



Ein cyf/Our ref LF/HL/0676/15

Ann Jones AM
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

15 July 2015

Dear Ann,

Children, Young People and Education Committee – Update on the plans for commencement and Transitional Arrangements to Establish Qualifications Wales

During Stage 2 consideration of the Qualifications Wales Bill by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 30 April, I offered to provide Committee Members with further details on the transitional arrangements to establish Qualifications Wales as they progressed.

My officials will be writing shortly to Awarding Bodies informing them of the current intentions regarding transitional arrangements, which I consider are necessary or appropriate to provide continuity and stability. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to provide an update to Committee Members on both these intended commencement and transitional arrangements.

Commencement and transitional arrangements

My officials are working towards commencing the provisions of the Qualifications Wales Bill, in the following order:

- those which are brought about by Royal Assent – the Bill already makes provision for this (section 60(1));

- those which relate to the establishment of Qualifications Wales shortly after Royal Assent, in order that the necessary preparations can be made before it becomes fully operational; and
- those which, on 21 September 2015, will commence Qualifications Wales' regulatory functions. Monetary penalties regulations will be brought forward at a later date.

I have already appointed a Qualifications Wales Shadow Board and it is my current intention to appoint those members as the first Qualifications Wales Board once I am able to. My officials are working with those members to develop arrangements so that Qualifications Wales can make the necessary operational and regulatory decisions during its initial months.

It is also my current intention to appoint Philip Blaker, currently Chief Executive (Interim) as the first Chief Executive Officer of Qualifications Wales. Subsequent appointments will be made by Qualifications Wales itself.

Recruitment for staff is well underway, with offers having been made for 34 positions with a further 30 positions currently at interview stage. Ten positions are expected to be recruited later in the year to bring Qualifications Wales to its full head-count of 74. The headquarters has been leased and fitted out. The ICT infrastructure has been largely completed and ICT equipment purchased. Software has been purchased and is being configured, and the website is being developed ready for launch. Data records for copy or transfer are being identified and contracts have been set up for a number of the on-going services required by the new body.

My officials are working towards transitional arrangements including the following:

- An awarding body currently recognised by the Welsh Ministers would be treated as recognised generally by Qualifications Wales and awarding bodies would be given (in advance of commencement) the opportunity to identify any qualifications or descriptions of qualifications for which they do not wish to be generally recognised upon their recognition being transitioned to Qualifications Wales.
- Most qualifications that are listed as eligible for public funding on the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales (DAQW) immediately before 21 September 2015 are to be treated as designated by Qualifications Wales with effect from 21 September 2015 until the earlier of the review date shown on that database or 31 August 2018.
- The remaining few qualifications listed as eligible for public funding immediately before 21 September 2015 will be treated as approved with effect from 21 September 2015 until their review date as listed on the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales (DAQW). These are the key reformed, Wales only, qualifications - GCSEs, AS and A levels, Welsh Bacc and Essential Skills Wales
- Regulatory documents published by Welsh Government and applied, through conditions of recognition, to awarding bodies and their qualifications are to be treated as standard conditions of recognition under the Bill, with some minor amendments, for example to reflect the terminology of the Bill.

These arrangements allow for:

- continuity of protection for learners;
- continuity of regulation with regulatory activities currently being undertaken by the Welsh Government (including, for example, any investigations or reviews) able to be continued by Qualifications Wales;
- continuity of the provision of funded qualifications as listed on DAQW;

- Qualifications Wales to be able to operate, in the first instance - and broadly speaking - by utilising existing regulatory documents;
- a period in which the use of the Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales logos on certificates to learners may be respectively phased out and in.

There is nothing in the current regulatory system which is closely analogous to the list of priority qualifications (section 13 of the Bill). The Welsh Ministers and Qualifications Wales will decide on the first list in due course. My officials will engage with Qualifications Wales on this matter once its regulatory functions are commenced.

I trust that this information is helpful to Committee Members.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Huw Lewis', written in black ink.

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills