

ANNUAL EQUALITY REPORT

1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022



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1. Introduction

2021-22 was a challenging year, with the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to be felt, most significant for learners being the cancellation of the summer exam series for GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021, and the impact on the assessment of many vocational qualifications. As the independent regulator for Wales, our job has been to continue to oversee the award of qualifications through alternative assessment arrangements amidst the disruption to teaching and learning. Our priority has been to ensure that learners were awarded qualifications and enabled to progress on to further learning or to employment. Despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic we also continued to make progress on reforming qualifications to support the new Curriculum for Wales.

As we explain in this report, our strategic equality objectives helped us to put overall fairness and equality at the heart of our decision making and our communications and engagement activities.

[Strategic Objective 1](#): Regulated qualifications are designed and assessed in a way that is fair for all learners.

[Strategic Objective 2](#): We communicate, engage, consult and conduct research with diverse groups, benefiting from a wide range of views.

We continued to pursue diversity in our recruitment approach for both employees and new Board members and this report provides an update of the position.

[Strategic Objectives 3](#): Our workforce and Board reflect the diversity of the population in Wales that we regulate for and work amongst.

2021-22 was a transitional period where we began the move towards hybrid working. We continued to look after the well-being of all our employees, who worked from home for much of the period but also began to return to the office to a limited extent. Our strategic objectives to build and maintain our inclusive culture enabled us to support our people and we are proud of the resilience and flexibility shown by all.

[Strategic Objective 4](#): We will continue to build a culture where people feel that the organisation values them as individuals, appreciates their differences and makes good use of the range of experiences and insight available.

[Strategic Objective 5](#): We maintain the progress we have made in embedding equality into how we operate, and we take opportunities to continue to improve

Our report provides a more detailed update on our progress against each of our five objectives for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

2. Our role

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.

Under the *Qualifications Wales Act (2015)* we have two principal aims:

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

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, make sure that they are awarded fairly, and review and develop 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 (HE) sector and professions.

Qualifications Wales is required by law, under the Equalities Act 2010 and Wales 2011 Regulations, to report its activity against its equality objectives on an annual basis. This report covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 and is the fifth Annual Equality Report from Qualifications Wales.

We want to involve people in our work, so we engage, communicate and collaborate to strengthen our ability to promote public confidence in the Welsh qualification system, and to meet the needs of learners in Wales. Our approach to our work and role is summarised below:

- We invite, listen and respond to the views of learners
- We listen and respond to stakeholder feedback, views and concerns appropriately
- The way in which we make regulatory decisions and engage with stakeholders is proportionate and we assess the potential impact of our regulatory actions on affected groups
- Our culture is inclusive, which enables us to make better decisions to benefit the entire organisation
- Consultations are transparent and meaningful

- We take a collaborative approach and draw on the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders as appropriate
- We produce clear, informative, targeted and timely communications, seeking feedback to find ways to improve our approach

How we regulate is set out in our [Regulatory Framework and Approach](#), which is underpinned by the principles of better regulation and by our values which are:

- *Collaborative* in the way that we work
- *Thoughtful* in the approaches we take
- *Positive* in our outlook
- *Learning* from experience and others

Our purpose is met when regulated qualifications taken in Wales are trusted and valued by learners, employers and education providers, and are recognised throughout the UK and internationally – this is our overarching vision, which is set out in our regulatory outcomes:

- Regulated qualifications taken by learners in Wales are valid, reliable and awarded to an appropriate standard;
- Regulated qualifications in Wales are inclusive and promote equality of opportunity for learners;
- Regulated qualifications and the qualification system are responsive to changing needs and circumstances, particularly in regard to the long-term benefit of Wales and its learners;
- Regulation is proportionate, transparent, consistent and targeted, to support a qualification system that is sustainable in the long term;
- Information reasonably required to deliver consistent and quality-assured regulated qualifications is available and accessible;
- Appropriate governance is in place to ensure accountability and regulatory compliance.

3. Our Organisation

Qualifications Wales is a relatively small organisation. We recruit based on merit and ensure that our recruitment panels have gender balance. Recruitment is generally via external schemes, and we advertise on our website as well as other sites that might be suitable or appropriate for the role. In the last twelve months we have run 17 recruitment schemes which were all externally advertised opportunities, some for multiple roles.

We promote flexibility and will consider alternative working patterns to fulfil a role's requirements, so whilst a position may be the equivalent of full-time hours (37 per week) we will consider applications for part-time working and job share.

Since the organisation was established, we have adopted an approach that guarantees an interview to a candidate who meets the minimum criteria at shortlisting. We are a Disability Confident employer; we use this logo on our recruitment webpages and on email correspondence during the recruitment process to signal our commitment.

Equalities in a Global Pandemic

In the last 12 months our employees have continued to work primarily from home, although our office did re-open in July 2021 for two days a week with attendance on a voluntary basis. Desks were bookable and we had Covid safety protocols in place. This worked well and we are currently transitioning to opening the office five days a week with a hybrid working approach. We have continued to provide equipment and allowed flexibility in our working practices to provide our employees with the ability to successfully manage their home and work priorities. We have continued to receive positive feedback from our employees about our approach to flexible working. In our annual survey in October 2021, 85% agreed that they were able to achieve a good balance between their work and private life.

"I enjoy my job and working for QW. I remain grateful for the provisions put in place to work from home during the pandemic and appreciate the effort that is being put into finding a new, hybrid way of working - thank you."

"I enjoy working for Qualifications Wales. My work / life balance has improved greatly with the flexibility of homeworking over the last 12 months."

"I feel the flexible approach to working during the pandemic has been incredibly generous. I feel QW has done really well to keep working effectively during some challenging times."

Working remotely and having the office open for employees to use on a voluntary basis has had an impact on us taking forward our objective to improve the diversity of our workforce through offering work placements, as we have been unable to guarantee consistency of access and training to support the benefits from working alongside others in person. We intend to take this objective forward once our hybrid working settles into a pattern.

Gender Pay

We have transparent pay scales and employees who perform satisfactorily receive annual increments until they reach the target rate for their pay band. We currently follow the Welsh Government's pay scales. When Welsh Government agree a pay increase, we review this and if accepted by us as the employer, we then consult with our recognised Trade Union and seek the views of the members before formally adopting it. We review our gender pay information annually and publish the detail in our [Annual Accounts](#).

At the end of March 2022, our gender pay gap was 16.3% (this compared to 12.8% in 2021 and 10.9% in 2020).

The median salary at 31 March 2022 (which excludes the CEO's salary) is £44,200, compared to £43,760 in 2021. The ratio of CEO salary (at the mid-point of the pay band) to the median is 3:00 in 2022, compared to 3:03 in 2021.

We have a gender pay gap this year in our pay bands 1, 3 and 4. These all have a greater number of women employed within them, with more women spread out across the scale points. Interestingly, our median pay is equal in Band 1, 4, 5 and 6, and where this occurs the median salary is the target rate/top of the pay band. In Band 2 women earn more than men in the equivalent band but they do outnumber them 6:2 here.

Fourteen of our new employees this year have been women, joining us in Bands 1, 3 and 4 which is where we see the pay differences. When new employees are recruited they tend to be appointed at, or near, the minimum of the pay band and they will then progress on an annual basis. This clearly has an impact on our figures.

We monitor recruitment patterns and pay data to identify any concerns, consider underlying reasons for what we report to ensure our processes are not sustaining inequalities, and we take appropriate action. In the last year we had six internal promotions, four were female and two male.

The information we hold does not indicate any unequal treatment on the grounds of gender although we typically receive more applications from women than men. The actions to support our objectives relating to workforce diversity and inclusive culture, our ongoing family-friendly HR policies, and our actions on recruitment (to ensure roles are attractive to either gender or people with protected characteristics) positively impact all protected characteristics, including gender. We therefore do not have a separate objective to address pay difference.

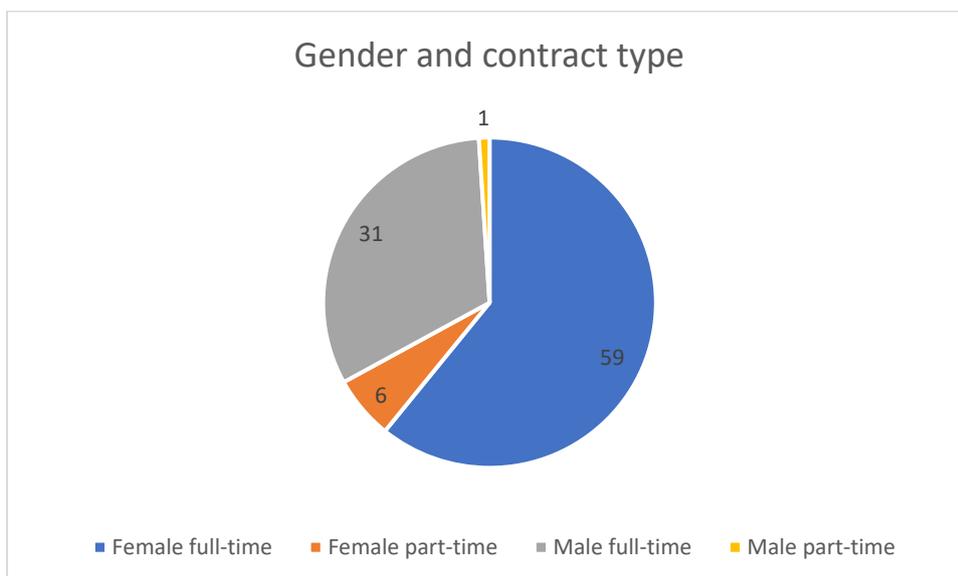
Our objective relating to gender focuses on recruitment and, in particular, ensuring that the roles we advertise are attractive to people of either gender, or the gender they identify with, and to people with other protected characteristics so as to encourage a diverse workforce. We publish our public sector equality data in an open format on our website.

Applicants are asked to complete an equality monitoring form when they apply for employment with us. This data is recorded by HR and anonymised reports are then produced. If an applicant is successful, they are asked to respond and record their responses to an

equalities questionnaire which sits within our HR information system and enables us to report on our employee population in relation to the protected characteristics. We seek to capture data about race, faith or belief, sexual orientation, age, marriage and civil partnership, disability and gender identity. We also hold information about pregnancy and maternity.

The following tables outline our employee composition as at 31 March 2022 by pay band, gender, age and contract type (full-time hours are 37 hours per week, part-time contracts have agreed hours under 37).

Pay Band	Female full-time	Female part-time	Male full-time	Male part-time	Total
1	4	1	2	0	7
2	7	0	1	0	8
3	15	1	6	0	22
4	23	4	10	1	38
5	6	0	7	0	13
6	2	0	4	0	6
7	2	0	0	0	2
8	0	0	1	0	1
Total	59	6	31	1	97



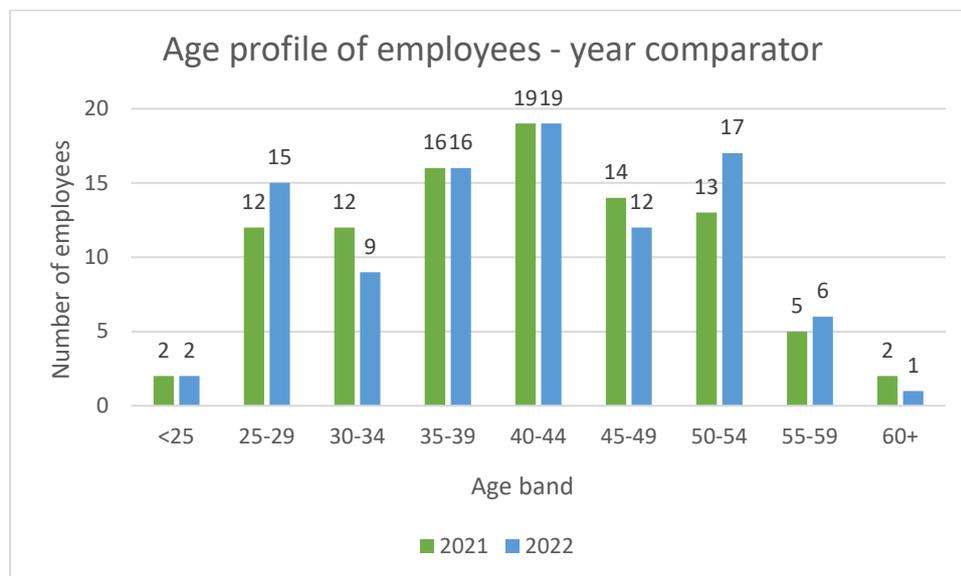
Due to our size, we have a number of instances where proportions of staff with a protected characteristic are too small to report. We do not report where there are five or fewer responses to ensure we protect confidentiality and anonymity. We also have some employees who have chosen not to respond to some or all of the questions.

Reflections on the profile of our staff

Whilst we have had some turnover in the last 12 months our profile has remained relatively static, meaning that when employees leave and others join, the composition of our workforce has not been significantly changed.

Our workforce continues to have a greater proportion of female employees, although this has stabilised. Our headcount at 31 March 2022 has increased by two to 97 and the gender totals have both increased by one. We employ seven employees on part-time contracts, one male and six women. We are similar to the wider education workforce in Wales and the UK in that we employ a higher proportion of females and have low ethnic diversity. We are committed to working with relevant bodies to help increase interest in working for our organisation which we hope will lead to applications from a broader range of candidates.

Our age profile has not seen any significant change and we continue with no employees declaring a disability through the questionnaire managed via the HR system.



The full data table is provided in *Appendix 1*.

Our Wellbeing and Equality Group champions promote positive messages in our organisation. The group is made up of volunteers from across the four directorates and works in partnership with HR to communicate in a way that helps to build our inclusive environment.

In our 2021 annual survey, 93% of employees agreed that they were treated with respect by the people they work with and 83% believed that we respect individual differences (cultures, working styles, background and ideas).

4. Our Board Profile

Qualifications Wales has a skills-based Board which is made up of the Chair, Chief Executive and between eight and ten members. Apart from the CEO, all members are appointed by the Minister for Education through the Public Appointments Process (Wales).

The role of the Board is to:

- provide effective leadership for Qualifications Wales, defining and developing strategic direction, and setting objectives;
- provide effective leadership for the operation of the organisation; holding the Chief Executive to account for ensuring that Qualifications Wales' activities are conducted efficiently and effectively;
- monitor performance to ensure that Qualifications Wales fully meets its aims, objectives and performance targets;
- promote high standards of public finance; upholding the principles of regularity, propriety and value for money.

As at March 2022, our Board had 12 members (including the Chief Executive). Their equality profile is shown in *Appendix 2*. The Chief Executive data is included in both the staff profile and the Board profile below.

A total of seven new Board members took up their position in 2021-22, and therefore the Board profile has changed from that reported in the previous progress report.

Following the last recruitment process for Board members the Chair asked QW officials to consider what actions could be taken to encourage a more diverse range of successful applications in the future. We identified a project called 'Pathway to Board Membership' run by a group of Housing Trusts aimed at developing individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds who had the potential to become Board members in the future.

The project has recruited a cohort of potential Board members and offers training, mentoring and the opportunity to observe Board meetings over a 12-month period. In January 2022 the Board agreed to participate in this project, and several of our Board members are acting as mentors. The project will continue throughout 2022-23.

More information about the Qualifications Wales Board can be seen here on our [website](#).

5. Our Strategic Equality Plan (Objectives 2019-2022)

The Qualifications Wales Board approved the *Strategic Equality Plan* (objectives 2019-2022) in January 2019, and this was published in May 2019.

The purpose of our equality objectives is to strengthen our performance of the public-sector equality duty and ensure we make progress in advancing equality and inclusion for protected groups in Wales.

We selected the areas to focus on by talking to our employees, our senior leadership team and our Board to generate ideas. We met and discussed our approach with groups representing people with different protected characteristics including Remploy, the Race Equality Council, the Equalities and Human Rights Council, Stonewall, Chwarae Teg, SEWEC (South East Wales Equality network) and SEWREC (South East Wales Racial Equality Council).

All our objectives are aimed at promoting equality and inclusiveness for people with any of the protected characteristics. We identified objectives which will help us better meet our duties and grouped these under five main headings:

1. Our regulatory work
2. Engaging with and informing the qualification system
3. Workforce and Board diversity
4. Inclusive culture
5. Continually improving how we operate as an inclusive organisation

To bring us in line with Welsh Government and other organisations we reviewed and refreshed our Strategic Equality Plan at the end of 2021-22 and our revised objectives were approved by the Board at its meeting in March 2022. We will further consult and engage during 2023/24, in line with other public bodies in Wales, in order to develop our objectives for the period 2024-2028.

The information in the remainder of this report provides an update on our work for the period April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

6. Review of progress against our objectives for the period April 2021 to March 2022

In the following pages, we provide an update of our progress against our four-year plan (2019-22) for strategic equality objectives.

When we set our equalities objectives in 2019, we could not have foreseen the impact of the pandemic. Our 'how we will achieve this' section did not therefore cover alternative assessments, but as described below, we approached this in the context of our strategic objective to secure overall fairness for learners.

Equalities considerations for alternative assessment arrangements for GCSE, AS and A levels in Summer 2021

Due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic on learner and staff attendance throughout 2020 and 2021, the Minister of Education took the decision to cancel the summer 2021 exam series and replace it with alternative assessment arrangements to enable grades to be awarded to learners, so that they could progress onto further education, training or employment where possible. The pandemic presented considerable challenges in finding an approach that was fair to every learner. Our objective to secure fairness for all groups of learners, (past and present and future, and with different characteristics) was at the heart of our decision making and the arrangements that we put in place for 2021.

Qualification assessment arrangements cannot eradicate inequalities that exist in society, and it is possible that disadvantaged learners have suffered more from the disruption to learning than other groups. In taking our decisions on planning for the necessary alternative arrangements we sought to develop arrangements that did not add any further disadvantage or increase any that already existed. We planned for approaches that were as fair as possible for all learners.

Compliance with the Public Sector Equalities Duty during our management of alternative assessment arrangements required due to COVID-19

As set out in our [Equalities: Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the awarding of qualifications](#) report we considered equalities throughout the process of managing alternative assessment arrangements for 2021 and planning for 2022.

We have kept under review how the pandemic might be impacting all learners, including those with protected characteristics, how well alternative assessment arrangements were meeting learner needs, and the impact on learners of any changes we needed to make.

As a public body, we had a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, as we would in any year. We gave due regard to the three aims of the Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED) during our work to develop alternative arrangements and these are set out below.

PSED Aim 1: Eliminating discrimination

Due to the different levels of disruption experienced at a centre, regional and learner level as a result of the pandemic, the alternative assessment arrangements for summer 2021 (centre determined grades) allowed centres to develop an assessment approach appropriate to and deliverable within their unique circumstances. The high degree of flexibility in the centre determined grade approach allowed centres to be able to award grades based only on what learners had been taught. This meant that learners who had high levels of absence could still be assessed, as long as they had covered a sufficient amount of the qualification to justify a credible grade being awarded. This approach was important for equality when, for instance, you consider that there were higher infection rates in more deprived communities, and a greater health impact on people from a minority ethnic background.

The flexibility of the approach meant that assessments were not prescribed and allowed centres to exercise discretion as to what assessments to use and the conditions of the assessments taken. Centres could use existing assessments they had developed themselves, entirely new ones, or WJEC's assessment resources, and learners who were isolating could complete assessments at home provided these could be authenticated as their own work.

We raised awareness of the need for centres to be compliant with the Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED) in producing grades. Early in 2021 we worked with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (Wales), providing updates and welcoming feedback on key aspects of the alternative arrangements as they arose. We facilitated provision of feedback from the Design and Delivery Advisory Group¹ on their guidance for centres on being compliant with the duty when producing centre determined grades for summer 2021. Stakeholders had expressed concerns to us about the risk of unconscious bias in centre production of grades. We therefore made sure that WJEC developed relevant resources to support centres and we secured support from Diverse Cymru, who collaborated with WJEC on provision of training.

We reminded centres of the need to ensure that reasonable adjustments were put in place for those learners who were entitled to them, should exams have gone ahead as normal. As in any normal year, these adjustments should represent the normal way of working for a learner. The holistic nature of the grade judgements that centres were asked to make also allowed for adjustments to be made as necessary and recorded in the grade rationale.

Our Strategic Engagement team works with centres across Wales, making sure those in the exam system understand how special considerations and access arrangements work. Since 2020 the team's work had been adapted to meet the needs of working through the challenges of the pandemic. The team held virtual visits with centres, in place of physical visits. The alternative arrangements put in place for assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels meant that centres needed to implement the equivalent of access arrangements and take special

¹ A group of individual school/college leaders established to develop workable proposals which could deliver the Minister for Education's policy direction on qualifications in 2021.

considerations into account when making their grading judgements. The team continued to provide support to centres throughout this period of significant change. This helped support the award of grades for learners with additional learning needs and disabilities.

PSED Aim 2: Advance equality of opportunity

The arrangements meant that most learners should have been able to be awarded a GCSE, AS or A level grade in summer 2021. Whilst the public health advice at different times of the year may have resulted in some learners with health issues not joining face-to-face learning as quickly or as often as other learners, the alternative arrangements allowed centres to award grades to learners in these circumstances.

We paid particular attention to the needs of the diverse group of learners referred to as private candidates². Our ongoing impact assessments meant we understood that many private candidates are not enrolled at a centre for reasons related to a protected characteristic(s) that they share, such as a disability or religious belief. Others might also be a private candidate due to the nature of their lifestyle.

In 2020, we considered several solutions to maximise access to qualification entry for private candidates but there were limits to what could be put in place in the time available. We developed an approach that facilitated entry via centres, but a small number of private candidates still did not secure entries. Therefore, for 2021, increasing access to grade awards for private candidates was a priority from the outset. We worked with members of the Design and Delivery Advisory Group to develop two routes to improve access to entries. In one of the routes WJEC completed the necessary assessment of private candidates, (which removed the burden of this from centres and increased the likelihood that centres would accept them). We also worked with Welsh Government to secure support from Local Authorities to ensure there was a good distribution of centres across Wales willing to accommodate private candidates. As details were finalised, issues like transport and reasonable adjustments were considered as necessary, so that private candidates could access the alternative arrangements put in place and were not disadvantaged relative to other learners by the arrangements.

PSED Aim 3: Foster good relations

In the planning for summer 2020 we carried out a public consultation. We also engaged with a number of stakeholder groups, including EHRC Wales. We held a webinar for a range of equalities stakeholder groups where attendees including Race Council Wales, Citizens Wales and Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales provided feedback on our proposals. We built on this in planning for summer 2021 arrangements, engaging more closely with a wider range of representative equalities organisations to ensure we had a full range of views to support our understanding of any potential impacts of the arrangements on learners with protected characteristics. The feedback from these equalities organisations contributed to our Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) of the potential impact of the alternative arrangements. They included Citizens Wales, Muslim Council for Wales, Race Council for Wales, Cytûn (Churches together in Wales), Welsh Refugee Council, Show Racism the Red Card, Travelling

² Learners who are not registered with a school or college for their studies.

Ahead, Diverse Cymru, and Samaritans Cymru. The final version of this EIA was published as an appendix to our Equalities: Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the awarding of qualifications report. We sought views from EHRC Wales on key documents and aspects of the process and welcomed advice that they shared. We also provided regular updates to the Children's Commissioner and welcomed advice about our communications with learners.

We usually monitor regulatory arrangements closely as they are implemented to make sure we understand and can evaluate the impacts of our work on learners. For 2021 we adapted our approach, being careful not to further increase the workload burden on centres at a time when they were already under pressure. We completed an analysis of attainment gaps for summer 2021 Summer 2021 Equalities Impact Analysis: GCSE, AS, and A level.

Strategic Objective 1: Our Regulatory work

'Regulated qualifications are designed and assessed in a way that is fair for all learners'

How we will achieve the objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will develop our requirements for qualifications to ensure there are no unreasonable barriers to access;• When reviewing qualifications for approval, we will focus on equality issues as part of our approval process;• The law requires awarding bodies to comply with the Equality Act 2010. In addition, as the regulator and to reinforce this requirement, we require awarding bodies to comply with equalities law through our Standard Conditions of Recognition, and follow other regulatory and guidance documents such as Fair Access by Design;• We will require all awarding bodies to report to us that they have appropriate procedures in place to ensure compliance with our Standard Conditions of Recognition;• We will take appropriate and proportionate action where non-compliance is identified within an awarding body;• We will check that all awarding bodies have appropriate procedures for applying reasonable adjustments in their qualifications for learners with disabilities;• We will complete both regulatory and equality impact assessments on major pieces of work;• We will review Fair Access by Design – the guidance relating to how to address accessibility within qualification assessment design³; we will also ensure staff and expert panels refer to the guidance when reviewing qualifications;• We will be active members, along with fellow regulators, of the Access Consultation Forum to consider equality issues;• Where we procure services from an awarding body/ies to develop new qualifications, we will require them to give due consideration to equality in their stakeholder engagement during their qualification development;• Where we identify any systematic equality issues outside our own remit, we will report these to the appropriate bodies.
Review of our work this year
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This year we approved new qualifications in Construction and the Built environment and Digital Technology. We trained the panels of subject experts that we used to support this approval work prior to them reviewing draft qualification materials; this training covered

³ This was completed in 2020.

ensuring fairness and minimising bias in assessment, making reference to 'Fair Access by Design'. The proforma that the subject experts were required to submit to us following their review of draft qualification materials included questions on equality of access, fairness and minimising bias, and where issues were raised, these were fed back to the awarding body to action.

- During 2021-22 we received six applications from awarding bodies wanting to be recognised by Qualifications Wales. Each applicant was assessed against criteria relating to equalities legislation. We also monitor awarding bodies that are recognised by us, giving due regard to equality.
- We received and reviewed Statements of Compliance from 92 awarding bodies. There have been no matters of non-compliance in relation to equality from awarding bodies in 2021-22.
- We completed an integrated regulatory impact assessment (RIA) in relation to the alternative arrangements that were planned for summer 2021. The integrated assessment includes an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) as an appendix. Assessing the potential impact of our alternative arrangements on learners who share protected characteristics was an important part of our work to develop the contingency arrangements for summer 2021. The EIA was an iterative document that was updated as the public health and policy positions changed. Though this had an impact on our ability to publish final versions, the work taking place to update the assessments supported decision making at key points.
- We published [*Equalities: Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the awarding of qualifications*](#) outlining our approach to alternative awarding arrangements for 2021 and providing our main EIA.
- As part of our *Qualified for the future project*, we published an integrated impact assessment of our decisions on the future range of GCSE and other related made-for-Wales qualifications in October 2021 and March 2022 respectively. These assessments set out the impacts identified by respondents as well as those we had considered and how potentially adverse impacts could be mitigated. We have subsequently carried out further integrated impact assessments as our work of co-constructing a new generation of 14-16 qualifications has continued throughout 2022. Further details of the work we have undertaken as part of the *Qualified for the future project* is provided later in this report under Objective 2.
- Throughout the reporting period, we have been active members of the Access Consultation Forum which is made up of representatives from awarding bodies, various disability groups across the UK and qualifications regulators from England, Northern Ireland and Wales. This group considers legislative matters for qualifications with regards to equality matters. During the pandemic the work of the group was slightly different but views on the alternative arrangements being developed were considered and potential mitigations discussed.
- We worked closely with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), seeking feedback on the alternative awarding arrangements for 2021 and also on aspects relating to proposals to reform qualifications to align with the new Welsh Government curriculum.

- As part of our Choice for All Strategy, we have committed to working with awarding bodies to strengthen their recording of the language preference of each learner at the point of registration, to enable them to forward plan for the delivery of the qualification. We have worked with awarding bodies to explore and better understand approaches that are currently in place to identify, record and respond to learners' language preferences. We have also engaged with awarding body systems and data teams to collect further information on the capabilities of registration systems to capture language preference data, any costs in doing so and any other potential impacts.
- We have not identified any systematic equality issues outside our remit, but if we did then we would report them to the appropriate body.
- We continued our approach to reform the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate which will require learners to develop and apply their skills in contexts based on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Wales' well-being goals. The goals are also relevant as learners consider their own personal goals and aspirations, helping them to consider their own future well-being and the well-being of others, and enabling them to think about a sustainable Wales and world. The learning contexts we have chosen support the rights contained in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child by allowing young people to become more aware of the decision-making processes that affect them as informed, responsible and active citizens.

Analysis and assessment of the impact of the proposed revisions to assessment arrangements for summer 2021 and planning for summer 2022

The pandemic meant that we had to plan contingencies that changed the way that GCSEs, AS and A level were assessed and awarded in summer 2021. We had a duty to comply with Regulation 8 of the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 when considering the impact of these alternative assessment arrangements. As well as assessing the likely impact in advance of taking decisions, we also had to consider how to monitor the actual impact. A detailed account of our approach is found in [Equalities: Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the awarding of qualifications](#), and is summarised below:

Summer 2021

We started contingency planning for summer 2021 back in April 2020, but it was impossible to know the scale of disruption that the pandemic might cause or how long the disruption might go on for. The proposed arrangements had to be changed a number of times in the period up to March 2021 as the impact of the pandemic developed. This presented a challenge in terms of maintaining up-to-date discussions with key stakeholders and building in appropriate feedback. During April and May 2021 we continued to work with the Design

and Delivery Advisory Group and other stakeholders to discuss and finalise details of the appeals process, and the process for private candidates in particular. One overall integrated Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was completed. This meant that, although an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed for the overall approach, separate EIAs were not completed for every decision taken, even though the required analysis and assessment of potential impacts took place implicitly within the work.

Using the EIA

Our EIA of the contingency arrangements for summer 2021 was updated regularly throughout the period as we moved through this changing context, and was used by our Board in taking its decisions.

Once the approach was finalised, we published our EIA in May 2021 as an appendix to our report [Equalities: Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the awarding of qualifications](#). To support decisions on some of the details related to these final alternative arrangements we carried out further stakeholder engagement to check our understanding of the potential impacts of the arrangements and to investigate further possible mitigations. This is detailed in section 2.2.6 of our report [Equalities: Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the awarding of qualifications](#). The Design and Delivery Advisory Group sub-group on equalities and learner voice also ensured appropriate focus was given to issues related to equalities, helping us to continue to assess the likely impact of any approaches and consider this in our decision making.

The most suitable approach to assessment for summer 2021 was the Centre Determined Grades approach. The feedback we had from specific equalities organisations was that the alternative approach itself would not exacerbate existing impacts of the pandemic. Flexibility was essential so that centres could plan assessment approaches that took into consideration local contexts and ensured that learners were assessed on work they had actually covered. Within our EIA we found that mitigations were similar for learners from different groups with shared protected characteristics. For example, a common concern was how centres would receive professional learning and guidance on avoiding unconscious bias. To mitigate this, WJEC developed resources to support centres and we secured support from Diverse Cymru who collaborated with WJEC to provide training.

Our EIA identified two areas which required particular consideration - the arrangements for private candidates and appeals. In setting up routes for private candidates we sought to ensure, as far as possible, that there was equality of opportunity for these learners. Accessibility was a key concern, as was fairness and comparability of approach relative to other learners. As details were finalised, issues like transport and reasonable adjustments were considered as necessary, so that private candidates could access the alternative arrangements put in place and were not disadvantaged relative to other learners by the arrangements.

With regards to appeals, the nature of the arrangements ensured learners had access to a process where they could request a review of their grade at a centre level. This allowed for a check on the academic judgement made by their centres, not just the administrative processes carried out, and was an improvement on the appeals process that was in place for summer 2020.

Monitoring outcomes in summer 2021

Given the timescales involved and the workload for centres in delivering the alternative assessment arrangements, it was not possible or appropriate to require them to provide information on the award of grades specifically to learners with protected characteristics while they were delivering the assessments. In addition, the scope for external quality assurance was limited. There was a requirement for internal quality assurance procedures and internal standardisation as well as some external quality assurance by WJEC.

During awarding we monitored:

- WJEC's provision of training sessions and resources on avoiding unconscious bias.
- WJEC's receipt of head of centre declarations (which included confirmation of compliance with PSED).
- Feedback from learners via our Learner Advisory Group and in our learner questionnaire (though the final approach was already in place by this time, we used feedback to improve communication).
- The number of centre reviews completed at a centre level (though no learner level detail would be collected in relation to this).

After awarding we analysed the impact and published:

- A summary attainment gap analysis in our results day publication.
- An equalities analysis for publication as official statistics in September. This analysis included attainment gaps for gender, entitlement to free school meals, those with special educational needs, and by ethnic background for GCSE and for gender and entitlement to free school meal at AS and A level.

Planning for summer 2022

Given the level of disruption learners had experienced during the 2020/2021 academic year, we decided that assessment requirements should be adjusted for summer 2022 and asked WJEC to put suitable adaptations in place. [We announced this in March 2021](#) and after consulting with centres and learners and parents, WJEC made the details available to centres in July 2021. These were publicly available in September 2021.

Once the 2021 summer series was completed, work progressed at pace to plan for summer 2022. At that time, the disruption caused by the pandemic had decreased significantly but there was still a risk that disruption could increase again, and that the 2022 summer series could also be disrupted. This meant that contingency plans needed to be put in place.

We revisited and reviewed options for the most suitable contingency approach for summer 2022, should the exam series again be cancelled. Following several discussions with WJEC and other key stakeholders, we decided that a Centre Determined Grade approach would continue to be the most suitable contingency arrangement for summer 2022. We had identified a few areas for improvement and plans to address these were progressed and put in place. High level information was published for centres in October 2021, so that suitable assessment arrangements could continue and centres would have the necessary evidence of attainment, in case the contingencies needed to be implemented. Plans for more detailed versions of our guidance as well as more detailed support from WJEC were in place. An integrated RIA was produced to support Board decisions about these contingency arrangements.

Whilst a contingency plan was in place from early in the new academic year 2021/22, we had committed to a return to assessment via exams (for qualifications designed to be assessed in that way) from spring 2021. An integrated RIA was completed for the return to exams, even though this represented a return to 'business as usual'. The EIA was also updated to include additional considerations where we assessed there was a risk of disadvantage to some learners.

A new variant of COVID-19 caused high levels of disruption during the winter, especially at the start of the spring term. However, levels of disruption were not spread evenly across Wales and some centres and learners experienced more disruption than others. This added to concerns amongst many stakeholders that some learners had lost more teaching and learning time than others and the risk that there would be a differential loss in learning. This group might include learners from groups such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with disabilities that affected their access to learning. We carried out detailed work to consider if there was any way to address this difference in learning loss. One aspect that was considered in detail was the notion of a COVID tariff that would compensate some learners who were deemed to have been more disadvantaged than others, for example, by adding a specified uplift to their overall marks from the assessments completed. Detailed analyses of the options were carried out. Another possible approach involved a special appeals process and options for this were also analysed. However, it was decided that any approach that needed to specify eligibility criteria risked introducing other unfairness into the process. In conclusion we decided that no such approach should be put in place. The addition to the EIA supported this decision making.

In October we [announced](#) that outcomes in summer 2022 should be at broad midway point between those in 2019, when exams were last sat, and summer 2021. This was to support those learners whose learning had been disrupted by the pandemic. Since then, we have worked

closely with WJEC and other regulators to consider the details of the technical approach to achieving the broad midway position. Whilst there were limits to the statistical modelling that could be completed, we have considered the potential impacts of any decisions we have made about the technical approach on different groups of learners and whether there was a need for any mitigations in the updated EIA.

Monitoring outcomes in summer 2022

With the return to assessment via a summer exam series for GCSEs, AS and A levels, we will monitor processes as we normally would. This includes monitoring WJEC processes for standardising and marking and awarding.

After awarding we will analyse the impact and publish:

- A summary of results in our results day publication.
- An equalities analysis for publication as official statistics in October. This analysis will include attainment gaps for gender, entitlement to free school meals, those with special educational needs, and by ethnic background for GCSE and for gender and entitlement to free school meals at AS and A level.

Strategic Objective 2: Engaging with and informing the qualification system

'We communicate, engage, consult and conduct research with diverse groups, benefiting from a wide range of views'

How we will achieve the objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will build consideration of equalities issues into the planning and design of our research programmes;• We will have the appropriate mechanisms to engage specific groups where required for the purpose of research, engagement, consultation and other relevant communication;• We will use our developing data infrastructure to monitor qualifications data in Wales - for example, how take up of qualifications is changing over time for different groups of students. We will consider how awarding bodies could provide us with evidence that their qualification assessments are fair and unbiased;• We will embed our new ethical review processes for research, which builds consideration of equalities into the design and management of research projects;• We will complete a research project to consider how learner engagement can best inform our work and include an equalities dimension in this work;• We will review our use of online surveys to see whether their accessibility could be improved;• We will review how we collect informed consent to participate in research, focusing on enabling participation. In particular, we will focus on how we collect informed consent from young people and learners with disabilities;• We will review our organisational consultation guidance to ensure it highlights equalities and in particular that the needs of people with protected characteristics are taken into account when designing a consultation;• We will continually seek out new ways to engage and communicate with groups with protected characteristics through a range of channels;• We sense-check our communications to ensure they are easy to understand for each target audience;• We will ensure a full range of visible diversity across our promotional content;
Review of our work this year
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cancellation of exams in 2021 continued to refocus the work of our research and statistics team.• To support equalities impact analysis of grading in 2021 we led work to secure additional data from Welsh Government related to the protected characteristics of learners entering qualifications.

- This data enabled further [equalities analysis of results on results day](#) and then subsequent publication of [experimental official statistics](#).
- The results day statistics showed that changes in gaps were different depending on where you looked in the grade scale, often gaps had widened at the top end of the grade scale relative to normal years but narrowed in the middle of the grade scale. The example below is for the attainment gaps by sex at GCSE at the grade A, C and G thresholds.

Figure 5.1.1 GCSE, difference (female – male) in outcomes in Wales ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾



Source: JCQ

- (1) Due to different awarding arrangements and no standardised national exams, 2020 and 2021 are not directly comparable either with each other, or years in which exams or other standardised national assessments took place.
- (2) All learners, all awarding organisation, summer only

- The statistical modelling in our official statistics analysed qualification results against Year 9 teacher assessment outcomes over a number of years, to analyse how moving to centre determined grading in 2021 had impacted on this statistical relationship. The analysis showed that for GCSEs the model-based gender attainment gap in 2021 was narrower than in previous years relative to teacher assessment outcomes in Year 9, that is it is closer to the attainment gap implied from the Year 9 outcomes than what is usually seen in years when exams happen. The SEN and ethnicity attainment gaps were stable, and the free school meal (FSM) attainment gap was wider in 2021 than in previous years.

- We intend to work with Welsh Government to secure access to the data needed for this sort of impact analysis on data extracts we receive for business-as-usual analysis work, including for impact assessments.
- Learning from the 2020 awarding arrangements, we established channels to gain a stronger voice for learners so we could better understand their needs. We established our Learner Advisory Group and hosted our first meeting with 18 young people aged between 14-18 on 20 April 2021. Members are an inspiring group of young people with a diverse and broad range of experiences and characteristics. The Learner Advisory Group (LAG), as far as practicable in a small group, is representative of the national demographics across Wales. The group has since met nine times and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language joined one of our meetings earlier this year to take feedback on his educational priorities. We've also established a VQ/WBL learner group to hear from a different group of learners on qualifications review and reform activity linked to post-16 vocational training and education. As members progress to Higher education and employment we are recruiting further members to join the two learner groups from September 2022.
- We launched our learner feedback questionnaire "Have your say" to gather opinion on Summer 2021 arrangements. This group provides Qualifications Wales with a platform to directly engage in conversation with learners and have two-way dialogue on qualifications and the qualification system. We will use this survey mechanism to gather feedback on 2022 exams/assessment arrangements from May – August 2022. We worked closely with the Children's Commissioner, sense checking our methodology and completed extensive learner engagement with centres, EOTAs and PRUs from across Wales on the curriculum and assessment arrangements.
- When we identify gaps in our reach to stakeholders with protected characteristics and/or harder to engage audiences through the usual channels, we engage with organisations that do this well and work with them on specific engagement activity linked to qualification reform and information on exams and assessments, e.g. Youth Cymru, Children in Wales, Welsh Government networks, EYST, Disability Wales, EHRC, Diverse Cymru, Children's Commissioner, Parentkind and Association of Directors of Education in Wales.
- As part of our Qualified for the future (QFF) consultation on the future range of made-for-Wales GCSE qualifications we developed a youth friendly version to make it easier for wider audiences to respond. This document was used by over one hundred learners.
- We commissioned an external supplier to conduct focus groups across Wales with learners using interactive software to enhance the reach of the consultation. We also made available editable PDF versions of the consultation available for respondents who could not access the online version of the document due to specific physical disabilities.
- We have sponsored the LWI Inspire awards 2022 to recognise adult learners' achievements across Wales, providing further opportunities for learners who have faced challenges to achieve their qualifications and goals at a later stage in life.
- We worked with a wide range of stakeholders to make sure our communications and engagement activities were designed to reach as many audiences as possible, preparing learner resources and learner communications along with easy to read documents.

- We subscribed to the simultaneous Zoom translation functionality which enabled us to conduct webinars in the chosen language of stakeholders.
- During the year we published an accessibility statement confirming the accessibility of our website, in line with public sector regulations issued in 2019. We have reviewed the accessibility of our web documents and will continue to make improvements over the coming year and will be fully compliant when we launch our new website in autumn 2022.

Qualified for the Future – Engagement on reforms to qualifications for 14 to 16 year olds

As part of our qualification reform, we have been actively engaging with a wide range of stakeholders with the aim of identifying what makes a coherent and inclusive qualification offer for 14-16 year olds in Wales, other than GCSEs. This is referred to as the Wider Offer. We carried out semi-structured interviews, learner focus groups, and surveys. Examples of just some of the stakeholders include: schools (mainstream, special, faith Welsh medium etc); colleges; Pupil Referral Units; employers; universities; charities; sector bodies; awarding bodies; local education authorities; those delivering provision where learners are educated other than at school. We carried out focus groups with learners, and we commissioned Youth Cymru to actively engage with learners who are harder to reach. This involved working with link teachers/tutors in advance, considering the communication and learning needs of the cohort in the method of delivery. We are now developing proposals to secure a coherent and inclusive qualification offer.

Following our consultation on proposals for the future range of GCSEs to support the new curriculum, we conducted additional work to further understand the concerns that were raised by respondents in relation to some of our proposals. For example, the implications of combining language and literature for Welsh and English and the potential impact this decision could have on inclusivity and accessibility. After considering all respondents' feedback for all subjects, we published our decisions report in October 2021 which included a comprehensive impact assessment. We outlined our approach to assessing the potential impacts of our proposals and how they could be mitigated. We also produced a youth friendly version of our decisions report.

We also conducted additional work with a range of stakeholders to revisit proposals before deciding on the range of for Welsh language qualifications for 14-16 year olds. A separate decisions report was produced, together with an impact assessment, in March 2022. Our aim is to support the new curriculum by offering an inclusive range of GCSEs for 14-16 year olds in Wales, including a new GCSE in BSL.

Strategic Objective 3: Workforce and Board Diversity

'Our workforce and Board reflect the diversity of the population in Wales that we regulate for and work amongst'

How we will we achieve the objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will collect and monitor data on applications, appointments and promotions;• We will monitor movement in our gender pay gap and continue to refine our recruitment process to encourage greater diversity of applications;• We will work with bodies representing those with protected characteristics to consider our job advertisement and recruitment practices, identify any barriers that may exist and take action on these with an aim of increasing the diversity of applications;• We will work with the same bodies to consider our environment and policies to ensure that when appointments are made that they are sustainable, that expectations are met and staff are retained;• We will run recruitment training that will ensure employees with a responsibility for recruitment understand equalities legislation and their responsibility for ensuring that our recruitment is fair and open;• We will sign the Equality and Human Rights Commission Working Forward Pledge to support pregnant women and new parents and identify the appropriate actions for our organisation;• We will run an annual work placement scheme, working with either Remploy (to assist people with disabilities who may be experiencing difficulties entering work) or with local secondary schools (aiming to assist young people who are not going on to further study but may be experiencing difficulties entering work);• We will work with the Public Appointments Unit to promote our Board member vacancies and opportunities widely and positively to increase our Board diversity;• We will conduct equality impact assessments for individual and groups of HR policies;• We will work to achieve the Disability Confident Employer status.
Review of our work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We continue to collect and monitor data on applications, appointments and promotions. We engage with groups who can offer insight into our application process/how our organisation is presented with a view to encouraging a more diverse range of applications. We also play an active part in networks, for example the Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies HR subgroup, which discuss equalities issues, so we can learn from other organisations and review our approach.• We monitor movement in our gender pay gap and continue to refine our recruitment process to encourage greater diversity of applications.

- Seven new Board members took up their positions on the Board of Qualifications Wales during 2021-22. These members were appointed following extensive recruitment exercise where we engaged a head-hunter to help increase the diversity of applications to Welsh Government. Although still in small numbers, the applications included a greater number from individuals with a declared disability or from an ethnic minority background.
- We recognise that the diversity of our Board does not fully reflect the demography of the population of Wales. To this end, in January 22 we began participating in the 'Pathway to Board Membership' project (being run by a group of Housing Trusts) to develop more skilled candidates for Board membership from people of an ethnic minority background.
- Our HR policies undergo an equality impact assessment and we have applied our philosophy of being people centred and family friendly into our policy development and implementation.
- We achieved the Disability Confident employer status and signed the Working Forward Pledge in 2020.
- This year we were unable to run a work placement scheme as we were not fully operating from the office and did not feel we could offer the support needed without working alongside the individual to help them engage successfully with the work. However, we look forward to starting this again once we hybrid working is running effectively



Strategic Objective 4: Inclusive Culture

'We will continue to build a culture where people feel that the organisation values them as individuals, appreciates their differences and makes good use of the range of experiences and insight available'

How we will achieve the objective

- We will organise regular training and presentations from external groups to continually challenge our thinking and approach;
- We will seek the views from external groups on our office environment and policies to make sure unintentional barriers are avoided;
- We will provide equalities training to all staff and Board members every three years;
- We will encourage staff with proficiency in the Welsh language and those learning to feel comfortable speaking Welsh to each other in the workplace;
- We will develop and implement our desired positive staff 'behaviors' to support our organisational values;
- We will achieve the Bronze Corporate Health Standard and continually monitor the agreed action plan⁴.

Review of our work

- We were awarded the Chwarae Teg Gold FairPlay employer standard in the Summer of 2021 following a survey of employees in Spring 2021. The award benchmarks organisations against others and demonstrates that diversity and inclusion is embedded within the organisation's culture.
- We have continued to work with Chwarae Teg and delivered training and feedback sessions. We have also worked with Stonewall to deliver training on 'Creating Practical Change in the Workplace'.

⁴ Achieved during 2019

- We continue to promote the use of the Welsh language and encourage learners to engage with Welsh language speakers to help build their confidence and skills. Employees can access a range of online training to develop their Welsh language ability and there is interest from employees to commit to the weeklong immersion training as part of the 'Work Welsh' scheme.
- In the last twelve months we have also procured and delivered a new HR system which offers bilingual employee self-service, further enhancing the way in which employees can manage their leave and their own personal information in the language of their choosing, Welsh or English.
- We have continued to promote our values and behaviours which are embedded in our performance and development process. New employees are welcomed to the organisation with packs that incorporate our values and behaviours, the aim of which is to make them feel part of the organisation regardless of whether they have joined remotely or worked in the office on their first day.
- We re-opened our office in July 2021 to provide access for employees for two days a week on a bookable basis. We have worked with our recognised trade union and employees to ensure that employee views are taken into account, in relation to Covid protocols and the future ways of working. We have begun a project to re-design our office space to meet future needs and have commissioned an independent accessibility review of the proposed design.
- In 2022-2023 we will engage an independent provider to review our approach to inclusion and we will use their findings to build targeted training for our employees and board members.

2021 People Survey

We ran our annual People Survey in 2021 with the following results which related to Inclusion and Fair Treatment:

- I am treated fairly at work – 91% positive
- I am treated with respect by the people I work with – 93% positive
- I think that QW respects individual differences (e.g. cultures, working styles, backgrounds, ideas etc.) – 83% positive

These outcomes have been relatively consistent over the last three surveys, and during the pandemic. 'I am treated fairly at work' has increased by a small margin since 2018, growing from an 84% positive response to 91% in this most recent survey. 'I am treated with respect' grew by +4 in 2018 and has seen small changes of +1% positive since then. Similarly, the final

reported figure above has remained steady with an 84% positive outcome in 2020 and an 86% outcome in 2019, compared to an 83% positive in 2021.

Working with Equalities Champions

Over the reporting period we have worked with both Chwarae Teg and Stonewall. Stonewall have assisted us with the delivery of training, 'Creating Practical Change in the Workplace' and we have included the Stonewall Diversity Champion logo on our recruitment pages. We do not take part in their Workplace Equality Index Scheme.

We also worked with Chwarae Teg, who focus on gender equality, but also the wider inclusion agenda. We surveyed our employees in March 2021 as part of their FairPlay Employer initiative and in the summer we were awarded the Gold standard, the second organisation to achieve this at that time, and the first to be awarded a gold on their first assessment. We have worked with Chwarae Teg to deliver the actions recommended as a result of the survey.

Corporate Social Responsibility

All employees worked remotely from March 2020 to July 2021, so it was difficult for us to maintain our usual practice of colleagues taking part in fundraising activities. Nevertheless, we were able to set up a programme of support for Sight Cymru, where employees volunteered to provide recordings of themselves reading newspaper articles for distribution to people with sight loss. We provided twelve weeks' worth of recordings. We also established links with the 'Chatty Café' scheme, whereby staff will be able to volunteer to hold telephone calls with people who are lonely or isolated. This scheme aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness by encouraging and creating opportunities for people to interact through conversation, something that has become increasingly important since lockdown.

In early 2022 we were able to recommence some local litter picks around the area of our offices for those who wanted to take part. Moving forward we are hoping to re-establish connections with local organisations to support activities in our local community now that covid restrictions have eased and there is minimal risk to staff.

Strategic Objective 5: Continually improving how we operate as an inclusive organisation

'We maintain the progress we have made in embedding equality into how we operate, and we take opportunities to continue to improve'

How we will achieve the objective

- We will review training needs and provide staff refresher training when appropriate;
- We will continue to provide access for staff to an Employee Assistance Programme;
- We will continue to provide flexible IT and working arrangements;
- We will maintain an office that is fully accessible for staff and visitors;
- We will continue to consider equalities issues in our procurement activities and grant schemes;
- We will continue to provide staff DSE assessments and consider requests for additional tools or working arrangements;
- We will maintain an AA accessible website;
- We will develop and implement a voluntary Welsh Language Scheme⁵;
- We will maintain and develop relationships with external partners who can support and advise us in relation to this plan.

Review of our work

- We continue to provide free access to the Employee Assistance Programme where staff can receive confidential advice on a range of issues online or by telephone. This has had greater prominence during the pandemic as the provider has run daily webinars on a range of issues, linked to Covid, which have been regularly promoted.
- We have a Partnership Forum with our Trade Union that meets on a quarterly basis. We discuss what impacts our people and our workplace, and how we can continuously improve. We engage with our Union on all people policies. This forum has continued to meet virtually, and our TU Chair is a member of a working group which was established to consider how and when we safely return to our workplace.

⁵ Published 2019

- We have continued to work flexibly and in the main employees have continued to work from home, although we have opened our office on a reduced capacity and voluntary basis for those who wanted to work from that location. Our HR policies promote flexible working as standard. During the pandemic we relaxed rules relating to working hours in response to feedback from our employees to enable them to work outside of our standard working day (7am-7pm). This was alongside messages that promoted balancing work and family life, this has continued and works well.
- We are continually monitoring our digital ways of working, ensuring the appropriate balance with security and governance.
- Our Wellbeing and Equality Group is central to our commitment to being an inclusive organisation where equalities, health and wellbeing are at the forefront in everything we do. This group has worked alongside HR to promote relevant messages during the last year, engaging with employees and running successful Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives.
- We have a Procurement Strategy which sets out our commitment to consider equalities in our procurement activity and to keep our systems and processes under review in this regard.
- We record information on our suppliers to identify whether they are a supported business / sheltered workshop and / or if they are a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic organisation (the business is majority owned (51%), controlled and managed by person or persons of ethnic minority). We also ask if they are a 'third sector' organisation which includes charities, social enterprises and community groups that may be representative of one or more of the protected characteristics.
- This year we have continued to award our grant portfolio in accordance with our equalities policy and ensure all staff involved in the grant process are aware of the requirements. Support and guidance are provided to staff if required.
- Our website is fully bilingual and meets AA accessibility classification standard. We are continuously monitoring and improving accessibility standards on the current website, in line with the regulations that came into force in September 2020, to ensure it continues to be appropriate for a variety of users. This year we will launch a new website which aims to achieve AAA accessibility standards to further improve accessibility and ease of use for all our users. We gathered stakeholder feedback on website usability in October 2020 which has helped inform our developments.
- We continue to keep our audiences and stakeholders fully up to date with timely, accessible, and targeted information on QW developments. We gather stakeholder feedback via our established stakeholder groups and/or through online questionnaires and surveys, working closely with partners to improve and gain better representation in our groups and engagement activity. We will publish a learner engagement strategy in 2022 that will evidence our commitment and outline our inclusive participation activity plans across Wales.
- We maintain good working relationships with external partners who can support and advise on improved inclusivity and participation – with our reform of qualifications and our Qualified for the future activity. Further work with groups representing those with protected characteristics will continue. A number of these organisations are represented on our Qualified for the future stakeholder

reference group or attend other meetings/webinars and receive written updates on qualifications review and reform activity. e.g. Citizens Wales, Muslim Council for Wales, Race Council for Wales, Cytûn (Churches together in Wales), Welsh Refugee Council, Show Racism the Red Card, Travelling Ahead, Diverse Cymru, and Samaritans Cymru.

6. Looking to the Future

Our next equality report will report on our work for the period April 2022 to March 2023. This will cover the first year of our revised Equalities Objectives which cover the period from April 2022 to March 2024.

Contact us

If you have any queries or would like to discuss this report or any aspect of our equality work, please do not hesitate to contact the Corporate Governance team via corporategovernance@qualificationswales.org or 01633 373 222.

Appendix 1 – Employee Equality Data – as at 31 March 2022

Gender

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2121		31 Mar 2022	
Female	46	58%	55	63%	64	67%	65	67%
Male	33	42%	32	37%	31	33%	32	33%
Total	79		87		95		97	

Age

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2021		31 Mar 2022	
Under 25	5	6%	2	2%	2	2%	2	2%
25-29	4	5%	7	8%	12	13%	15	15%
30-34	14	18%	12	14%	12	13%	9	9%
35-39	12	15%	18	21%	16	17%	16	17%
40-44	20	25%	16	18%	19	20%	19	20%
45-49	10	13%	14	16%	14	15%	12	12%
50-54	8	10%	12	14%	13	14%	17	18%
55-59	5	6%	5	6%	5	5%	6	6%
60 and over	1	1%	1	1%	2	2%	1	1%
Total	79		87		95		97	

Ethnic Origin

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2021		31 Mar 2022	
Ethnic Minority	0	0%	*	1%	*	1%	*	4%
White European	51	65%	56	64%	60	63%	72	74%
White Other	*	5%	*	1%	*	3%	*	2%
Prefer not to say / Not specified	24	30%	29	33%	31	33%	19	20%
Total	79		87		95		97	

Nationality

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2021		31 Mar 2022	
British	35	44%	36	41%	38	40%	48	50%
Other	*	1%	*	2%	*	3%	*	2%
Welsh	22	28%	23	26%	28	29%	31	32%
Not specified (left blank)	21	27%	26	30%	26	27%	16	16%
Total	79		87		95		97	

Religion/Belief

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2021		31 Mar 2022	
Religion/Belief	22	28%	22	25%	26	27%	38	39%
No Religion/Belief	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	13	13%

Prefer not to say / Not specified (selected)	57	72%	65	75%	69	73%	46	47%
Total	79		87		95		97	

Marital Status

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2021		31 Mar 2022	
Married or in a civil partnership	45	57%	49	56%	47	49%	52	54%
Other Status	30	38%	34	39%	44	46%	43	44%
Not specified (left blank)	*	5%	*	5%	*	4%	*	2%
Total	79		87		95		97	

Sexual Orientation

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2021		31 Mar 2022	
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, other	6	8%	*	5%	*	4%	*	5%
Heterosexual / straight	48	61%	54	62%	61	64%	69	71%
Prefer not to say / Not specified (left blank)	25	32%	29	33%	30	32%	23	24%
Total	79		87		95		97	

Disability

	31 Dec 2018		31 Mar 2020		31 Mar 2021		31 Mar 2022	
No	53	67%	57	66%	65	68%	75	77%
Yes	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Not specified (left blank)	26	33%	30	34%	30	32%	22	23%
Total	79		87		95		97	

* Indicates where the number of staff is 5 or fewer unless no response or does not identify staff. This has not been applied to data tables relating to part time working, age, salary band or gender.

Appendix 2 - Board Equality Data - as at 1 April 2022

Gender

Female	*
Male	7
No response	0
Total	12

Age

16-24	0
25-29	0
30-34	*
35-39	0
40-44	0
45-49	*
50-54	0
55-59	*
60-64	6
65+	*
No response	0
Total	12

Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Minority	0
White	12
No response	0
Total	12

Disability

No	9
Yes	*
No response	0
Total	12

Marital Status

Married/Civil Partnership	10
Other status	*
Prefer not to say	0

Religion/Belief

Religion	7
No religion	*
Prefer not to say	0

Sexual Orientation

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, other	*
Heterosexual / Straight	10
Prefer not to say	*

* Indicates where the number of members is 5 or fewer (unless no response or does not identify members). We do not report where there are five or fewer responses to ensure we protect confidentiality and anonymity.