



## FOA Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

[SeneddChildren@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddChildren@senedd.wales)

16<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Dear Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee,

I am writing in regard to the decision to no longer offer Sociology GCSE as an option for learners in Wales from 2026 and the impact of this removal of an opportunity to learn about issues which are highly relevant to contemporary social challenges.

The AQA Sociology GCSE is currently offered as a 'designated' GCSE in Wales, however under the new system, Qualifications Wales have deemed it to be too similar to the new approved Social Studies GCSE, and have therefore decided it will no longer be available as a 'designated' GCSE from September 2026.

Concerns were first raised with me in March 2025 by members of my Youth Advisory Panel, and I have since received over 20 individual letters from young people who are current or recent students of Sociology GCSE, as well as approaches from current teachers of Sociology GCSE from Swansea and from Newport.

The concerns include:

- the lack of sociological theoretical content and academic rigour within the proposed Social Studies GCSE which is intended to replace the Sociology GCSE offer, and hence it not offering as strong a pathway to Sociology A Level or beyond, and thereby disadvantaging Welsh students compared to English counterparts
- the lack of clear explanation for why Sociology GCSE could not continue to be offered as an option alongside the new qualification
- weakness of the initial consultation on the proposed changes, which perhaps did not make it sufficiently clear that the proposed Social Studies GCSE would effectively replace the Sociology GCSE and only received 12 responses.

I have since written to WJEC, Qualifications Wales and more recently, to the Cabinet Secretary for Education. And I have included my correspondence to the latter two in this letter. Whilst the responses I have received have offered a more in-

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*Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.*

*We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.*



**Comisiynydd  
Plant Cymru**

Children's  
Commissioner  
for Wales

depth explanation into the decision-making progress, and whilst I welcome the further funding to Adnodd and WJEC for support for Wave 2 of the GCSES (including Social Studies), I remain concerned that the initial consultation on the proposed changes did not provide ample opportunity for engagement and was therefore not reflective of learners' views.

I am also concerned about the lack of time available for teachers to effectively prepare to teach the new Social Studies GCSE, with the specification only having been published in Dec 2025, and a discussion meeting happening in March 2025, this leaving virtually no INSET days available for preparing to teach an entirely new course.

I would be grateful if you would consider this as an issue to be examined in more depth by the committee, and in doing so, I encourage this process to be paused and to be postponed by an academic year, enabling teachers to be more fully prepared for what is a very different course to the one which it is replacing.

I would hope that this time could also allow for further and more meaningful consultation with teachers and most importantly learners.

Yours sincerely,

Rocio Cifuentes MBE  
Children's Commissioner for Wales

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Dear Cabinet Secretary,

I am writing to share my growing concerns about the decision to remove Sociology as a GCSE option for learners in Wales from September 2026, which I fear will impact detrimentally on Welsh learners, leaving them disadvantaged compared to English counterparts. I have already written to and met with both Qualifications Wales and WJEC, however I am not reassured by their response, hence this letter.

These concerns were first raised with me in March 2025 by young members of my Youth Advisory Panel, and I have since received over 20 individual letters from young people who are current or recent students of Sociology GCSE, as well as approaches from current teachers of Sociology GCSE from Swansea and from Newport.

Initial concerns were threefold: firstly, around the lack of sociological theoretical content and academic rigour within the proposed Social Studies GCSE which is intended to replace the Sociology GCSE offer, and hence it not offering as strong a pathway to Sociology A Level or beyond, and thereby disadvantaging Welsh students compared to English counterparts; secondly, and based on the strength of the first concern, around the lack of clear explanation for why Sociology GCSE could not continue to be offered as an option alongside the new qualification; and thirdly, around the weakness of the initial consultation on the proposed changes, which perhaps did not make it sufficiently clear that the proposed Social Studies GCSE would effectively replace the Sociology GCSE and only received 12 responses.

I took these concerns to both WJEC and Qualifications Wales in March 2025 and met with them subsequently in July 2025. I understand the importance of ensuring that exams in Wales more closely reflect the National Curriculum for Wales, and the need to ensure that all exams publicly available are available bilingually. However, my discussions with WJEC and Qualifications Wales suggested a lack of clarity as to the locus of decision making on the issue. WJEC indicated they would like to be able to offer both qualifications and could potentially translate an English qualification to ensure Welsh language compliance, however they felt constrained in their ability to do so by the Qualifications Wales/ Welsh Government policy framework which they felt discouraged offering two similar qualifications. My discussion with Qualifications Wales implied that it was up to WJEC and came down to a business decision.

Whilst I was not assured during my discussions about the rationale for the change itself, I have recently become even more concerned about the proposed timescales for this change to take place, which appear to leave very limited time for teachers to be adequately

prepared to teach a whole new proposed course by September 2026. I understand that while the specification for the new course was published in September 2025, no further resources were published until today 17<sup>th</sup> December 2025. It is my understanding that only one online meeting has taken place in November 2025 to introduce the new course to teachers, and that a further meeting is planned for March 2026. I am aware of strong concerns from teachers about this leaving an unacceptably short window to prepare to teach students this course from September 2026.

I am aware that similar concerns around proposed changes to History GCSE and Science GCSEs have been listened to and have resulted in a delay to the proposed introduction of new qualifications. I would urge you to at the very least press pause on this process and postpone by an academic year the date by which the proposed changes to Sociology/Social Studies are intended to take effect. This would enable teachers to more fully prepare for what is a very different course to the one which it is replacing. Furthermore, I would hope that this time could also allow for further and more meaningful consultation with teachers and learners about the proposed changes.

I am writing as Children's Commissioner to highlight these concerns which as mentioned have been raised with me directly by children and young people who are concerned about the potential removal of an opportunity to learn about issues which are highly relevant to contemporary social challenges, and to be taught by experienced teachers with adequate resources to deliver this course.

As a former student and teacher of Sociology myself, I have a deep understanding of as well as sympathy with these concerns, and would like to see the teaching of sociology protected for the benefit of learners in Wales.

I look forward to your response,

Diolch yn fawr

Rocio Cifuentes

C.C Philip Blaker, Qualifications Wales

Ian Morgan, WJEC

Dear Philip

I have been contacted by a number of professionals as well as more than 20 learners, including members of my young people's advisory group, following the recent publication of consultation findings related to the National 14-16 qualifications.

The concerns relate to the removal of Sociology as a GCSE option from September 2026.

Those who have taught or studied this topic as a GCSE speak passionately about the impact that this sort of subject can have on their critical thinking and analysis skills, and their wider world view. In short, of all the topics studied in our secondary schools, Sociology has to be one of the most aligned with the ethos of the Curriculum for Wales.

Whilst there is to be a new GCSE Social Studies course, those with experience of the details of the Sociology course have highlighted a large number of valuable areas, including core sociological concepts and theories, that do not appear to be covered at all in the new course, based on the information currently available. Concern has also been raised at students being at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers should they pursue Sociology at KS5 without having had the foundation of the KS4 course. This is particularly a concern because of the perceived lack of equivalent academic rigour in the proposed Social Studies course.

The young people who have reached out to me do not feel that their experiences are being listened to and acted upon.

Teachers who have contacted me speak of the importance and rising popularity of this subject, with one of the schools having a current cohort of 100 learners aged 14-16-year-olds within their department.

Although I am aware of consultations on the wide suite of qualifications, I would urge you to take stock of this feedback, to review the specification with this in mind, and also to listen to experienced teachers' views on this.

I understand that there were similar concerns raised about the new History specification, which were listened to and able to be accommodated through a revised specification. Although this meant a one year delay in introducing the new course, I would feel this to be proportionate if it results in a better end product that will best prepare students for further study in this popular and important subject area as part of the wider ethos of the Curriculum for Wales.

I would be happy to meet to discuss this further and explore the options at this crucial juncture. Please contact my Executive Support Assistant Ceirios Chesters if you are happy to arrange a meeting; [Ceirios.chesters@childcomwales.org.uk](mailto:Ceirios.chesters@childcomwales.org.uk) or 01792 765600.

Yours sincerely

cc. Ian Morgan, Chief Executive of WJEC

Lynne Neagle AS/MS  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref LN/01484/25

Rocio Cifuentes  
Children's Commissioner for Wales  
[Natasha.Gorton@childcomwales.org.uk](mailto:Natasha.Gorton@childcomwales.org.uk)

30 January 2026

Dear Rocio,

Thank you for your letter dated 18 December, raising your concerns and those of your Youth Advisory Panel that Sociology GCSE will no longer be available in Wales from 2026.

The Welsh Ministers' functions relating to the regulation of qualifications and oversight of Wales's qualifications system were repealed in 2015 with the establishment of Qualifications Wales. As the independent regulator of qualifications (up to degree level) in Wales, Qualifications Wales has responsibility for regulating qualifications, setting the criteria for qualification approval, commissioning new qualifications and restricting the range of qualifications offered, including at GCSE and A Level. It also has responsibility for the recognition and regulation of awarding bodies in Wales. WJEC, as the awarding body for approved GCSEs and A Levels, has responsibility for the administration of these qualifications.

I note that you have both written to and met with Qualifications Wales and WJEC to raise and discuss your concerns with them. In the context of this engagement, I understand that Qualifications Wales has provided further detail in respect of the decisions it has taken as part of the programme of work it is leading to introduce a new National Suite of 14-16 qualifications. To recap, in October 2021, Qualifications Wales published their [decision report](#) which detailed the range of new GCSEs that would be made available from 2025 to support and reflect the Curriculum for Wales. Whilst Sociology GCSE was not included within the new suite of GCSEs, it was confirmed that a new [GCSE Social Studies](#) would be developed. I can also confirm that Qualifications Wales consulted on the range of GCSEs that would be available within the report titled '[Right Choice for Wales](#)' consultation in 2021. The question gathering views on Qualifications Wales's proposal to develop a new GCSE Social Studies had 315 responses. The consultation document noted that a GCSE Social Studies may replace GCSEs in subjects such as Sociology, law and citizenship, depending on its final design.

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This GCSE qualification will be introduced for first teaching in Wales in September 2026. WJEC published the qualification specification in September 2025, a year in advance of first teaching.

Social Studies is a new subject under the Curriculum for Wales. It is one of the five subject areas within the [Humanities Area of Learning and Experience](#) (Area). The Humanities Area encourages learners to engage with the most important issues facing humanity, including sustainability and social change, and helps them to develop the skills necessary to interpret and articulate the past and the present. It encompasses geography; history; religion, values and ethics; business studies and social studies. These disciplines share many common themes, concepts and transferable skills, while having their own discrete body of knowledge and skills. The Humanities Area supports learners in realising the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, supporting them to become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

One of the statements of what matters for this Area is 'Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs'. Experiences in this Area can encourage a critical understanding of how societies are and have been organised, structured and led, in the learners' own locality in Wales, as well as the wider world. As part of their learning in this area, learners may also be introduced to other complementary disciplines, such as classics, economics, law, philosophy, politics, psychology and sociology, if and where appropriate.

The aim of the GCSE Social Studies is to build on this, to support learners to develop an understanding of the discipline and its value, whilst encouraging active participation and engagement with social issues through social enquiry, discussions and social action. GCSE Social Studies takes a multidisciplinary approach to exploring the Humanities and will provide a broad foundation for progression to a range of post-16 qualifications in this area, including Sociology A level.

There are currently two 9-1 GCSEs in Sociology which can be offered to 14-16 learners in schools as 'designated' qualifications under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015. 'Designated' qualifications differ from 'approved' qualifications, which are fully regulated by Qualifications Wales and for which they publish 'approval criteria'. There has never been an 'approved' GCSE Sociology in Wales.

Qualifications Wales cannot designate a qualification that is the same as, or similar to, an 'approved' qualification (e.g. the new GCSE Social Studies). Qualifications Wales has therefore undertaken an exercise to compare the new, approved, made-for-Wales GCSEs being introduced in September 2025 and 2026, to each currently designated 9-1 GCSE. This included the AQA GCSE Sociology and their approval criteria for GCSE Social Studies. (The exercise was only undertaken on the AQA qualification as WJEC has indicated that they will not be running the Eduqas GCSE Sociology once GCSE Social Studies is introduced.) Although there are differences between the Sociology and Social Studies qualifications, Qualifications Wales's review panel concluded that there was sufficient similarity between them to prevent them designating GCSE Sociology. They have subsequently confirmed that GCSE Sociology will not be made available to 14-16 learners, after the final cohort of Year 10 learners starting in 2025, due to its similarities with GCSE Social Studies.

Qualifications Wales has advised that the reasons for this decision were:

- The Assessment Objectives (AOs) for GCSE Sociology and GCSE Social Studies are almost the same. There is an additional AO in the GCSE Social Studies, but the two qualifications ultimately target very similar skills.
- GCSE Social Studies takes a multidisciplinary approach to exploring the Humanities and will provide a broad foundation for progression to a range of post-16 qualifications in this Area, including Sociology.

Qualifications Wales has reached this decision through a thorough and consistent process undertaken by individuals with appropriate experience and expertise. Subsequent to this, Qualifications Wales wrote to schools on 30 January 2025 to provide an [update on the National Qualifications](#), including designation decisions relating to 9-1 GCSEs. Sociology continues to be available at AS and A level in Wales, with learners able to progress onto these qualifications without having taken the subject at GCSE.

It is of course crucial that schools have the tools and guidance needed to deliver these new qualifications to learners. Following the success of the professional learning approach taken for the implementation of the Wave 1 GCSEs, and the resources and supplementary materials developed, I have provided further funding to Adnodd and WJEC to ensure that the same support is provided for Wave 2 GCSEs, including Social Studies.

WJEC are in the process of producing a package of bilingual resources that will mirror the support offered for the introduction of the Wave 1 qualifications. The bilingual resources are being developed by WJEC's Subject Teams, in conjunction with curriculum specialists and are designed to support and enhance teaching and learning, with a focus on new topics which are being introduced within these qualifications. As planned, these are being published in phases beginning from late autumn 2025 with, as you have noted, WJEC publishing on 17 December Sample Assessment Materials (SAM) for [Unit 1](#) – Society and Social Issues, [Unit 2](#) – Investigating Society and Social Issues and [Unit 3](#) – Social Change in Contemporary Society, of the new GCSE Social Studies. It is anticipated that WJEC will publish the Guidance for Teaching later in January, with the full suite of bilingual resources to be available by summer 2026. Additionally, WJEC's Professional Learning Team has prepared a [comprehensive programme](#) of training opportunities designed to give practical guidance to schools, alongside the resources and supplementary materials, as they prepare to deliver Wave 2 qualifications. This will include [face-to-face](#) professional learning events in February and March 2026.

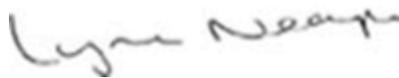
Given its complexity and importance, the reform of National 14-16 Qualifications has always been gradual and staged, ensuring that the interests of learners were protected at all times. It is now standard practice for qualification specifications to be made available a year before first teaching, not just for GCSE qualifications in Wales, but for other qualifications in Wales and across the UK. New qualification specifications were not always published this far in advance, and this is a lesson learned from previous reforms.

GCSE Social Studies is being introduced under Wave 2 of the reform, allowing greater time for the sector to familiarise themselves with the Approval Criteria for the qualification, which was published in summer 2023, in advance of first teaching in September 2026. As noted, although there are differences between the current GCSE Sociology and planned GCSE Social Studies qualifications, Qualifications Wales's review panel concluded that there was sufficient similarity between them to prevent them designating GCSE Sociology in Wales. Schools will therefore be broadly familiar with large elements of the content.

You also reference GCSE Psychology in your letter, noting you are aware that similar concerns have been raised in respect of its future availability in Wales. To confirm, Qualifications Wales has confirmed GCSE Psychology does not form part of the approved offer of GCSEs for pre-16 learners in Wales. Like Sociology, Psychology is named in the curriculum as a complementary discipline within the Humanities area of learning and experience, which learners may be introduced to where appropriate.

In line with Qualifications Wales's [Designation Policy](#), they have completed a review to determine if GCSE Psychology overlaps with an approved qualification. As Psychology sits in a different sector subject area to Social Studies and Sociology, it was reviewed against different qualifications to determine any overlap. The review found that GCSE Psychology was unlikely to undermine the approved GCSE offer, so it would remain eligible for designation, providing it meets the other requirements of the Designation Policy. This includes the requirement that qualifications are available in both Welsh and English, to support Qualifications Wales's policy intent of securing a fully inclusive and bilingual range of 14-16 qualifications. It is for awarding bodies to decide if they would like to apply for their qualifications to be designated in Wales. Subject to eligibility, Qualifications Wales's [Welsh Language Support Grant](#) is available to awarding bodies to assist them in making their qualifications available through the medium of Welsh. Qualifications Wales continue to advise stakeholders, including centres, to discuss their needs with awarding bodies and encourage them to apply for designation if there is a qualification they wish to offer.

Yours sincerely,



**Lynne Neagle AS/MS**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Rocio Cifuentes MBE  
Children's Commissioner for Wales

[cymwysterau.cymru](http://cymwysterau.cymru)

[qualifications.wales](http://qualifications.wales)

By email

22 April 2025

Dear Rocio,

Many thanks for taking the time to write to us to relay the concerns you have heard from learners and educational professionals around our decision not to allow the designation of GCSE Sociology once the new made for Wales GCSE in Social Studies is introduced. Your letter raises a number of points each of which are addressed below.

### **Sociology and its relationship to Curriculum for Wales**

Through your engagement with learners and teachers your letter identifies Sociology as a subject that:

*has to be one of the most aligned with the ethos of the Curriculum for Wales.*

Firstly, it is worth clarifying that the reason why GCSE Sociology does not form part of the approved suite of GCSEs is because of its status within Curriculum for Wales.

Our starting point for National Qualifications has been Curriculum for Wales. All of the National Qualifications relate to and support Curriculum for Wales. In terms of GCSEs within the Humanities Area our basis for determining the range of GCSEs available has been the curriculum guidance. For Humanities the curriculum guidance states that the Humanities Area:

*encompasses geography; history; religion, values and ethics; business studies and social studies. These disciplines share many common themes, concepts and transferable skills, while having their own discrete body of knowledge and skills. Learners may also be introduced to other complementary disciplines, such as classics, economics, law, philosophy, politics, psychology and sociology, if and where appropriate<sup>1</sup>*

As Social Studies is one of the five disciplines specifically named in the guidance we have previously consulted on and agreed that a GCSE in Social Studies (alongside GCSEs in Business,

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Geography, History and Religious Studies) will be created to ensure GCSE qualifications in Humanities fully reflect the breadth of the Humanities Area. We consulted and took decisions on two separate occasions on the inclusion of GCSE Social Studies as one of the range of qualifications in the National Qualification suite and also on the design and content.

Sociology is mentioned in the curriculum guidance as a complementary discipline that learners may be introduced to where appropriate. Given its status we confirmed in October 2021 that GCSE Sociology would not form part of the range of National GCSEs.

At the heart of the vision for the new National 14-16 Qualifications is that there is a curated suite of qualifications aligned with Curriculum for Wales that are coherent and inclusive; that no qualifications exist which would undermine any other qualifications. There is a strong risk that the continued designation of GCSE Sociology would be at odds with this.

### **Content in GCSE Sociology and GCSE Social Studies**

There will be some content overlap between the new GCSE Social Studies and the current GCSE Sociology. However we are not expecting the new GCSE Social Studies to replicate the current GCSE Sociology.

For example both qualifications include content on agents of socialisation and the techniques they use to socialise individuals. Both specifications have content relating to research methods and social issues and so themes about inequality and diversity (familiar within GCSE Sociology) are also considered in GCSE Social Studies.

However, GCSE Social Studies is not a GCSE in Sociology - it has been designed not only to meet the requirements in the approval criteria, but purposefully to be accessible to teachers from a wide variety of subject backgrounds, including Sociology. WJEC have involved teachers of Sociology at every stage of the development of GCSE Social Studies.

### **Development of analytical and critical thinking skills**

Your letter identifies the valuable analytical and critical thinking skills that GCSE Sociology fosters. It is worth noting that the Assessment Objectives (AOs) for GCSE Sociology and GCSE Social Studies are almost the same. Therefore, in a similar fashion to GCSE Sociology, the new Social Studies qualification will provide learners with the opportunity to develop and apply these important analytical, evaluative and critical thinking skills.

### **Progression to A Level Sociology**

We note the concern in your letter around the removal of GCSE Sociology and its potential to disadvantage learners who want to progress to A Level Sociology. GCSE Social Studies takes a multidisciplinary approach to exploring the Humanities and will provide a broad foundation for progression to a range of post-16 qualifications in this Area, including A Level Sociology. Learners taking Social Studies will not be at a disadvantage when it comes to A Level Sociology. It is also important to appreciate that many schools in Wales do not offer GCSE Sociology and many learners already take A Level Sociology without having studying the subject at GCSE.

## **Lack of academic rigour in GCSE Social Studies**

The GCSE Social Studies qualification has been designed to be of equivalent demand to other GCSEs in the suite and this is reflected in the content of the qualification, the assessment objectives and forms of assessment within the qualification (which include the same proportion of examination and Non Examination Assessment as the other Humanities GCSEs).

The full specification for the qualification will be published by WJEC in September, with the sample assessments following later that term. I would encourage those you have engaged with to consider these documents fully when they are published so they have a fuller picture of GCSE Social Studies and how it compares to GCSE Sociology.

## **Young people do not feel their experiences are being listened to and acted on**

Extensive collaboration and engagement with key stakeholders has been central to our approach to developing National Qualifications. We have involved young people throughout the co-creation process, for example through youth friendly versions of our consultations (including consultations on both the range of made for Wales GCSEs and the high level design requirements for GCSE Social Studies). We have also spoken directly to learners on centre visits, involved our learner advisory panel in discussions on the range of National Qualifications and commissioned external organisations to conduct specific engagement and research with learners on National Qualifications. This feedback and input has helped to inform and shape our decision making.

Throughout this process it is worth noting that the majority of respondents to our consultation on the range of approved GCSEs agreed with our proposal to create GCSE Social Studies.

## **Decisions around GCSE History**

The context for decisions made around GCSE History are quite different to those for Social Studies. We took the decision to delay the introduction of the new GCSE in History by a year in response to feedback from the Association of Directors of Education in Wales and teaching unions who identified the need for more time for history teachers to familiarise themselves with the new specification and resources that are being developed to support it.

This delay was linked to the extent of change in content within the history specification, for example in relation to the requirement to cover medieval history in the new specification and the inclusion of a more diverse range of historical topics including those from outside of Europe and North America. The content of the GCSE specification for history has not changed in any way as a consequence of the delay to Wave 2 implementation, the only change has been a delay to its introduction from September 2025 to September 2026.

WJEC are currently in the process of submitting the GCSE Social Studies specification to Qualifications Wales for approval. Therefore, the content and focus of this qualification will not fundamentally change from that which has been presented in WJECs qualification outline.

## **Next Steps**

We hope that this letter addresses the concerns outlined in your letter, however if you would like to discuss this further and follow up on any of the points raised then please contact Lucy Blair ([Lucy.Blair@qualifications.wales](mailto:Lucy.Blair@qualifications.wales)) who can arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely



Philip Blaker  
Chief Executive