

## **Enterprise and Business Committee 28 February 2013**

### **Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales**

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## **1. The Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales**

**1.1** The Review of Qualifications for 14 to-19-year-olds in Wales was launched in September 2011. It was led by a Review Board appointed in November 2011. The Chair was Huw Evans OBE and the Board was composed of external members, including two employers, two headteachers, FE principals, practitioners from work-based learning provision and higher education, and Welsh Government officials. One headteacher was from the Welsh medium sector, and several Board members were Welsh speakers.

**1.2** The Review's task was to consider how best to achieve the vision of 'qualifications that are understood and valued and meet the needs of our young people and the Welsh economy'. The Review was prompted by a number of concerns about the complexity of the current system, the extent to which it is understood, and the relevance, value and rigour of some qualifications.

**1.3** The Review was based firmly on evidence and discussion with stakeholder groups. On 28 November 2012, the Board submitted its final report and recommendations to Ministers. On 5 December the Minister for Education and Skills announced his acceptance of the proposal in recommendation five: the establishment of Qualifications Wales, and on 29 January 2013 the Deputy Minister for Skills announced the Welsh Government's broad acceptance of the remaining forty-one recommendations.

## **2. Vocational qualifications**

**2.1** The Review of Qualifications will impact positively on vocational qualifications in Wales. The Review Board gave its support to vocational education, noting that high-quality, relevant vocational qualifications should be recognised on a par with equivalent general qualifications. The Board also acknowledged the important role of vocational qualifications in engaging young learners. The proposed revised, more rigorous Welsh Baccalaureate model supports both vocational and general qualifications, ensuring that learners will receive the same Welsh Baccalaureate qualification at each level irrespective of whether they pursue a general, vocational or combined pathway.

**2.2** The main concerns relating to vocational qualifications raised during the course of the Review will be addressed through implementation of the recommendations. These are summarised below.

### **3. A need for clarity over the purpose of qualifications**

**3.1** A lack of clarity over the purpose of qualifications has led to young people and providers making choices based on factors other than the relevance and value of qualifications. Some young people have been taking qualifications that were not developed for this age range, for example 14 to 16-year-olds taking competence-based qualifications designed for adults already in the workplace. This in turn has had a negative impact on the perception of vocational qualifications in general.

**3.2** Vocational qualifications are, and will continue to be, offered primarily on a three-country basis. This is because they are based on National Occupational Standards, with little need for variation between countries within the UK. However, the Review recommends that vocational qualifications in Wales should be identified as being in one of the two following categories:

- Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) is general or vocational education and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life. It *does not* lead to occupational competence.
- Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) is education and training after initial education and training, or after entry into working life, for instance to improve or update knowledge or skills or acquire new skills for a career move. It *does* lead to occupational competence.

**3.3** The Review recommended that, for learners at 14 to 16, only IVETs should be available as these will provide a general introduction to an industry sector, supporting the principle of a broad and balanced curriculum at this phase. Both categories should be available as appropriate at post 16. Moving from IVETs to CVETs should be recognised as progression for the learner even where learning remains at level 2.

**3.4** Adopting these definitions, widely used across Europe, should bring clarity and coherence to vocational qualifications provision and aid progression, reducing duplication of learning and the frustration sometimes felt by learners who remain at level 2. We expect to be able to label qualifications in the system as either IVET or CVET by the end of 2013.

### **4. Measurement of performance**

**4.1** Measurement of performance in this context is about reporting on the performance of providers rather than measuring an individual learner's achievement.

**4.2** Currently, some vocational qualifications taken at 14 to 16 are worth up to six GCSEs in performance terms. The current system of equivalences between qualifications can mislead learners into thinking certain qualifications may be highly relevant and more useful than they prove to be later in life, based on an over-inflated equivalence value.

**4.3** The Review concluded that some of the current equivalences are not credible and distort the qualification choices offered and promoted. Misperceptions of the real worth of some qualifications can lead learners to make poor choices and, in turn, to negative views of some qualifications based on expectations linked to over-inflated equivalences.

**4.4** The Review Board therefore recommended the introduction of a limit of equivalence to two GCSEs in performance terms per qualification, even where the stated size of a qualification is larger than 2 GCSEs. It also recommended the introduction of a limit of 40% on the contribution of non-GCSEs to the level 1 and level 2 thresholds and to external qualifications in the Welsh Baccalaureate at 14 to 16. More or larger vocational qualifications could still be taught where they meet the needs of individual learners, but would not count towards performance measures in the same way as they do now. This should remove the incentives for schools to encourage take-up of vocational qualifications that attract heavy weighting in performance terms but that are not always in the best interest of learners. It should also encourage the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

## **5. A need for a strengthened qualifications gate-keeping and quality assurance process**

**5.1** Qualifications go through a dual process prior to mainstream delivery: accreditation onto a regulatory qualifications framework, and approval as being eligible for public funding. Qualifications approved for teaching in Wales and eligible for public funding are listed on the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales (DAQW). In January 2012, there were over 10,400 qualifications on DAQW for the 14 to 19 age group, a number that increases year on year. The majority of these are vocational qualifications. The vast majority of the Review's consultation respondents agreed that the number of qualifications at 14 to 19 should be reduced.

**5.2** The current systems do include some checks relating to the relevance and value of qualifications. However, only limited information regarding purpose, relevance and value of qualifications are asked of Awarding Organisations in relation to vocational qualifications submissions and these are not related to age-specific questions.

**5.3** The Review recommends that a strengthened gate-keeping process be introduced, which is likely to have a significant impact on the provision of vocational qualifications for the 14 to 19 age range. The Review concluded that the principles of relevance (seen in terms of progression to next-stage education or employment) and value (seen in terms of broader educational benefit for the learner) should underpin the accreditation and approval process for qualifications for the 14 to 19 age group. The recommendations relating to these gate-keeping processes assume an evidence-based approach to establishing relevance and value, drawing on a number of sources including the stated purpose of the qualification, subject specifications and occupational standards. A more robust gateway process is likely to result in fewer, but higher quality, qualifications being available to learners aged 14 to 19 in Wales, particularly at 14 to 16, which, in turn, could lead to improved understanding, awareness and perceptions of vocational qualifications.

**5.4** Awarding Organisations should be asked to submit a more detailed justification for qualifications at point of submission to the Welsh Government. As well as placing responsibility on Awarding Organisations, this will also offer an evidence base that can be scrutinised by stakeholders in the relevance and value checks and by regulators in quality assurance activities.

**5.5** The Review's recommendations relating to the gate-keeping process includes a role for Sector Skills Councils/Organisations (SSCs/SSOs) (or other appropriate employer/sector bodies) to carry out a relevance rating of vocational qualifications, based on set criteria. Where SSCs/SSOs are not deemed to be the most appropriate organisation, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) will liaise with alternative sector bodies such as trade associations or business and training federations to gather views on the relevance criteria.

**5.6** Rather than basing decisions solely on the opinions of SSCs/SSOs, this information will be considered by Sector Qualifications Advisory Panels. These panels are yet to be established, but they will need to be appropriately representative, including representation by end users and practitioners. These panels will initially focus on informing choices on which qualifications should be deemed as being eligible for funding in Wales but will in time inform both accreditation and approval processes. Other key stakeholders will also be invited to determine which qualifications are considered relevant to educational progression or related employment. A number of sources of information should be used to triangulate evidence and opinion.

**5.7** Contact has been established between DfES and all Sector Leads within Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science (BETS) to raise awareness of the qualifications agenda. Further meetings will take place to discuss how best to involve BETS Sector Panels in the process of ensuring the relevance of qualifications.

**5.8** As well as stronger gate-keeping activity, other quality assurance activities will be reviewed in order to focus on the relevance and value of qualifications and check that assertions relating to progression and purpose made by Awarding Organisations at the point of submission to the Welsh Government have actually transpired. Quality assurance activities can address any specific areas of concern raised by the Sector Qualifications Advisory Panels and can also feed findings back into the Panels to inform future approval work.

## **6. Meeting the needs of employers**

**6.1** Meeting the needs of end users, be they employers or next stage education providers, is seen as the lynchpin of a strengthened qualification gateway process as described in the previous section. The Welsh Government intends to ask Awarding Organisations to supply evidence of the inclusion of employers or next stage education providers in the development of qualifications and to provide evidence relating to the progression routes available for candidates after successfully gaining the qualification.

**6.2** The proposed Sector Qualification Advisory Panels described above will include employer representatives and will consider information supplied by SSCs/SSOs relating to the needs of employers. Many of the employers consulted as part of the Review expressed the view that they were less concerned about the specifics of the actual qualifications delivered to 14 to 19 year olds than with employing a ‘well rounded’ young person with a good standard of literacy, numeracy and social skills. This will be tackled by ensuring that all learning at 14 to 19 will take place within a broader programme of learning i.e. the Welsh BaccaLaureate (see page 11).

## **7. Meeting the needs of Higher Education**

**7.1.** Awarding Organisations will be expected to provide evidence of progression relating to their qualifications, including evidence of progression from vocational qualifications to Higher Education, where appropriate. In order to address some concerns raised regarding vocational qualifications’ ability to prepare learners for Higher Education study, any vocational qualification with a stated purpose of progression to Higher Education, written, externally marked assessment should form a significant part of the assessment method.

## **8. European alignment**

**8.1** The Review of Qualifications report stresses the need for the ability to benchmark qualifications delivered in Wales against other international qualifications in order to ensure the portability of qualifications. It also notes that there may be scope for consolidating the alignment of our system with Scotland, Wales and other European countries.

**8.2** The ‘Bruges Communiqué 2010 sets out 22 short term deliverables which provide the road map for Vocational Education and Training (VET) for the next ten years for Member States. It assists in providing overarching aims for VET in Wales and aligns us to the 27 member states who signed up to the Copenhagen Declaration of 29-30 November 2002. The Copenhagen process ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/vocational-education/copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/vocational-education/copenhagen_en.htm)) is the umbrella term used to describe all the European agreements that aim to develop VET in member states. Some of the objectives refer to stakeholder engagement in developing VET. Benefits of aligning IVET and CVET include:

- A global vision for vocational education and training in 2020.
- High quality initial VET (I-VET) which learners, parents and society at large may regard as an appealing option, of the same value as general education. C-VET should equip learners with both key competences and specific vocational skills.
- Easily accessible and career-oriented continuing VET (C-VET) for employees, employers, independent entrepreneurs and unemployed people, which facilitates both competence development and career changes.

In addition, the Qualification and Regulation Division is working towards implementing the European quality cycle.

**8.3** The following summarises the European VET initiatives:

- European Quality Assurance for VET (EQAVET) is a community of practice bringing together member states, employers, trade unions and the European Commission to promote European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET by using the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. Quality assurance initiatives have been developing on a European basis for some time and EQAVET has brought together quality assurance initiatives since 2010. The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET builds on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Credit system for VET (ECVET) and previous European quality assurance systems.
- The EQF was adapted in 2008 to make qualifications systems in the EU countries more transparent with the view that business, learning providers, learners and workers will find that their ambitions for mobility and recognition will be easier to achieve. Particularly significant was the desire of business sectors for a translation device to aid the understanding of the different national qualifications systems. The EQF aims to promote lifelong learning, make qualifications across Europe easier to understand, clarify the training systems across Europe and encourage the integration of the European labour market.
- The aim of ECVET is to facilitate the mobility of the workforce in VET across Europe. It has been tested in pilot projects across the European Union with the intention of extending its application gradually to a wider range of VET qualifications, either existing or new as part of the Education and Training 2020 initiative.
- European Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO) is in the early stages of development and is being developed and tested for the first time in 2012. The idea is to link all the national data systems for describing the occupations in the national labour markets and the skills and competences needed for jobs. It is hoped that this will help employers state their job vacancies in a way that can be understood in other countries and in a way that job seekers can understand in terms of their own ambitions and their knowledge, skills and competences. To do this there is a need to create a European classification that can link skills/competences, qualifications and occupations. Our National Occupational Standards (NOS) are important for this.

## **9. Reducing the number of approved qualifications in Wales**

**9.1** An incremental approach is being taken to the introduction of revised processes in order to trial, evaluate and refine on an ongoing basis. Some activities were undertaken during the course of the Review and in the period between the publication of the report and the Deputy Minister's response to the recommendations. Findings from these activities are informing the implementation plan.

**9.2** As part of the Review, and in conjunction with Awarding Organisations, some qualifications were removed from DAQW for the 14 to 16 and 16 to 19 age groups. A variety of methods was used, including removing qualifications that are not included in an apprenticeship framework and have not been offered in schools and FE colleges for 2012/13 or in the last two academic years (not including new

qualifications). This has resulted in the removal of 3,000 qualifications for 14 to 19 year olds. However, there are significantly more qualifications still available on DAQW than anticipated following the cleansing process due to a high number of these being contested by Awarding Organisations.

## **10. Sector Studies**

**10.1** As part of the Review, four Sector Studies were carried out by external consultants [in ICT, Care, Engineering and Travel/Tourism.] The aim of the studies was to pilot the production of Sector Qualification Priorities Lists across a number of sectors. Each study produced a report which informed the criteria for prioritising the qualifications used in Wales. The sector studies were cross-sectoral and involved engagement with key stakeholders including FE, HE and employers.

## **11. Sector Qualifications Priority pilot**

**11.1** During October and November 2012, DfES took advantage of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills Universal Services contract arrangements with SSC/SSOs, to trial a Sector Qualification Priority (SQP) activity based on criteria produced as a result of the sector studies.

**11.2** The overall aim of the pilot SSC/O SQP activity was to assess the relevance of qualifications available to learners in Wales in relation to entry to the appropriate sector. This was pilot activity and, as such, the cut of data supplied to SSC/SSOs was by no means perfect. The spreadsheets contained qualifications for sector-specific vocational qualifications, pan-sector vocational qualifications, and general qualifications listed on DAQW.

**11.3** In light of the remit of the Review of Qualifications in Wales for 14-19 year olds, this particular activity concentrated on Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. Therefore, on this occasion SSC/Os were not asked to review Entry Level qualifications, nor any qualifications on DAQW for Levels 1, 4, 5, 6 or 7. The number of pan-sector qualifications was also significantly limited.

**11.4** The SQP activity was not intended to create a new list of qualifications, but to gather together data from a range of sources, to review the existing list of qualifications available on DAQW. The involvement of SSC/SSOs was not to invite them to make decisions on which qualifications would be funded, but to inform officials on which qualifications SSC/Os consider to be relevant and valued and to offer comment on the draft criteria and methodology.

**11.5** Following completion of the activity we were able to create an internal database which can now be searched to determine:

- All Essential/Desirable qualifications by SSC/SSOs.
- Priority qualifications identified by SSC/SSOs by identifying which offer: Progression in to FE/HE/Employment/Training; or License to Practice.
- A definitive list of subject sector codes linked to SSC/SSO responses.

- Lists of any "missing" qualifications identified by SSC/SSOs (may have been deleted from DAQW, never submitted for use in Wales, or incorrectly categorised by Awarding Organisation). Further work will be required to resolve these issues.
- Pan-sector qualifications considered essential or desirable per sector.
- GQs considered essential or desirable per sector.
- Gap analysis/market failure.
- Identified duplicate qualifications.
- Qualifications used in Apprenticeships/Pathways.
- Which criteria were left blank by SSC/SSOs, indicating we may need to consider other organisations to complete these fields.

**11.6** Feedback from the SSC/SSOs on the SQP pilot referred to above, indicated that they struggled capacity-wise with a "one-off" exercise of this size, and they would prefer to spread the task over the year if possible. Therefore, DfES intends to utilise its Grant In Aid contribution to UKCES Universal Services in 2013/14 to further refine the SQP activity trials:

- In April 2013 – all SSC/Os will be provided with access to the newly created SQP database for Wales. They will be asked to review/check/endorse all qualifications listed for their sectors.
- In April 2013 – SSC/Os will also be provided with lists of unseen sectoral Level 1, 4, 5, 6 quals on DAQW. SSC/Os will be asked to apply the revised Relevance/Value Criteria to these qualifications.
- On a monthly basis – SSC/SSOs will be provided with a list of all new vocational qualifications, general qualifications and Pan-sector qualifications submitted to DfES, to endorse against revised Relevance/Value criteria.

## **12. ICT Sector data analysis**

**12.1** The overall aim of this small-scale study is to suggest useful combinations of data in relation to ICT qualifications currently available in Wales. The consultant will suggest combinations of data fields from the draft ICT Sector Qualifications Priority list that could provide the Welsh Government with useful information (linked to accreditation, approval and funding, for example). The study will also compare the ICT findings with other data and reports relating to ICT qualifications, such as the ICT Sector Study noted above and reports submitted by the ICT Curriculum Managers within FE Colleges in Wales on courses currently offered in the FE sector. Hopefully, this study will suggest a methodology for analysing similar data across other sectors.

## **13. Gate-keeping**

**13.1** Some immediate steps are being taken to strengthen the process of approving qualifications as being eligible for funding in Wales, such as trialling the involvement of the Care Council for Wales in judging the fitness for purpose of proposed qualifications for specific age ranges in its sector. It is also intended to introduce the IVETs and CVETs categories as soon as possible. Further significant changes will require consultation with Awarding Organisations.



**13.2** Decisions regarding the approval of qualifications still lie with the Welsh Government. Until the appropriate Sector Qualifications Advisory Panels can be established, Welsh Government Officials are carrying out high level scrutiny of the pending qualifications submitted to DAQW on a monthly basis.

**13.3** In order to trial how sector bodies can feed into this process, an activity with the Care sector is being piloted. Each month, a list of pending Health and Care related qualifications submitted to DAQW for approval is sent to the Care Council for Wales (CCfW) for comments.

**13.4** We request that CCfW review the list and return to us in its existing spreadsheet format, with comments in the appropriate highlighted columns. As part of this process, the relevance criteria we ask them to consider are:

1. Is the qualification essential/desirable for entry in to the sector?
2. Does the qualification allow progression to FE/HE/Employment/Training?
3. Is the qualification intended for use on an Apprenticeship Framework?
4. Is the qualification a licence to practice?
5. Is the qualification an IVET or a CVET?
6. Are the subject codes and purposes accurate, and if so, which age groups is the qualification suitable for?

We will evaluate this process to date by end of April 2013.

## **14. Wider impact on vocational qualifications**

**14.1** While the review and its recommendations relate specifically to qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds, there will be a wider impact on post 19 qualifications. The principles of an evidence-based gate-keeping process will underpin all qualifications and a focus on fitness for purpose of qualifications for specific age ranges should ensure that post 19 qualifications will be purposeful and not faced with the negative messages about them that has been the result of these qualifications being delivered in an inappropriate context. Clearer progression routes should also enable post-19 learners to build on an appropriate qualification basis at 14 to 19.

**14.2** A reduced number of qualifications would also greatly aid Welsh medium provision, as support for the most relevant qualifications could be prioritised.

**14.3** It is anticipated that the data from the SQP activity will prove useful to other divisions across the Welsh Government. Officials are working with the Funding Policy Team within DfES to triangulate our evidence on qualifications considered relevant and valued by different groups of stakeholders. Where there is correlation between the views of SSC/Os, employers, sector panels, and delivery partners, we should be able to make clearer decisions on which qualifications should be included within learning area programmes and apprenticeship pathways, and therefore eligible for public funding.

**14.4** This data is also of interest to colleagues within BETS, when reviewing the skills and qualification requirements within the nine priority sectors within Wales.

## 15. Communication

**15.1** The value of vocational qualifications is not universally appreciated, and the proposed communications strategy should address this by promoting a better understanding of the role and relevance of vocational qualifications. As well as their intrinsic value, vocational, and particularly hands-on qualifications, can motivate and engage some learners who might otherwise lose interest in education.

## 16. General Qualifications

**16.1** On the whole, the Review found that there was widespread support for retaining the GCSE and A level brands.

**16.2** The Review found that A levels are well respected and that the public have confidence in them. The review's findings were largely consistent with the findings of research commissioned by the three regulators to consider whether A levels are 'Fit for Purpose' and which reported in April 2012.

*"Overall, A levels were viewed positively by all the research audiences. Generally, those associated with higher education and teachers agreed that the A level qualification prepares most students for higher education undergraduate degrees. Employers said they select A level school leavers because they have met the right level of academic achievement".*

*(Ipsos Mori Report (2012): Fit for Purpose? The view of the higher education sector, teachers and employers on the suitability of A levels, page 3.)*

**16.3** Stakeholders suggested some improvements which could be made to A levels and the Welsh Government will be considering those suggestions within the wider context of A level reform in England and Wales.

**16.4** As with A levels, the Review Board found that GCSEs are well respected and that the public generally have confidence in them. The Board certainly didn't consider that GCSEs are 'broken' but did find that that certain GCSE need developing.

**16.5** In particular, some employers and representatives from HEIs did not feel that current GCSEs in English Language/Welsh First Language and Mathematics are reliable indicators of appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy. For example, some employers and universities consider that grade C, or even above, does not guarantee sufficient literacy or numeracy.

*"At present qualifications in Wales do not give employers sufficient confidence in the skills of young people, particularly literacy, numeracy and employability skills"*

*Federation of Small Businesses*

**16.6** To address this issue, the Review of Qualifications recommended that for first teaching from September 2015:

- revised GCSEs in English Language and Welsh First Language should be developed; and
- that two new mathematics GCSEs, one covering numeracy and the other covering aspects of mathematics techniques to be developed for first teaching from September 2015.

**16.7** Together, it is expected that these new GCSEs will provide employers and HE with better information about the literacy and numeracy skills of their potential employees.

## **17. The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification**

**17.1** The Review of Qualifications sets out a number of recommendations to build on and improve the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. In accepting the Report's recommendations, Ministers have made clear their expectation that there should be a more rigorous Welsh Baccalaureate.

The changes to the Welsh Baccalaureate should address the concerns identified by the Review of Qualifications. This will include:

- changing the assessment method for some elements
- removing unnecessary repetition of learning or assessment
- improving awareness and understanding of the Welsh Baccalaureate
- strengthening the reputation of the Welsh Baccalaureate
- introducing grading to increase rigour- Advanced level will be graded from September 2013
- increasing the level of demand

**17.2** The report also recommends that the Welsh Government should encourage universal take up of the Welsh Baccalaureate and that it should, in time, become the basis of headline performance measures. Universal adoption was felt to be the best way of providing a broad and balanced general education at 14 to 16 and a coherent programme of learning at 16-19. Making attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate the headline performance measure will go some way to encouraging fuller take up. It will also be necessary to consider how funding mechanisms might contribute to the aim of universal take up. Improving the qualification, its perception and its recognition by Higher Education Institutions and employers will also be important factors.

**17.3** The model set out in the Report of the Review of Qualifications is a starting point for further development. We will work with delivery partners and other stakeholders to develop the model. A steering group has been established to oversee the development of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. This group met for the first time on 5 February. The group has representation from a range of stakeholders. Amongst the issues that the Steering Group will need to consider in developing the model are whether science should be included in the Essential Qualifications requirement, as well as English Language/Welsh First Language and Numeracy. This issue has already been raised by some stakeholders.

**17.4** The model set out in the Report of the Review of Qualifications emphasises the importance of skills. These will be incorporated within the Core for pre 16 learners

and will feature in both the Core and the revised Essential Skills Wales for post 16 learners.

**17.5** To note Simon Thomas AM has raised questions about limiting vocational qualifications that count towards the level 1 and 2 performance thresholds and to the “Supporting External Qualifications” requirement of the National and National Foundation level WBQ. In both cases recommendation 39 of the RoQ limits the contribution to 40%. However, as set out in paragraph 4.4, more or larger vocational qualifications could still be taught where they meet the needs of individual learners. This is felt to be the appropriate curriculum balance for young people.