



Cynulliad  
Cenedlaethol  
Cymru

National  
Assembly for  
Wales

# Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#)

[The Children, Young People and Education  
Committee](#)

14/12/2016

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*Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd. Lle y mae cyfranwyr wedi darparu cywiriadau i'w tystiolaeth, nodir y rheini yn y trawsgrifiad.*

*The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.*

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Mohammad Asghar <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Michelle Brown <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	UKIP Cymru UKIP Wales
Hefin David <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Llafur Labour
John Griffiths <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Llafur Labour
Llyr Gruffydd <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Darren Millar <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Julie Morgan <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Llafur Labour
Lynne Neagle <a href="#">Bywgraffiad</a>   <a href="#">Biography</a>	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Philip Blaker	Prif Weithredwr, Cymwysterau Cymru Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales
Alistair Davey	Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr, Galluogi Pobl, Llywodraeth Cymru Deputy Director, Enabling People, Welsh Government
Ann Evans	Cadeirydd, Bwrdd Cymwysterau Cymru Chair, Qualifications Wales Board
Albert Heaney	Cyfarwyddwr, y Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol ac Integreiddio, Llywodraeth Cymru Director, Social Services and Integration, Welsh Government
Carl Sargeant	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gymunedau a Phlant) Assembly Member, Labour (Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children)

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol  
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Joe Champion	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Gareth Rogers	Ail Glerc Second Clerk
Siân Thomas	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:30.  
The meeting began at 09:30.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau  
Introductions, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

[1] **Lynne Neagle:** Good morning, everyone. Can I welcome you all to today's meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Committee? There have been no apologies for absence. Can I ask if there are any declarations of interest, please? No. Okay.

**Ymchwiliad i Ddarpariaeth Eiriolaeth Statudol: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 4  
Inquiry into Statutory Advocacy Provision: Evidence Session 4**

[2] **Lynne Neagle:** Item 2 this morning is our final evidence session on our inquiry into statutory advocacy provision. I'm very pleased to welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, Carl Sargeant, to our meeting today. Thank you for providing a paper in advance, Minister. Can I just ask you to introduce your officials?

[3] **The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children (Carl Sargeant):** Yes. Good morning, Chair; morning, committee. I'll ask the team to introduce themselves.

[4] **Mr Davey:** Alistair Davey, deputy director, Enabling People, social services and integration director at Welsh Government.

[5] **Mr Heaney:** Albert Heaney, director of social services and integration.

[6] **Lynne Neagle:** Lovely. Thank you all for coming, anyway. If you're happy, we'll go straight into questions.

[7] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, Chair. That's fine.

[8] **Lynne Neagle:** If I can just start by asking for the update that you referred to in your paper on the meeting that you held with the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru on 24 November.

[9] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, Chair. I received a letter yesterday, which is very helpful, from the Welsh Local Government Association, in regards to the meeting we had. Maybe if I read that through to you, if possible:

[10] 'Dear Cabinet Secretary, I write following our very helpful recent meeting with the Children's Commissioner, Sally Holland, on the roll out of the National Advocacy Service across Wales. I know you are keen to see significant progress being made and to ensure that all local authorities are signed up to implementing the national approach.

[11] 'WLGA promised at that meeting to raise the matter nationally with elected leaders. In this respect Councillor Huw David our lead spokesperson on Social Care took the matter to the WLGA Coordinating Committee on the 25th November and gained national support from the 22 leaders present for the approach to date and the future development of the service. They also restated their commitment to the implementation plan developed by the Local Government Technical Group which is led by ADSS Cymru.

[12] 'The key point is to ensure that the service is established as quickly as possible and it is the view of the Technical Group that this will be achieved across Wales by June 2017. The National Approach is to be delivered through lead authorities within the partnership framework underpinned by Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act...In this setting it is anticipated that that some areas will come on stream before the June 2017 date. WLGA has written to all the Regional boards for them to formally confirm the timescales for adopting the new approach'.

[13] And they'll let me know the detail, and I will let committee know following those letters, but a very positive letter showing their commitment to what Sally Holland and I—. When we met with them, that's what they said to us, and they've confirmed that by writing.

[14] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. Thank you. So, all local authorities will have actively—. They've basically all actively signed up now then.

[15] **Carl Sargeant:** They have. They have, but, in terms of delivery, the expectation—. Because of the commissioning process, they expect that all regions will have delivered on this by June of 2017, and some might come on stream before then. We expect north Wales, actually, to come on before June of next year, just because of the way their commissioning is at the moment.

[16] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. Thank you. Michelle.

[17] **Michelle Brown:** Well, I think most of my questions have already been covered in the last bit.

[18] **Carl Sargeant:** That's helpful. [*Laughter.*]

[19] **Michelle Brown:** Yes, it saves time, doesn't it? Have local authorities experienced any particular difficulties with this? What are the practical issues?

[20] **Carl Sargeant:** With local government, the issue about delivery of services is generally finance. We've had some protracted discussions with local authorities about the amount of funding that they have received in the past and where that it is now. Some local authorities, as I think you've heard through your evidence sessions, will be better placed than others, because they've already started delivery on some services, and some are building up to that, despite the money being in the revenue support grant. Previously, some authorities have used it well and some not so well.

[21] **Michelle Brown:** Just one more thing: who's going to monitor the effectiveness of the national strategy?

[22] **Carl Sargeant:** The children's commissioner will have a view on that, in terms of her annual report.

[23] **Michelle Brown:** Okay. Thank you.

[24] **Lynne Neagle:** Darren.

[25] **Darren Millar:** Yes. I just wanted to ask you, Minister, you mentioned

the fact that you've got political sign-up now, which is obviously very welcome, and there was similar evidence from the WLGA last week. But we've got elections to come. What happens if the political landscape has an impact, if you like, on the subscription that those local authorities have made to this national approach?

[26] **Carl Sargeant:** It's a fair question, but it's a policy delivery process now. It has been signed up to by all authorities. It's gone into a regional process now. An authority would have to actively opt out, which I would find unlikely, on the basis that there are statutory provisions to be delivered now. Therefore, this probably is the easiest way for them to do that. I can't see a reason why they would want to do that, but I don't underestimate the fact that they could.

[27] **Darren Millar:** What sort of back-up plan do you have in place, as it were, if a local authority decides to opt out or fails to deliver by the June 2017 date? Have you got sanctions up your sleeve?

[28] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, there are, and the local government Minister has been very keen in terms of his discussions with local authorities on saying how there is an expectation for some services to be delivered on a statutory basis. This could be one of those services. In fact, to be fair to the local government association, while it's been a challenging process to get to where we are, they are all very positive about delivering this.

[29] **Darren Millar:** Okay. And just one final question on the finances. We understand that there's been a pot of about £0.5 million, or just over—I think up to £550,000—that you've made available in order to get this new advocacy programme rolled out across the country. What are you going to do to make sure that that's not rewarding people for failing to provide decent advocacy services at the moment, because, obviously, you've made it quite clear that some local authorities are already effectively delivering a service that is very similar to the one that is envisaged?

[30] **Carl Sargeant:** There is an expectation of delivery of service, and, as we move into implementation, we'll learn from the experiences of people. Again, I've been very clear to my team about real life experiences, so, people using the services, and so children's voices are going to be an important part of that as to what's their experience of using the service. If we see system failure, then we will certainly intervene in that process.

[31] **Darren Millar:** But how are you going to distribute that cash in a fair and equitable way in order to prime the pump ready to deliver the service?

[32] **Carl Sargeant:** The funding will be distributed on a regional basis, so there will be a regional approach to the delivery of this. So, it won't be individual local authorities—it will be a regional plan that will be rolled out. It's not unusual for us to do funding streams or delivery of services like that.

[33] **Lynne Neagle:** Albert.

[34] **Mr Heaney:** In terms of the funding, the Cabinet Secretary has committed to the active offer in full, because, again, for all authorities that is a major responsibility that is much welcomed and takes the relationship of advocacy directly to the children and young people. In terms of the remainder of the money, there is some contribution the Cabinet Secretary is assisting with but, again, each local authority and the Welsh Local Government Association will be committing to scaling up to the new service model.

[35] **Darren Millar:** But I assume that the spend is currently very different from one local authority to the next.

[36] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, it is, but this is not an optional approach—this is a statutory process, where we are saying it's going to be a 100 per cent offer. We don't expect that all young people will want to take the offer up, but the offer will be there. We shouldn't underestimate the fact that it's not as if we haven't been doing anything in the past. We've invested a significant amount of money in advocacy services and looked-after children over the previous years within the RSG, and that's why some authorities are better placed than others, because they've used it specifically for that. As to the issue around when you roll grants into the RSG, sometimes they get distributed by the political will of the lead authority. That's why ring-fencing can be advantageous sometimes.

[37] **Darren Millar:** Are you going to ring-fence this?

[38] **Carl Sargeant:** No, that's not my intention on this.

[39] **Lynne Neagle:** Llyr, you wanted to ask about finance.

[40] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Yes. Clearly, there's been a rise in demand for services.



How is that reflected in your funding commitment going forward because, obviously, if there's a rise in demand there's a rise in cost? Is that something that will be reflected in the Government's contribution in years to come?

[41] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, our contribution has been consistent with local authorities'. No matter what portfolio I've been in, I've always had a discussion with local authorities, and their starting point is generally, 'How much money are we going to have?' or 'How much more money can we have?' I don't blame them in that respect but, actually, we're in a different place in time now, where we have to look at the funds that are available and how we can deliver the best services. As I said, the amount of funding for this specifically is not in isolation; a significant amount—millions of pounds—has been put into the RSG over the previous years in terms of shaping local authorities to get ready for this process. So, we don't anticipate that there'll be a pull on any further Government funding, but there may be some internal pressures for local authorities. But that's not to say they haven't had that money.

[42] **Llyr Gruffydd:** But you're making it clear that this funding that you're putting on the table is recurrent funding—

[43] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes.

[44] **Llyr Gruffydd:** —and is going to be there as far as you can foresee, which isn't easy, I know, but your intention is to fund this year on year until you feel that that's no longer needed.

[45] **Carl Sargeant:** That's correct, yes.

[46] **Llyr Gruffydd:** But when, of course, we asked last week local authorities about their money being put on the table, there was a bit of an uncomfortable silence for a few seconds. Clearly, they're under pressure. Are you confident that they are—? You've had the letter, of course, giving you the political buy-in, but are you confident that, on a practical level, the money is there for them to step up to the plate?

[47] **Carl Sargeant:** I can't have any more confidence on this. I was very clear in the meeting with the Welsh Local Government Association that there are sanctions if there's failure to deliver. I don't want to be in that place, actually; I want to understand if there are issues and how we get over those things. There's a common argument to have about finance, we always have

that, but actually, underneath this, the WLGA and the leadership of the WLGA were saying actually they want to do this, and this makes sense. And it works in the principles as well of the issue around prevention and early intervention, because when you get in early around advocacy, sometimes it's cost-saving, longer term. So, there is clearly a reason why they'd want to do this. I'm confident that they can do this because they've told me they can do this.

[48] **Llyr Gruffydd:** But your message is that there won't be any more money coming from the Government. This £0.5 million, or £550,000, however much it'll be, that's it.

[49] **Carl Sargeant:** That's correct.

[50] **Llyr Gruffydd:** On a recurrent basis.

[51] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes.

[52] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Okay, thanks.

[53] **Lynne Neagle:** Thanks. Oscar.

[54] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, Cabinet Secretary. In July 2014, the Children's Commissioner for Wales said, and I quote,

[55] 'The current prominence of historic child abuse scandals demonstrates the immediate need to get advocacy right for children and young people'.

[56] Despite the urgency stressed two and a half years ago, what has the Welsh Government identified as the major hurdle to implementing a national approach? That's one.

[57] **Carl Sargeant:** I think the issue around the children's commissioner's report is absolutely right, and we are learning more, and there are more disclosures week in, week out. And this does pressurise the system. What's important for me is making sure that I can get implementation of the advocacy plan. I've been in post for just over six months now, and it's a very wide-ranging department, and the children's aspect of this was new to me in my role. I was very keen early on to understand what pressures were in the

system, and this was one of them. And I think, actually, while it's taken quite a long time to deliver, I'm very pleased that, actually, within six months of being in post, that I've got a commitment from the associations to deliver this. So, my ambition is to make sure that I can get an advocacy service up and running by June of next year, and I've been very clear that I actually wanted it before then, but they were honest with me and said, 'Look, we can't do this because of the commissioning process. Some of the areas are going to be a little bit longer.' So, I can accept that, but, for me, it's making sure that we've got a service to be active.

[58] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you. And the second is: the children, actually, who are looked-after children and under care, they normally speak to their own colleagues, young children, not to elders, and they're more vulnerable to abuse and other things. What steps are there to make sure that children are no longer vulnerable and they are protected? Their safety is paramount now, and lessons should be learned from past historic affairs in north Wales and other areas. That should not happen in this country ever again.

[59] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, of course. And, as I said earlier, we're learning every day of new incidents and actions that have taken place. I think what we've got to be able to do is give young people and abused people confidence to come forward, and that's why the helplines that we have set up—particularly, we've got Meic, which is one of the helplines and is a national helpline, which has open access for individuals; making sure that we've got support for it with social workers and advocacy services. I think what's important for me as well, and I mentioned it earlier on, is gleaning information from people who have been in the system. So, I've got an advisory group that David Melding chairs for me on looked-after children, and I'm seeking whether we should be using more looked-after children as advisers for us, because I think, actually, a lived experience is an important one. I do that already with domestic violence survivors; I've got an advisory group where I've got survivors supporting us.

09:45

[60] I think there should be a credible approach to embedding the WFG Act to make sure that we listen to real people and engage real people who've had an experience. I think we can learn a lot, rather than professionals saying, 'This is what happens', when actually it's not, all the time. Young people who have experienced this do understand that.

[61] **Mohammad Asghar:** Finally, Cabinet Secretary, on schools and the health service, the doctors and nurses—are they involved with your approach to this?

[62] **Carl Sargeant:** We're changing the way that we operate across all of Government. I'm really pleased that the communities division is, as I said, very wide-ranging in where we engage with people. I've been clear with my department and all of my partners that I work with that the lived experience is an important one that should feed back into policy. That's what we're doing. All the people that I work with, I expect them to do that too. So, any advice I receive, we do a little—. There's a test in there for me about who's given me this advice, where's it come from, is it from my team—I've got a great team around me—and where they are gleaning their information from. So, all of the areas that we're doing, we operate like that, or we're starting on that journey of operating like that.

[63] The other important factor is around not trying to fix a problem after it's happened. We're absolutely into early intervention and prevention. That's where we need to be. Hopefully, we can reduce the numbers of looked-after children if we get into that space early on with family intervention and parenting support. That's where we need to be. But, we're sort of firefighting—we've got the day job to do here, but actually we've got prevention at the other end as well that we need to start concentrating on. So, I've got a really interesting project that we're starting with Public Health Wales and several organisations, called Cymru Well Wales. It's a programme, not Government-run; it's a collective of organisations that want to start doing some very specific work on tackling issues in communities and we're part of that programme, which operates on the principle of early intervention and prevention.

[64] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Julie and then John.

[65] **Julie Morgan:** Yes, thanks very much. You refer to the fact that children's voices are not heard. I've been very aware of that recently, as I'm sure the Cabinet Secretary is, with my constituent, Cedric Moon MBE, who has made revelations about alleged abuse at Llandrindod school for the deaf. This was 50 years ago, and those children's voices weren't heard. I don't expect the Minister to comment necessarily on this situation, but doesn't he think that this reveals, if we'd had advocacy then, how important that would have been? It's a real example of something being quiet for 50 years because

nobody knew about it.

[66] **Carl Sargeant:** I won't comment on the specific case, but we are shocked and surprised at the daily events that are in the media around historic abuse. The Member talked about people not realising about it—there were people that did know about it and didn't do anything about it, and that's even worse. I think what we're trying to do, by learning from these cases and saying what safeguards are in place—. Even in the safest places that we have for children and young people, we've got to be very cautious about who's employed, how they interact, what the advocacy process is for them and giving people the opportunity to speak freely and in confidence. That's why the helplines are important and the activity of engagement is important. There's still much more to do, and I think the issue around historic abuse will continue to roll for some time yet.

[67] **Julie Morgan:** And, in terms of leadership on this issue, what do you plan to do to show that it has taken some time to bring this plan to fruition? Hopefully, we are there now, but what can we do to show that the Welsh Government is committed and leading this with great determination?

[68] **Carl Sargeant:** I can give my personal commitment. I'm very serious about making sure this happens because I realise actually there are two areas: this is morally right to do, but also fiscally right. The moral reasons are well rehearsed, about why you should do this and why they should be available. But actually, for Governments and public bodies, there are long-term fiscal savings if we get this right early on. It makes sense to do it. So, I'm absolutely committed to doing that and actually, the legislation surrounding this—the well-being of future generations Act and the social services Act—embed this principle of making sure that we do these things. It's about making sure that our partner agencies are also in the same place. I've got to make sure that the leadership approach to this—I and my team have to make sure that we bear down on the authorities that aren't in the space where we expect them to be.

[69] **Lynne Neagle:** Thanks. John.

[70] **John Griffiths:** Could I firstly, Chair, just pick up on historic events? Because obviously, in the news recently we've heard a lot of appalling stories about abuse in the world of football, for example. I think there's a strong feeling amongst many that there's probably quite a lot that hasn't yet come to public attention that may do so. There are lots of other sports and similar

relationships between coaches and trusted adults and young people who are very keen to succeed and develop their talents. I just wonder, in the light of the recent revelations, whether that's required any new thinking—any fresh thinking for these areas of advocacy that we're discussing today?

[71] **Carl Sargeant:** We don't think so, but new challenges will purely be based on the numbers of people approaching now. I think we'll have to deal with that, because we should—the fact that more people are presenting. We've got to be able to be in that space of—. Once somebody presents, the worst situation is not being able to support them. That goes for various cases, whether that's domestic violence or historical sex abuse—you've got to be in that space. It's a bit of an unknown quantum, so we're just finding our way with that. If there's more pressure in the system, then we'll have to deliver more advocacy services and counselling around that. Again, it depends what people are seeking from disclosure.

[72] In terms of the principle of what's happening, I asked my team to have discussions with the Football Association of Wales and the community football group—I can't remember their title—asking to see whether there is anything more we need to do in terms of support for those organisations and for individuals who present as well. But it is something that I know Cabinet colleagues are very aware of, wherever their jurisdiction is, with regards to sporting events and other relationships in close-contact sport.

[73] **John Griffiths:** Okay, thank you very much, Cabinet Secretary. In terms of the national framework for advocacy, could you tell us when that will be issued for consultation and when the final version will be published?

[74] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, I can. In terms of the standards and the framework, we're working with regards to—. I'll give you a bit of a potted history on where we were and where we're heading. In 2010, it was decided that the national standards for the provision of children's advocacy services should be reviewed with regard to publishing statutory guidance, 'Delivering Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales'. That happened in 2012. The commissioner then raised a number of issues in the 'Missing Voices' report and I think that's been quoted by Members this morning with regard to that. As part of the Welsh Government's response to the report, the then Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services committed to issuing a draft advocacy standards and outcome framework for the consultation. The consultation ran for 12 weeks, from the 28 February 2013 and 60 responses were received then.

[75] Overall, there was broad support for the principles behind the development of the standards and the outcomes then and the national standards and outcomes were clearly welcomed. In line with the agreed work plan that we have to support a national approach to advocacy, a review of the standards and outcome framework was undertaken at that point. We expect the draft national outcome framework for social services to set out the well-being outcomes for people who need care and support and carers who need support for advocacy. The framework states that people must speak for themselves and contribute to the decisions affecting their lives and that's the whole principle of the advocacy service. But we expect from March 2017 for the standards to be issued in that space. That was a very potted history on where we came from to where we are today.

[76] **John Griffiths:** So, March next year is the date for actual publication.

[77] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, that's correct. For the consultation.

[78] **John Griffiths:** For the consultation. And the publication?

[79] **Carl Sargeant:** Same time.

[80] **Mr Heaney:** It will be following on from the consultation process.

[81] **John Griffiths:** Right, okay.

[82] **Lynne Neagle:** So, will they be actually ready to implement from June 2017?

[83] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes.

[84] **Lynne Neagle:** Right.

[85] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Just one other matter from me, Cabinet Secretary, and that is: will you be updating the code of practice on advocacy that goes with the social services and well-being Act, which, I think, the children's commissioner is quite keen on?

[86] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, we will. When we issue that paper, that's when we'll do that.

[87] **John Griffiths:** Okay, fine.

[88] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Are there any other questions from Members?

[89] **Mohammad Asghar:** Yes. Thank you, Chair. Cabinet Secretary, just looking through the papers here, in 2015, there were nearly 24,000 children who would potentially be eligible for the statutory professional advocacy they needed. And earlier, it was mentioned the money set aside was just £0.5 million. So, if that's the case—and the children may be more in number now than last year—it comes down to £25 per head. So, do you think that money is good enough for people, for children in need, to cover their needs at the moment, or will you probably need more after?

[90] **Carl Sargeant:** As I said earlier, our commitment in terms of finance provision is around £0.5 million, but we've put additional money into the system. I'll have to write to the committee in terms of specific numbers, but I think I recall—I think from 2005—we had about £13 million in terms of services for looked-after children, including advocacy. So, these aren't small amounts of money. I mean, £0.5 million doesn't sound a lot, but, actually, there's a lot of money in the system already. That's why I'm saying to authorities, 'You've already had some of the money; you need to reprofile that.' Some are in that space already and some will have to move a little bit.

[91] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you.

[92] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. Any other questions? Can I just end, then, by asking you to confirm that, as far as you're concerned, this will all be operational by June 2017—that this isn't an aspiration, this is something that we're going to see in force?

[93] **Carl Sargeant:** The information I have been given by the providers—by the commissioners from local authorities—would indicate that is correct, Chair. I expect this to be fully implemented by June 2017. I've asked, if there are any problems arising up to that date, by the WLGA, for them to inform me immediately. I will keep the committee informed if there is a problem with that as well.

[94] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay, thank you. If there are no other questions from Members, can I thank the Cabinet Secretary and his officials for their attendance this morning? As usual, you will be sent a transcript of the



discussion, to check for accuracy. But, thank you very much for your time.

[95] **Carl Sargeant:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, committee.

[96] **Lynne Neagle:** Our next witnesses aren't here yet, so the committee will take a short break, if that's okay.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 09:58 a 10:14.  
The meeting adjourned between 09:58 and 10:14.*

### **Craffu ar Adroddiad Blynyddol Cymwysterau Cymru Scrutiny of Qualifications Wales Annual Report**

[97] **Lynne Neagle:** Can I welcome everybody back for item 3, which is the scrutiny of the Qualifications Wales annual report? This is the first annual report that's been published and, indeed, the first time that we've had this session in our committee. So, I'm delighted to welcome Philip Blaker, the chief executive of Qualifications Wales, and Ann Evans, the Chair of the Qualifications Wales board. Thank you very much for coming this morning. We're really pleased that you could come to our session. Can I just ask whether you'd like to make some opening remarks?

10:15

[98] **Ms Evans:** Yes. Thank you very much indeed.

[99] **Diolch am ein gwahodd ni yma** Thank you for inviting us today to heddiw i drafod adroddiad blynyddol discuss the first annual report of cyntaf Cymwysterau Cymru. Qualifications Wales.

[100] Thank you very much for inviting us here today to discuss Qualifications Wales' very first annual report. Our report covers the period from September 2015 till August 2016 and sets out our aims and activities in our first year. As you will be aware, we were set up following the review of qualifications and the Welsh Government's acceptance that the regulation of qualifications should be undertaken by an independent body. It sets out our role as a regulator, but also our principal aims. Those principal aims are very important to us because they are at the heart of everything that we do. They are in the legislation that set us up, but I think they are worth repeating because they guide us, and that is to ensure that qualifications and the Welsh qualification system are effective for meeting the needs of learners in Wales.

The second principal aim is to ensure that there is public confidence in the Welsh qualifications system.

[101] We are the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales, and we regulate around 117 bodies. They're often called awarding bodies—people such as City and Guilds, Pearson, WJEC and Agored Cymru. We protect the value of qualifications and ensure that standards are met. If the system's not working, we can take action ourselves or we can actually instruct or advise others to take action.

[102] Our first year has been very challenging, but very rewarding. The development of a brand-new organisation required us to design and implement all the processes and procedures to run efficiently, alongside establishing ourselves as a credible qualifications regulator and taking over the very large reform programme for GCSEs and A-levels that had been started within Welsh Government. Our board has been very active in this area and has taken forward driving our agenda. But even more important for a new organisation, the board has been setting our tone. Our tone is about openness, transparency and being evidence based. I think that organisations are led by their boards' culture, and I think that that's a very important aspect.

[103] We are an independent organisation that's funded by the Welsh Government. That said, a smooth, efficient and effective working relationship with the Welsh Government and with others is absolutely essential to create a qualifications system for Wales that serves the needs of our learners, and is deliverable by our workforce. We're still very new, and we have begun to establish ourselves as part of the wider education community. We had three main goals this year, and that was to establish ourselves, to undertake and continue with the GCSE and A-level reform programmes, and also to start work on vocational qualifications.

[104] I'm going to hand over to Philip very, very briefly for him to say just a few words about our key achievements, but before I do so, can I just reiterate that I'm very pleased to be here? We look forward to answering your questions and to discuss our work in more detail. Philip.

[105] **Mr Blaker:** Thank you. So, as Ann said, we're a new organisation and we've recruited nearly all of our staff completely new to this area of work. We're very glad that we recruited a knowledgeable and skilful group of people to be on the staff. We've used this first year to gather a lot of

experience of the role of being an independent regulator, and in that year we've developed our expertise, and we're very pleased with the progress we've made. We always set out to have an equal focus on vocational and general qualifications. With general qualifications, the focus last year was on taking over the baton from the Welsh Government with the reform of GCSEs and A-levels. We think that we've made very good progress in those areas. Clearly, that's an area of work that is ongoing, and there are still subjects that are being reformed ready for first teaching in September 2017. We also saw through the first summer exam, so, for the regulator, summer exams of GCSEs and A-levels are very important. We've seen the first round of new Wales-only AS-levels last summer. A key focus for us was on maintaining standards there and making sure that those new AS-levels carried the standard forward and were credible.

[106] With vocational qualifications, we've developed our approach. Vocational qualifications have not always been the focus of regulators, but we've developed what we believe is a very effective approach in sector reviews and we've completed our first sector review of health and social care. So, generally, I feel that, one year in, we've developed as an organisation, we've started to build some confidence and I feel that we're well placed for our work in the year ahead.

[107] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you very much. We'll go to questions now from Members. Michelle.

[108] **Michelle Brown:** Thank you, Chair. Nice to see you again. You're working at the moment on restricting the qualifications in the health and social sector. Can you explain the rationale behind that decision to restrict the number of qualifications available?

[109] **Mr Blaker:** Yes. I think it's probably important, to begin with, just to say a couple of words about the sector review approach. It's very heavily evidence based. The sector review for health and social care involved more than 120 meetings and interviews with stakeholders, employers, providers—colleges and schools—and the sector bodies. We had more than 200 responses to an online questionnaire about the qualifications in health and social care. We did some direct learner engagement and heard the voices of more than 800 learners directly to understand their views of those qualifications. We've completed a consultation on the proposal to restrict and had more than 160 responses from those. So, there's an awful lot of evidence that underpins our rationale for going ahead and making a proposal

to restrict.

[110] The review itself found that, whilst there were a number of strengths in the qualifications system, there were areas for improvement, and some of those areas of improvement were fundamental enough for us to think that the best approach was to commission a new suite of qualifications. So, it's probably worth recapping on some of those findings.

[111] We found that progression routes, the way that learners progress through the different levels and depth of understanding, weren't always working very well. So, an example that we cited was that you may have somebody who has completed level 3, the equivalent of A-level qualifications, in college, goes on to complete a degree, then expects, quite rightly, that they could go into employment, but it's found that they don't have some of the qualifications that they need in order to progress into employment. So, whilst they might go into employment, they have to backtrack slightly and take some level 2 qualifications often. We also found that there was a gap with level 4 qualifications and people were progressing inappropriately on to level 5 care management courses when they weren't quite ready in their careers to do that, but had a desire to progress. So, we found that progression routes weren't working as effectively as they might do.

[112] We found some issues with content. We found that some of the content related to out-of-date legislation, so weren't reflecting the latest legislation here in Wales. We found that, in the assessment methods that were being used, certainly around the competency-based models, quite often, they were looking at very atomised elements of evidence, rather than looking at a more holistic approach. So, they were demonstrating a recall of facts, rather than an understanding and a contextualisation of those facts.

[113] We also found that there were inconsistencies between the different awarding bodies in terms of their quality assurance mechanisms. We expect awarding bodies to go and visit schools and colleges and work-based learning providers on a regular basis, to make sure that procedures are correct and that the quality is being maintained, and we didn't see that that was happening on a consistent basis.

[114] Finally, around the Welsh-language provision, we found that whilst awarding bodies may have Welsh-medium provision in place, sometimes that was offered in such a way that it didn't encourage take up. So, an example

might be where translation services were being offered for assignments, and it may take two or three weeks for those to go off, be translated, marked and come back, whereas if English medium was being used, there'd be a much faster turnaround. All of those things, in effect, became a bit of a discouragement to using Welsh-medium assessment.

[115] So, with all of those factors, we considered the way that we might move forward with addressing some of those. As a regulator, we have tools in the toolbox, so we could require that awarding bodies take actions to address some of those things. We are requiring that they address some of those things in the short term, but in the longer term we felt that the best approach would be for us to look at commissioning a suite of qualifications for Wales that could address those issues more fundamentally. In doing that, we've consulted on a proposal to restrict, because we think that that makes the offer most appealing to awarding bodies, and also we think it's the better solution for addressing some of those concerns. So, where, for example, there might be inconsistencies in quality assurance, having one awarding body eliminates that inconsistency. For Welsh-medium provision, we think that one awarding body will be able to coalesce around the skills that are in the assessor workforce at the moment much more effectively, and be able to set up a more regional basis for assessment.

[116] **Michelle Brown:** Is this approach something that you're using specifically on health and social care qualifications? Or are you going to look at other sectors on a case-by-case basis and see whether those qualifications in those sectors need restricting as well? Or is it a blanket principle?

[117] **Mr Blaker:** We've started sector reviews on construction and the built environment and ICT, and we'll be conducting those over the next year. As an evidence-based organisation, we're not drawing any conclusions about what our approach might be until such time as we've completed them. We've been very clear to signal that to awarding bodies: we don't see this as a blanket approach. Health and social care, as a devolved area of policy in itself, was particularly attuned to the notion of commissioning something bespoke for Wales.

[118] **Michelle Brown:** How are you going to ensure that the public, that employers, that both sides of the English-Welsh border, and Scotland and elsewhere, value these qualifications and actually know what they mean? Because there have been occasions when qualifications have been

introduced, learners have been told that they're equivalent to however many A-levels, but the universities and colleges have had slightly different ideas, sometimes. So, how will you ensure that those qualifications are valued, and that the employers and different people actually have faith in those qualifications and understand them?

[119] **Mr Blaker:** So, as we move forward with the development of those qualifications, we're continuing with stakeholder engagement. The needs of higher education and employers are very important, and they'll be taken forward in the development of content. We started working with the Care Council for Wales on developing content for those qualifications, and the panels do involve universities and employers.

[120] I guess the important thing is also thinking about portability across borders, because, especially in something like health and social care, it may well be that a worker wants to work either side of the border and may move between the two. Because it's a devolved area of policy, whilst we've been very sensitive to the need for portability, we have felt that, for health and social care, the needs of Wales should be paramount in terms of making sure that the qualifications meet the needs of legislation here in Wales. Having said that, a lot of the content will be very similar to what would be required in England, and we're working with the Care Council for Wales so that it can work with its counterparts in England to make sure that there is recognition of the qualifications in Wales in England.

[121] **Michelle Brown:** Just one final question: do you have a publicity strategy for the—? I mean, you're doing all this reorganisation and it does sound like a positive step, because from what you've said about the qualifications in this sector, it must be very difficult for learners to identify which courses they need to be doing. How are you going to communicate that to the public? Do you have a marketing or publicity strategy in place?

10:30

[122] **Mr Blaker:** Yes, we'll certainly be doing that. It's early days yet, in that we're still at the very early stages of commissioning. So, we're planning that these new qualifications would be introduced for first teaching in September 2019 and, as we get closer to that point, we'll be communicating more and more about the changes. But it's worth going back to the fact that that doesn't mean to say that we won't be completing activities here and now. So, for example, we meet regularly with FE colleges and with schools. We're

looking to have employers involved and we've got a very close working relationship with the Care Council for Wales and are able to use their networks.

[123] **Michelle Brown:** Okay. Thank you.

[124] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Darren.

[125] **Darren Millar:** Yes, just on this very same issue, in terms of the sector review, I listened carefully to what you said about the portability. As you know, one of the issues that we're facing in Wales at the moment is that we have a shortage of certain skills, particularly in the NHS and the social care sector. Isn't there a risk that having Wales-specific qualifications may put a barrier in the place of people wanting to become part of the Welsh care and healthcare workforce?

[126] **Mr Blaker:** We're sensitive to that in the design of these qualifications. What we're looking to do is to see whether there might be a module that could be, in effect, a top-up to qualifications that are gained in England that provide the content that is necessary for working in Wales. So, we're looking—. Portability works both ways and we recognise that. It's something that we're going to look at in the design.

[127] **Darren Millar:** But having to take an extra module is going to be a hurdle, isn't it—a barrier—for people who might want to come and take a job in Wales?

[128] **Mr Blaker:** Indeed, and I guess it will be for the Care Council for Wales to think about what its licence to practice might be in terms of the qualifications it's prepared to accept.

[129] **Darren Millar:** I think one of the other potential downsides of having just one awarding body for such qualifications, if you commission one body to deliver these—and I appreciate some of the rationale for doing so, by the way; I'm not saying that I can't see that there might be problems out there, particularly in terms of the Welsh-language side of things—is how do you ensure that those awarding bodies don't charge the earth for assessment and examination fees. We've got problems with WJEC examination fees at the moment, haven't we, which have been lifted up quite significantly and some schools and local authorities are balking at the moment about that?

[130] **Mr Blaker:** It's one of the considerations we'll have as we procure. The idea is that, as we go into commissioning, we will go through a fair and open procurement process to find the best supplier for us. As part of that, we'll want to have an understanding of the charges that they are going to make for the qualification. It's important that, as we go out and design something, we design something that is both fit for purpose and affordable to the public purse in particular. So, we're very sensitive to that. Ultimately, we do have fee-capping powers within the powers that are given to us as a regulator. So, if need be, we have that as a final resort that we can go to.

[131] **Darren Millar:** So, you're able to regulate the fees that are charged from all of the bodies that are registered with you.

[132] **Mr Blaker:** Indeed.

[133] **Darren Millar:** Okay. Thank you.

[134] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Julie.

[135] **Julie Morgan:** Following on from Darren's earlier question on this issue of what you have to do in order to satisfy the legislation in Wales and to have qualifications that could be recognised or that would be recognised in England, you said that, in terms of the social care sector, your first aim was to ensure that you had people who would be able to work in Wales, which is absolutely what we'd expect. But, following on from what Darren was saying, I think it is very important that people are able to move, and the border is very close, so what efforts are you making in England, for example, to explain the qualifications that you are having in Wales to make it easier for people to move, if they want to?

[136] **Mr Blaker:** I think that will become a more important factor over this next stage. So, now that we've made the decision that we want to commission a suite of qualifications, the next stage is in designing those qualifications. So, it's about specifying the content and then looking at the assessment methods that are most appropriate. I think there's a stage of engagement to come with bodies in England and using the Care Council for Wales as a conduit for part of that. But, really, the basis for that needs to be a little more detailed than we're in a position to do at the moment. It's really for once the content has started to be specified. And we imagine that that will be a process that we complete over the next six months. So, we're aiming to have the content specified by June of next year.



[137] **Julie Morgan:** Right. And this issue comes up in every sector, presumably?

[138] **Mr Blaker:** I'm sorry?

[139] **Julie Morgan:** We've been talking about the health and care sector, but this would apply to every sector—this issue about the recognition of the qualifications?

[140] **Mr Blaker:** Indeed, and it would be a case of, as we proceed, if we decide to commission something particularly for Wales. But I think, as we've already mentioned, one of the important things is that we recognise that we sit within an economic environment across the whole of the UK. And therefore, if we do develop something for Wales, we have to make sure that it's got portability, and, to a degree, almost do that bespoke for Wales, with a degree of caution. So, we would only do that if we found that the market wasn't providing something that was suitable.

[141] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you.

[142] **Lynne Neagle:** Oscar, on this.

[143] **Mohammad Asghar:** [*Inaudible.*] Thank you, Mr Blaker. The thing is, my question is on the same—the social care sector, which is the vocational qualification that's needed, and a lot of employees, tens of thousands, I think, we have recognised are caring for some of the most vulnerable members of society. So, my question to you is: what approaches have you made to the employer in the private and public sector, you know, this care sector, to ensure that your qualifications are fit for purpose and drive up a professional standard that's recognised everywhere in the world, rather than the other side of the border?

[144] **Mr Blaker:** It comes back to that issue of strong engagement. I've mentioned the Care Council for Wales, and our engagement with them, to make sure that whatever qualifications are developed—and they're engaged with us in the development of content, so we're working together on that—meet their requirements, and their licence-to-practice requirements. We haven't mentioned the fact that we're also working with the NHS as well, because there are core components that would be shared between

qualifications in the health sector, and in the health and social care sector. So, we're working with them, as a large public employer, in effect, through the NHS.

[145] The engagement with employers more generally will continue through this process of developing and then implementing these new qualifications, because we'd be missing a trick if the vocational qualifications, which are, ultimately, to lead to employment, weren't what employers want. So, we're very attuned to that, and making sure that the process, as it moves forward, both has the engagement of employers and is very much focused on meeting the needs that they've identified.

[146] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Hefin.

[147] **Hefin David:** You say in your report, on page 31, that you support the Welsh Government in the implementation of the Donaldson report. Can you expand on that?

[148] **Ms Evans:** In terms of the curriculum review that's going on now, we thought it was incredibly important that we were engaged with several of the working groups that the Welsh Government has set up, because, clearly, with curriculum change, there could be implications for qualifications, and we needed to understand that, and understand what might need to be done in the future. And so Philip and some of his team are part of several of the working groups, as the curriculum developments are rolled out, and begin to be more clearly defined. At the moment, we don't have absolute clarity on what implications there are for qualifications. I think it would be useful if you talked about some of your experiences that you've recently had, about the work in Scotland, for example, where they've had an enormous curriculum change, and the impact that had on qualifications, which is what we've been looking at as well.

[149] **Hefin David:** You say 'could have', but it's more likely 'will have', isn't it? If a curriculum changes, then the assessment changes. Isn't that inevitable, or not?

[150] **Mr Blaker:** I think we're anticipating there will be changes to qualifications. For us, it's around the magnitude of those changes. So, one of the things that we've identified through the reform process that we're going through at the moment, and through some of the experiences that we've

seen in Scotland, is that brand and brand strength is really quite important. So, GCSEs have got a strong brand, as A-levels have got a strong brand. Our thinking is that GCSEs would need to be developed in some way to meet the needs of the new curriculum. We've started to do some early thinking about what those developments might be. But the next stage for us is really when the Welsh Government's in a position to share the design principles around the curriculum, which we're anticipating early next year, so that we can then look at existing GCSEs and see how they fit with those design principles and also where we believe that there may be some changes necessary to see how those changes that we've got in mind might fit with the design principles. So, we are anticipating change, and that will be an important part of our work next year. What we do want to do is one of the things that we found through some of the research that we've done—and, actually, through some of the work that was before our time with the review of qualifications—that we need to be cautious in the pace of change, and that we need to be in a position where schools aren't destabilised by constant reform. So, what we are thinking at the moment is that we may be in a process of evolution of GCSEs rather than a full-stage revolution.

[151] **Hefin David:** Is it possible that you might not have any choice, given that the curriculum changes might actually be revolutionary?

[152] **Mr Blaker:** They may be. What we would need to understand is what the impact might be on content and the way that subjects are described. We visited Scotland recently, and Scotland, with Curriculum for Excellence, has a very similar model of curriculum to Successful Futures.

[153] **Hefin David:** Although Donaldson said that it wasn't necessarily the same as Scotland.

[154] **Mr Blaker:** It's not, and, actually, having been there and become engrossed in it for a week, you can see the differences between them. I think this is where we need to understand the design principles more, but what we have thought is that, across the six areas of learning and experience, you can quite quickly map existing GCSEs into those different areas and you can see how they might fit. We also think that there might be areas where we would need to develop new qualifications. So, for example, in humanities, we have a shortage of social science-type subjects at the moment. So, we're anticipating that there may be a need to develop a GCSE in something like social sciences, which brings together sociology, psychology and other elements of social sciences, which would then give you, in relation to the

curriculum, more of those interdisciplinary learning-type techniques that we believe the curriculum is calling for.

[155] **Hefin David:** So, given this work that you're implying—or I'm certainly inferring—is likely to take place over the next 12 months, could we expect, perhaps in next year's annual report, a little bit more detail on that co-ordination with the curriculum review?

[156] **Mr Blaker:** Absolutely. It was too early in this last annual report to really say much on it, but we're hoping that the starting point for our deeper analysis will be early next year.

[157] **Hefin David:** Okay, thank you.

[158] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Llyr.

[159] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Thank you. I just want to ask a few questions about the resources that are available to you, and some of the processes, clearly, that you've been putting in place. Are you confident that you have now, for the coming year, the necessary resources and processes to deliver a successful year of activity?

[160] **Ms Evans:** 'Yes' is the simple answer to that. Where we have been is establishing ourselves during the year, and we now have a very clear handle on our costs. We've undertaken quite a detailed scrutiny and some forward modelling as well for our resources, because we think it's important—not that we're just looking at next year, but we're looking at the two or three years to come, because, clearly, there will be pressures on our budget going forward. We've been very clear with the Welsh Government about where we are. You will all have seen that we've accepted a 4 per cent hit in our budget for next year, and we've accommodated that by doing various things—cutting back on certain areas of work, and not actually recruiting some staff, because we're very aware that once you've recruited staff you have onward pressures once they're in place. So, we've done all of those kinds of things. But we've also been very clear with the Welsh Government that if, at some point, there was significant additional work that they wished us to take on, we would need to talk to them. So, we're confident at the moment. We know there are more pressures coming due to inflation and other pressures on budgets. And if there is additional work, then we would clearly have to have ongoing discussions with Welsh Government about it. But currently 'yes'.

10:45

[161] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Okay. Well, I was going to ask about the 4 per cent, but clearly you've pre-empted that. So, you've mentioned that you've reflected that reduction in your work going forward. Could you maybe tell us where or which priorities are maybe not going to be delivering as much as you would have hoped, and also in relation to recruitment, because you did mention in the report that the majority of recruitment is complete? Notwithstanding those posts that you will now not be recruiting to, could you maybe give us an idea of where remainder of the recruitment needs to happen?

[162] **Mr Blaker:** Sure. So, we made a decision to freeze the recruitment of two posts, as Ann said, thinking about the sustainability of workforce if we are in a position where there are cuts. The main area for next year where we've made some changes is we've reduced some of our research budget. Now, in that, we've made the decision to recruit quite a large internal research structure within the organisation because we want to conduct as much of the research ourselves as possible, because we think we can get the best benefit out of that. What we will always need to do is go out and do some research exercises where we're looking for very niche skills. What we've done is we've reduced our external research budget on the basis that, now that we have our internal team in place, we'll be doing less external research because we'll be taking more on ourselves.

[163] The key thing is that for next year we're in a reasonable position and we don't think that it will impact on any of our work at all. Moving forward, because we're a new organisation, we're recruiting staff at the bottom of pay spines more generally. Over the next couple of years, those staff will progress through the pay spines, which are the same as Welsh Government pay spines. So, we see an increased pressure on our budget in a couple of years' time, and that's where resourcing will become tighter.

[164] What we've done, though, is we've been clear to Welsh Government that what we're doing when we're accepting the budget that's been offered to us, and looking at that 4 per cent cut, is that any additional work that is outside of our scope of work at the moment would need to be funded additionally. Now, the area that we're particularly unsighted on is on curriculum reforms, and what might be the impact on qualifications, so going back to Hefin's point. What we believe there is that, for next year, our external research budget will be sufficient. But we'll be able to check that early next year when we see the design principles and we can check our early

thinking. We do imagine that we will need to be making more of a claim for the year after in terms of some research that we think that we would need to do to prepare for the curriculum.

[165] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So, the danger is that that additional workload will be coming around at the very time when maybe you will be getting to a point where you can't function as effectively as you'd like without additional resources.

[166] **Mr Blaker:** Indeed.

[167] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Okay. Could I ask a couple of questions about the qualifications in Wales database as well? How confident are you of the accuracy of its contents? How do you monitor it?

[168] **Ms Evans:** That's for you, definitely. [*Laughter.*]

[169] **Mr Blaker:** So, data were migrated across from the database of qualifications in Wales, DAQW, which was the former database, so it may be worth saying a few words about QiW, qualifications in Wales, the new database. So, we developed that from scratch. It was one of the first things that we needed to do in September/October of last year, because the existing commercial relationships around DAQW would end at 31 March. Also, we made the decision that we wanted to have operational independence from Ofqual. DAQW was reliant on Ofqual's data feed and was therefore reliant on awarding bodies to go in and input their data. So, we developed QiW very rapidly, and we're very pleased with it. We actually got nominated for UK IT Industry Awards, and we were finalists in that. We didn't win it, I'm afraid, but we were very pleased to be nominated for it. It was a very successful project.

[170] As part of that, we did undertake quite an extensive data cleansing exercise as the data came across from DAQW. We've invited awarding bodies to check their own data. We've also undertaken a cleansing exercise in terms of trying to reduce the number of qualifications that were on there. So, there were around 20,000 qualifications that were on DAQW, many of which hadn't been awarded in Wales for a number of years, and, actually, the number of qualifications is one of the driving factors in those perceptions of complexity in the qualifications system. So, as an early win, we engaged with awarding bodies to try and remove all of the moribund and redundant qualifications that haven't been awarded in Wales for some time, and we've managed to

reduce that down to 7,000 qualifications now that are in QiW.

[171] Data cleansing is something that is constantly going on. One of the changes that is being introduced at the moment is that awarding bodies have until the end of this month to make sure that the guided learning hours that are associated with their qualifications, which are used in the sizing of qualifications, are accurate, and we're seeing some changes in guided learning hours.

[172] I think the other area that it's worth saying about QiW is that we felt it was important that it offered a national resource in Wales, so one place for schools to go and get information on qualifications. There are some data in there that are not our data. So, Welsh Government use QiW to be able to portray performance points and equivalencies: so, looking at those guided learning hours and asking, 'Is a qualification roughly the size of a whole GCSE, half a GCSE, a quarter of a GCSE?', and those data are updated by and managed by Welsh Government directly. We provided them with an interface on to QiW, so that they can do that.

[173] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Julie.

[174] **Julie Morgan:** Yes, thank you very much. I wanted to ask a bit more about public confidence in the qualifications, to go back to that. I know that you have this study, longitudinal study. Have you got any information from that?

[175] **Ms Evans:** I think it would be sensible to say that the purpose of the longitudinal study—that first, initial piece of work—was to set a baseline. It is very difficult to measure public confidence, because, as you probably know, if you ask people something on one day and something has happened in the press on that day, it influences the way in which they respond. So, we are very careful that it is only one measure, our study that we're doing, but we will repeat it in two years and then repeat it again in another two years. Philip, you have got some initial findings from it, which maybe you can explain.

[176] **Mr Blaker:** We're planning on publishing the research early in the new year. It's something that's planned for January, so you'll be able to see it in full there. The study had two main approaches. One was in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and there were 46 stakeholders who were engaged, and those would be teachers within schools, colleges, work-based learning

providers and the like, and then part of the study also used an omnibus survey going out to adults in Wales and there were just over 1,000 responses from that.

[177] **Julie Morgan:** So, that's random.

[178] **Mr Blaker:** Indeed, yes. Essentially, understanding and confidence are two very closely related things. So, the closer somebody was to the qualifications system, the greater understanding they had and therefore the more relevant the response was. So, we've been weighting a lot more towards the 46 in-depth interviews to get a baseline. The key findings are that the majority of people do have confidence in qualifications and the qualifications system, particularly around the GCSE and A-level reforms, and this goes back to the point I raised earlier about the strength of those brands. There were concerns raised about the pace of change and there were also concerns, especially from schools, around vocational qualifications that are used in the school environment. Clearly, that's an area that we're paying close attention to in our sector reviews, as we look at qualifications that are used throughout the whole of the system.

[179] It's probably worth going back to sector reviews as an approach for a moment. One of the reasons why we've chosen sector reviews, or the way of dividing the vocational qualification market up by sector rather than by age, is so that you can actually have a really strong view of what the progression routes are. So, do qualifications that are offered in schools—initial vocational qualifications—provide the basis of knowledge to be able to then engage with deeper learning, whether that be knowledge-based learning, academic learning, or whether it be practice and competency-based learning? So, one of the main reasons for sectoral users is that we can start with school qualifications and go right the way through to the end of our remit, which finishes at non-degree. So, we don't go beyond degree.

[180] **Julie Morgan:** Right. Can I ask what the 1,000 random responses were?

[181] **Mr Blaker:** Again, generally quite strong in terms of an understanding of, or confidence in, the system. And, again, stronger with GCSEs and A-levels, where the brand is such an important component of people's thinking. I think I'd go back to what Ann said. We're always concerned that these sorts of surveys will be one measure of what we're doing. They will never be entirely comprehensive. Ann's mentioned the fact that, from a public confidence perspective, public confidence will always be influenced by the



last thing somebody's heard. And, of course, in that, a lot of media is focused around the system in England. So, quite often, things that get into the general media will be related to changes, reforms, issues that may occur in England, but may not be affecting us here in Wales.

[182] **Julie Morgan:** Were they aware of you as a body?

[183] **Mr Blaker:** So, this was before we became established. It was a baseline. We will be, in future studies, looking to see whether people understand our role and the impact that we're having.

[184] **Julie Morgan:** Yes. And how often will this be surveyed?

[185] **Mr Blaker:** Every two years.

[186] **Julie Morgan:** Every two years. Right. So, you're encouraged, really, in terms of confidence in the system.

[187] **Mr Blaker:** Yes. And, clearly, there's work to be done, and one of the key things is improving understanding of the system, especially where there are reforms in key qualifications like GCSEs and A-levels, letting people understand what the differences are, why the differences are there, and also the confidence that one can have from the fact that the system is prepared for those changes. So, an example of that is we've recently agreed a three-regulator joint statement on reforms in GCSEs and A-levels, which are describing the differences between Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and restating the value of those qualifications and the commitment of the three regulators to maintain standards independently in each jurisdiction.

[188] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you.

[189] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Hefin.

[190] **Hefin David:** Although it's not specifically in the chapter on public confidence, on page 48, you've got the incidents that may affect learners. If I was an educator or a parent picking it up, I might be a little bit alarmed. Although the numbers are relatively low—107 notifications—some of the categories are maladministration, malpractice, assessment questionnaires and assessment material security breaches. There's not then a lot of detail behind that, which doesn't help reduce the alarm. Can you just give a little bit more explanation?

[191] **Mr Blaker:** Sure. So, it's a requirement through our conditions of recognition that awarding bodies alert us to any incidents that may have a negative impact on learners. The most common things that get reported to us might be security breaches, where—. That can often be that a school has gone and opened paper 2 rather than paper 1, and issued it to some candidates, or a timetabling issue where a candidate has taken a paper earlier than they should have done.

[192] **Hefin David:** But, according to your graph, the most commonly reported was maladministration.

[193] **Mr Blaker:** So, those can often be those sorts of issues. So, that can be described as maladministration. So, basically, it's an administrative error that's occurred within the schools. In those situations, the schools can take local arrangements to make sure that security is maintained. Often, they'll be seeking undertakings from the learners that they won't be sharing anything that they have found. The awarding bodies can also put those schools under particular scrutiny, so they'll scrutinise results within the school to see if there's any patterns that may not be what one would expect. So, those are the sorts of things.

[194] The other area that was in there was around—

[195] **Hefin David:** Just before you move on, that's where my concern might be, because you've described two things. You've described an assessment material security breach, and you've described maladministration, as appearing, from the evidence you've given, to be the same thing, whereas, in the graph, they're distinct. I think it was a little bit of a weak point of your report, to be frank, in that you've got that information there without any depth to it.

11:00

[196] **Mr Blaker:** The texture behind it.

[197] **Hefin David:** Yes.

[198] **Mr Blaker:** Well, certainly, that's something we can look at in the report, moving forward, to provide more information on there.

[199] **Ms Evans:** I think, Hefin, what you're asking there is something that the board has actually asked questions about as well, which is a contextualisation of those kinds of data, because, as raw data, they actually feel potentially more worrying than they are, whereas all of the explanations that we then received at board level gave us reassurance that these were—

[200] **Hefin David:** Which is what Philip is delivering now, but there still remains in Philip's explanation a lack of clarity on what those specific things are, and I think that's quite important. Even if the incidents are low, and even if they led to limited impact, I think still you need an explanation of that in order to engender confidence in your report.

[201] **Mr Blaker:** We can certainly look at that for the future.

[202] **Ms Evans:** We'll take that on board.

[203] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. John.

[204] **John Griffiths:** Yes, I wanted to ask about national relationships and whether you've had any difficulties in engaging with stakeholders, and whether you think there are any particular relationships that you need to further develop?

[205] **Ms Evans:** I think it would be fair to say that everyone we've approached has been very welcoming and willing to talk to us and willing to engage with us. We've seen that as a very important aspect of our first year of existence, because people need to know who we are and what we do. And so we've not met with barriers. People haven't turned around to us and said, 'Why do you want to bother to come and talk to us?', and so it's been very positive up until now. Where we are very clear is that that's something we need to develop as well; good working relationships with stakeholders don't happen overnight. There has to be a development of a level of trust between different organisations and it's an aspect that we will be taking forward even more next year, particularly looking at the way in which we engage with employers, the way in which we ensure that we've got good links with higher education institutions, et cetera. So, it is something that's on our agenda. I think we've made a good start. We've certainly not met any barriers, but it's something that we want to develop and probably spend a bit more time on next year—or this current year, I should say. Did you want to add anything to that?

[206] **Mr Blaker:** No, I think just to reiterate it's something that has gone well, but we know that there's always more one can do in terms of engagement. We've introduced a couple of—. I guess we're trying to move from informal engagement to more formal engagement, and more of a regular pattern of engagement. We've had two first events, I suppose is the best way of describing them, over the last couple of weeks. So, we've had a first meeting with teaching associations and other associated bodies that have got a representative nature in terms of schools in Wales. And, yesterday, we had our first big awarding body forum where we had more than 100 attendees from awarding bodies, which has given us an opportunity to set out our stall in more detail to them.

[207] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Darren.

[208] **Darren Millar:** Yes. Sorry, I just wanted to go back to this issue of the regulation of examination fees. So, there's been an increase in the past three years of over 23 per cent in the charge for GCSEs made by WJEC. I assume they have to notify you of the increases in the fees, or do you have to wait for somebody to complain about them before you take a look and see whether those things can be justified?

[209] **Mr Blaker:** So, they don't need to notify us of changes. We are tracking changes. One of the things that we're planning on doing as one of our research studies over the next year is to look at baselining fees, not only from WJEC, but from all of the other awarding bodies, and not just the headline fees for GCSE entry, but also all of the things like continuous professional development events that schools go on. One of the reasons there is, whilst there might be increases in Wales, we see that there are increases in England and, actually, what we're looking for is making sure that those fees are both reasonable and that there isn't any exploitation of a single supplier situation that could occur.

[210] So, one of the things that we also want to do is recognise that there's a degree of baselining over the costs that schools will see. We also want to do some baselining over perceptions of customer service and customer experience, so, as we move into more of a single supplier situation, with WJEC being the only awarding body that has decided to offer reformed A-levels and GCSEs in Wales, we want to make sure that we've got a good understanding that the service that they're offering is a good service and is at least comparable with the service that's being offered in England through a market environment.

[211] **Darren Millar:** So what have you done to investigate why they feel they can justify a 23 per cent increase in their examination fees for a typical GCSE?

[212] **Mr Blaker:** We haven't done any specific investigations on that particular issue. We have done some work on looking at training events, which is something that had come to our attention—an increase in fees in training events. It seemed that, whilst there had been an increase in WJEC's fees, they were still offering a lower cost to schools than the awarding bodies in England were charging.

[213] **Darren Millar:** But isn't that a silly thing to compare, if you like? Because you're looking at an organisation that was able to offer a GCSE for a certain price a couple of years ago, which has increased that price dramatically, regardless of what the fee levels are elsewhere with other examination bodies that might be doing very different things. Here, this is a cost that is borne by the Welsh taxpayer, which is coming out of schools' pots, as it were, which is having a direct impact on school budgets at a time when we've got pressure, if you like, in the public finances. So, schools will be looking to you as the regulator to ensure that that's delivering value for money and, if it's not, you're working with the WJEC to get that price down and using your teeth, which you've got as a regulator, to cap those fees.

[214] **Mr Blaker:** Indeed, and as I said, it's an area that we'll be looking at in more detail over the next year. I think one of the things that's worth noting is that WJEC fund all of the reforms that they've been going through for GCSEs and A-levels, so there isn't a central pot of money to support the changes that they've needed to make. Now, there may be some element of cost recovery in pricing that they have, but we can certainly investigate that.

[215] **Darren Millar:** It's a commercial decision for them, I suppose, isn't it, in terms of them getting a return on any investment that they may have made. But it is a matter of concern; it's been brought to my attention, certainly. Can I ask—? Is this something that you're going to report on in the future? There's no reference to the regulation of fees at all in the report this year.

[216] **Mr Blaker:** It would certainly be something—once we've undertaken some of this work in terms of perceptions of customer service and baselining of fees and costs—that we'd be looking to report on next year.

[217] **Darren Millar:** But certainly, with the single-supplier status, the risk of exploitation of examination fees is much higher than in a more competitive marketplace.

[218] **Mr Blaker:** And I think it's that change in the market dynamics that is making us more alert to that particular dimension.

[219] **Darren Millar:** Thanks.

[220] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Oscar.

[221] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair. I'm a great believer in vocational qualifications, because I know, 20-odd years ago, Chair, there was a free education, even for flying training, and a lot of pilots are probably flying, now, jumbos in this country. My question to you is: you mentioned earlier, Philip, that you've got all the tools in your toolkit—you said those words clearly—and you said there are some niche skills, so I need to know, in that context, are there any—? In the old days, there were some tax incentives. I'm talking about older people, who aren't young—the senior people, not young children—and vocational qualifications; people of senior age, or over 25. What sort of assistance is available to them for qualifications—tax incentives or any sort of thing where people can learn an extra qualification while they're in jobs or work? Have you got anything like that at the moment? Because you're very new in this field.

[222] **Ms Evans:** It's a very interesting concept and idea, but it's outside of our remit in terms of supporting learners directly. We don't have any remit in that area; we're very clearly focused on the regulation of qualifications. That kind of debate and discussion, I think, is one for the Welsh Government, and probably other organisations as well, but unfortunately not for us. But I absolutely understand what you're saying and how important it is for the Welsh economy.

[223] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay; thank you. Are there any other questions from—? Go on, then.

[224] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much indeed. What do you think that the biggest development in your day-to-day practice will be over the next year? So, how are you going to develop yourselves next year?

[225] **Ms Evans:** The year we're in now?

[226] **Mohammad Asghar:** Yes.

[227] **Ms Evans:** I think there are several things. I'd start with: last year was our first year, so we were doing everything for the first time. This year, we're embedding good practice and honing everything that we're doing. So, one of our challenges for this year is to actually sharpen up everything that we're doing and make sure that we're doing it in the best possible way. In terms of the challenges going forward for us, clearly we will have a summer exams series for GCSEs and A-levels, which will be the culmination of two years' work for lots of our young people and we want to make sure that that goes smoothly and is handled appropriately.

[228] We are undertaking this major reform programme in vocational qualifications. So, by the end of the next year, we will be looking at the health and social care qualifications that will hopefully be delivered for 2019. We're also clearly going to need to articulate all of the issues that Hefin was raising, which were around the impact of the curriculum, potentially, on our qualifications and what that means for our work plan going forward. So, I think that's quite a lot of challenges for us for this coming year.

[229] We also keep a weather eye on what's happening England, because there can often be developments and changes that happen across the border that have a washback effect on us. So, we do keep a very close eye on developments and changes that are going on in England, for example the skills plan and things like that. Is there anything you want to add?

[230] **Mr Blaker:** Just to reiterate that, in the first year, we were doing everything for the first time. We made a commitment to be a learning organisation and to develop our practice as we develop as an organisation. An example is we spent quite a bit of time looking at the sector review method for vocational qualifications on the basis that it was novel. Nobody had done something like that before, so we spent a lot of time looking at the method, understanding where we could strengthen it, and we've already implemented some slightly different mechanisms as we move forward for the two that we're starting for next year. So, we'll always be looking to improve our practice.

[231] **Lynne Neagle:** Are there any other questions from Members? No. Okay, well, can I thank you both for attending today and answering our questions?

We will follow your progress with interest in the coming year. You will be sent a transcript of the meeting to check for accuracy. Thank you very much.

11:12

**Papur i'w Nodi**  
**Paper to Note**

[232] **Lynne Neagle:** Item 4 is a paper to note. Paper to note 3: a letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education, which is a follow-up to action following the budget scrutiny session. Are Members happy to note that?

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42(ix) i Benderfynu Gwahardd y  
Cyhoedd o Weddill y Cyfarfod**  
**Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to Resolve to Exclude the  
Public from the Meeting for the Remainder of the Meeting**

*Cynnig:*

*Motion:*

*bod y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog 17.42(ix).*

*that the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(ix).*

*Cynigiwyd y cynnig.*

*Motion moved.*

[233] **Lynne Neagle:** Item 5 is a motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public for the remainder of this meeting. Are Members content? Thank you.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.*

*Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11:13.*

*The public part of the meeting ended at 11:13.*