



# BUSINESS PLAN 2021-22



Noddir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Sponsored by  
**Welsh Government**

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## 1. Qualifications Wales

### 1.1. Introduction

Qualifications Wales regulates recognised awarding bodies offering qualifications in Wales. We are an independent body focused on publicly funded qualifications, including GCSEs, A and AS 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 the qualifications we regulate 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.

2021-22 is our sixth full financial year of operation. The past year has seen the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across the whole education system. This has required Qualifications Wales and the other regulators across the UK to explore and adopt approaches to the award of qualifications that have not been seen before. Throughout this difficult period our priority has been to support learners to receive grades that allow them to progress to employment or to the next phase of their education. We continue to remain flexible in our approach so that we can respond to any new challenges. Grades awarded in 2021 will, in most cases, be Centre Determined Grades, and a critical part of our work in the early part of the year will be finalising the regulatory arrangements to make this happen.

Last year, we listened to feedback that said we needed to improve how we communicate and engage with learners, parents, teachers and other stakeholders across the education system. This year's Business Plan shows the priority we have given to strengthening this two-way dialogue. We aim to create real and ongoing engagement with those impacted by our ideas and plans. This will apply to both the awarding process for 2021 and 2022, and to our longer-term qualification reforms. We have plans in place to expand this area of our work.

We did not review our strategy documents last year and our approach is currently laid out in the following documents:

[Qualifications Wales Strategy](#)

[General Qualifications Strategic Plan](#)

[Vocational Qualifications Strategy](#)

[Corporate Capability Strategic Plan](#)

[Choice for All \(our new Welsh-medium Qualifications Strategy, published in July 2020\)](#)

However, this year we will be bringing together our strategic approach to both general and vocational qualifications, and we will be looking at the use of digital technology and promotion of the Welsh language.

The whole education system in Wales has dealt with unprecedented challenges this year. Our plan for the coming year balances delivering what is needed now, while keeping sight of the longer-term needs of future generations.

We have some important decisions to make in the coming year, both in relation to assessment arrangements for the current qualifications and the reform of qualifications to support the new curriculum for Wales. These will be informed by our ongoing research activities. Research remains a priority, using both our in-house team and external providers. This year some of our existing research projects will conclude and we will commence work in new areas. We will be informed by the data we collect and analyse, and we will continue to publish our official statistics.

This Business Plan for 2021-22 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, recognising that we will respond to learner needs and our priorities can change during the year if required.

Last year, we successfully worked remotely for the entire period; this year we hope to reopen our office and explore hybrid ways of working. This Business Plan is a baseline, and the planning has been based on a full complement of staff working at full capacity. As with last year, the plan will be regularly reviewed 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 qualification 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 qualification system.

We protect the value of qualifications, overseeing the fair awarding of qualifications and reviewing and developing them as the needs of learners evolve. As the independent regulator of 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 which we reported on during 2020-21.

## 2. Summary

This Business Plan covers our sixth full financial year of operation.

Education and the qualification system remain of high political and public interest. Our 2021-22 plan will deliver the alternative assessment arrangements for qualifications in summer 2021 as set out by the Minister for Education, while at the same time we continue to progress our work on the reform of qualifications. Our plan will result in improved communication with those affected by our decisions, with an increased use of social media and improvements to our website. Throughout, we will continue to fulfil our statutory role to regulate and monitor the system.

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill has been enacted into law and we will continue to take forward our 'Qualified for the Future' programme of work to reform qualifications for learners aged 14-16. We will be responding to feedback on our consultation on the range of qualifications and collaborating with learners, teachers and others in the education system to agree the content and assessment arrangements for the new qualifications. As we do so, we will seek opportunities to innovate, while aligning with the new curriculum. We will also be gathering views and conducting research to agree the full range of qualifications required to offer a coherent and inclusive choice and meet the needs of all learners. Different subjects will need different forms of assessment. We will be using the next two years to develop our thinking on future qualifications and listening to all views with an open mind while considering the findings from our research.

We will monitor the delivery of the alternative assessment arrangements for qualifications in summer 2021, overseeing the agreed approach for the award of approved qualifications, including GCSEs, AS and A levels based on Centre Determined Grades and the three-country approach for the award of vocational qualifications. We will work with WJEC to provide clarity on adaptations for the award of qualifications in 2022. We will start to consider how to approach the setting and maintenance of standards for future years.

We will continue to deliver reforms in vocational qualifications. Where we make changes, this will be to secure improved assessment, clearer progression routes for learners and a clear focus on what employers and sector bodies tell us they want. Ultimately, this helps Wales to create a workforce appropriate for its needs in the 21st century. Our work helps learners progress and develop skills for employment, thereby improving overall prosperity and economic growth.

We will continue our approach to change management, working with schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to explain the changes and provide support. Where we commission awarding bodies to develop new qualifications, we will require them to ensure that centres are well-prepared for delivery.

During 2021, we will be commissioning an awarding body to develop the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales. This new Level 3 qualification will replace the existing Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate and will, similarly, be taken alongside Level 3 qualifications, including A levels. It will provide learners with the opportunity to demonstrate their integral skills while undertaking projects that reflect current global issues and promote a sustainable future.

Following our early sector reviews, which led to the development of suites of qualifications, all new qualifications for Health, Social Care and Childcare are now being taught. The first new qualifications in Construction and the Built Environment will be taught from September 2021. This new qualification approach provides a common base for all trades, with learners encouraged to progress from the Foundation qualification into apprenticeships where they will become fully qualified in their trade.

In response to our sector review 'Delivering Digital', a new GCSE in Digital Technology is available for first teaching from September 2021, with an A level to follow in 2022, to support the development of the skills needed in today's digital world.

Following our reviews of Essential Skills qualifications and our 'The Importance of Engineering' review of engineering qualifications, we will be delivering the agreed actions to improve qualifications in these areas.

We have just started our sector review of Travel, Tourism, Hospitality and Catering, and will be continuing to progress this in 2021, taking views from across the sector. We are reaching the conclusion of our sector review into qualifications in Sport and Public Services on which we will report in 2021, before commencing the second of these reviews in the area of Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care.

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.

Underpinning our work will be a full programme of research, and the collection and analysis of data to help ensure that we take well-informed and evidence-based decisions.

During the year, we hope to enable the safe return of our staff to our office. We will be building on our inclusive culture, while retaining the benefits of more flexible working. We will continue to have a focus on staff well-being, our equalities objectives and our environmental impact.

We will be welcoming new Board members and staff, and making sure we deliver an effective, while remote, induction. We will continue to seek efficiencies and improvements in how we operate, and this will include implementing new HR and finance software systems.

### 3. Operational priorities 2021-22

The 2021-22 operational priorities build on last year's plan. There are five operational priorities for 2021-22:

1. Review
2. Reform
3. Regulate
4. Resources – corporate capability
5. Reach – communications and engagement

#### 3.1. Priority 1: Review

Our priority is to work effectively with the whole qualification 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 qualification system to strengthen public confidence in qualifications. In doing this work, we will explore the impact of the pandemic on stakeholders and the implications for the future.

In 2021-22, we will:

<b>Project manage Qualified for the Future</b>
We will deliver Phase 3 of our project, secure subject experts and plan the next phase, using effective project management techniques to ensure our important contribution to the new Curriculum for Wales can be delivered effectively and efficiently.

<b>Determine the future range of qualifications taken at 16</b>
We will review what we have heard from our recent consultation on the range of subjects that should be available to support the new curriculum and publish our decisions. We will engage with stakeholders to start to consider the range of qualifications required to achieve an inclusive and coherent offer that meets the needs of all learners aged 14 to 16.

<b>Develop design principles for future GCSEs</b>
We will develop and consult on the high-level aims, size and grading of new GCSE qualifications. We will also start to consider the content and assessment arrangements for individual subjects, drawing on research and engagement with stakeholders. We will consider the regulatory arrangements required to support our proposals.

### **Securing qualifications for learners aged 14 to 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. We will also review our approach to designating pre-16 qualifications as eligible for public funding.

### **Continue the Travel, Tourism, Hospitality and Catering sector review**

We will continue our sector review, completing international and technical reviews, and seeking the views of learners, employers, learning providers and other stakeholders via interviews and online surveys.

### **Review the future availability of qualifications for post-16 learners**

We will continue to deliver our planned work to secure an effective range of qualifications for learners taking post-16 vocational courses and apprenticeships. We will publish our review of sport and public services qualifications and start to implement any actions identified. We will begin our review of qualifications for Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care.

### **Develop the future strategy for qualifications reform and review**

We will review our existing strategic plans and develop thinking on future priorities and challenges. In doing so, we will consider our progress against our 'Choice for All' Welsh language strategy and success in increasing the range of qualifications available for assessment through the medium of Welsh.

### **Inform forward planning for qualifications and the qualification system in Wales**

We will continue to deliver our research priorities to inform our thinking. We will complete our research projects on experiences of non-examined assessment within reformed GCSEs. We will develop an approach for evaluating our qualification reforms. We will continue to conduct research to measure and understand public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system in Wales. To support our work on reforming qualifications for learners aged 14-16, we will complete a review of teacher involvement in assessment in other countries. We will also review the alternative assessment arrangements used in 2020 and 2021 with teachers.

### **Develop an approach to support the expansion of the use of digital technologies in regulated qualifications in Wales**

We will approach qualifications reform with a preference for making use of digital assessment where appropriate and beneficial. We will identify the opportunities for, and the barriers to, increasing the use of digital technology in regulated qualifications.

## **3.2 Priority 2: Reform**

Our commitment is to review the qualifications offered in Wales and the qualification system to ensure that they meet the reasonable needs of learners and promote public confidence. This may 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 on the qualifications offered in Wales.

In 2021-22, we will:

### **Start to develop approval criteria for new 'made-for-Wales' qualifications**

Working closely with external stakeholders, we will start to develop proposals for the requirements that will shape how new 'made-for-Wales' qualifications should be designed and assessed.

### **Commission the development of a new Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales qualification**

We will commission an awarding body to develop this new qualification and establish a change management programme to help schools and colleges to manage its effective introduction.

### **Continue the delivery of the Digital Reform Project**

We will approve the new AS/A level in Digital Technology for first teaching in 2022. We will establish a change management programme to support schools and colleges with the introduction of both this qualification and the GCSE in Digital Technology that we approved last year for first teaching in 2021.

### **Conclude the Health and Social Care Reform Project**

We will complete our review of the policy, and processes and outcomes of this project, to identify any improvements we can make to future reforms.

<b>Continue the Construction and the Built Environment Reform Project</b>
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We will approve the Progression and Apprenticeship qualifications. We will oversee the introduction of the Foundation, Progression and Apprenticeship qualifications, as well as GCSE and GCE A level Built Environment qualifications. 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. We will continue to review our work and identify any lessons learnt.
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<b>Implement the actions from the Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing and Energy sector review</b>
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We will engage with awarding bodies and other stakeholders to implement the actions identified from this review.
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<b>Reform Essential Skills Wales qualifications</b>
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We will engage with awarding bodies to identify any changes that should be made to strengthen the qualification design principles. We will then work with the awarding bodies and learning providers to test, approve and implement any changes.
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<b>Continue to manage grants effectively</b>
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We will manage the Welsh for Adults, Welsh-medium and Qualification Reform Support Grants, and make information more transparent – including alerting stakeholders to qualifications newly available in Welsh.
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### 3.3. 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 sanction 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 response to the pandemic, we will continue to manage the impact on learners and consider the implications beyond 2022.

In 2021-22, we will:

**Maintain and keep under review our Regulatory Framework, documents and approaches**

We will decide how we intend to use our powers to 'select' qualifications to restrict and approve, and how we will use our powers to 'designate' qualifications as eligible for public funding. We will continue our policy review process and improve our suite of regulatory documents. We will review our regulatory Welsh-medium qualifications policy and improve the information we hold on learner language preferences. We will continue to carry out regulatory Integrated Impact Assessments.

**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 recognised awarding bodies' statements of compliance and monitor areas of non-compliance. We will have a particular focus on awarding body viability following the impact of the pandemic on revenues. 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 2021 alternative assessment arrangements and the winter 2021-22 examination series. We will monitor the development of assessment for future examination series, the implementation and delivery of the Essential Skills Wales qualifications, and the new approved vocational qualifications in Health, Social Care and Childcare, and Construction and the Built Environment.

**Oversee the setting and maintenance of appropriate standards for qualifications**

We will continue to 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 the maintenance of standards for three-country qualifications.

#### **Manage QiW (Qualifications in Wales) database**

We will continue to manage QiW data and implement changes to managing qualifications end dates. We will continue to engage with stakeholders to receive 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. In doing so, we will manage changes resulting from the alternative assessment arrangements in 2021. We will develop the means to collect more data on Welsh language to support our Choice for All strategy.

#### **Manage the impact of Covid-19 on qualifications**

We will oversee the delivery of our alternative assessment arrangements for 2021 for both general and vocational qualifications, working closely with other regulators to ensure appropriate alignment across the UK. We will revise our Exam Procedures Review Service process to support learner needs in 2021. We will continue to engage with stakeholders in this work.

#### **Determine the approach to assessment and regulation of qualifications in 2022 and subsequent years**

We will oversee the awarding arrangements for 2022 (including appropriate adaptations to qualifications). We will reflect on the impact of the alternative assessment arrangements on standards and consider a way forward for qualification awarding post 2022.

### **3.4. Priority 4: Resources – corporate capability**

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. We will continue to manage the impact of the pandemic on our workforce and consider our future ways of working.

In 2021-22, 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 and Statistics

**Publish corporate reports on time and to a high standard**

Reports included will be:

- 2021-22 Business Plan and Operational Plan
- 2020-21 Annual Accounts
- 2020-21 Annual Equality Report
- 2020-21 Welsh Language Scheme Report
- 2020-21 Annual Report

**Deliver our Equality and Future Generations objectives**

We will continue to deliver our Equality objectives and Future Generations objectives, through both our regulatory and corporate work. We will continue to strive for workforce and Board diversity and continually improve how we operate as an inclusive organisation. Following our Gold Fairplay employer award, we will work with Chwarae Teg to identify and implement an action plan for further improvement.

**Deliver the actions from our Welsh Language Scheme**

We will continue to monitor delivery against our Welsh Language Scheme and deliver identified actions. We will review our Welsh Language Scheme to ensure progression towards the Welsh Language Standards.

### **Support staff well-being and manage our environmental impact**

Assuming a partial return to the office, we will work towards achieving the Silver Corporate Health Standard Award by embedding a positive health and well-being culture. We will continue to 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 continue to 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 qualification system and to make use of opportunities for greater efficiency or effectiveness. This year, we will work with other Welsh Government sponsored bodies to continue to deliver the learning and development programme for managers and leaders, and we will continue to provide IT support to the National Academy for Educational Leadership and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.

### **Support Board and workforce development**

We will provide an effective induction for our new Board members and review how effectively we have supported new employees while working remotely. We will review options for the purchase of Board paperless software. We will also review how our new approach to staff performance and development has worked over the last year.

### **Develop and embed new ways of working during and post Covid-19**

Listening to the views of staff and working closely with our trade union, we will pilot a partial return to the office and consider what our new ways of working might be, experimenting to try different approaches before considering changes to HR and facilities policies.

### **Implement new finance and HR systems**

We will implement the new finance and HR systems, enabling our finance, procurement and HR functions to operate efficiently and effectively, and for staff to access bilingual self-service HR modules.

### 3.5. Priority 5: Reach – effectively connecting, engaging and communicating with all our audiences

#### **Build public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system**

We will deliver our Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-22, improving how we tailor messages to different audiences. We will review and monitor our effectiveness. We will work with our Learner Advisory Group to make sure the voice of learners helps us improve how we communicate and engage. We will develop our organisational narrative to better explain our role in the system and review our tone of voice. We will continue to plan activities for regular stakeholder engagement and effectively manage enquiries. We will also review our Internal Communications Strategy.

#### **Focus continuous improvement to deliver effective communications and engagement activity**

We will continue to develop effective feedback channels for stakeholders. We will ensure effective internal project management of our campaigns, embedding the Government Communication Service's OASIS approach to managing strategic communications. We will improve our website and social media content management processes.

#### **Create a comprehensive communications and engagement strategy to manage the impact of COVID-19 and alternative assessment arrangements in 2021**

We will deliver our strategy and plan for communications on awarding in summer 2021, working with WJEC and Welsh Government, and focusing on ensuring learners, parents and the teaching profession understand the arrangements and why they are in place.

#### **Develop a targeted and human-centric approach to stakeholder engagement**

We will implement our stakeholder engagement strategy, focusing on different groups having effective means of getting the information they need and providing regular feedback to us. We will engage and manage our stakeholder groups to ensure they are an effective channel for two-way dialogue. We will run our Awarding Bodies Forum and Exams Officer Conference.

#### **Improve and develop the social media strategy and website**

We will implement a new social media strategy using data and insight and monitor our effectiveness. We will improve our website navigation and implement robust content management processes and accessibility. We will also trial the use of Instagram.

### **Communicate and engage on reform priorities**

Our campaigns to support our reforms will focus on ensuring centres are ready and stakeholders understand the changes and reasons for them. We will support the Qualified for the Future project, where a key focus will be securing and coordinating effective inputs from a wider range of stakeholders to inform our decisions. This will include engagement with learners, practitioners, academics, national and local government, universities and employers. We will also support reforms in Construction, Health and Social Care, Engineering, Digital Technology and the new Advanced Welsh Skills Baccalaureate. We will explain our use of grants to support the availability of qualifications through the medium of Welsh.

### **Communicate and engage on review priorities**

We will explain our published research to support our reviews. A key focus will be our Phase 2 sector reviews for vocational qualifications and our review of qualifications in the Travel, Tourism, Catering and Hospitality sector.

## **4. Funding and planned expenditure 2021-22**

Qualifications Wales is primarily funded by Welsh Government. Our core funding allocation for 2021-22 is £8.067m; we are allocated a further £200k to fund the 'Welsh for Adults' qualification, and we have been allocated a further £1.35m to cover the additional costs we will incur for our Qualified for the Future project. We also plan to generate income of approximately £41k through the provision of IT support services to two other Welsh Government sponsored bodies and, as at 1 April 2021, will hold a usable reserve on our balance sheet of circa £234k.

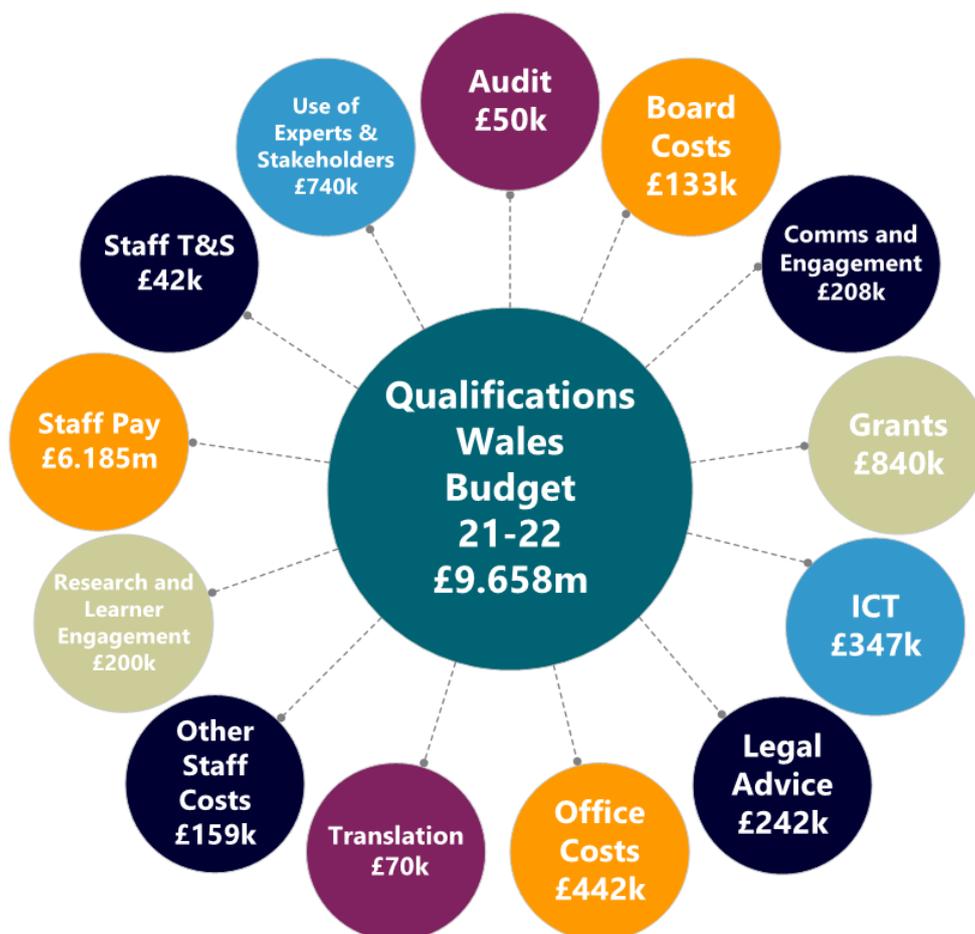
We have a Medium-Term Finance Plan (last updated in March 2021) for the period 2021-22 to 2023-24. This estimates our anticipated cost-base over this period and provides the baseline for funding discussions with Welsh Government.

At a summary level, our 2021-22 budget is shown below:

Area		2021-22 Core Budget	2021-22 Qualified for the Future Budget	2021-22 Total Budget
		£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>CORE:</b>				
Pay		5,309	814	6,123
Grants		640	50	690
Programme Costs		673	416	1,089
Running Costs		1,348	8	1,356
Accounting Officer Programme		138	62	200
<b>Core QW Activity</b>		<b>8,108</b>	<b>1,350</b>	<b>9,458</b>
Welsh For Adults Grant		200	0	200
<b>Overall Total</b>		<b>8,308</b>	<b>1,350</b>	<b>9,658</b>
<b>Funding</b>				
Core WG Grant				8,067
Welsh For Adults Grant				200
Qualified for the Future Funding				1,350
IT Income				41
<b>Total Funding</b>				<b>9,658</b>

We have had approval from Welsh Government to utilise the usable reserve to cover the costs of the implementation of our replacement finance and HR systems. These costs are not yet included in the above budget estimates as they are currently being finalised, but the £234k reserve will be sufficient to cover them.

The diagram below further illustrates how we plan to spend our £9.658m budget:



Our expenditure plans will be subject to regular review as we consider delivery of our Business Plan and respond to the impact of the pandemic.