



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Qualifications Wales**

DATE **7 February 2013**

BY **Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Education and Skills**

In my Written Statement on 5 December I confirmed that the Deputy Minister for Skills and I had accepted the proposal in Recommendation 5 of the report of the Review of Qualifications, that the regulation of qualifications in Wales should be strengthened and separated from government. I announced that we will move towards establishing a new body, “Qualifications Wales”, to regulate and assure the quality of all qualifications other than degree level in Wales. Today I want to reiterate that commitment and provide an update.

Huw Evans and his independent Board reported on the Review of Qualifications to the Deputy Minister for Skills on 28 November. We responded to their remaining 41 recommendations last month.

The reaction from stakeholders to the Board’s report and its recommendations has been a positive one. Now that you have had the opportunity to digest the report, I am sure that you will agree that it sets out a potentially exciting path for qualifications in Wales. If we proceed in the direction that Huw Evans and his Board recommend there will be significant implications for everyone in Wales. The work ahead offers exciting opportunities. Whilst it would not be without its challenges, it will be vital that, in implementing the changes that we agree, we get it right - vital for businesses in Wales, vital for educators in Wales and vital for learners in Wales.

Our current regulatory and delivery system for qualifications is designed around the operation of three-country working and qualifications that are jointly owned by Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Whilst we want to maintain three-country working where that is appropriate, it is a fact that, increasingly, the current arrangements and structures are becoming untenable, particularly for ‘general qualifications’ – GCSEs and A levels.

Unilateral announcements from Westminster about our shared qualifications undermine the three-country arrangements. The qualifications regulator in England, Ofqual, naturally has to align with the agenda set in Westminster. We do not.

Of course we recognise the importance of portability of our qualifications and we will continue to work with colleagues and stakeholders in other countries to ensure that our qualifications are recognised in, and are relevant to, other countries. However, we will sometimes take a different view to that taken by the Secretary of State for Education in England. In these cases, we will do as we always have done. We will put the needs of Wales and the interests of Welsh learners first.

Huw Evans and his team have been careful to put Wales' needs and Welsh learners' needs at the forefront of their report and recommendations. They have taken an inclusive and evidence-based approach – an approach that has drawn compliments from commentators in Wales and beyond. All of this is reflected in the positive way in which the report has been received. The Board's recommendations stem from an extensive evidence base, drawing from their own wide ranging experience and expertise, from meetings with stakeholders, a full consultation and from the Review of the Structure of the General Qualifications Market in Wales, which reported to me in May 2012.

But regardless of which of the recommendations from the Review of Qualifications we do accept, it is clear that our qualifications are already diverging from England. Now is therefore the time to review and strengthen our regulatory and delivery arrangements.

I said in my Written Statement that, we will study and learn from the model that has been in operation in Scotland for some years and has built a strong reputation for rigour and quality. To that end, I visited Scotland shortly before Christmas, where I met with Graham Houston, Chair of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Janet Brown the CEO and Michael Russell MSP, the Scottish Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning. The meetings were productive and gave me valuable insights about the operation of the qualifications system in Scotland.

I also met John McCormick, who was Chair of SQA for four years, from 2004 to 2008. SQA took over the functions of the Scottish Examinations Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council in 1997. This was another valuable meeting. John McCormick's experience of the oversight of SQA is highly relevant to the work which the Welsh Government will be undertaking in the establishment of Qualifications Wales.

My officials are working on the details of the work to establish Qualifications Wales. As part of this they have already held a productive workshop with John McCormick and they will continue to have detailed discussions with him and with SQA officials. As I said in my Written Statement, one of the early tasks is to commission a due diligence review. On the basis of its findings, we will develop detailed proposals and a business case in the first half of 2013 to ensure the viability and value for money of our proposed new approach.

I also announced on 5 December that Huw Evans had agreed to chair a task and finish group, which we will establish early in 2013, to steer the early delivery of Qualifications Wales. The group will advise on issues relating to timing, governance, structures and due diligence. Huw's expertise will be invaluable in supporting this change programme.

Our aim is that from September 2015 Qualifications Wales will take responsibility for awarding qualifications including the majority of general qualifications. Clearly this will have implications for the WJEC. So we are engaging with them. I am also engaged in discussions with local government leaders on this issue and will be continuing this dialogue.

Meanwhile, WJEC will continue to be a key and valued provider of qualifications in Wales and in other nations as these discussions progress.