



CYPE(5)-01-21 - Paper to note 9

By email

To Lynne Neagle MS,
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

22 December 2020

Dear Lynne,

Re: Qualifications Wales Annual Report 2019-20

Further to your recent letter asking for information on the actions from our annual report 2019-20 please find our response.

Our regulatory approach is to be outward-looking, so we engage, communicate and collaborate to strengthen our ability to promote public confidence in the Welsh qualifications system and to meet the needs of learners in Wales.

1. Public understanding and communication

- 1.1 Throughout 2021 we will continue to provide timely and engaging communications and stakeholder engagement activity. As we said in the committee, as part of our role as independent regulator we need to ensure that there is clear public understanding of the qualifications system. We continue to work closely with schools, colleges and other stakeholders and provide regular briefings and information to support teachers, exams officers and learners. We will also continue to work closely with the Welsh Government Communications and Policy officials and WJEC in our respective roles so there is a co-ordinated approach to communication with teachers, learners and parents about the 2021 exam series. We will include our progress with this important part of our work in our annual report for 2020-21.
- 1.2 We take a collaborative approach and draw on the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders as appropriate. We have a range of key stakeholders. Engaging with them is critical to informing our decisions. We have a number of established stakeholder groups that provide insight and advice to Qualifications Wales on a range of matters. These groups include our Head Teachers Reference Group (HTRG), Trade Union Representative Organisations (TURO) and the more recently established 2021 Stakeholder group. We also have ongoing engagement with Estyn, ADEW, WLGA and the education consortia.
- 1.3 We have learnt a lot from our experience in summer 2020. Our consultation with the public had 2,079 responses alone from learners. But we know we need to do more. In the first quarter of 2021, working with the Children's Commissioner, we will be setting up a Learner Advisory Group of 14 young people who will help us listen and learn

Qualifications Wales

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



about what is important to them. Members will all be in education and be studying a range of general and vocational qualifications and be from a range of education settings including further education, schools, external candidates, Welsh medium, and ALN learners. Members will be recruited from across Wales.

- 1.4 We will continue to publish statistical evidence, research reports and conduct our annual stakeholder survey that allows us to understand what people think about qualifications. This annual survey allows us to measure any fluctuation in public attitudes and provides information to support our work.
- 1.5 From 19 January to 31 March 2021, we will be consulting on which main qualifications should be available as part of the new curriculum. We will take a collaborative approach and draw on the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders as appropriate. We have arranged a series of webinars aimed at practitioners and schools and are working in partnership with Youth Cymru who will host focus groups with their established network of children and young people. In recognising the important voice of parents and carers we are also working with Parentkind who will host focus groups with their members on the consultation proposals for each Area of Learning and Experience.

2. Awarding in Summer 2021

- 2.1 We will produce clear, informative, targeted and timely communications, and regularly review the impact of our communications and seek to find ways to improve our approach. In recognising the importance of public opinion, we are committed to keeping the public fully informed of Qualifications Wales' activity and plans.
- 2.2 We plan to take a targeted approach to engaging with learners on social media. We will also be launching a three-month exercise through Instagram targeted at learners. We will continue to engage more widely through social media to help explain what is happening with assessments in 2021.

3. Vocational Qualifications

- 3.1 We have established a VQ stakeholder group to discuss the issues that face the work-based learning and further education sectors in delivering qualifications in 2021. The group is already playing a key role in gathering and sharing feedback from the wider sector, disseminating information and informing our decision making. The group includes representatives from Welsh Government, the National Training Federation for Wales and ColegauCymru. We also engage with the sector through attending groups such as the ColegauCymru Health and Social Care and Childcare network and their Curriculum and Quality Group as required.
- 3.2 These discussions with stakeholders have supported us and the awarding bodies in making further adaptations to qualifications which were announced before the Christmas break. These adaptations significantly reduce the assessment burden on learners and centres over the coming year.

- 3.3 We extended the adaptations for Essential Skills Wales Application of Number and Communication qualifications at Levels 1-3 which were due to expire in December until 31 August 2021.
We expect the extension to support many learners to successfully complete their apprenticeship frameworks over the coming months and relieve some of the pressure on learners and centres.
- 3.4 We have also extended the adaptations for the Health and Social Care: Core and Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development: Core qualifications from December until 31 August 2021. We worked with Social Care Wales in agreeing these adaptations to ensure they fully supported the adaptations to these qualifications which play an important part in meeting workforce requirements.
- 3.5 The Extended Extraordinary Regulatory Framework for Vocational Qualifications provides awarding bodies with a significant amount of flexibility to adapt their qualifications to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on learners. We are encouraging awarding bodies to use the full flexibilities available to them under the framework.
- 3.6 We continue to work closely with our fellow UK regulators on three-country qualifications to ensure the needs of learners in Wales are considered, and that decisions and communications are aligned. Following the Department for Education in England's announcement on 3 December, awarding bodies are considering what further adaptations may be appropriate for their qualifications and will provide further details to centres in January.
- 3.7 For Wales-only Approved vocational qualifications, in addition to the adaptations being considered for three-country qualifications we have asked WJEC to consider whether any part of the approaches set out regarding the arrangements for Approved general qualifications in summer 2021 may also be appropriate.
- 3.8 Awarding bodies and regulators will continue to respond to the feedback from centres, the developing public health situation, and any government policy decisions. Further adaptations may be possible in some qualification, but this may not be the case for many qualifications that confirm professional competence where any further changes would undermine the validity and purpose of the qualifications.

4. Continuous improvement in our communications

- 4.1 We carry out regular reviews of our work to assess the costs, benefits and risks associated with our communications and engagement activity.
- 4.2 Our internal auditors have followed up with the Communications and Engagement directorate this week and we are pleased to report that there has been progress in the areas outlined for improvement. These areas included updating the Communications Strategy and implementing an internal communications plan and tracking process within the communications team.

4.3 We will continue to monitor and improve our communications and engagement activity as a priority. The auditors will return in March 2021 to further evaluate impact and progress of operations, and we will report on progress in our next annual report.

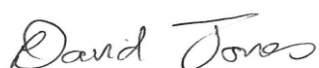
5. Restoring standards

5.1 Our immediate focus now is on arrangements for 2021. Alongside this we will work with WJEC, other awarding bodies and our fellow regulators to establish a path that restores standards post-COVID. Apart from the technical work which will need to be completed, we understand that we will also need to include work to secure public understanding of any approaches taken, as well as public acceptability of the principles. These will not be simple things to achieve and we will need to continue to consider stakeholder views as an important part of this process. We will report on progress in our next Annual Report.

5.2 Our decisions will continue to have regard to comparable qualifications, maintaining a common path with other UK jurisdictions (or whether awarded in Europe or elsewhere) so that we stay in step with the expectations of learners, employers, higher education institutions and the professions regarding education and training.

Thank you for your continued support, and we wish you a Merry Christmas and New Year and look forward to working with you in 2021.

Yours sincerely,



David B Jones OBE DL
Chair



Philip Blaker
Chief Executive