



CYPE(5)-24-20 - Paper to note 9

By email

Lynne Neagle MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

7 October 2020

Dear Lynne,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 23rd September requesting responses to supplementary questions that were not covered at our recent appearance at the Committee to discuss the General Principles of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) bill.

We have now had time to consider these questions fully and our answers to them are provided in the annex attached to this letter.

Yours sincerely

Philip Blaker
Chief Executive

Qualifications Wales
Q2 Building, Pencarn Lane
Imperial Park,
Newport
NP10 8AR
☎ 01633 373 222



www.qualificationswales.org

Cymwysterau Cymru
Adeilad Q2, Lôn Pencarn
Parc Imperial,
Casnewydd
NP10 8AR
☎ 01633 373 222

Annex

QW Response to CYPE Committee's Supplementary on the Curriculum and Assessment Bill.

1. RELIGION, VALUES AND ETHICS

The Bill's provisions in relation to Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) mean that there are likely to be two different versions of RVE taught in schools across Wales. Community schools and other schools without a religious character will be required to teach RVE having regard to the Agreed Syllabus. Voluntary controlled schools with a religious character will be required to teach RVE having regard to the Agreed Syllabus unless a parent requests their child receives RVE in line with the trust deeds of the school or tenets of the school's faith (i.e. denominational RVE). Voluntary aided schools with a religious character will by default teach denominational RVE unless a parent requests their child receive RVE that accords with the Agreed Syllabus.

- ***What implications does the likely provision of more than one form of RVE have for qualifications in this discipline?***

QW Response:

This is something we will want to consider carefully with stakeholders when we come to later stages of consultation on the specific design of individual qualifications.

As for other areas of the curriculum, when considering the future design of qualifications in this area, we will look at how qualifications can be designed to offer schools and learners flexibility in how they approach the content and context they study.

When reforming the current GCSE Religious Studies qualifications we consulted and engaged widely on design proposals to ensure the qualification met the needs of learners in different schools and settings. The result was a specification that combines mandatory and optional elements to offer many different routes through the qualification. This means that a single qualification offers learners and centres a course that is coherent and that balances knowledge of core beliefs, teachings and practices of at least two religions, with an understanding of how they can be applied to philosophical and ethical themes. Our experience of developing the requirements for the current GCSE suggests that through careful collaboration it is possible to develop national qualifications in this area that allow sufficient flexibility to meet different local needs.

While we will of course want to ensure the reasonable needs of all learners are met, it is worth noting that the curriculum, national and local, is distinct from qualifications. Not every detailed aspect of a school's curriculum will necessarily be reflected in a qualification. As with much of the work that lies ahead on qualifications and the curriculum, the key will be to work with stakeholders to get the balance right.

2. WELSH LANGUAGE

The Bill establishes a single learning continuum of learning Welsh in all schools, replacing the current distinction between Welsh first language and Welsh second language.

- ***How will qualifications in Welsh align with the different stages that learners are likely to be on along the single continuum for Welsh?***
- ***Will there be a single qualification in Welsh or will there still be a need for two levels of qualification depending on the learner's proficiency in Welsh?***

QW Response:

When it comes to agreeing an appropriate range of qualifications to support Welsh language learning, there are several challenges and opportunities to consider. We have discussed these in more detail in [our advice to the Minister for Education](#)¹ earlier this year.

Given the broad range of language development that the continuum covers, it is likely that more than one qualification will be necessary to enable fair and proportionate assessment of learners who are at different stages of progression. We envisage that any Welsh language qualifications would clearly link to a single continuum of learning and move away from the current distinction between Welsh first language and Welsh second language.

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

We will be seeking views on proposals for qualification to support the continuum for learning Welsh in our next round of consultation. Over coming weeks, we will engage with a range of stakeholders to identify possible proposals for consultation.

¹ <https://qualificationswales.org/english/qualified-for-the-future/phase-1---shaping-our-approach/>

In approaching this work, we recognise the need to:

- Sustain and build on the attainment and proficiency achieved in current qualifications, including the recently reformed Welsh Second Language GCSE that was awarded for the first time in 2019.
- Ensure the qualifications available meet the needs of all learners and support them to become confident Welsh speakers by 16.
- Make clear how language qualifications relate to the curriculum, to each other and to post-16 pathways.
- Encourage learners to work towards suitably demanding and ambitious qualifications based on their existing progress and proficiency.
- Consider the resources and teaching capability that will be available to schools as they introduce the new curriculum.

We will also need to consider whether to make changes all at once or in stages. It may be for example that the level of demand of some qualifications will need to be kept under review in line with progress towards achieving the Welsh Government's *Cymraeg 2050* strategy.

3. PLANNING FOR QUALIFICATIONS MORE BROADLY

Your written evidence states that the development and publication of the new Curriculum for Wales has been a 'catalyst' for you to look at how qualifications for 14 to 16 year olds will need to change. This, you explain, is in order to meet the new curriculum's aims and purposes and respond to future needs. You also outline the work you have undertaken to date on consulting on the high-level approach to shaping future qualifications, and work that is yet to come.

In oral evidence, you said that the engagement undertaken so far suggests there is preference for qualifications to continue to be structured mainly around subject disciplines, rather than having individual qualifications that are seeking to cover the whole of an Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). However, you also suggested there may be opportunities to develop more holistic and integrated qualifications to sit alongside those that are subject-specific.

- ***Are you able to share any further detail, at this stage, on your thinking about how the new GCSEs will look in practice, and give an indication of what any future consultation will consider***

(e.g. will it outline the options which should be available to young people, or will it be focused on the philosophy underpinning the approach)?

QW Response:

In our next consultation we will propose the range of GCSE and other approved qualifications that should be available for centres to choose from when determining which courses to offer to their learners. This will focus on the main, 'made-for-Wales' qualifications that should be available. Once the main qualifications are agreed we will be able to start looking in more detail at what other, less bespoke qualifications that centres could also be able to choose from.

In developing our proposals, we are looking at the qualifications that will be necessary to support the main areas of the curriculum. We will also be asking about the qualifications that may be required in other subject, including practical and work-based areas, in which qualifications may be required.

We will not be looking at this stage to agree the detailed content and assessment of individual qualifications. That work will be done once we have agreed on the overall range of qualifications that will be required.

Our proposals will carefully consider what range of qualifications could best support the curriculum's areas of learning and experience and its key elements. In the main we will propose that the main GCSE should continue to include many of the subjects that are currently available, rather than moving to much broader qualifications that seek to cover whole areas of learning and experience. We will also be suggesting some possible changes to subjects, to introduce some new ones and to combine existing ones. We will also identify potential opportunities for developing more integrated qualifications. In our consultation we will explain the thinking behind our proposals. A key consideration is to offer schools and learners the greatest possible flexibility to choose different combinations of qualifications to support broad and balanced curriculum experiences.

It is important to stress that the biggest potential for changes is not in the range of qualifications that learners can choose from, but in how each qualification is assessed. The overall proposed range of subjects may not look radically different to the current one, but this could still lead to some significant changes in how individual qualifications are designed and assessed.

We will expect the next generation of qualifications to:

- support learners to realise the four purposes
- give learners and centres more flexibility to shape the content they study
- encourage learners to make links across different aspects of the curriculum
- assess learners using a variety of different assessment methods

- make more use of digital technology to support more engaging and relevant assessment and learning.

Once we have agreed the range of qualifications that should be available, we will then move on to consult on the proposed design and assessment of individual qualifications, starting in autumn 2021.

4. Digital assessment

During the meeting on 17 September, in relation to assessment, you stated:

“There are a number of things that we would like to progress. These are things that we were already thinking about, but maybe they should be accelerated in the thinking. Simple things like digital assessment—online assessment through tests that are delivered on screen, can be delivered remotely, can be delivered in schools, can be delivered on demand, so that you don't have the logistical issues of trying to get 200 young people into a room with computers at the same time— are all things that we're starting to think about in a more concerted way. And they're things that we'll be looking to consult on next year.”

- ***Can you provide more detail on your thinking to date about the role of digital assessment under the future curriculum, and an indication of how it might feature in arrangements for the awarding of qualifications in 2021 (for example as part of the response to the disruption caused by COVID-19)?***

QW Response:

Qualifications to support the new curriculum are likely to be awarded for the first time in 2027. Given the pace at which digital technology is changing many aspects of day-to-day life, including teaching and learning, it is right that we consider how this might affect qualifications.

Following our next consultation, we will start to look at the detailed design and assessment of individual qualifications. As we do so we will actively look for how more digitally enabled assessment could benefit learners, centres and the whole qualifications system. These could include more positive experience of, and engagement with, teaching, learning and assessment for learners, or increased resilience, efficiency and manageability in the delivery of qualifications and assessments.

As we told the committee, when introducing any changes to the mode of assessment, there will always be a range of factors that must be considered, including:

- Manageability for schools and centres
- Delivery risk for awarding bodies
- Accessibility for all learners

In agreeing a way forward, a balance must be struck that is forward-thinking, while at the same time pragmatic and achievable.

Because of the potential benefits it could bring, our general position is to encourage and facilitate greater use of digitally enabled assessment in future qualifications. We will engage with stakeholders to explore what this could look like in practice. For example, should we aim to make digital assessment mandatory from the start, or optional to begin with? We have been looking around the world to learn from other countries that are moving to more digital assessment. For example, New Zealand has set a long-term aim for all school-leaving exams to be on-screen, but are currently in a phased transition period when learners can choose between doing a digital version or a pen-and-paper exam.

To ensure that potential benefits are realised and adverse impacts avoided, we will consider the specific changes needed at individual qualification level, through active engagement with learners, providers and awarding bodies.

As far as 2021 is concerned, we are currently working with a range of stakeholders to develop and consider a range of different possible approaches to awarding qualifications in 2021. While there are some limited instances where digital assessment could potentially play a part, we do not see it offering a solution to the immediate challenge of agreeing arrangements for 2021. A rapid and widespread shift to digital assessments would present significant delivery risks and challenges to an already difficult and uncertain situation.