

**QUALIFICATIONS WALES**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17**





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## CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

I would like to welcome you to Qualifications Wales's second Annual report in which we describe our work and highlight our achievements from September 2016 to August 2017.

Our second year of operation has been no less challenging than our first, but it has been equally rewarding. We continued to establish ourselves, developing our regulatory policies and approaches and doing many things for the first time. The commissioning of new qualifications for the Health and Social Care (including Childcare) sector is a good example.

We achieved our goals and had several notable successes. This has been due to the hard work and professionalism of our staff, and I would like to pay tribute to them.

We are now fully established and have developed a strong and clear voice as the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales.

Our activities as a Board are maturing and we are always seeking ways to ensure and enhance our effectiveness. We undertook our first external Board performance review, with very positive results: this allows us to set a benchmark to judge ourselves against in the future. We also conducted an internal review

of our Board and committee structure to ensure our governance structure is fit for purpose.

From the very beginning, our Board and staff have had the needs of students at the front of their minds. Quite simply, they are at the heart of everything we do, as we continue to work to ensure that qualifications, and the qualifications system, generates the confidence of everyone in Wales and beyond.

We made great strides forward this year, publishing our strategies for both general and vocational qualifications. We oversaw the safe delivery of the summer series of exams, and our reviews of vocational qualifications, in a number of employment sectors, continue at pace.

In the course of our work we have sought contributions from experts and feedback from stakeholders. I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who have engaged openly and positively with us.

We know that the future will continue to have many challenges but with our dedicated Board and knowledgeable staff, we look forward to meeting these with enthusiasm, commitment and confidence.

**Ann Evans**



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*We achieved our goals and had several notable successes. This has been due to the hard work and professionalism of our staff, and I would like to pay tribute to them*

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## CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S INTRODUCTION

During this Annual report period we achieved a great deal, and used some of our new powers for the first time.

### KEY ACHIEVEMENTS THIS YEAR

We oversaw the delivery and award of Wales's first 'Wales-only' GCSEs and A levels, monitoring their delivery closely, and ensuring that they were awarded fairly so that their standards can be carried forward appropriately.

We acted on the principal findings of last year's review of the Health and Social Care (including Childcare) sector, using our powers to restrict qualifications to a new suite of qualifications commissioned for Wales through an open competitive process.

We started reviews of the Construction and the Built Environment and IT sectors – taking forward our rolling programme of reviewing the range of qualifications available in key employment sectors.

We continued our focus on vocational qualifications by initiating a monitoring audit of First Aid qualifications; this will report in spring 2018.

During the year we conducted research into early and repeat entries for GCSEs and started work to review the Welsh Baccalaureate and Skills Challenge Certificate.

Finally, we developed our own capability by

recruiting staff and consolidating our internal processes so that they are efficient and effective.

The project to develop our final core capability – a mechanism to collect and interrogate qualification data provided by awarding bodies has been initiated. This will give us full operational independence.

These achievements demonstrate a positive impact upon the qualifications system in Wales. We are proud of what we have achieved in this period. We are still a young organisation, but no longer consider ourselves new.

### THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

We operate in a challenging and complex environment where many new policy initiatives in Wales (and sometimes those in England) have an impact upon qualifications, the qualifications system and our work.

Some of this change is led by us, including the reform of GCSEs and A levels and the new suite of qualifications in Health and Social Care, and Childcare; some is outside our direct control, but needs to be considered so that we can understand the likely impact on students in Wales. For example, the implementation of the Skills Plan in England, which responds to Lord Sainsbury's review of technical education, is likely to have a significant impact upon the range of qualifications offered across the UK.

## THE YEAR TO COME

We anticipate a busy year ahead, from September 2017 to August 2018. We will be reporting on important pieces of work, such as our review of students taking their GCSEs early, the Welsh Bacc, and our sector reviews. We will also work hard to ensure that students are protected through our core regulatory activities, including our monitoring of awarding bodies' compliance with our requirements.

Our Principal Aims, set out for us in our underpinning legislation, ensure that we are focused on the interests of students. Our achievements contribute to a sense of confidence as we move forward with our important work. We are confident that we have, and will continue to act to protect the interests of students in Wales.

**Philip Blaker**

“

*Our achievements contribute to a sense of confidence as we move forward with our important work. We are confident that we have, and will continue to act to protect the interests of students in Wales*

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## INTRODUCTION TO QUALIFICATIONS WALES

We regulate qualifications, other than degrees, in Wales. We took on our regulatory functions on 21 September 2015, under the *Qualifications Wales Act 2015*.

The Act gives us 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.

In delivering these aims, we carry out the following activities:

We regulate awarding bodies that apply to us for recognition. In order to be 'recognised', awarding bodies must meet our *Criteria for Recognition*. Once awarding bodies are recognised, we monitor them to ensure they comply with our *Conditions of Recognition* for all regulated qualifications that they award in Wales. Recognised awarding bodies may also submit qualifications for us to approve or designate as eligible for use on publicly funded programmes of learning.

We monitor a range of awarding bodies' activities including how they set question papers, award grades, quality assure non-examination assessment, and how well they

support schools, colleges and work-based learning providers. If necessary, we can take a range of enforcement action.

We develop and publish policies and requirements that recognised awarding bodies must adhere to.

We consider whether the qualifications provided for a given subject, industry sector, progression path, or age group meet those students' needs.

If we find that changes are needed, we may commission the development of qualifications on behalf of Wales. We can use our powers to restrict the number of awarding bodies that can offer a particular qualification if we consider this is better for students.

We may provide grants to support the qualifications system and students' needs; for example, to support the availability of Welsh-medium assessment or to fund specific activities associated with the implementation of new qualifications. We use a range of communication methods to share information and improve understanding amongst schools, colleges, universities, employers and other bodies. We provide support to centres across Wales (schools, colleges and work-based learning providers).

Our work is supported by corporate functions including Communications, Corporate Governance, Facilities, Finance, Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT) and Procurement. We procure our legal, audit, translation and payroll services.



## CORPORATE OVERVIEW

### The Qualifications Wales Board

The Board consists of the Chair, the Chief Executive and between 8 and 10 members. Its role 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's activities are conducted efficiently and effectively;
- Monitor performance to ensure that Qualifications Wales fully meets its aims, objectives and performance targets; and
- Promote high standards of public finance; upholding the principles of regularity, propriety and value for money.

At the end of August 2017, the Board was made up of the following members;

- Ann Evans (Chair)
- Philip Blaker (Chief Executive)
- Caroline Burt
- Ellen Donovan
- David Jones (appointed 15 May 2017)
- Robert Lloyd Griffiths OBE
- Alun Llwyd
- Angela Maguire-Lewis
- Arun Midha (appointed 17 May 2017)
- Claire Morgan
- Isabel Nisbet
- Rheon Tomos

Paul Croke was a member of the Board until 3 November 2016 when he resigned.

The Board has met five times throughout the year; the minutes of all meetings are published on our website.

## Business plan

We published our business plan, which contained 20 Operational Priorities for the year.

In setting our 2016-17 Operational Priorities, we looked at how we could strengthen our functions in regulation, policy and research, grants, stakeholder engagement and corporate services. These priorities were in addition to our core regulatory activities.

For the purpose of this report, we have summarised our Operational Priorities into five main areas of business. These are as follows:

- General qualifications activities;
- Vocational qualifications activities;
- Core regulatory activities;
- Engaging with and supporting the Welsh qualifications system; and
- Developing our corporate capability and capacity.

This Annual report contains a section on each of the five areas above and provides an overview of our activities and achievements in each area.



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# GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS ACTIVITIES



### OUR WORK IN 2017

Much of our work during the year has focused on completing reforms to GCSEs and A levels. New GCSEs and A levels in the third – and final – set of subjects to be reformed will be introduced for first teaching from September 2017.

We continued to work with others in the education system to secure the development of teaching and learning resources to support the new qualifications. We oversaw the first award of reformed qualifications in many subjects.

We ran an information campaign to increase awareness and understanding of the new qualifications, and we worked with universities and regulators to explain how new qualifications in Wales compare to qualifications taken in other parts of the UK.

As well as our work on reforming qualifications, we commissioned a detailed review of the new design of the Welsh Bacc, and began an investigation into the reasons for the increasing use of early exam entry in GCSEs. In 2017 we published a strategic plan, setting out the main priorities we will focus on in our approach to regulating general qualifications over the next three to five years.

During summer 2016 following extensive consultation, we published the approval criteria for the final round of GCSE and A level subjects to be reformed in time for first teaching in September 2017. The new qualifications were developed by WJEC and submitted to us for approval. Before approving them, we scrutinised proposed versions of each qualification until we were satisfied of its fitness for purpose. The content of these reformed subjects has been updated and assessments have been strengthened. They continue to be as challenging as the qualifications they replace.

Approving qualifications is a complex process. For each qualification, we use a panel of experts to review the draft specification and sample assessment materials against our approval criteria. On average, our panel will review and give feedback on at least three draft versions of a qualification before recommending it for approval.

Our aim was for the qualifications to be available to schools and colleges as early as possible in the academic year. To achieve this, we applied lessons learned from the 2015-16 approval process to refine our approach and improve overall efficiency.

By the end of March 2017, we had approved all qualifications due to be introduced for first teaching in September 2017, with some being approved considerably earlier. Throughout the development and approval period, we published regular updates about when we expected to be able to approve each subject.





The following table shows projected approval dates and actual dates achieved:

Category	Projected approval date	Actual approval date
GCSE Computer Science	09/12/2016	25/11/2016
GCSE Business	23/12/2016	24/01/2017
A level Mathematics	06/01/2017	09/01/2017
A Level Further Mathematics	06/01/2017	09/01/2017
A level Government and Politics	06/01/2017	01/12/2016
A level Law	13/01/2017	09/02/2017
GCSE Welsh Second Language	10/03/2017	31/03/2017
GCSE Design Technology	17/03/2017	02/03/2017
A Level Design Technology	17/03/2017	15/03/2017
GCSE Media Studies	17/03/2017	27/03/2017
A level Media Studies	17/03/2017	30/03/2017

We know schools and colleges would have preferred that qualifications be approved at least a year before first teaching. This was not possible with these reforms, as the timeline was set before we were established and linked to parallel reforms in England. We will plan future reforms to allow more time between the approval of specifications and first teaching. We used a range of communication channels to keep schools and colleges fully informed throughout the reform programme. These included visits from our Centre Support Team, letters to heads of centres, newsletters and regular updates to our website.

### RESOURCES FOR NEW QUALIFICATIONS

In the autumn of 2016, we brought together key stakeholders in the education system to identify the resources needed to support the new qualifications. We invited WJEC, regional consortia, Estyn and Welsh Government to review the qualification criteria and early drafts of the new specifications. Regional consortia, in particular, were able to feed in the views of their subject leads on the demands of the new qualifications. We shared the findings from the meetings to

help WJEC, regional consortia and Welsh Government concentrate their support activity where it is most needed.

From these meetings, we identified a need to engage with schools to discuss the implications of removing the short course GCSE Welsh Second Language. In January 2017, we organised a series of twilight meetings across Wales that focused on explaining the changes to GCSE Welsh Second Language. These meetings gave teachers and school leaders a chance to discuss the changes with us, Welsh Government and WJEC.

We also worked with WJEC to identify where additional funding would be required to facilitate the development of essential teaching and learning materials to support the new qualifications. We used grant funding to enable the development of essential resources that would otherwise not be produced – either at all, or not in time to support the new qualifications. As with everything produced directly by WJEC, the resources developed through this process are available bilingually and can be accessed digitally through WJEC's

## GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS ACTIVITIES

The information we gathered from our work on resources allowed us to produce subject-specific tables detailing the support available for each new GCSE and A level subject. We published these on our website. Each table explained the key features of the new qualification, and the English and Welsh-medium training and resources available to support them. The tables also indicated when new or additional resources would become available, to help teachers to plan more effectively.

### COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

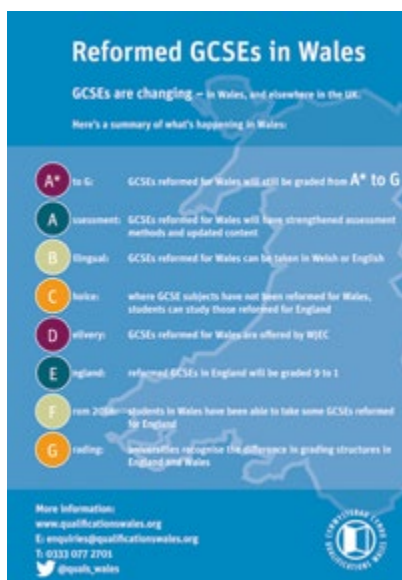
This year, we increased our efforts to raise public awareness and understanding of the new general qualifications being introduced in Wales.

We worked with partner regulators in England and Northern Ireland to explain the changes being made to GCSEs and A levels across the UK. We produced a joint statement and infographic to explain the main similarities and differences between the qualifications offered in each country.

We worked closely with UCAS throughout the year to make sure that universities are aware of, and understand, the changes to qualifications in Wales. At the UCAS annual university admissions conference, we launched our updated guide for higher education admissions. This document explains in detail the qualifications taken in Wales by university applicants.

In May 2017, working with UCAS, we sponsored and organised two conferences in Llandudno and Swansea for teachers and advisors of students preparing to go to university. The conferences featured a range of workshops on topics including: making applications stand out, applying to university with the Welsh Bacc, applying to medicine, vocational progression routes, and advice on personal statements and references.

Ahead of the summer exams series, we launched a campaign to raise awareness of the new GCSEs being sat for the first time this year. As part of the campaign, we sent thousands of leaflets and posters to schools for distribution to students and parents. With different changes being made to GCSEs in England (where a new grade scale is being introduced), we wanted to make sure that students and parents in Wales understood the similarities and differences between the new GCSEs in Wales and England.



Building on our information campaign, we produced a series of articles focusing on the specific subjects in which new GCSEs were awarded for the first time. These articles formed part of a wider campaign to explain how GCSEs and A levels are assessed and awarded. Our aim was to raise awareness of how we work with exam boards to secure fairness for students at a time when qualifications are changing.

In the run-up to GCSE and A level results days, we organised a series of briefings for stakeholders. These covered how awarding works, the changes to qualifications and to the cohorts of students taking them, and what to bear in mind when interpreting this year's results. We gave briefings to Welsh Government, Estyn, teaching unions, school and governor associations, press and media organisations, and Assembly Members.

## MONITORING QUALIFICATIONS

2016-17 saw the first award of many new GCSEs and A levels designed specifically for Wales and offered by WJEC. In November 2016, new GCSE Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy qualifications were awarded for the first time. This was followed in January 2017 by the first award of units for the new GCSEs in English Literature and Welsh Literature.

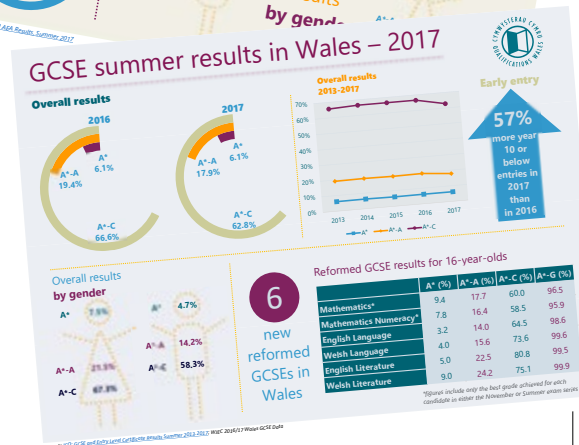
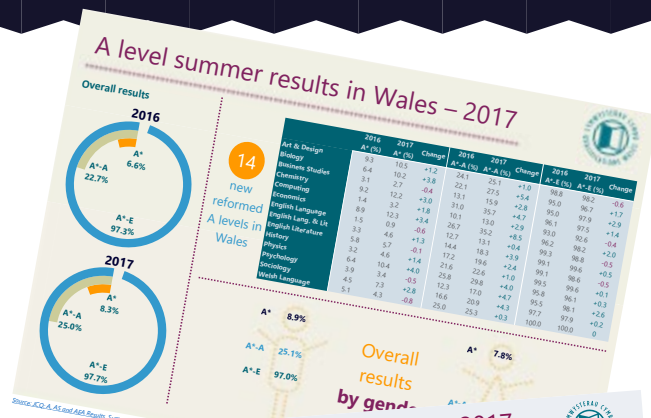
By far the busiest awarding period is the summer exam series. This year was no exception, with the first award of new GCSEs, AS and A levels in a range of subjects, as well as new versions of the Welsh Bacc at Key Stage 4 and Advanced levels.

Until they are replaced, qualifications in subjects that have not yet been reformed continue to be taken across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We regulate the non-reformed three-country qualifications alongside our fellow regulators, Ofqual and CCEA.

To prepare for and oversee this year's awards, we worked with WJEC, other awarding bodies and fellow regulators to understand the risks and issues that they may face in assessment and awarding, and to agree how these would be mitigated.

For each exam series, we conducted an extensive programme of monitoring to oversee each stage of the assessment and awarding process. We went to meetings of Question Paper Evaluation Committees (QPECs), examiner standardisation meetings and awarding committees for a range of the new GCSE and A level subjects. After each examination series, we published a report on the findings from our monitoring and oversight activity.

Across the summer exam series, we attended 26 standardisation meetings and nine awarding meetings for GCSE subjects. For



and A level, we attended 32 standardisation meetings and 20 awarding meetings. We also monitored the moderation of the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate, attending all six standardisation and three awarding meetings.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

Once again this year, we ran an online (*Have Your Say*) questionnaire for students and teachers to gather views on the new GCSE, AS and A level qualifications. We received a positive response to the questionnaire, giving valuable feedback on how the new exams were received. The intelligence gathered helped to inform our oversight of the awards and to identify aspects of the new qualifications that we will look at in more detail as part of our ongoing monitoring of GCSEs and A levels.

More than 800 people completed the questionnaire; 51% of the responses were from teachers and lecturers, and 45% were from students. We asked about the difficulty of the exams; whether they assessed the syllabus fairly; whether students were given enough time, and for general comments on a range

## GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS ACTIVITIES

of qualifications, with no one issue or subject dominating. There was general agreement that the content from the syllabus had been assessed appropriately. We saw a range of views about the difficulty of the assessments and whether enough time had been given, but nothing to indicate an overwhelming concern about a specific subject or exam. A summary of the responses will be published during Autumn 2017.

### WELSH BACCALAUREATE REVIEW

In September 2015, schools and colleges started delivering new versions of the Welsh Bacc.

Four versions of the new Welsh Bacc are available:

Title	Level	Description
Advanced	3	A two-year course delivered in sixth forms and colleges
National/ Foundation Key Stage 4 (KS4)	1 & 2	A two-year course delivered in schools
Post-16 National	2	A one-year course delivered in sixth forms and colleges
Post-16 Foundation	1	A one-year course delivered in sixth forms and colleges

Each version of the Welsh Bacc is based on a common design that requires students to complete several qualifications:



At the heart of the new design is a new qualification called the Skills Challenge Certificate.

This assesses skills that young people need for further study and employment:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Planning and organisation
- Creativity and innovation
- Personal effectiveness
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Digital literacy

In early 2016, we reviewed the introduction of the new Welsh Bacc suite and made recommendations to support its continued implementation. One recommendation was to conduct a more detailed review of how the Skills Challenge Certificate is assessed and structured, including its place in the new overall design of the Welsh Bacc.



In January 2017, we commissioned Wavehill Ltd, working with the Institute of Education at University College London to conduct this detailed review. As part of the review, Wavehill conducted in-depth qualitative research with schools, colleges and students to gather views on how the new design was working in practice. We will report on the findings of the review in 2018.

### INVESTIGATION OF EARLY AND REPEAT ENTRY FOR GCSES

We investigated the reasons for the growing trend in the practice of students sitting their GCSE exams early (and often more than once before they reach the end of Year 11). Our research was based on in-depth interviews with education professionals (including teachers, headteachers and regional consortia staff) from a sample of 21 schools and the four regional consortia. We explored the factors that influence how schools decide whether to enter students for their exams more than once before they finish Year 11.

We launched our investigation in December 2016 and will report on the findings in October 2017.

### OUR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR REGULATING GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS

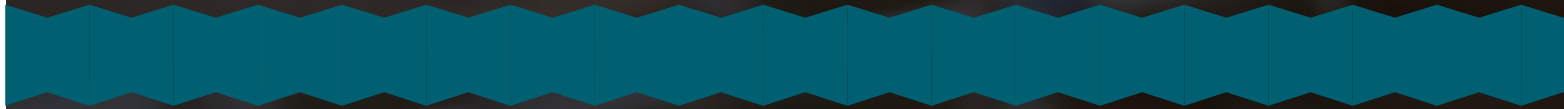
In July 2017, we published our general qualifications strategic plan. This sets out our priorities for regulating GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Bacc for the next three to five years.

During this period we will focus on:

- Securing standards;
- Evaluating change;
- Improving public understanding;
- Increasing availability through the medium of Welsh; and
- Adopting an incremental approach to future changes.

The plan also identifies some of the key challenges we will face, as we move to most general qualifications being offered by a single awarding body, and as we consider the potential impact of curriculum reform.





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### OUR STRATEGY

The majority of qualifications that we regulate are vocational – they are about the knowledge, understanding and/or skills that relate explicitly to the world of work. Vocational qualifications are a vital part of our work, and we are proactive in regulating them.

In January 2017, we published our first Vocational Qualifications Strategy, setting out how we would address our Principal Aims for these important qualifications. We published our first sector review for Health and Social Care (including Childcare) in July 2016. Building on the success of this, we confirmed that sector reviews will continue to be our core approach to the review and reform of vocational qualifications.

Having sought the views of others, including the Regional Skills Partnerships, we proposed

a sequence of sector reviews over the next few years – focusing on economically important sectors where there are skills shortages in Wales. Construction and the Built Environment and Information and Communication Technology are the next two sectors to be reviewed.

As well as committing to a programme of sector reviews, we explained that we would also:

- Evaluate the recent introduction of revised Essential Skills qualifications in Wales;
- Monitor other selected vocational qualifications;
- Continue to subsidise, through grants, the provision of Welsh-medium assessment for qualifications; and
- Commission new qualifications to fulfil the commitments we made in the Health and Social Care (including Childcare) sector review.





## PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS STRATEGY

### Sector review – Construction and the Built Environment



We began our sector review of Construction and the Built Environment in October 2016. This is one of Welsh Government's priority sectors, employing around 130,000 people in over 13,000 organisations in Wales\*. We recruited an expert on qualifications in this field, on secondment from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), to provide specialist advice to the review team and to lead our engagement with stakeholders in this broad and complex sector.

We held a series of semi-structured interviews with nearly 200 stakeholders in the sector, and engaged with more than 100 employers. We reached out to employers of a range of sizes, across Wales and across the industry sub-sectors. Stakeholders welcomed the review and engaged enthusiastically and helpfully with the review team.

We also:

- Commissioned focused discussion groups with over 900 students taking construction-related qualifications across Wales;
- Ran an online survey to gather further views;
- Convened three meetings of two stakeholder engagement panels (in south and north Wales) to provide us with advice and to test emerging findings;
- Contracted subject and assessment experts to review a sample of 23 qualifications from across the sector, together with examples of students' assessed work; and
- Conducted a desk-top comparative evaluation of provision in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the rest of the UK.

We are preparing our report on this sector review and developing proposals for action, with a view to publishing these early in 2018. We already know that, while the review identified a number of similarities with the issues arising from the Health and Social Care (including Childcare) sector review, there are significant differences between the two sets of findings. These differences highlight one of the benefits of taking a sector-by-sector approach – one size does not fit all.

### Sector review – Information and Communication Technology (ICT)



We began our sector review of ICT in March 2017. This included conducting stakeholder interviews with employers and learning providers and preparing for a technical review of a sample of qualifications in this sector. Focused discussion groups with over 800 students have taken place in further education colleges and we are considering how best to reach students in schools, as well as those who will have progressed to higher education in autumn 2017.

We are looking at how ICT learning and training is delivered and assessed in a range of European nations and other countries. We expect to publish our report on this sector review in 2018, but we are already identifying a different set of issues, again, from those identified in other sector reviews.

### Vocational qualifications in the wider UK context

We are mindful that the majority of vocational qualifications that are delivered in Wales were developed, primarily, for the market in England. We are also aware that there are a number of significant changes underway in England that could have a major impact on the availability of qualifications in Wales.

Apprenticeships in England are moving from ‘frameworks’ (the system currently used in Wales, and previously in England, involving vocational qualifications) to ‘standards’ that do not require vocational qualifications. Instead, they rely on ‘end-point assessments’ – assessed mainly through skills tests, rather than through the accumulation of records of competence.

As a result, it is likely that the number of vocational qualifications available to students in Wales will reduce, as they are replaced in England by end-point assessments. Demand for the current vocational qualifications that are taken by apprentices in Wales could fall, to the point where it may not be economically viable for awarding bodies to continue to offer them.



These changes to apprenticeships in England may provide an opportunity to strengthen assessment in apprenticeships in Wales, through more consistent and manageable forms of assessment. The assessments could be less burdensome to apprentices, employers and learning providers. However, in the short term, there are likely to be some challenges in ensuring that all apprenticeships can continue to be delivered in Wales.

We have notified recognised awarding bodies that any end-point assessments that they deliver in Wales are regulated qualifications.

Over the coming year, we will continue to engage with the newly formed Institute for Apprenticeships in England to stay abreast of developments. We will also continue to discuss the longer-term future of qualifications within apprenticeships with Welsh Government, awarding bodies and learning providers.

The UK Government has also announced that it will be creating a new type of 'technical' learning programme for students in further education in England, known as 'T levels'. We need to consider the impact of these changes on students in Wales – there may be benefits, but there may also be challenges.

We will continue to engage with the UK Government and the Institute for Apprenticeships to identify the best way for us to keep up-to-date with developments and to protect the interests of students in Wales.

### **Vocational qualifications for students aged 14-16**

As we conduct each sector review, we consider whether, and how, the learning and qualification pathway in that sector could begin at age 14. There is a risk that the new curriculum for Wales may not provide enough opportunities for young people to learn about the world of work, or about the range of vocational subjects that could be useful stepping stones into apprenticeships and employment. It is important for young people to have these opportunities and to be able to take qualifications that are just as valued as GCSEs.



## VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS ACTIVITIES

### Vocational qualifications monitoring

We continued to monitor the revised Essential Skills Wales qualifications and engaged extensively with awarding bodies and centres (schools, colleges and work-based learning providers) to review how they are implemented and delivered. We also offered students the opportunity to give feedback through an online survey. We will evaluate these responses along with the other evidence we collected and report on our findings later this year.

We also monitored the four First Aid qualifications with the highest number of awards in Wales: the Level 2 Award in Emergency First Aid; the Level 3 Award in First Aid at Work; the Level 3 Award in Emergency Paediatric First Aid; and the Level 3 Award in Paediatric First Aid. We conducted an in-depth technical review of these qualifications, as well as reviewing the effectiveness of the awarding bodies' quality-assurance systems. We will be reporting our overall findings in spring 2018. Where we identify issues we take these up with the awarding body in the first instance. Next year we will be starting our monitoring of Food Safety qualifications.

### Health and Social Care developments

In July 2016, we committed to developing a new suite of Health and Social Care, and Childcare qualifications. Since then we worked closely with key stakeholders such as Social Care Wales (Care Council Wales prior to 1 April 2017) and NHS Shared Service, Workforce, Education and Development Service (WEDS) – and with three subject experts to develop draft subject content for the new qualifications.

In November 2016, we published a 'Notification of our intention to Restrict' the number of forms of each of the new qualifications to one. Following the Notification, and responding to any concerns which had been raised by stakeholders, we formally published a Determination to Restrict on 31 March 2017.

Having restricted the number of forms of each qualification to one, we decided to commission one or more awarding body(ies) to develop all, or part of, the suite of the new qualifications. We engaged awarding bodies in pre-tender dialogue before embarking on a commissioning process in January 2017.







In August 2017, we awarded a contract to a consortium comprising WJEC and City & Guilds London Institute to develop the new suite of qualifications.

Throughout the commissioning and the qualification development phases, we engaged with stakeholders in the Health and Social Care, Childcare, Play, Education sectors and relevant national bodies.

Contributions from these key sectors have helped us shape the new suite of qualifications to meet the needs of students, employers and the sector in Wales. We also organised a series of advisory group meetings, which had a balanced membership from across these sectors.

The new suite will consist of up to 20 new qualifications spanning Levels 1 to 5 and will replace more than 200 currently available qualifications. The new suite will provide students in Wales with up-to-date qualifications offering cohesive, clear and credible progression routes both to employment and to further and higher education.

We hope that this reform will also support the government's policy to bring Health and Social Care closer together, by providing the opportunity for students to move between the two professional areas more easily. The suite will be offered in English and Welsh, and will provide options for school-age students, as well as experienced members of staff working in specialised roles such as managers of residential care homes.

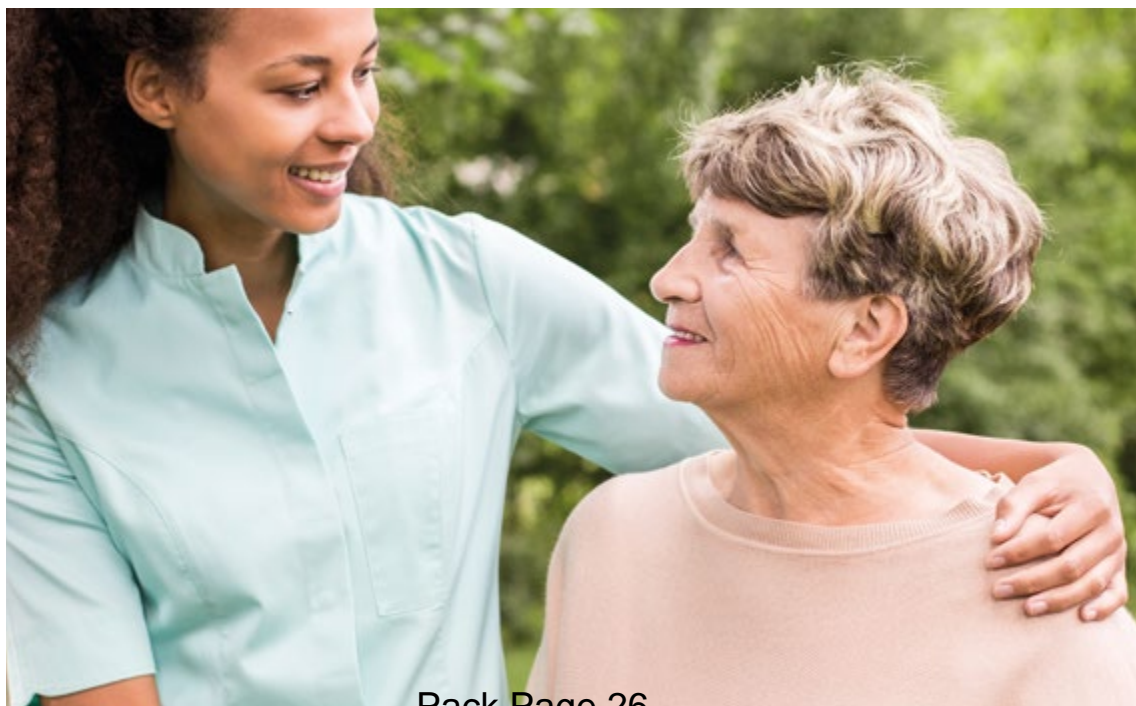
### Health and Social Care – Workforce Development

While the development of a new suite of qualifications for Health and Social Care, and Childcare forms our central response to the issues raised by that sector review, the qualifications being replaced will continue to be taken by students for a number of years.

Our review also identified wide-ranging concerns about the assessment of competence-based qualifications in this sector. As a result, we decided to facilitate some training to improve assessment practices. We commissioned the development of a practical workshop, 'Strengthening Assessment' which was delivered in spring 2017. The workshop was held in 11 locations across Wales, attracting 330 assessors.

We conducted an evaluation of the workshop by interviewing participants after it was held. We had a variety of responses across different types of assessment centres. For example, staff assessors in local authority social services departments had found it easier to implement improvements than those working for work-based learning providers.

We intend to follow this workshop with one for internal quality-assurance staff and centre managers in the autumn of 2017 – again in a number of locations across Wales. As well as improving current practice, these workshops help by keeping assessors and others engaged with us throughout the qualifications development process. This underpins the effective change management which will be vital to the success of the new qualifications when they are first taught in September 2019.



## VQ awards

This year, we joined Welsh Government, the National Training Federation for Wales and Colegau Cymru to sponsor the 2017 VQ Awards for the first time. Our Chair, Ann Evans, was the guest speaker at the awards ceremony.

It was the first year that an award was given to recognise the important contribution of staff involved in training and educating students in Wales, as a result of a recommendation that we made for the awards. The new award for Trainer of the Year joined the existing awards for employer, intermediate learner and higher level learner of the year.

The awards celebrated those who used technical, practical and vocational qualifications to achieve success and recognised individuals and companies who demonstrated progression and excellence in vocational studies.



We will be supporting the VQ Awards again in 2018 and look forward to encouraging more people to seek recognition for their achievements, helping to raise the profile of vocational qualifications for students and employers in Wales.

## The winners



Alys Evans, Alys's cakes & cupcakes, Matthew Booth, Gwobr, Julie Mundy, Seren Cyf





28



An aerial, high-angle photograph of a busy hospital lobby. The scene is filled with people of various ages and ethnicities moving through the space. Some are walking, some are standing in small groups, and others are seated on a row of red chairs in the lower portion of the frame. The lighting is bright, creating soft shadows on the light-colored floor. The overall atmosphere is one of a busy, active environment.

## CORE REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

### INTRODUCTION

We focused our work this year on developing our approach to regulation. We developed our approach to monitoring awarding bodies and ensuring that they are compliant with our *Standard Conditions of Recognition*. We also developed our regulatory systems and processes, with particular focus on the designation of qualifications as eligible for public funding. Where relevant and appropriate, we worked with other regulators.

### OUR APPROACH TO REGULATION

The *Regulatory Framework and Approach* document that we published in May 2017 summarises how we currently regulate awarding bodies and qualifications in Wales.

We communicated our intention to retain the rules-based approach to regulation set out in our *Standard Conditions of Recognition* and other supporting regulatory documents.

We developed regulatory outcomes that will be used to describe what we want to achieve through our regulatory activities and actions, and as such outline our vision.

We consulted on these outcomes, and will publish the consultation report before the end of 2017.

Our vision states that regulated qualifications in Wales are valued by students and employers in Wales, the UK and internationally.

To achieve this, the following regulatory outcomes have been developed:

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



## REVIEW OF CONDITIONS

The next stage of our work in further developing our regulatory approach is a review of our *Standard Conditions of Recognition*, which will begin in autumn 2017.

The *Standard Conditions of Recognition* were transitioned from Welsh Government's *General Conditions of Recognition* when we took on our functions in autumn 2015, and have not been reviewed since our inception. The review aims to make the conditions as accessible as possible to awarding bodies, while ensuring that they enable us to execute our regulatory functions in Wales. The review also aims to ensure that the *Standard Conditions of Recognition* are appropriate and relevant for students.

In taking this work forward, we will ensure engagement with all stakeholders, as well as keeping other regulators informed; in this way, we can work together to minimise the potential for additional regulatory workload on awarding bodies.

### Policy Development

To support our regulatory approach, we continued to develop and review a number of regulatory documents to meet the requirements of the *Qualifications Wales Act 2015*, and to fulfil our functions.

Since August 2016, we published the following regulatory documents:

- *Recognition policy*
- *Policy Statement on Conducting Reviews of Qualifications and the Qualifications system*
- *Interim Regulatory Whistleblowing policy*
- *Criteria for Designating GCSEs and A Levels*
- *Exam Procedures Review Service*
- *Consultation policy*



We reviewed and updated the following regulatory documents:

- *Regulatory Welsh-medium and Bilingual Qualifications policy*
- *Regulatory Incident Management policy*
- *Regulatory Services Charging policy Statement*
- *Additional Standard Conditions of Recognition GCSE/GCE qualifications*

We are developing regulatory documents relating to:

- Monetary Penalties
- Transfer Conditions
- Designation
- Additional Standard Conditions of Recognition for the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate

### Recognition

Before an awarding body can offer regulated qualifications in Wales, it must be recognised by us.

We check every application for recognition against our *Criteria for Recognition* to ensure that the applicant is capable of meeting the requirements placed on a recognised awarding body.



## CORE REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

During 2016, we received 14 expressions of interest from organisations wanting to become awarding bodies recognised by us and six awarding bodies surrendered their recognition with us. We received two formal submissions for recognition and reviewed both of these submissions thoroughly against our criteria. We recognised both organisations as awarding bodies in Wales in August 2017.

Year	Awarding Bodies we recognise
	133 (at establishment on 21 September 2015)
2016	121
2017	117

*Note: Figures represent numbers at the end of the academic year.*

Once we recognise an awarding body, we regulate all the qualifications that it awards in Wales, unless the awarding body chooses to exclude any of them.

This year, we worked with all of our recognised awarding bodies to confirm that we had an accurate record of qualifications that we do not regulate. As a consequence, 24 recognised awarding bodies chose to surrender part of their recognition. This meant that they withdrew some of their qualifications from regulation; for example, some awarding bodies surrendered qualifications that they had customised for particular employers.

Our recognition policy is currently being reviewed as part of the annual review cycle. This review will evaluate our criteria for recognition and our processes to identify areas that need improvement and development.

### Designations

Designated qualifications are offered by recognised awarding bodies and are eligible for use on publicly-funded programmes of learning for students under the age of 19. In practice, other organisations (such as sector bodies, or funders of programmes of learning for students over the age of 19) also require qualifications to be designated by us.

Designated qualifications are not unique to Wales, and are usually available to students in other countries of the UK.

Before we designate a qualification, we ask awarding bodies to assure us that there is evidence of both demand (from students) and support (from users of the qualifications in Wales), that the qualification is relevant in a Wales context, and that it is appropriate for the selected age range.

The majority of designated qualifications are vocational qualifications. However, in December 2016, we published *Criteria for Designating GCSEs and A levels*, which enabled us to designate GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in subjects that have not been developed exclusively for Wales. We have since designated a range of GCSEs, AS and A levels to ensure that students in Wales can continue to access low-uptake subjects that would not otherwise be available to them.







### Review of designation

During the year, we reviewed our approach to designation to make sure that the requirements we place on awarding bodies wanting to offer designated qualifications are appropriate and clear. We drafted a revised policy and new rules for designation which together describe our approach, requirements and processes, and will now engage with awarding bodies to get their feedback prior to introducing changes.

We started considering designated qualifications that are potentially the same as, or similar to, approved qualifications, as these qualifications may no longer be needed.

We will make sure that any changes that affect centres and students will be communicated in plenty of time before any changes are implemented.

### QiW

The QiW (Qualifications in Wales) database was launched in April 2016 and holds details of all qualifications that are approved and designated by us. During 2016-17, we made continuous improvements to QiW, in response to our own business needs and feedback from stakeholders.

Although QiW is a Qualifications Wales database, it also holds some fields and information for which Welsh Government is responsible. We worked closely with Welsh Government colleagues to implement new rules, logic and additional pages in QiW to display and calculate the qualification performance measures. These are used by Welsh Government to assess school performance. We continue to work together to improve and refine those pages and processes within QiW in which Welsh Government has an interest.

We worked with our recognised awarding bodies this year to make sure that all of the detailed information within qualifications records is current and accurate.

### Awarding body monitoring and compliance

Our approach to awarding body monitoring this year has been to:

- Review *Statements of Compliance* and conduct follow-up monitoring; and
- Hold regulatory update meetings with selected awarding bodies.

### Statements of Compliance

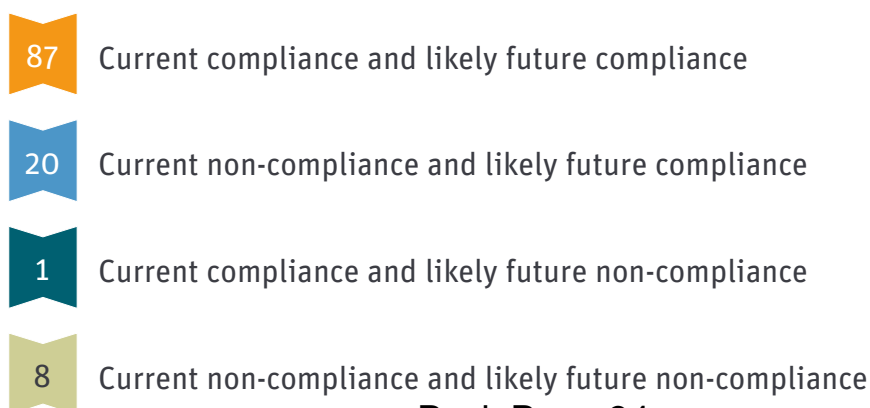
*Statements of Compliance* are a key monitoring tool to support our intelligence-led and risk-based approach to regulation. We use the information and evidence collected from *Statements of Compliance*, alongside other information and evidence, to monitor awarding bodies' compliance with our *Standard Conditions of Recognition*.

Awarding bodies must submit an annual *Statement of Compliance* to us and include details of any current or likely future non-compliance with our *Standard Conditions of Recognition*. Depending on the nature of the non-compliance, this may not be a significant cause for concern, particularly if the awarding body has a clear plan in place to address the issue and return to full compliance.

In 2016, we asked all awarding bodies to provide evidence of their systems for identifying and managing risks, and their systems for identifying, managing and promptly notifying us of incidents that could have an adverse effect on students.

All 117 awarding bodies submitted *Statements of Compliance* to us in 2016. We reviewed all of them in detail and considered the evidence alongside all other relevant intelligence that we hold about each awarding body.

Our findings are presented below:



We found that 75% (87) of awarding bodies declared compliance with all *Standard Conditions of Recognition* and that they were likely to comply for the next 12 months. This is comparable with the 2015 figure of 78%. Whilst 25% (29) of awarding bodies declared non-compliance and/or that they were likely to be non-compliant in the future, which is comparable with the 2015 figure of 22%.

The most common non-compliances reported included: failure to correctly use our logo on certificates; not awarding any qualifications in Wales during the previous two years; and published qualification specifications not including complete or up-to-date information.

Following our review, we concluded that four awarding bodies that had declared non-compliance with certain conditions were actually compliant with those conditions. We wrote to these awarding bodies to inform them that we considered them to be compliant with all of our *Standard Conditions of Recognition*.

All 25 non-compliant awarding bodies produced action plans detailing how they were addressing the issues identified. We are monitoring the implementation of these action plans, and are using the evidence gathered during the process to inform our awarding body monitoring programme. We have published a report on the 2016 process on our website<sup>1</sup> and will carry out the process again in 2017, with a focus on different compliance conditions.

<sup>1</sup><http://qualificationswales.org/media/2448/soc-external-report-2016-eng.pdf>



### Regulatory update meetings

Regulatory update meetings with awarding bodies are an opportunity for us to:

- Gain a better understanding of how each awarding body operates;
- Keep up-to-date with the developments at each awarding body;
- Probe areas of the awarding body's operations that we want to know more about or have concerns about;
- Update awarding bodies about our regulatory activities; and
- Build a positive relationship with awarding bodies.

From September 2016 to August 2017, we held regulatory update meetings with five awarding bodies. We reviewed and developed our approach for 2017-18, which includes increasing the number of awarding bodies we meet with.

In addition to this, we held regular meetings with WJEC, given their position as the only awarding body offering reformed GCSE and GCE qualifications in Wales. The meetings focused on key aspects of the delivery and award of the reformed qualifications at a strategic and operational level.

### Incidents

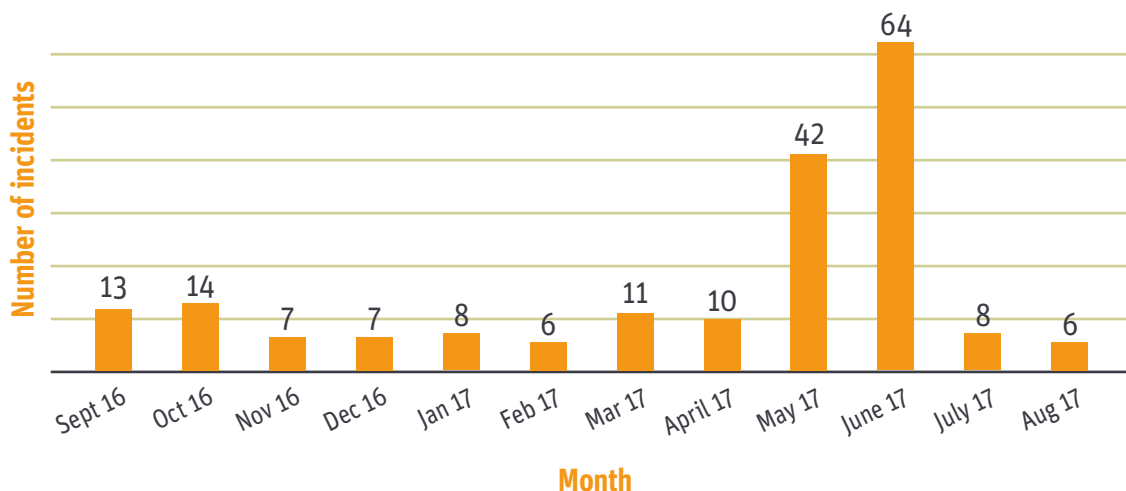
Awarding bodies must notify us of any incident that is likely to lead to an adverse effect for students, for example, errors in assessment materials, or a breach in the security of an examination paper. When we receive a notification, we check that the awarding body takes appropriate steps to reduce the impact on students and to prevent a recurrence. Incidents may originate outside Wales, but have the potential to impact upon Welsh students who are entered for the same qualification. The majority of incident reports that we received during the period related either to very minor issues, or resulted in no significant impact on students in Wales.

There was an increase in the number of incidents reported during the Summer 2017 examination series compared to Summer 2016. This was in part due to us asking awarding bodies to report all incidents – even minor incidents that may not have been reported in previous series. It also reflects the increased number of examinations being taken this summer, with both reformed and legacy examinations available in many subjects. We changed the way we categorise incidents from the previous Annual report and as a result, 2017 data is not directly comparable with



## CORE REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

### Total incidents received by month

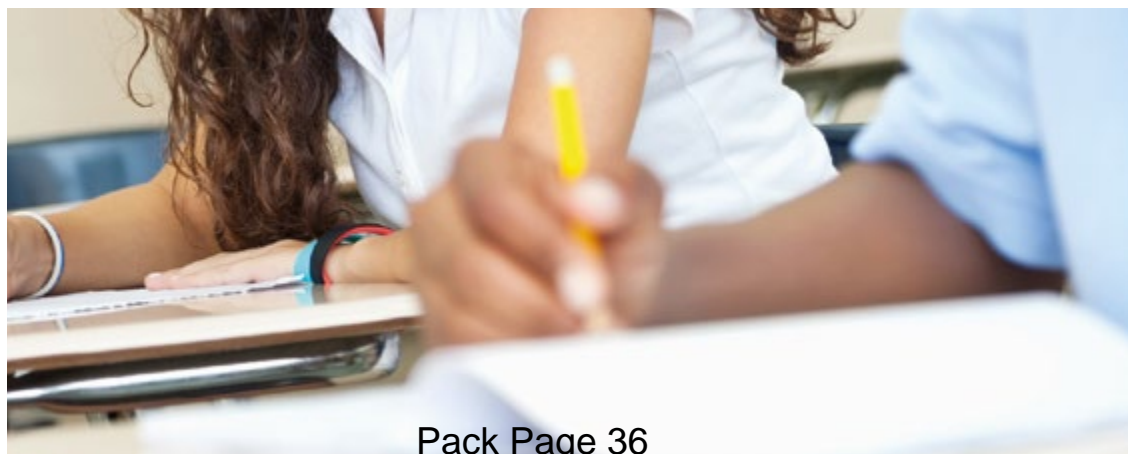


### Total incidents received by type

Incident type	Number
Security breach	94
Question paper errors	56
Process and system errors	31
Other	8
Malpractice	4
Marking	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>

We categorise the types of incidents as follows:

- Security breach – any event whereby sensitive material is compromised;
- Question paper errors – issues in any material used for assessment purposes, or the mark scheme;
- Process and systems errors – issues involving processes or systems including electronic processes or systems employed by either the awarding body or an examination centre;
- Other – incidents that do not fit into any of the above types;
- Malpractice – where intentional improper or negligent acts are committed; and
- Marking – issues concerning the process of marking scripts.





Only four out of the 94 security breaches originated from centres in Wales. In cases where the breach originated outside Wales, there was no adverse effect on students in Wales.

There were 56 question paper errors reported to us during the year. To set this in context, there were 2,200 question papers developed for the Summer 2017 series alone. Most question paper errors reported to us were minor and did not impact on students being able to answer the questions. In a very few cases, there were some errors that resulted in students being unable to answer a question as anticipated. In such cases, we have monitored the action taken by the awarding body to ensure that students were not disadvantaged as a result.

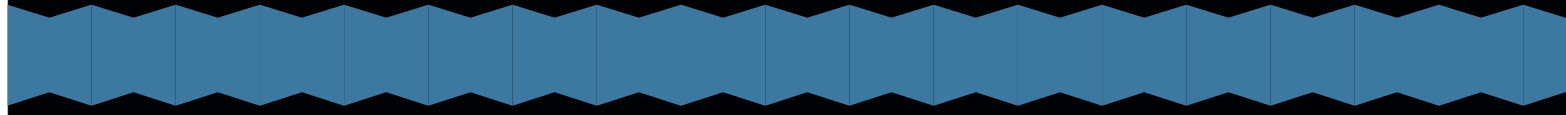
We closely monitored the actions that were taken to manage each reported incident and were content that appropriate actions were taken. Actions that an awarding body may take include: investigating the extent and impact of the incident; social media monitoring; and, statistical analysis to detect if an advantage has been gained. Where an incident has affected students, we ensure that the awarding body has taken appropriate action to minimise the impact of the incident and to prevent future recurrences, wherever possible.

Awarding bodies are required to take all reasonable steps to prevent malpractice. Where there is an allegation of malpractice, awarding bodies are required to investigate. If cases of malpractice are found to have occurred, awarding bodies are required to take action. Where a malpractice case could affect standards or public confidence, an awarding body must report this to us during the examination series. Otherwise, all such incidents are reported to us at the end of the series.

We monitored the actions taken by awarding bodies reporting alleged malpractice and were content that students in Wales were neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. Ofqual currently collect and publish data on behalf of the three regulators (Qualifications Wales, Ofqual and CCEA) on the number of malpractice investigations that are carried out by exam boards in relation to GCSEs, AS and A levels<sup>2</sup>.

We continue to work with our fellow regulators, including contributing to the maintenance of the joint contingency plan that has been developed by regulators and other stakeholders in the event of widespread disruption to the examination system in Wales, England and Northern

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/malpractice-for-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2016-exam-series>





# ENGAGING WITH AND SUPPORTING THE WELSH QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM



To fulfil our Principal Aims, it is important that we understand how well the qualifications system is working and the level of public confidence, and that we take action or provide advice to others as appropriate.

### CENTRE SUPPORT TEAM

#### Centre visits

The Centre Support Team visited a total of 589 schools, colleges, special schools, pupil referral units and other centres.

We continued to develop effective working relationships with school examination officers, who are responsible for administering exams within centres. This included aspects such as advising centres on how they ensured that students were entered for the correct exams, ensuring that exam papers were stored safely and distributed to the right students on the day of the exam, and that exam conditions were adhered to fairly and consistently.

During the 2016-17 academic year, we delivered regional training to a total of 2,492 examination invigilators. The training focused on the security of examination

papers and in particular, the risks associated with the increased amount of assessment material as centres delivered new and legacy specifications this year.

We highlighted the key role that invigilators play in upholding the security and integrity of the assessment process. We noted this year that Wales had proportionally fewer regulatory incidents reported during the examination period compared to England. We believe that this may in some part be a direct result of the high level of support on offer in Wales.

We met with teachers, headteachers, and other senior managers in centres and discussed issues such as their responsibilities in relation to the examination cycle, provided updates on changing requirements related to access arrangements for students with additional needs, as well as broader issues, such as the introduction of reformed qualifications.

In 2016, we developed the Wales Exam Officer Portal. This site enabled exams officers in Wales to access good practice documents and key dates, and provided a forum to share information and ask questions.



## CURRICULUM REFORM

In 2015, Welsh Government published *Successful Futures* and committed to reforming the national curriculum. As a key organisation within the education system in Wales, we are working closely with Welsh Government, Estyn and other stakeholders to support the new curriculum for Wales and to understand the implications any reforms will have on qualifications and the qualifications system.

We contributed at a number of levels within the reform process, including observing the Curriculum Pioneers Strand 1 and Strand 2 working groups, all Areas of Learning Experience groups and the Curriculum and Assessment Group, and membership of Programme Board and Change Board.

In November 2016, we visited Scotland to consider the impact of its curriculum reform on its qualifications and qualifications system.

We presented our initial thoughts at a conference of all Pioneer Schools in July 2017, demonstrating our commitment to ensuring that qualifications support the new curriculum.

Given what we know at this stage in the development of the new Curriculum for Wales, we believe that the GCSE brand can and should continue, as it offers students a strong and credible qualification. We will continue to engage closely with Welsh Government on curriculum reform to ensure that we can support developments, offer advice and respond to any changes in a timely and effective manner.

We identified two priority areas for research to underpin any future changes to qualifications associated with curriculum reform; investigating the assessment of higher order skills in reformed general qualifications and models for effective non-examined assessment (for example, teacher-led assessment) in qualifications for 14-16 year-olds.

## PUBLIC CONFIDENCE RESEARCH

We published the first results from our research project into public confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system. The research was based upon interviews and surveys that took place in early 2016, and provided information from qualitative interviews with stakeholders, as well as a representative survey of the public. The evidence-gathering took place shortly after we were established, so much of the feedback related to activities undertaken by Welsh Government. The information provides a baseline that we will build on in future studies.

Key findings included:

- 60% of adults in Wales had confidence that qualifications are fit for purpose, whilst 14% disagreed;
- 54% of adults in Wales considered that the range of qualifications met the reasonable needs of students in Wales, whilst 15% disagreed;
- There was support for the decision in Wales to retain the AS level as part of the A level and the A\* - G grade scale for GCSEs;
- There was backing for the reforms to general qualifications in the belief that they will drive up standards; and
- There was support for the establishment of Qualifications Wales as an independent regulatory body.

The research also uncovered some areas of concern, including:

- Risks around the divergence of the Welsh and English qualifications systems and public understanding of the changes; and
- That the pace and scale of change in the system was having an impact on the confidence of some stakeholders.

We will build on this research using a range of approaches, with the next phase of the research project due to take place in autumn 2018.



### EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Maintaining dialogue with all our stakeholders is a vital part of our work and underpins our role in overseeing the qualifications system in Wales.

We engaged regularly with our various stakeholders.

#### Students and parents

We regularly briefed the media on issues that were of importance to parents and students. Our A\*-G information campaign included leaflets for schools and colleges to pass to parents and students. During our review of the Construction and the Built Environment sector and the Welsh Bacc researchers spoke directly to students and our *Have Your Say* questionnaire allowed them to tell us how they felt about their exams. We intend to pilot the use of webinars to engage directly with schools' student councils.

#### Awarding bodies

We hosted termly meetings for the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) and the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) and provided updates on our policy development and research. We also held our first annual Awarding Body Forum in December 2016, where all awarding bodies were invited to a day of workshops and information sharing. Our aim is to involve awarding bodies in our early thinking. This year we achieved this in our approach to the data project and the way in which we have developed our regulatory outcomes.

#### Schools, colleges and work-based learning providers ('centres')

We engaged with organisations such as ColegauCymru, regional consortia and the National Training Federation for Wales by sponsoring events and attending/presenting at meetings.

This year we set up, and will now continue to hold, six-monthly meetings with:

- Teaching unions and representative organisations
- Our headteachers reference group

We will continue to discuss our priorities and how best to communicate our key messages to stakeholders.

#### Employers and related organisations

We met with the CBI, Institute of Directors (IoD) and Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and provided information for them to use in their newsletters and websites.

In carrying out our sector reviews, we met with a wide range of employers from more than 150 different organisations.

#### Higher education (HE)

We updated and re-issued our *Higher Education Admissions Guide* giving clear information to the Higher Education sector about qualifications in Wales, and answering questions about the Welsh Bacc and the new GCSE mathematics qualifications.

We had a stand at the annual UCAS Admissions Conference, where attendees were able to ask questions and request further information. This year, for the first time, we sponsored two UCAS conferences for teachers and advisers. Our close network with centres meant that we were able to identify the main concerns from the 14-19 sector in relation to HE entry. The conferences were a great success, with over 96% of delegates stating that they would recommend the conference to others.

“

*We've been really impressed with the way in which the Qualifications Wales team have engaged with us and actively sought the views of staff and students, and have looked to understand the day-to-day experience of schools who are delivering a broad range of qualifications to young people and the opportunities and challenges this presents to us and, more importantly, those students.*

**Trevor Brown**  
Headteacher

**St. Joseph's RC High School, Newport**

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“

*We are delighted that our developing relationship with Qualifications Wales has assured us of many opportunities to discuss important issues in an open and forthright manner.*

**Tim Pratt**  
Director of ASCL Cymru

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“

*Although still a very new organisation in Wales we have been pleased with the willingness of Qualifications Wales to engage with the profession via ourselves as a trade union representing members interests. That engagement will continue so that we can ensure feedback from those in the classroom and help secure a Welsh qualifications system that meets the needs of learners in Wales.*

**David Evans**  
Wales Secretary  
National Education Union Cymru

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*As the representative body of work-based learning providers in Wales, The National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) has developed a very close and productive working relationship with our colleagues at Qualifications Wales. We have worked in partnership on a number of occasions, and we firmly believe that Qualifications Wales is making a real difference to the vocational qualifications landscape.*

*As an organisation, we have worked tirelessly to promote the value of vocational qualifications to employers and individuals, and we are pleased to see that Qualifications Wales have also taken up the challenge, by ensuring that vocational qualifications in Wales remain 'fit for purpose' for all involved.*

**Jeff Protheroe**  
Director of Operations, NTfW

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“

*The Federation of Awarding Bodies values the positive relationship we have with Qualifications Wales. We particularly welcome that the regulator seeks to engage with our members on a range of regulatory projects and consultations. We believe this engagement and on-going constructive dialogue helps to contribute towards ensuring that learners continue to have access to high quality vocational qualifications in Wales.*

**Stephen Wright**  
Chief Executive  
Federation of Awarding Bodies

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“

*Governors Wales appreciates being a member of the school representatives group and has welcomed sharing key information from Qualifications Wales with governors across Wales.*

**Jane Morris**  
Director, Governors Wales

”

### COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

Communicating our messages to stakeholders and to the general public is one of our key objectives.

The work done by our teams is varied and detailed, and it is important that relevant stakeholders, whether they are in the education or employment fields, are kept fully informed of our work and any new developments in qualifications.

Our objective is to increase knowledge and understanding of qualifications in Wales, particularly those general and vocational qualifications undergoing reforms, and to ensure that public confidence in the system is maintained.

We used a variety of channels to convey our messages to different audiences, depending on their preferred method of communication. For example, using the mainstream media is one of the most effective ways for us to communicate with the wider public. Face-to-face briefings were held with key education

journalists in Wales and the UK prior to the January and August examination results.

The *General and Vocational Qualifications Strategies* were both launched during the year, with extensive media coverage; social media activity was developed, and a publicity campaign to highlight the changes to GCSEs and A levels in Wales was rolled out across the country.

We used both traditional and new media, often combining the two, depending on the target audience. For example, the GCSE publicity campaign involved sending more than 70,000 leaflets and posters to all centres in Wales, aimed at the parents of Year 10 and 11 students to give them information about reforms to qualifications. This was supplemented with downloadable information on our website, links via Twitter and articles and press releases published in newspapers and stakeholder publications.

We produced two regular bilingual e-mail newsletters for education professionals – *The Slate* for centres, and *The Examiner* for





awarding bodies – with copies available to download from our website. We also contributed articles and blogs to websites, newsletters and magazines produced by a host of organisations in the education and employment sectors. This included a regular monthly article in the education pages of the *Western Mail*.

Animations and videos were developed with the first ones published on our website on the Construction and the Built Environment and ICT sector reviews.

We worked closely with other organisations during a variety of public and stakeholder-facing events, including UCAS, ColegauCymru, the National Training Federation for Wales, Estyn, the Education Workforce Council and Welsh Government.

We reviewed our website and started a project to improve how we organise information and to refresh its look and feel. We look forward to launching the new website in early 2018.

### The Urdd Eisteddfod

We attended the Urdd Eisteddfod for the first time in 2017, sharing a stand with Estyn and the Education Workforce Council. This gave us the opportunity to discuss the reform of general and vocational qualifications with the general public.

The nature of the event, as the largest youth festival of its kind in Europe, meant that it attracted a high proportion of young people, parents and teachers. This made it an ideal event to discuss our work with the people most directly affected.

Over 1,200 people visited the stand and took away leaflets and brochures containing a wide range of information.



### GRANT FUNDED ACTIVITY

Our grant programme falls into five broad categories:

#### Qualification Reform Support Grant

Grants are awarded to support the implementation of reformed approved qualifications such as GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Bacc through the production of bilingual resources and continuous professional development. They support teaching practitioners and trainers so they are better equipped to deliver these qualifications.

#### Welsh for Adults Grant

Funding supports the viability of Welsh for Adults qualification provision. This includes the development and quality assurance of the qualifications, as well as professional development and resources to support it. We managed this grant scheme from September 2016.

#### Welsh Language Support Grant

This grant supports the translation of general and vocational qualifications exams and other assessment materials, as well as the translation of specifications and supporting qualification guidance and resources. Grants in this category were awarded to a wide range of vocational awarding bodies and supported qualifications

in a variety of vocational areas and levels. The allocated grant budget for Welsh Language Support in 2017-18 is lower than in 2016-17 due to the completion of the GCSE and A level reforms and therefore the end of our support to ensure these qualifications are available bilingually.

#### Essential Skills Grant

This grant funding supports the continued development of the confirmatory tests for the Essential Skills qualifications in Communication and Application of Number.

The funding supports translation and other costs incurred around the newly developed tests, as well as for tasks for each of the four Essential Skills areas (Communication, Application of Number, Digital Literacy and Employability). The grant came to an end in March 2017.

#### Health and Social Care Grant

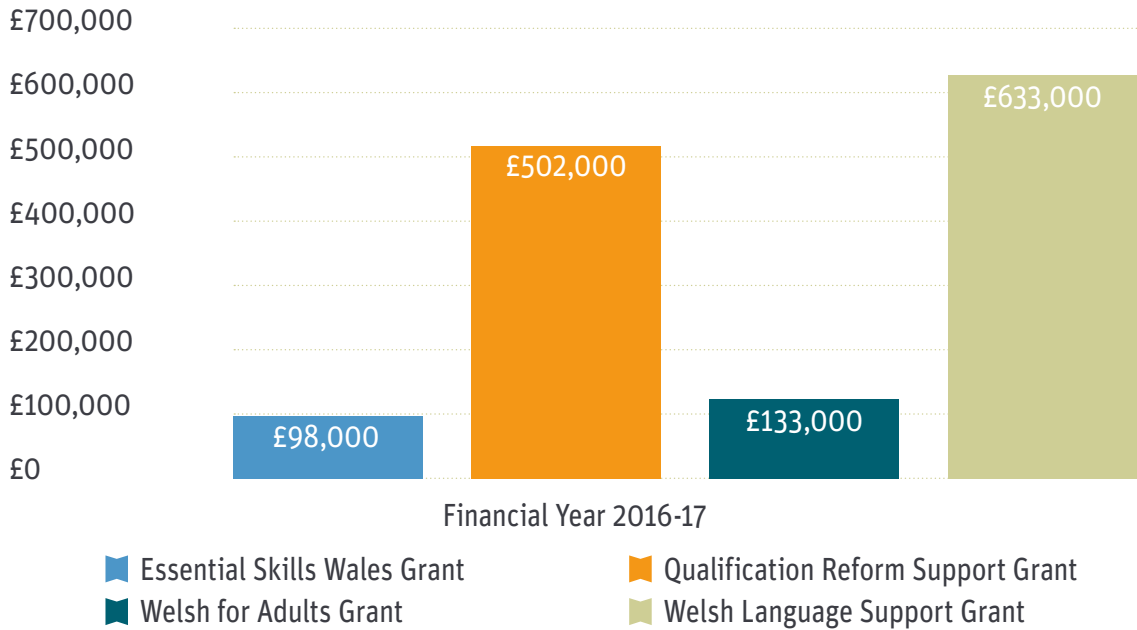
In the 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years, we will award a new grant to support the reform of the new suite of approved Health and Social Care, and Childcare qualifications.

The grants listed opposite and the activities they support help us to ensure the reasonable needs of students in Wales are met and that the public has confidence in the Welsh qualifications system.

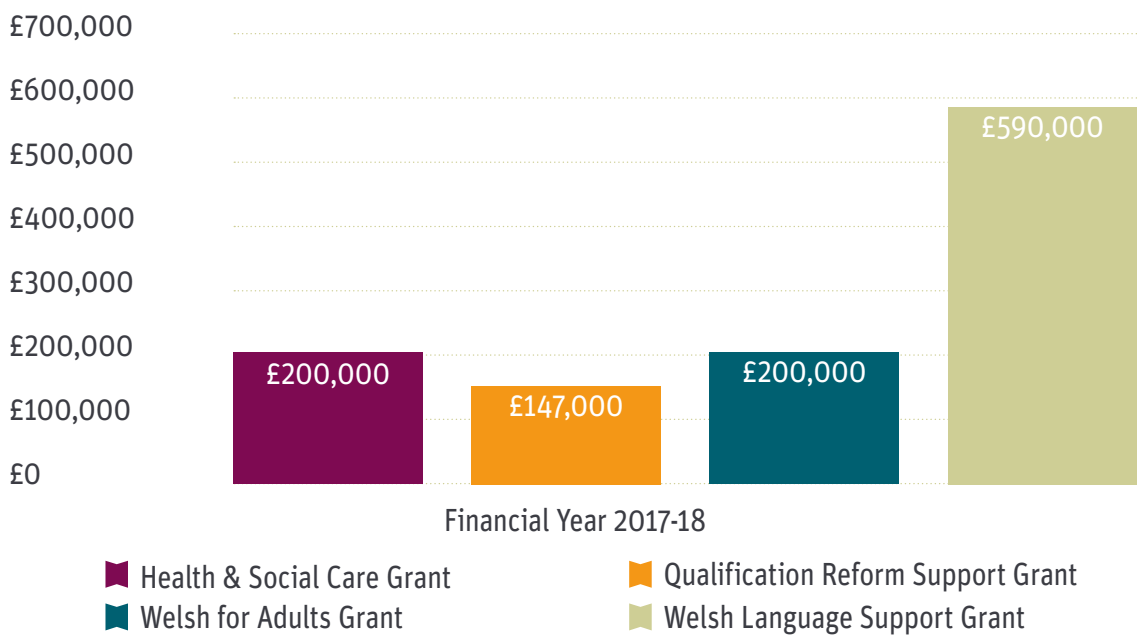


Details of the grants that we award, the recipients of grant funding, and the activities that they support, can be found on our website.

### QUALIFICATIONS WALES – GRANTS ISSUED FY 2016-17



### QUALIFICATIONS WALES – GRANTS ALLOCATED FY 2017-18



*The Welsh for Adults grant is higher in 2017-18 as it reflects funding for the full academic year, 2016-17 was for two-terms only.*

*The Essential Skills Wales grant ended in 2016-17.*

*FY = financial year.*





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## DEVELOPING OUR CORPORATE CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

### OUR WORK IN 2017

The role of the Finance and Corporate Services Directorate is to help the organisation to deliver its regulatory functions effectively, efficiently and compliantly. This means:

- Providing the policies, safeguards and controls that keep us legally compliant and in line with best practice;
- Setting up processes and systems that are easy to use and do not produce unnecessary administration;
- Making sure that we have robust and evidence-based decision-making and good audit records;
- Challenging the organisation to make sure it makes best use of its resources and spends money wisely – including staff development, working with suppliers and grant recipients, and using assets and information effectively and efficiently;
- Training staff to understand what they need to do and why, and helping managers/budget holders to be confident in their corporate responsibilities; and
- Providing professional expertise (for example, using our Head of IT to support our sector reviews).

The Directorate also provides the communications and external relations functions that help the organisation to listen to our stakeholders and provide useful information about what we are doing.

Over the year we worked to improve the maturity of each function, building on the work we did to set up in 2015-16. Here are some of the things that were achieved:

#### COMMUNICATIONS AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

- Issued eight electronic *The Slate* newsletters to schools and colleges and five *The Examiner* newsletters to awarding bodies;
- Organised Qualifications Wales's inaugural Awarding Body forum;
- Managed successful information campaigns on general qualifications – including the A\*-G campaign and the Summer Series Spotlight articles;
- Sponsored the VQ awards and organised two UCAS events for teachers; and
- Set up regular forums with Unions and a Headteacher reference group.

#### FINANCE

- Completed our second set of Annual accounts in August 2017; and
- Paid 98% of contractors within 30 days.



## GOVERNANCE

- Published our first Annual report in December 2016;
- Completed a review of our Board and Committees' effectiveness;
- Agreed the Board's risk appetite and enhanced our risk-reporting structure;
- Gave all new staff an introductory briefing on our legislation;
- Developed our Business Plan and Performance monitoring; and
- Completed our internal audit programme.

## IT

- Achieved 'Cyber Essentials Plus' information security accreditation;
- Established business continuity plans and ran two simulated exercises;
- Developed our IT security procedures by phishing training and simulated testing;
- Developed QiW to support WG performance points and to receive *Statements of Compliance* electronically; and
- 99% of staff said they had the right technology (IT) to do their job effectively.

## HR

- Agreed, published and implemented our 'family-friendly' suite of HR policies;
- Set up performance management and developed an approach to staff deployment;
- Completed 17 recruitment exercises;
- Ran our first staff survey (with a 96% response rate and 76% engagement index);
- Delivered Equality and Diversity training and 'Kick off Cymraeg' Welsh awareness training to staff and Board members; and
- Supported eight members of staff to complete ILM qualifications at Level 3.

## PROCUREMENT

- Awarded 56 contracts following a tender or quotation process;
- Ran a major procurement exercise to award a concession contract to develop Health and Social Care, and Childcare qualifications for Wales;
- Launched our CRM software and made additional use of it to support contract management;
- Published our procurement policy; and
- Contracted with 33 subject experts.

### ADVICE TO WELSH GOVERNMENT

As the recognised expert in qualifications, we are required, if requested, to provide Welsh Ministers with advice on specific issues. We have provided evidence and consultation feedback to National Assembly Committees and Welsh Government as follows:

#### Evidence

- *Qualifications Wales Annual report* (Children and Young People's Education Committee);
- *Inquiry into the Financial Estimates Accompanying Legislation* (Finance Committee); and
- *Inquiry into Welsh Government's new Welsh Language Strategy* (Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee).

#### Response to Welsh Government Consultations

- *Welsh Language Strategy: One million Welsh speakers by 2050*;
- *Consistent measures for post-16 learning in Wales*; and
- *Education (Student Information) (Wales) Regulations 2017* and *Education (Destination Information) (Prescribed Activities) (Wales) Regulations 2017*.

### CONSULTATIONS

During the year, we conducted the following consultations, in accordance with our consultation policy:

- Review of qualifications in the Health and Social Care sector;
- Notification of intention to restrict Health and Social Care qualifications;
- Consultation on proposed regulatory outcomes and mapping of conditions; and
- Data project general qualifications templates (consultation runs beyond this reporting period).

### WORKING WITH OTHER REGULATORS

We held regular meetings with the other UK qualifications regulators: Ofqual in England, CCEA in Northern Ireland and SQA in Scotland. We worked closely with these regulators; during the year, we published a number of documents in collaboration with Ofqual and CCEA, to explain the reforms to qualifications in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, and how they will affect students.

We met with Estyn on a quarterly basis, and our research team maintains regular contact to share and discuss research plans.

We worked with the Welsh Language Commissioner and her team to advance our work, considering how we can work together for the benefit of the language and people of Wales.

We worked closely with Social Care Wales as the regulator of the social care workforce as we continue to reform qualifications in that sector, following commitments made in our sector review.

Where our work is linked to that of other regulators, we clarified roles within *Memorandums of Understanding (MoU)* documents. These are in place with Ofqual, CCEA, the Welsh Language Commissioner and Social Care Wales.

## WORKING FOR WALES

### Wellbeing and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

As the independent qualifications regulator for Wales, we are one part of the public-sector infrastructure. In both our corporate policies and our work as a regulator, we look to support the economic, social and environmental development of Wales and thereby the wellbeing indicators defined in this Act.

During the year, we worked collaboratively with the other public bodies delivering the education system in Wales. This included the

awarding bodies that we regulate, schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, regional consortia and local authorities, as well as qualifications regulators in other parts of the UK. Our analysis informed Ministers, officials and other organisations that are involved in developing or setting education policy, delivering education services or teaching students.

Our work has a long-term impact by ensuring that qualifications are fit for purpose, and by considering how well they meet the needs of employers and further and higher education institutions. This supports academic progression and employability, and, therefore, prosperity and economic growth.





### Welsh language

The desirability of promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh Language is one of the 'eight matters' that our legislation requires us to consider. We published our *Regulatory Welsh-Medium and Bilingual Qualifications* policy, following its approval by our Board in May 2016. We reviewed our action plan supporting this policy during the year.

We established a group of awarding bodies that we can consult with, as we develop specific actions in relation to Welsh-medium and bilingual qualifications. Through this group, we will offer advice to awarding bodies on how they can develop and quality-assure their Welsh-medium provision, whilst also taking steps to help awarding bodies identify individuals with the necessary combination of assessment and Welsh-language skills.

As well as establishing this awarding body group, we are also setting up an advisory group of schools and colleges so that they too can support us by identifying where there is most demand for bilingual assessment. We hope to meet with the advisory group in the autumn.

By establishing both groups, we will work collaboratively to identify how to overcome

some of the potential barriers that we all face, and see what more can be done to improve the availability of Welsh-medium and bilingual qualifications and assessments.

We provided extensive grant funding to help support the availability of Welsh-medium qualifications and assessment for both general qualifications (GCSEs and A levels) and vocational qualifications, including the Welsh for Adults qualifications. Grant funding in support of the Welsh Language totalled £633,000 for the year.

We communicated with our stakeholders bilingually, as appropriate. We are not yet subject to the Welsh Language Standards, but we developed our corporate Welsh language plans and engaged positively with the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office.

At the end of March 2017, 32% of our staff rated themselves as having Welsh-language skills. We actively support the continuous development of our staff, from attending short courses to more immersive training. During the year, 93.6% of our staff and 66% of the Board attended 'Kick off Cymraeg' training. Culturally, those who are more confident Welsh-speakers within the organisation support those who are learning and developing.





## Equality

We comply with the general duties within the *Equalities Act 2010*, and we take care to consider equality issues in all our activities. Examples of our approach include the design of our office, our recruitment practices, our website design standards and the organisation of our events. Equality considerations are built into the design of our policies, our regulatory impact assessments, and the delivery of our services, and they are kept under review.

As a regulator, we also monitor how well awarding bodies meet their equalities duties. We have adopted the principles of *Fair Access by Design*, the three-country policy that seeks to ensure that the design of qualifications has no in-built discrimination. We published our *Strategic Equality Plan* following Board approval in April 2016 and we will monitor and review this on an annual basis.

Some of our achievements from the plan are summarised below:

- 93.5% of our staff and 100% of the Board attended Equality and Diversity training;
- We reviewed how we advertise our roles and widened the locations and publications we use to advertise / promote our vacancies;
- Our website promoted accessibility and we ensured that our publications were available to a variety of audiences;
- Applications for recognition of new awarding bodies were assessed against equalities legislation;
- We published our procurement policy;
- We developed our Equality Impact Assessment template and embedded it into our work; and
- We collected and analysed data on gender pay, age profile and disabilities of our staff to identify any issues that needed to be addressed.

We will publish our Annual equality report in the autumn of 2017.

**Finance overview**

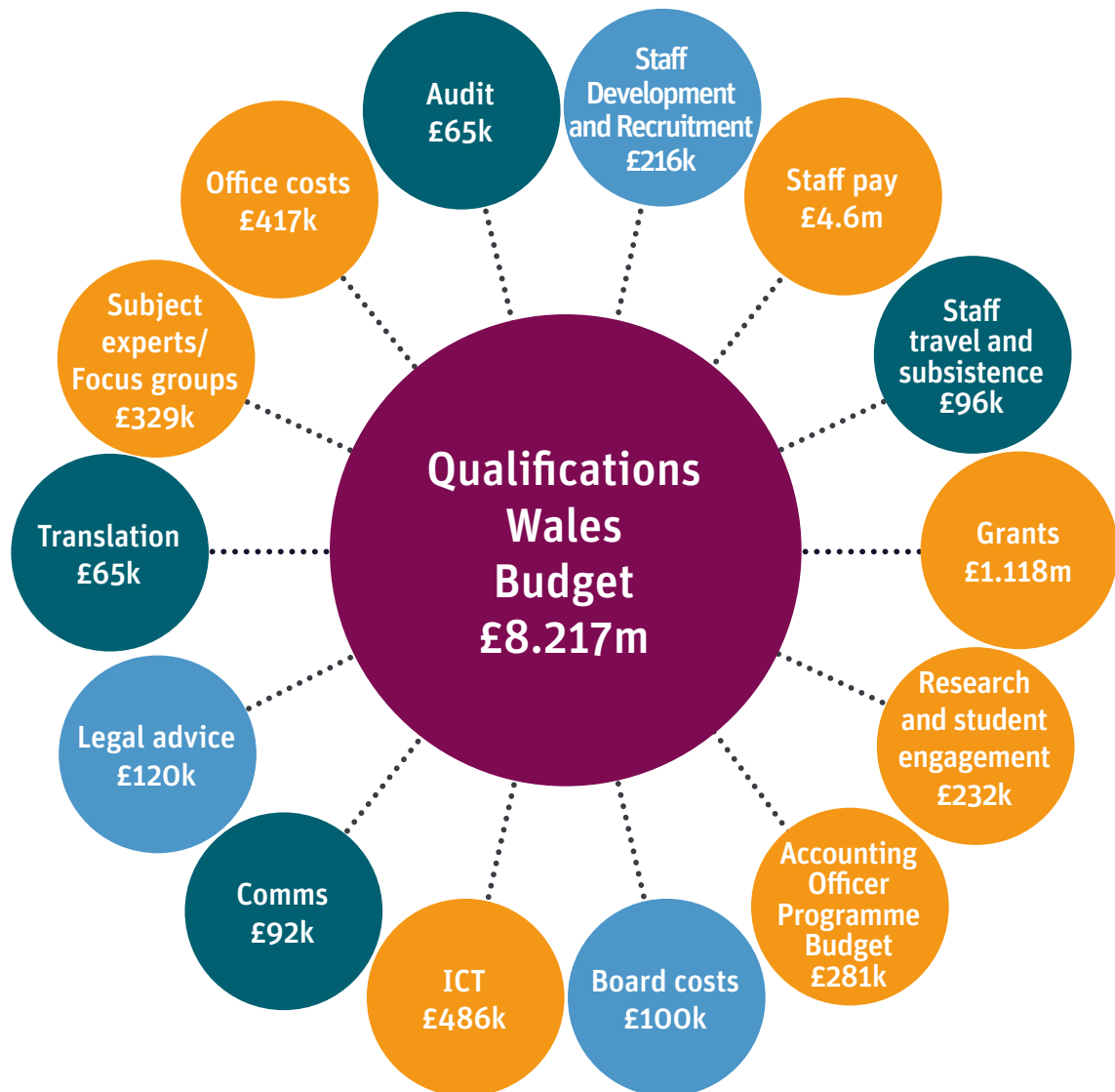
As a Welsh Government Sponsored Body, we receive an annual grant allocation to cover our operational costs.

The amount of our allocation is confirmed in an annual letter covering the financial year April to March, which we published. Our grant allocation for 2017-18 was reduced by £327k to £8.042m, which equates to a 4% reduction.

We set a budget of £8.217m for 2017-18, which is made up of the £8.042m annual grant allocation; plus the utilisation of £175,000 from a £500,000 reserve we set up in 2016-17 to meet costs associated with specific, one-off projects that we had planned.

Information on how we spent our 2016-17 allocation, which includes further details on the creation of the £500,000 reserve, is provided in our Annual accounts.

How we propose to spend our 2017-18 allocation is shown below:





Whilst our core costs are largely fixed, many of our activities (and therefore the costs associated with them) will vary from year to year. This is because we need to ensure that our work programme aligns with Welsh Government policy initiatives, and responds to regulatory issues that emerge.

We produced, and regularly refine, our Medium-Term Finance Plan, which translates our anticipated activities into a rolling three-year profile of anticipated costs.

We are aware of the funding challenges facing the public sector and of the need to remain financially resilient. We will continue to review our Medium-Term Finance Plan and consider the impact of potential changes to our funding levels, to ensure that we remain focused on key performance areas, and can highlight the possible consequences associated with reduced funding allocations.

We anticipate that this will enable us to continue the mature dialogue we have with our Sponsor Unit on funding matters.

### Establishing our research capability

In the last year we completed the recruitment and set up of our research and statistics function. The team consists of social researchers and statisticians, who bring a range of experience from academia and public-sector organisations. It provides an objective evidence base for regulatory and policy decision-making on qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales.

The team's role includes:

- ✦ Designing, commissioning and conducting research;
- ✦ Supporting monitoring, review and consultation activity;
- ✦ Collecting and analysing data;
- ✦ Producing statistics; and
- ✦ Disseminating evidence and insight to support decision-making, policy and strategy.

The research that we conducted or commissioned as an organisation is an important component of the reviews outlined elsewhere in this report, including the VQ sector reviews, the Welsh Bacc review and investigation of early entry into GCSEs.



We have developed our approach to consultation activity through questionnaire design and analysis on several consultations, and through developing organisational guidance on best practice in delivering consultations. We continue to develop our research and statistics infrastructure, including building access to, and interaction with, professional associations and academic research; developing new web pages for publishing research and statistics; reviewing ethical guidance, and developing research and statistics policies. Future developments include initiating a research and ethics advisory group.

Insight gained from statistical analysis is very important, and our data project will be a crucial enabler of our capability.

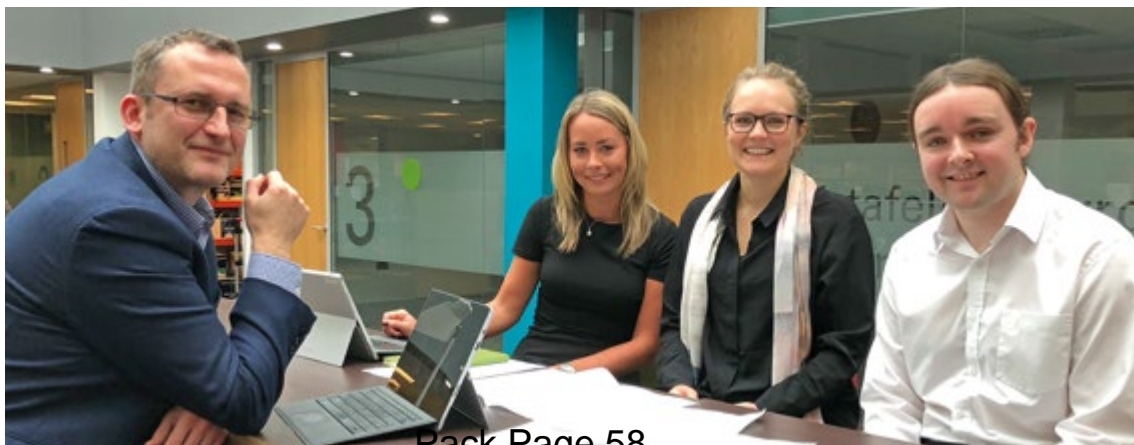
### Data Project

As we develop our research and statistical capability, we need to be able to collect and analyse data about examinations taken in Wales and to publish reports. Currently, Ofqual collect and publish this data on a three-country basis.

During the year, we completed a scoping study to decide the type and frequency of the information we need to collect, and the type of IT infrastructure needed to support this. We also engaged with awarding bodies to understand their views and any concerns.

To support our regulatory monitoring activity and publications, we decided that it was our preference for our regular collections to request aggregated data, for example the number of candidate entries by qualification from awarding bodies, on a regular basis. Disaggregated data, for example candidate level grade to answer specific research questions, is requested on an ad hoc basis.

In July, we issued a formal consultation on the templates and schedule that we are proposing for general qualifications data collections. We will give further consideration to the data we need to collect for vocational qualifications. We also started building the IT solution to hold the data and to plan changes to the front end of QiW.





### Staff development

This year, we completed our full recruitment, bringing in our research and statistics team and our full complement of Qualifications Managers, Officers and Assistants. We helped staff to enhance their skills and capabilities. We saw some staff turnover this year as the secondments put in place to support the transfer of knowledge from Welsh Government came to an end. A small number of other staff who joined us at the outset also moved on, having developed their skills during their time with us.

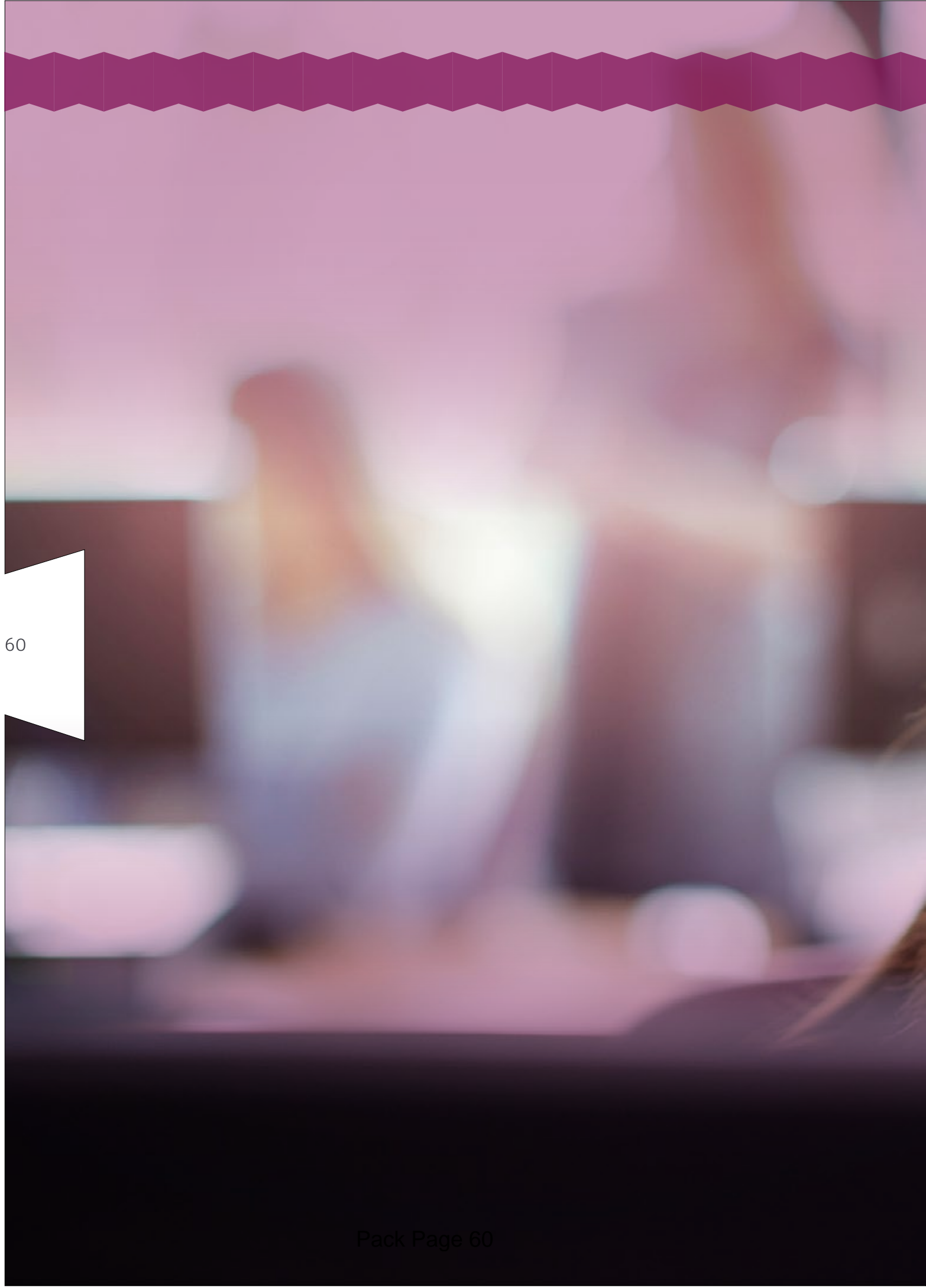
In October 2016, we launched our first staff survey and this provided our benchmark for an annual survey each autumn to measure engagement. We were pleased with our initial results: we had a response rate of 96%, and our overall engagement score was 76%. 'Engagement' is measured by a subset of questions focused on how people feel about the organisation and how long they intend to stay, and our score was strong when compared with similar organisations. The survey did highlight some areas for improvement. We ran an all-staff session to discuss these and identify positive changes that could be made.

We are committed to developing our staff and offer both corporate training and support for individuals. This year our corporate training focused on Welsh in the workplace with 'Kick off Cymraeg', alongside Equality and Diversity training, which was delivered across the organisation and also to our Board members. We also brought in external providers to deliver sessions on facilitation skills and personal impact as part of a strand of learning focusing on leadership capability.

Our Executive team took part in sessions focusing on leadership in their individual roles and as a team. For more junior staff, we delivered our first ILM Level 3 in Leadership and Management to a cohort of nine.

As well as formal training, we used internal staff to provide training, or to give updates on their work, and we offered a range of development activities, such as shadowing and cross-team working, where staff could work on projects outside their normal work profile. In addition, we operate a deployment model to facilitate formal internal moves to broaden knowledge and capability and in doing so build our internal resilience and business session planning.





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## FORWARD LOOK

Below is a summary of some of our priorities for the 2017-18 financial year.

### GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS ACTIVITIES

- Continue to deliver our GQ strategy;
- Report on our research into Early Entry;
- Report on our review of the Welsh Bacc;
- Undertake research into the lessons learned from the GQ qualification reform programme;
- Oversee the examination series for the Summer and Winter periods; and
- Continue to work with stakeholders to increase the availability of qualifications through the medium of Welsh.

### VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS ACTIVITIES

- Continue with our programme of sector reviews;
- Report on our sector reviews of Construction and the Built Environment and ICT;
- Publish our findings from our monitoring of First Aid qualifications;
- Continue our programme of VQ monitoring; and
- Continue developing the new Health and Social Care, and Childcare qualifications.



## CORE REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

- Begin our review of the *Standard Conditions of Recognition*;
- Start our programme of Awarding Body Monitoring; and
- Finalise our regulatory outcomes and publish the report from our consultation.

## ENGAGING WITH AND SUPPORTING THE WELSH QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

- Continue our research programme to underpin changes to qualifications linked to the new curriculum;
- Continue to distribute grants;
- Continue to support centres through our Centre Support Team;
- Publish phase two of our Public Confidence research; and
- Continue to develop our communication channels and increase public understanding of our role within the qualifications system in Wales.

## DEVELOPING OUR CORPORATE CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

- Continue to implement our action plan to comply with the Welsh Language Measures Act (2011);
- Develop our workforce strategy;
- Deliver our data collection project; and
- Publish our corporate capability strategy.



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