



Buffy Williams, MS,

Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee

Senedd Cymru

27 November 2025

Dear Buffy,

Re: Letter to Qualifications Wales regarding implementation of education reforms

Thank you for your letter, dated 20 October 2025, regarding the implementation of education reforms in Wales. In this letter, I respond to each of your queries in turn.

GCSE Geography

As the regulator of publicly-funded qualifications in Wales, we set Approval Criteria for all priority qualifications designed for 14-19 year olds. Approval Criteria set out our minimum requirements for a qualification, generally including an outline of aspects of its content and assessment. Approval Criteria are used by an awarding body who intends to develop the qualification. Approval Criteria are intended to allow scope for an awarding body to develop the detailed qualification content and assessment requirements so they do not detail all content that may be included.

We worked with a range of stakeholders, including subject experts and practitioners, to co-create the requirements in the Approval Criteria for the new Made-for-Wales Geography GCSE. We consulted on the draft design requirements in Autumn 2022. We carefully considered all feedback before publishing the final version of the [Approval Criteria](#) in June 2023. When developing the Approval Criteria, we also gave careful consideration to the Statements of What Matter and Descriptions of Learning in the National Framework for the Curriculum for Wales.

In line with the intended scope of Approval Criteria, the requirements for GCSE Geography focus on broad geographical concepts that must be covered in the qualification, such as 'place', 'diversity' and 'environment'. The Approval Criteria do not include (or exclude) specific content, such as plate tectonics and ecosystems. We are

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of the view that including this level of prescription in Approval Criteria would limit the flexibility for awarding bodies to develop their own qualifications, and would go beyond our remit as a qualifications regulator.

Whilst plate tectonics and ecosystems do not specifically appear in the new specification for GCSE Geography, there are numerous opportunities for learners to consider human impact, inequality and management of geographical events. As outlined in the Approval Criteria, the aims of the new qualification include:

- Demonstrate a geographical viewpoint on values, attitudes and perspectives surrounding the interrelationships between people and their environment
- Appreciate the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies and their interactions with diverse and dynamic physical landscapes
- Foster a curiosity to explore geographical causes, effects and consequences.

Building on these aims, there are content requirements for learners to demonstrate geographical knowledge and understanding of factors affecting geographical events and how environment, people and places adapt over time and scale.

Throughout the Approval Process, we carefully considered compliance against the requirements in the Approval Criteria. We also sought views about how the qualification had been developed from subject experts who were part of our Approval Panel. The Approval Panel for Geography included individuals who are members of the Geographical Association and have significant expertise and experience in this area. We are confident that the new Geography GCSE achieves these aims and incorporates the content requirements effectively.

Tectonic Landscapes and Hazards is an optional theme in the GCSE Geography specification that was available for teaching prior to September 2025. This means that not all learners will have studied this topic in depth before progressing onto AS and A level study. The AS and A level qualifications have been designed to account for this.

WJEC are currently undertaking a targeted review of Approved AS and A levels in Wales to check whether changes to GCSEs require amendments to AS and A levels. They will also check that content is up-to-date. As the GCSEs were designed to support progression to the current range of approved AS and A levels, we do not anticipate significant changes will be needed in the majority of subjects. However, if gaps or inconsistencies are identified, then WJEC will amend the AS and A level specifications accordingly, and submit them to us for approval. If WJEC identify that amendments are required in Geography, an amended specification will be published in September 2026, in readiness for first teaching from September 2027. This will be when the first cohort of learners studying the new Geography GCSE will reach post-16.

GCSE Natural History

We do not currently have plans to develop Approval Criteria for a Made-for-Wales GCSE in Natural History. In 2021, we [consulted](#) on the range of GCSE qualifications that should be made available to support the Curriculum for Wales. Although we did not specifically gather feedback on whether or not to develop a Natural History GCSE, we did not receive any feedback that suggested there was a missed opportunity or demand for such a qualification in Wales.

We will monitor the planned development of a GCSE in Natural History in England. Once developed, if an awarding body wishes to make it available in Wales, they will be able to apply to us for designation. To be designated in Wales, the qualification will need to comply with our [Designation Policy](#). To comply with this policy, the qualification will need to be available in both English and Cymraeg, and must not undermine any of our Made-for-Wales, approved qualifications.

From September 2027, schools will be able to offer a [VCSE](#) and/or a [Foundation qualification](#) in Nature Restoration, and [Skills for Life](#) units in areas such as 'Skills in the Natural Environment' and 'Sustainability in Action'. The specifications for these qualifications are currently being developed by awarding bodies and will be available from September 2026.

I hope that this information is helpful. If you would like any further information or to discuss the content of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me on Philip.blaker@qualifications.wales

Yours Sincerely,



Philip Blaker

Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales