our anticipated cost-base over this period and provides the baseline for funding discussions with Welsh Government.

At a summary level, our 2020-21 budget is shown below:

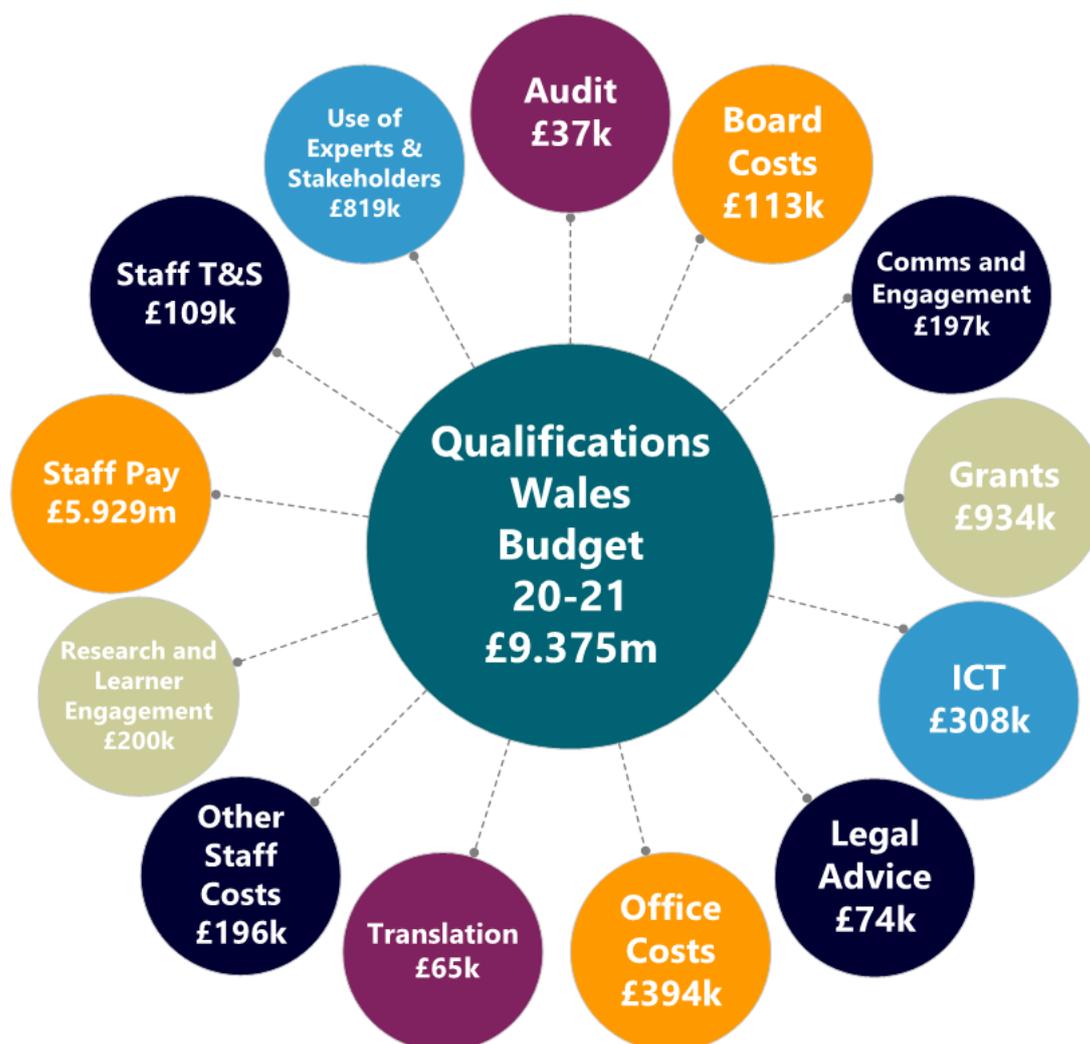
Area	2020-21	2020-21	2020-21
	Core Budget	Qualified for the	Total Budget
	£'000	Future Budget	£'000
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Pay	5,124	743	5,867
Grants	734	0	734
Programme	1,060	156	1,216
Running	1,276	20	1,296
Accounting Officer Programme Budget	0	62	62
Core QW Activity	8,194	981	9,175
Welsh for Adults Grant	200		200
Overall Total	8,394	981	9,375
Funding			
Welsh Government Grant			8,067
Core grant funding			200
Welsh for Adults Funding			981
Qualified for the Future Funding			
ICT Income			40
Total funding			9,288
Potential funding shortfall			87

The £87k funding gap between the total funding available (£9.288m), and the estimated total funding required (£9.375m), is entirely attributable to the provision made in the budget to cover any pay award in 2020-21. We have alerted Welsh Government that additional funding could be required should there be a pay award, and it has been agreed that funding for this cost pressure will be assessed once any pay award is known.

We have had approval from Welsh Government to use the usable reserve to cover any costs incurred on our planned re-tender of our Finance and HR systems. The costs for this over

this and next year will become clearer as the project develops, and therefore are not included in our current budget estimates

The diagram below further illustrates how we plan to spend our £9.375m budget:



Our expenditure plans will be subject to regular review as we consider delivery of our business plan and any changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.