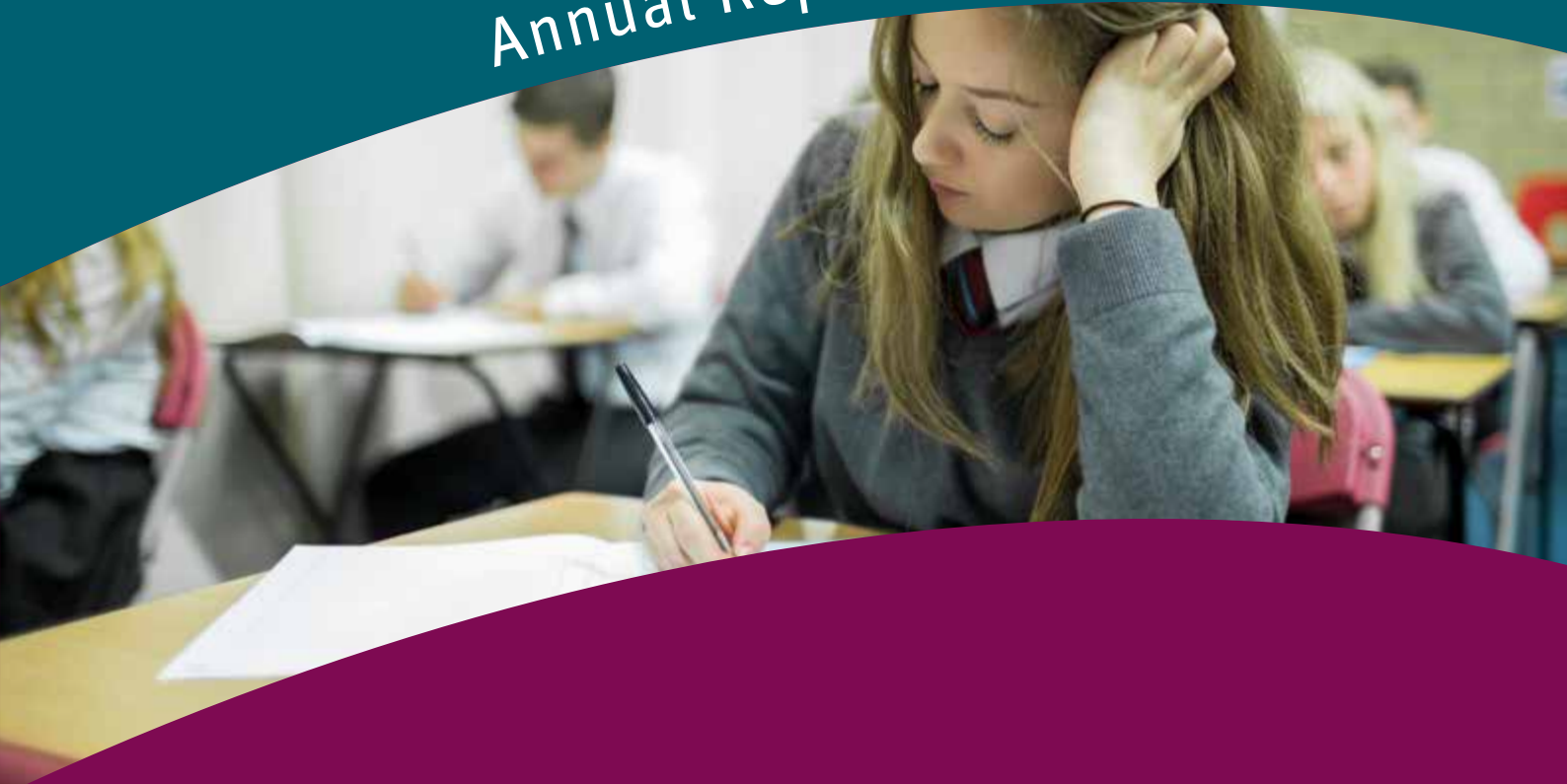




Annual Report 2016



Contents

Chair's foreword	2
CEO's introduction	3
About Qualifications Wales	5
Strategic Priority 1: A strategically-regulated qualification system in Wales	21
· The development of qualifications	23
· Health and Social Care Review	24
· Regulatory Strategy Project	26
· Providing grants	28
· Support for centres	29
· Relationship with the Welsh Government	31
· Research	32
· Teacher-led assessment in post-14 education & training: a literature review	34
· Policies	35
· Simplifying the qualification system	36
Strategic Priority 2: Quality-assured supply	37
· Recognising awarding bodies	39
· Approving/Designating qualifications	41
· Relationships with other regulators	45
· Monitoring and compliance	46
· Reviewing the Welsh Baccalaureate	50
· General qualification results	52
· Relationships with awarding bodies	56
Strategic Priority 3: Build Qualifications Wales' capability and capacity	57
· Making a regulator	59
· Building capacity	61
· Qualifications in Wales (QiW)	64
· Qualifications Wales as an employer	67
· Our people	68
Strategic Priority 4: Deliver public confidence	71
· Public confidence	73
· Measuring public confidence	76
· Working with our stakeholders	77
Looking forward	81

Chair's Foreword

I am delighted to present Qualifications Wales' first annual report covering the period from September 2015 to August 2016. It sets out our aims and activities since we were established, and gives an overview of what we have delivered.

We were set up following the Welsh Government's acceptance of the recommendation in the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19 year-olds in Wales* report to establish an independent regulator of qualifications in Wales and remove the regulation of qualifications from the work of the Welsh Government.

Our Board brings together a wide range of knowledge and experience in education and business. The Board has met regularly since its first meeting on 25 September, and I am pleased to report that its governance and financial stewardship of Qualifications Wales is working well.

Our first year has been extremely challenging, but very rewarding. The development of a brand-new organisation required us to design and implement all the necessary processes and procedures to run efficiently, alongside establishing ourselves as a credible qualifications regulator and taking over the significant A level and GCSE reform programme started within the Welsh Government. This was a major task, but one we have met due to the hard work, enthusiasm and professionalism of our staff and I'd like to pay tribute to all of them. I would also like to thank the very many people and organisations with whom we work and who have helped to shape our new organisation.

In our first year, we have achieved our goals and have begun to establish ourselves as part of the wider education community in Wales. We place at the heart of everything we do the learner and public confidence in the Welsh qualification system; while we know there are many challenges ahead, we look forward with enthusiasm and confidence to our second year.



Ann Evans, Chair

CEO's Introduction

This Annual Report reflects the work that we have undertaken up to the end of August 2016 and demonstrates the impact that we have had since we were established as the new independent regulator of qualifications in Wales on 21 September 2015.

In September 2015 we started with new staff, a newly fitted-out office space and new systems. Our challenge across the last twelve months has been to transform these core assets into a strong and effective regulator. Our aim has been to ensure continuity and security within the qualifications system, whilst developing our understanding, processes and capability.

This report provides a welcome opportunity to reflect on our achievements and progress towards meeting our Principal Aims: to ensure effective qualifications and an effective qualifications system for learners and to promote public confidence.

We play an important role in many people's lives – particularly our young people – and it's important that we are there to protect their interests. It's also important that we are accepted as an expert body playing a significant part in the education system as a whole, working in tandem with many other organisations and individuals who are dedicated to improving both opportunities and outcomes for Welsh learners.

In our first year, I would highlight that we have:

- continued with the reform of GCSEs and A levels initiated by the 2012 Review of Qualifications;
- commenced a sectoral approach to the review and potential subsequent reform of vocational qualifications;
- overseen the safe award of summer examinations;
- developed our role within the education system in Wales;
- proactively engaged with our stakeholders; and
- established a productive and effective organisation.

These are important tasks, and we have completed them with a high degree of professionalism. However, it has not always been plain sailing, and we have had to make some difficult decisions. Our independence helps us to focus on making the right decisions. We have found that if we keep learners at the heart of what we do, then we will not go far wrong.

This report lays our achievements against our four Strategic Priorities. Key areas include:

Strategic Priority 1: 'A strategically-regulated qualification system in Wales'

- Undertaking our first sector review – in Health & Social Care;
- Developing and publishing Approval criteria for GCSEs and A levels for first teaching from 2017;
- Developing and publishing key regulatory policies;
- Completion of Phase 1 of our Regulatory Strategy Project;
- The work of our Centre Support Team;
- Commissioning research to improve our evidence base.

more...

Strategic Priority 2: 'Quality-assured supply'

- The development of a robust process for considering the recognition of awarding bodies;
- Increasing the level of monitoring for high-stakes qualifications;
- The successful implementation of a rigorous process to Approve reformed GCSEs and A levels for first teaching from 2016;
- Overseeing the successful award of the summer GCSE and A level examination series.

Strategic Priority 3: 'Build Qualifications Wales' capability and capacity'

- Recruiting our staff and completing a successful induction programme;
- Developing our values;
- Setting up the corporate functions required for the brand-new organisation;
- The development and launch of our new regulatory database – Qualifications in Wales (QiW)
- Substantial development of our staff.

Strategic Priority 4: 'Deliver public confidence'

- Actively engaging with our stakeholders to increase our mutual understanding of what is happening in the qualification system;
- Commissioning a long-term study to look at perceptions of public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system;
- Communicating effectively with our key stakeholders to ensure their understanding of our role and purpose.

We have had many successes over the year. In all cases, these successes are principally due to the efforts, skill and judgement of our staff. The development of Qualifications in Wales (QiW), our public-facing database of qualifications that are eligible for funding in Wales, is a prime example of how we work as an organisation. We identified the job that needed to be done, we planned it carefully (identifying the issues and risks that we faced), and completed it successfully – so successfully, in fact, that we have been shortlisted as a finalist for a national IT award.

This general approach has also been evident elsewhere: for example, our first set of accounts was produced without qualification and we have had a clean bill of health from our audits. Where we have undertaken reviews of how aspects of the qualifications system are working, these have been comprehensive and produced meaningful, actionable recommendations.

While our first year has been highly productive, there is a huge amount for us still to do. In this report, we outline our plans for next year. These are challenging, and we will be publishing them in more detail in our business plans.

We are a small organisation, but one that has a big impact. We will continue to develop and evolve as we make our contribution to the education system in Wales.



Philip Blaker, Chief Executive

About Qualifications Wales

Who are we?

Qualifications Wales is the new regulator of non-degree qualifications for Wales. We took on our regulatory functions on 21 September 2015, under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015.

The Act gives us two Principal Aims:

- *Ensuring that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and*
- *Promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system.*

What we do

We have a key role in protecting the value of qualifications. We do this by ensuring that awarding bodies (often called ‘exam boards’) that develop and deliver qualifications, meet certain standards. We scrutinise specific qualifications and oversee the Welsh qualification system to make sure it is working in the interest of learners in Wales.

In our work, we are obliged by law to consider the following ‘eight matters’ that affect qualifications and the qualification system in Wales:

- i) The desirability of promoting sustainable growth in the Welsh economy;
- ii) The desirability of promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language;
- iii) The range and nature of qualifications available, and their assessment arrangements;
- iv) The reasonable requirements of employers, higher education institutions and professions;
- v) Whether the knowledge, skills and understanding required to be demonstrated for the award of a qualification reflect current knowledge and best practice;
- vi) Whether qualifications indicate a consistent level of attainment with comparable qualifications in Europe or elsewhere;
- vii) Whether qualifications are provided efficiently and give value for money;
- viii) The roles and responsibilities of awarding bodies, learning providers, Qualifications Wales, the Welsh Ministers and others exercising relevant functions in the Welsh qualification system.

We focus on four main areas of activity:

Recognition & Approval

We recognise awarding bodies that meet specified criteria and we Approve or Designate the qualifications that they propose to offer in Wales.

Monitoring & Compliance

We regulate awarding bodies to check that they maintain the required standards and deliver qualifications effectively, and we review existing qualifications to assess their fitness for purpose.

Development & Commissioning

Where necessary, we oversee the design of new qualification requirements, and we commission awarding bodies to develop new qualifications for Wales.

Research

We undertake research into the qualification system and into specific areas of interest and relevance so that we can make evidence-based decisions.

How we work

Qualifications Wales is an independent statutory body, sponsored by the Welsh Government, but able to take autonomous decisions about qualifications, based on evidence. In doing so, we are committed to protecting the interests of learners in Wales and maintaining standards. We also consider how our actions affect other key stakeholders and the qualification system in which they operate.

In our work, we embrace the principles of the Future Generations Act: we strive to work in an integrated, sustainable and collaborative way, thinking long-term, with the emphasis on working proactively to prevent problems, rather than simply managing the consequences.

We are accountable to the people of Wales through the National Assembly for Wales. This Annual Report is the vehicle through which we report on how we have fulfilled our functions, and how we plan to carry them out in the future.

Our governance

The Qualifications Wales Board

Our Board comprises the Chair and the Chief Executive, supported by eight to ten members who are appointed by Welsh Ministers via the public appointments process.

The Board leads Qualifications Wales, overseeing strategic direction, and the organisation's performance and financial management.

In particular, the Board is responsible for ensuring that we:

- meet our Principal Aims;
- pay due regard to the eight matters listed in the Qualifications Wales Act;
- operate within our financial framework and provide value for money;
- advise Welsh Ministers of any changes that are likely to affect the Welsh Government and/or the delivery of our Principal Aims;
- demonstrate high standards of corporate governance at all times.

At the end of the 2015-16 reporting year, the members of the Board were:

- Ann Evans (Chair – appointed 6 August 2015)
- Philip Blaker (Chief Executive – appointed 6 August 2015)
- Caroline Burt (appointed 6 August 2015)
- Paul Croke (appointed 6 August 2015)
- Ellen Donovan (appointed 8 December 2015)
- Robert Lloyd Griffiths OBE (appointed 8 December 2015)
- Angela Maguire Lewis (appointed 6 August 2015)
- Claire Morgan (appointed 6 August 2015)
- Isabel Nisbet (appointed 6 August 2015)
- Rheon Tomos (appointed 8 December 2015)

Iestyn Davies and Dylan Jones were members of the Board from 6 August 2015 until 5 November 2015, when their terms expired.

Alun Llwyd was appointed in September 2016.

The Qualifications Wales Board



LR

Rheon Tomos, Caroline Burt, Angela Maguire-Lewis, Robert Lloyd Griffiths, Ann Evans, Philip Blaker, Isabel Nisbet, Ellen Donovan, Alun Llwyd (appointed September 2016), Claire Morgan, (Paul Croke, not pictured).

Board Members, 21 September 2015 to 31 August 2016



Ann Evans, Chair
(appointed 6 August 2015)

Ann has been an independent education consultant since 2012, following four years as the Chief Executive of Careers Wales for Mid Glamorgan and Powys. As such, she played a key role in the Review of Qualifications. Her earlier positions include Assistant Chief Executive of the former Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), a Science teacher and a lecturer and manager in Further Education.



Philip Blaker, Chief Executive
(appointed 6 August 2015)

Philip was previously Director of Operations at UCAS. Prior to this, he worked as a management consultant. He has a background in the delivery of national assessments and examinations, having been Director of Test Operations with the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency and a member of the senior management team with the examination board AQA.



Caroline Burt
(appointed 6 August 2015)

Caroline is the Admissions Tutor and Director of Studies in History at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge. Her career history includes tax analyst at Arthur Andersen Accountants on the company's Gap Year Scholarship Programme, and school trustee.



Paul Croke
(appointed 6 August 2015)
Chair, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Paul is currently Chair of Governors at Bridgend College and a former Principal of both Yale College, Wrexham and Gorseinon College, Swansea. He has previously worked as an examiner for two examination boards, and has been appointed as a member of the newly-formed Education Workforce Council.



Ellen Donovan

(appointed 8 December 2015)

Ellen is an experienced management board Director, with over 25 years of business experience in the private sector. Her previous roles include Trading Director, being responsible for the development of brands, products and services within Debenhams PLC, and Operations Director, where she led a workforce of over 5,000 staff.



Robert Lloyd Griffiths OBE

(appointed 8 December 2015)

Chair, Resources Committee

Robert is the Director of the Institute of Directors (IoD) for Wales, a post he has held since 2009 following earlier career roles in advertising, public relations, marketing and communications. He is a member of both the First Minister's Council for Economic Renewal and The Secretary of State for Wales' Business Advisory Group.



Angela Maguire-Lewis

(appointed 6 August 2015)

Angela currently works as a freelance educational consultant supporting companies on both operational and quality strategies. She has in-depth experience and knowledge of the design, delivery and evaluation of apprenticeship, employability and alternative curriculum programmes.



Claire Morgan

(appointed 6 August 2015)

Claire is the Dean for Learning and Teaching at Cardiff Metropolitan University. She joined Cardiff Met from Cardiff University, where she held the post of College Associate Dean. Claire's background is as a senior lecturer in Economics, with a specific interest in assessment policy and practice and quality systems.



Isabel Nisbet

(appointed 6 August 2015)

Chair, Regulation Committee

Isabel is an Affiliated Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. She serves on the Board of Governors of two universities in England and on two committees advising the UK Government on ethical matters. In 2005 she was appointed Director of Regulation and Standards at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and she subsequently became the first CEO of Ofqual, the regulator of examinations and qualifications in England.



Rheon Tomos

(appointed 8 December 2015)

Chair, Remuneration Committee

Rheon is a Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)-qualified accountant, and is currently a partner of TDE-Associates, where he provides specialist support on corporate governance. He has been involved in the administration of public sector services over many years.

The Board is supported in the execution of its duties by four active Committees. The Committees have key roles in relation to the system of governance and assurance, scrutiny, development discussions, assessment of current risks and performance monitoring. All Committees are chaired by a Board member, are attended by relevant members of the Executive Team, and serviced by the Head of Corporate Governance.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee supports the Board and the Accounting Officer (the Chief Executive) by reviewing the comprehensiveness and reliability of assurances on governance, risk management, the control environment, the integrity of financial statements and the annual accounts.

Regulation Committee

The purpose of this committee is to consider and provide recommendations to the Board on issues arising from our regulatory approach. Its recommendations must be endorsed by the Board before any action is taken.

Remuneration Committee

The Remuneration Committee considers and provides recommendations to the Board on the remuneration of staff and Board members, in line with our Framework Agreement with the Welsh Government.

Resources Committee

This committee provides scrutiny of how we use our resources to deliver our objectives. It offers an environment for detailed discussion on financial and business planning matters, and on staffing policies.

Board meetings and decisions

Minutes of Board meetings are available on the Qualifications Wales website.

Some of the main areas of work that were subject to scrutiny during this year were:

- Progress against a health-check on the establishment of the organisation;
- The development of the QiW database;
- The Health and Social Care Review and recommendations;
- The General Qualifications Reform programme;
- Planning for the Summer examinations series;
- Development of the Vocational Qualifications Strategy; and
- Communications.

In addition, some of the key decisions taken by the Board during the period included:

- Approval of the Scheme of Delegation;
- Approval of the Business Plan for 2015-16 and for 2016-17;
- Approval of the Priority Qualifications List prior to agreement with Welsh Ministers and subsequent publication;
- Approval for additional expenditure on the QiW system in order to secure enhanced features;
- Deferral of GCSE History and GCSE Religious Studies for first teaching in 2017;
- Approval of a number of regulatory policies;
- Approval of the Strategic Equalities Plan;
- Approval of the Corporate Risk appetite;
- Approval of the Memorandum of Understanding between Qualifications Wales and Ofqual;
- Approval of the Annual Accounts; and
- Approval to consult on the intention to use our powers to restrict for Health and Social Care qualifications.

Our management

The organisation is divided into three directorates (Regulation, Policy & Research, and Finance & Corporate Services), each led by an Executive Director.

We also have two Associate Directors, who have a cross-cutting role to oversee our strategic approach to general qualifications and vocational qualifications.

The Executive Team

Our Executive team is accountable for our day-to-day activities as an organisation, and for providing corporate leadership; it is made up of:



Philip Blaker
Chief Executive Officer



Kate Crabtree
Director of Policy & Research



Jo Richards
Director of Regulation



Alison Standfast
Director of Finance &
Corporate Services

Management Board

Our Management Board is the main decision-making forum, and gives direction on operational activities and corporate matters. Its membership consists of the Executive Team, the two Associate Directors, the Head of Communications and the Head of Corporate Governance.

Senior Leadership Group

The Senior Leadership Group brings together all of the heads of teams within the organisation. Its primary purpose is to ensure that there is strong cohesion across the various functions, and effective communication throughout the organisation.

How we regulate

To ensure stability for the qualifications system during the transition to a new regulator, we continued with the regulatory approach that had been taken by the Welsh Government. This has allowed us to take time to start developing our own approach, based on researched evidence and experience. Through our Regulatory Strategy Project we are working closely with awarding bodies and other regulators as we evolve our thinking, considering carefully how we meet the needs of Wales, while still retaining a shared approach with other regulators to broad common regulatory principles.

Our regulatory approach is guided by the five principles of good regulation:

Transparent

Our regulations should be simple and user-friendly, and – by being open about our processes and with our records – we should ensure that people understand the decisions we have made and why.

Accountable

We should be able to justify all of our decisions, and answer for them under public scrutiny. Each year, we will be scrutinised on behalf of the public by the National Assembly for Wales' Committee for Children, Young People and Education.

Proportionate

We only intervene when necessary. Any remedies that we propose should be appropriate to the risk posed. We should identify any costs resulting from our decisions, and keep these to a minimum.

Consistent

We make sure that our rules and conditions are joined up and implemented fairly, so that we give stability and certainty to the organisations that we regulate.

Targeted

By making sure that our regulatory activities focus on addressing the problem, and by setting clear, unambiguous targets, we minimise any unintended consequences.

Working for Wales

Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ('FGA Act')

As the independent qualifications regulator for Wales, we are one part of the public sector infrastructure. In both our corporate policies and our work as a regulator, we look to support the economic, social and environmental development of Wales and thereby the Well-Being Indicators defined in the FGA Act.

We work collaboratively with the other public bodies delivering the education system in Wales, including: the awarding bodies that we regulate, schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, regional consortia and local authorities, as well as qualifications regulators in other parts of the UK. Our analysis informs and advises Ministers, officials and other organisations that are involved in developing or setting education policy, delivering education services or teaching learners.

Our work has a long-term impact by ensuring that qualifications are fit for purpose, and by considering how well they meet the needs of employers and further and higher education establishments. This supports academic progression and employability, and, therefore, prosperity and economic growth. We endorse the statement made in 2016 by Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): *"your education system today is your economy of tomorrow"*.

Welsh Language

We communicate with our stakeholders bilingually, as appropriate. Although we are not yet subject to the Welsh Language Standards, we are already developing our corporate Welsh language plans and have engaged positively with the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office.

The desirability of promoting and facilitating use of the Welsh Language is one of the 'eight matters' that our legislation requires us to consider. We have published our Interim Regulatory Welsh-Medium and Bilingual Qualifications Policy, following its approval by our Board in May 2016.

We have also taken practical action to support language development. For example, as part of the review of GCSEs and A levels, we took the decision to improve the current GCSE Welsh Second Language qualification ahead of the longer-term changes that will result from the Welsh Government curriculum reform.

Our improvements will:

- strengthen the focus on speaking and listening to ensure that learners have the everyday Welsh skills they need for the real world;
- remove the reliance on narrowly-defined vocabulary and topics that can constrain learning and attainment in the language;
- clarify the expectation that the time dedicated to teaching should be the same as for other GCSEs.

We also set criteria for the revised GCSE History qualification to include the culture and history of Wales.

We provide extensive grant funding to help support the availability of Welsh-medium qualifications and assessment for both general qualifications (GCSEs and A levels) and vocational qualifications, including the Welsh for Adults qualifications.

Internally, at the end of March 2016, 32% of our staff rated themselves as having Welsh language skills. We actively support the continuous development of our staff, from attending short courses to more immersive training. Culturally, those who are more confident Welsh-speakers within the organisation support those who are learning and developing.



CEFNOGAETH
SUPPORT



Equality

We comply with the general duties under the Equalities Act 2010, and we have taken care to consider equality issues in all our activities. Examples of our approach include the design of our office, our recruitment practices, our website design standards and the organisation of our events. Equality considerations are built into the design of our policies and the delivery of our services, and they are kept under review.

As a regulator, we also monitor how well awarding bodies meet their equalities duties. We have adopted the principles of 'Fair Access by Design', the three-country policy that seeks to ensure that the design of qualifications has no in-built discrimination.

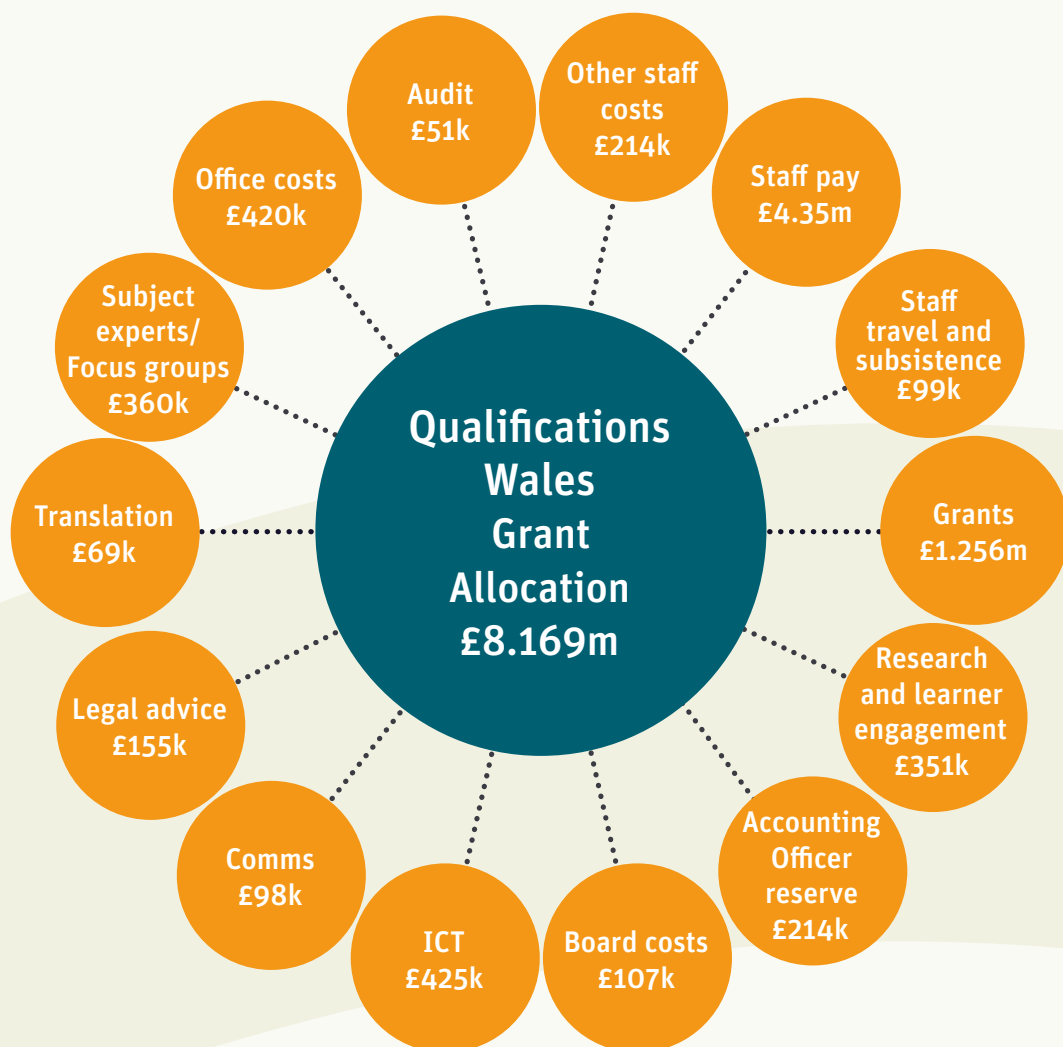
We have published our Strategic Equality Plan following Board approval in April 2016 and we will monitor and review this on an annual basis.

How we are funded

As a Welsh Government Sponsored Body, we receive an annual grant allocation to cover our operational costs. The amount of our allocation is confirmed in an annual letter covering the financial year April to March, which we publish. Our grant allocation for the 2016-17 financial year is £8.169m.

Information on how we spent our 2015/16 allocation is provided in our Annual Accounts, published in August 2016.

How we propose to spend our 2016/17 allocation is shown below:



What we want to achieve

Our strategic priorities for 2015-20

We have four long-term Strategic Priorities, which are underpinned by strategic objectives:

Strategic Priority 1: A strategically-regulated qualifications system in Wales

So that: we have a demand-led qualifications system where there is optimal breadth of opportunity for learners.

Strategic Priority 2: A quality-assured supply of qualifications

So that: Learners in Wales take qualifications that are valid, with outcomes that are fair and reliable, and are respected widely as a result of rigorous independent regulation.

Strategic Priority 3: Build Qualifications Wales' capability and capacity

So that: Qualifications Wales is confident that it is effective and efficient in fulfilling its Principal Aims and is continually evolving to add value to the education system in Wales.

Strategic Priority 4: Deliver Public Confidence

So that: Qualifications Wales is recognised widely as an expert independent body, and engenders public and professional confidence.



Strategic Priority 1:

A strategically-regulated qualifications system in Wales

A demand-led qualifications system where there is optimal breadth of opportunity for learners.

Strategic Priority 1:

In addressing this Strategy Priority, we aim to ensure that there is an appropriate range of high-quality qualifications to meet the needs of learners – paying particular attention to the eight matters within the Qualifications Wales Act 2015. For example, we focus on ensuring that any qualifications that we Approve or Designate are appropriate for meeting the needs of employers, higher education institutions and the professions. We also check that qualifications are aligned with the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and with broader education policy in Wales.

We are developing an appropriate set of regulatory policies to enhance the effectiveness of the underpinning qualification system – working effectively with other regulators where it is appropriate to do so.

We commission and conduct insightful research (and make use of research by others), so that we can develop policies and make decisions on the basis of robust evidence.

Key achievements towards meeting this strategic priority this year have included:

- Undertaking our first sector review – in Health & Social Care;
- Developing and publishing Approval criteria for GCSEs and A levels for first teaching from 2017;
- Completion of Phase 1 of our Regulatory Strategy Project;
- Developing and publishing key regulatory policies;
- The work of our Centre Support Team;
- Commissioning research to improve our evidence base.



“In a time when vocational qualifications and apprenticeships are undergoing a significant period of reform across the UK, it is important that the qualifications system, and the qualifications that underpin it, are trusted, valued and respected.”

“We have every confidence moving forward that Qualifications Wales will be fundamental to achieving this aim.”

Jeff Protheroe, Operations Manager, NTfW

The development of qualifications

Commissioning

The Qualifications Wales Act gave us a range of innovative powers, designed to enable us to commission one or more awarding bodies to develop new qualifications to meet the needs of learners in Wales. While the majority of qualifications that we regulate are offered in an open market across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there may be times when we identify that learners in Wales need a qualification that is not presently available, or that is significantly different from those that are already available.

Because Wales is a small nation, awarding bodies (who are commercial organisations) will need to be satisfied that it is viable for them to develop a qualification for Wales. Under the Act, our powers to implement a restriction on named 'priority qualifications' mean that we can hold an open and fair competition to select one awarding body or more that we would allow to offer particular qualifications eligible for public funding in Wales. This means that awarding bodies can bid to work with us to develop such new qualifications on an exclusive basis for a period of time.

We have not yet implemented such a restriction, or commissioned new qualifications, but we are considering doing so. Following our Sector Review of Health and Social Care, we took the decision to consult on plans to restrict and commission a new suite of qualifications in this sector for learners from the age of 14 upwards.

GCSEs and A levels - developing and publishing Approval criteria

The reform of general qualifications was begun by the Welsh Government and transferred to us when we were established, giving us responsibility for developing the Approval criteria for the final set of reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels that are due for first teaching from September 2017.

To ensure that these new qualifications met the needs of learners in Wales, we developed their Approval criteria with the active involvement (in person), and through consultation – of stakeholders and subject experts, who provided us with proposals and recommendations for the subject content, structure and assessment arrangements. This enabled us to develop Approval criteria for a number of qualifications in our first year. We published a total of 11 Subject Approval Criteria and 2 sets of Qualification Approval Criteria on 20 July 2016.

These were:

Qualification Approval Criteria

- GCSE Qualifications
- GCE AS and A level Qualifications

Subject Approval Criteria

- GCSE Business
- GCSE Computer Science
- GCSE Welsh Second Language
- GCE AS and A level Law
- GCE AS and A level Government & Politics
- GCE AS and A level Mathematics
- GCE AS and A level Further Mathematics
- GCSE Design and Technology
- GCE AS and A level Design & Technology
- GCSE Media Studies
- GCE AS and A level Media Studies

Health and Social Care Review

Sector Review of Health and Social Care (including Childcare and Playwork)

From the outset, we have been clear that vocational qualifications are a vital aspect of our work, and that we intend to be proactive in our approach. That is why, in October 2015, we launched the first of what we intend to be a substantial programme of Sector Reviews of vocational qualifications – and the qualification systems that support them. We chose to look first at aspects of the Health and Social Care sector, including childcare and playwork, with a particular focus on those qualifications that are taken by learners on publicly-funded programmes of learning. As far as we are aware, this was the first time that such an in-depth review of a vocational qualification area has been carried out by one of the UK qualification regulators, across multiple awarding bodies and levels of qualifications.

The review involved significant engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Between September 2015 and March 2016 we conducted an extensive programme of communication and consultation, including interviews and discussions with sector bodies, learning providers, employers and learners. We sought their views on the effectiveness of the present qualifications and the qualification system – and asked about gaps in these. This involved more than 125 separate meetings. We also received more than 200 responses to our online consultation and listened to the views of over 800 learners.

We conducted a detailed analysis of ten of the most popular qualifications taken by learners in Wales in this sector. The purpose of this analysis was to look at the format of the assessments, the mechanisms for quality assurance, the evidence that learners provided and the way in which assessment decisions were made.

In July, we published a report on our findings and judgements about the effectiveness of the present qualifications, and the qualification system, for the sector in Wales.

Through the review we identified a number of strengths of the present system, including:

- a high level of engagement of professional bodies in the sector with qualifications;
- the willingness of some awarding bodies to meet the needs of Wales (for example, there are already a number of customised qualifications to meet Welsh requirements);
- learners and assessors showed high levels of commitment to completing assessments;
- the increasing demand for qualifications, demonstrating that they are valued;
- examples of qualifications which promote both vocational and academic progression;
- a high level of engagement with the Review itself and the willingness to identify options for change and improvement.

We also identified a number of concerns.

In relation to the qualification system, the issues we identified included:

- complex and confusing roles and responsibilities of different bodies;
- unclear and sometimes misleading progression routes for learners;
- challenges in relation to the portability of qualifications for learners between different areas of work and between different parts of the UK;
- some aspects of the learning and assessment system that had an impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the qualification system;

- some inconsistent assessment and quality-assurance processes;
- insufficient or ineffective opportunities for learners to be assessed through the medium of Welsh;
- some learners being poorly prepared to enter the workplace, either as employees or on work placement;
- the need for more effective data management in relation to qualifications and the qualification system.

In relation to the qualifications, the issues related to:

- the effectiveness of the present models of assessment in determining the knowledge, skills and understanding of learners;
- the currency of some qualifications, particularly those qualifications taken by learners aged 14-16;
- the extent to which qualifications prepared learners for progression to higher education;
- the coverage of certain key aspects of learning for different areas of work, for example in relation to dementia care, domiciliary care and playwork in the context of childcare;
- the extent to which qualifications prepared learners effectively for working in a bilingual nation.

Rather than simply identifying these concerns and requiring others to take action, we will take a lead role in addressing many of them and, in autumn 2016 will be consulting on how we propose to oversee the development of a new suite of Health and Social Care qualifications.

We have allocated resources to delivering the commitments we made in the review report, so that we can:

- work with sector bodies, other experts and awarding bodies to ensure that a new suite of qualifications in health and social care; childcare, learning & development and, potentially, playwork are developed to meet the needs of learners in Wales from age 14 upwards and to address the issues raised in our report;
- support the introduction of this new suite with an effective programme of change management;
- ensure that learners, employers and other interested stakeholders have clear and unambiguous information on the new qualifications once they are available;
- seek assurances from awarding bodies that concerns about the quality of assessment are addressed, while the present qualifications remain.

As we begin to implement the commitments we made in this review we are also turning our minds to the next Sector Reviews.

In 2016-17, we will be undertaking two Reviews: on Construction and the Built Environment, and on Information and Communication Technology. In preparing for these, we have reflected on the experience of our first Review and are implementing the lessons learned from this important work, including the findings of an independent external evaluation.

Regulatory Strategy Project

In September 2015, we began to develop the processes and systems we need to regulate the qualification system strategically – but we felt it was also important to take time to consider the way we regulate and to decide what sort of regulator we should be. To do this, we set up a Regulatory Strategy Project to identify exactly how we will approach the regulation of awarding bodies on behalf of learners.

Our regulatory strategy (which we are still developing) is made up of two elements: the framework (the rule-based approach to regulating awarding bodies that is reflected in our Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition), and the approach that we take – that is, some of the tools we use, and how we engage with our stakeholders.

To maintain business continuity, we initially adopted a regulatory approach similar to the one that had been used by the Welsh Government. We have now reviewed this to see whether we need to make changes, in the context of both the Qualifications Wales Act and our Strategic Priorities. We are considering how to make both the regulatory framework and our approach more effective for us, for the awarding bodies we regulate, and ultimately for learners.

Phase 1 of the Regulatory Strategy project ran between February and June 2016. This phase consisted of two main themes: reviewing our current approach and exploring alternative options.

In Phase 1, we:

- commissioned a team from ‘Regulatory Delivery’ (part of the UK Government’s Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) to undertake a review of our current approach;
- evaluated how well the current approach fits our role and remit, including our powers and duties under the Qualifications Wales Act;
- reviewed comparable regulatory models; and
- consulted with stakeholders to seek their views and feedback.

As part of Phase 1, in April 2016, we held a workshop with representatives from 32 awarding bodies. The discussions were focused on six central themes:

- Qualifications Wales’ Principal Aims
- Regulatory processes
- Recognition and approval/monitoring
- Stakeholder engagement/communication
- Qualifications Wales as a regulator
- Quality enhancement/innovation

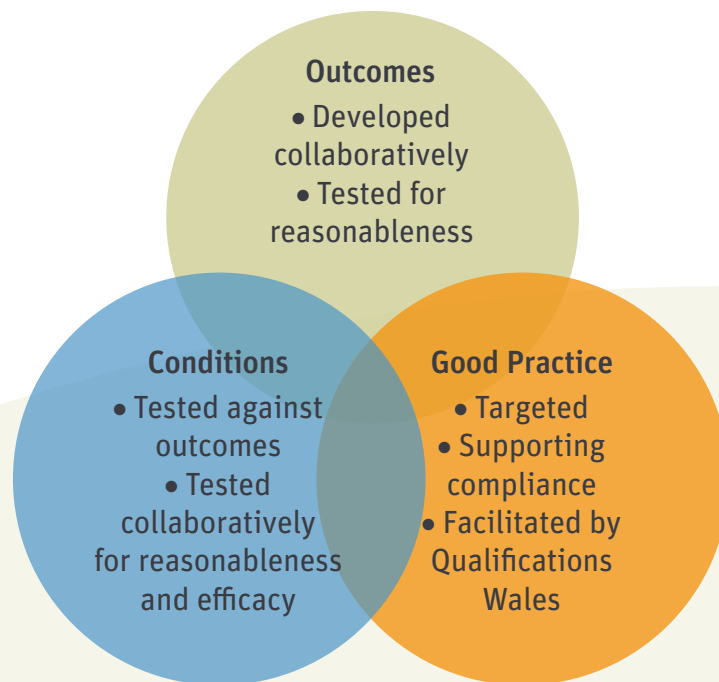
The workshop was a collaborative and informative event that was positively received by awarding bodies. We value this collegiate approach to regulatory development and were able to respond immediately by making a number of changes in the light of the workshop discussions.

For example, we created a new 'Awarding Body Resources' section on our website and made several improvements to the qualifications database 'QiW'. Following the success of the workshop, we are now planning to create more opportunities to engage with awarding bodies and wider stakeholders (employers, universities, schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and others) on new developments. We aim to communicate through a range of methods, including webinars, online forums, workshops, focus groups and formal consultations.

Our findings from Phase 1 of the Regulatory Strategy Project identified a case for change in order to strengthen our regulatory activities and to act independently and effectively, to meet the needs of learners in Wales.

With this in mind, we will continue to work with stakeholders to investigate and adopt an outcomes-based regulatory framework.

Potential regulatory model



We are currently developing our plans for Phase 2 of the project.

Providing grants

We provide grants, as resources allow, where a positive intervention is required to support qualifications and/or the qualification system in Wales. For example, we may issue grants to support the production of Welsh-medium assessments for learners, or to fund activities that support the introduction of new qualifications.

On 21 September 2015, a number of grants relating to qualifications in Wales were transferred from the Welsh Government to Qualifications Wales. We have managed these grants and awarded new grant schemes from 1 April to cover the 2016-17 financial period.

Between 21 September 2015 and 31 August 2016, we issued just over £1m in grant funding. This funding went to awarding bodies, regional consortia, and Colegau Cymru.

Our grant support included:

Essential Skills Wales – funding the development of the new tests, translation of the new tasks and support for collaborative working across the four awarding bodies involved to ensure cohesion for learners;

Qualification reform and implementation – funding to support the four regional consortia and ColegauCymru in the implementation of the reformed Welsh Baccalaureate. This covered the provision of online resources and training events, including guidance on how to make best use of the new e-portfolio system, payment to cover teacher release to enable attendance at training events and collaborative working and resource-sharing across centres. Our approach has allowed different support models to be used to meet the needs of the different regions and sectors.

Welsh-medium assessment – funding to translate the specifications and sample assessment materials for new general and vocational qualifications, to contribute to the translation costs for examination papers and to enable the assessment of qualifications through the medium of Welsh.

Support for centres

Our regulatory responsibilities give us oversight of the qualification system itself, from the development to the delivery of qualifications. The responsibility for managing the examination process lies with centres – the schools, colleges and work-based learning providers through which learners study and are assessed.

Centres are responsible for ensuring that assessments and examinations are planned and timetabled, for entering candidates, and for arranging the logistics to make sure that examinations take place smoothly and securely.

To help centres fulfil these responsibilities effectively, our Centre Support Team, who are regionally based, maintain close relationships with teachers and examination officers. The team develops centres' understanding and knowledge of the examination system, and supports exams officers so that they can administer exams securely, informing them of the changes to qualifications.

The Centre Support Team are a direct link between us and the centres that deliver the qualifications that we regulate. Through this team, we can speak directly to the staff working on the ground, to provide clear information and practical face-to-face advice where necessary.

The team also acts as a two-way communication channel between Qualifications Wales and centres, enabling us to consult with them, taking soundings on certain issues and gathering intelligence to inform our work.



Centre visits

During the reporting year, the Centre Support Team conducted a total of 394 visits.

As a result of their visits and communication activities, the team have developed meaningful working relationships with school examination officers, headteachers, other senior managers and Special Educational Needs Coordinators. They have discussed issues such as the timeline for new qualifications and the impact on teaching, as well as updates to guidance and access arrangements for students with additional needs.

Training

Invigilator training

During the 2015/16 academic year, the team delivered regional training to a total of 1,508 examination invigilators, focusing on access arrangements, and highlighting the key role that invigilators play in upholding the security and integrity of the assessment process.

QiW

In March and April 2016, the team offered training to centre staff on the new QiW database, hosting training sessions in every county for centres and other stakeholders. These included county 14-19 and Youth Engagements Co-ordinators, Post-16 Education Consortium Co-ordinators, School Information Management Systems Support Officers, Local Education Authorities, regional consortia School Improvement Groups and the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW).



“I started as exams officer last January with no experience in anything to do with exams. The fact that I could have someone from Qualifications Wales come out and walk me through the process was more than invaluable.”

“I always know that if I have a question or a query that I will get an answer from someone who knows the job through and through.”

Hannah Figg, Exams Officer at Michaelston Community College, Cardiff

Relationship with the Welsh Government

The Qualifications Wales Act established Qualifications Wales as an independent regulator for Wales. This means that we are able to operate at arms' length from the Welsh Government and update the National Assembly for Wales on how we have delivered our functions. As a Welsh Government Sponsored Body, we are accountable to the Welsh Government for our financial performance, but we operate independently from Welsh Ministers.

Overall responsibility for education and skills policy in Wales, including qualifications policy, lies with Welsh Ministers, as articulated in their policy 'Qualified for Life'. Qualifications Wales is responsible for regulatory decisions and overseeing the effectiveness of qualifications and the qualification system. As the expert authority on qualifications, we can be asked to give advice to Welsh Ministers and work closely with Welsh Government officials.

We have not been asked to provide formal advice during the period of this report. However, as part of our role, we inform the Cabinet Secretary for Education, and the relevant officials, about key decisions that we have taken. During our first year, we have corresponded with the former Education Minister, and the current Cabinet Secretary for Education, informing them of our progress in a number of areas:

- In December 2015 and February 2016, we wrote to Huw Lewis AM, then Minister for Education, outlining our decision to delay the introduction of GCSEs in Religious Studies and History, and noting our progress regarding GCSE Welsh Second Language.
- In August 2016, we updated Kirsty Williams AM, the new Cabinet Secretary for Education, on the development of GCSE Welsh Second Language for first teaching in 2017. In our letter, we set out the changes that we will be making to the qualification, and gave details of our plans for introducing it from September 2017.
- Prior to the dissolution of the previous Assembly, we met with Julie James, then Deputy Minister for Skills and the present Minister for Skills and Science, on the findings and potential outcomes of our Sector Review of Health and Social Care (including childcare and playwork).

We support the Welsh Government in their implementation of the curriculum reform programme, following Professor Graham Donaldson's '*Successful Futures: an independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales*'. Qualifications Wales is represented on the Change Board, and on the Curriculum and Assessment Expert Group; members of staff also attend some of the Pioneer School events.

Research

Section 46[3] of our Act gives us the power to carry out or commission research into any matter connected with qualifications, thereby supporting our evidence-based decision-making.

Over the course of spring/summer 2016, we recruited a team of seven research and statistics staff. The team bring with them a wealth of expertise from ONS, Welsh Government, Estyn and higher education.

During this year, we have commissioned research in:

Teacher-led assessment

This literature review was commissioned to provide an understanding of the international use of teacher-led assessment in post-14 qualifications. The literature surveyed from the past 20 years is voluminous and complex, covering the many different uses of assessment by teachers and others, in many countries, and across all phases of education and training. The information gleaned will assist Qualifications Wales in future monitoring exercises focusing on teacher-led assessment activities.

The Expected Difficulty of test items in the new Mathematics and Mathematics - Numeracy GCSEs

As a result of the general qualifications reform programme, we recognised that qualifications in Maths had been through a significant degree of change. We have therefore started work on the perceived level of difficulty of the new Maths qualifications and will go on to review data from the first awarding series before reporting our broader findings during 2017.

Public Confidence in Qualifications and the Qualification System in Wales

This is a four-and-a-half-year study being conducted by an external agency. A report on the initial stage of research, establishing a baseline against which to monitor and assess public confidence, will be published in early 2017. The study involved conducting a series of qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders and a survey with a representative sample of adults across Wales.

Skills and knowledge rewarded in GCSE mark schemes

This initial investigation was devised to assess the level of skill that GCSEs reward through applying the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy to mark schemes. Fifteen practising teachers were recruited and trained to make judgements on papers from the four highest entry GCSE subjects in Wales. Data analysis is ongoing and we expect to disseminate results in early 2017.

Methodology applied during Vocational Qualifications (VQ) Sector Reviews

To support continuous improvement of our VQ sector reviews, an independent review was commissioned. The review considered sectoral reviews as an approach, as well as the methodology adopted in our first review. It concluded that the approach was a helpful one and that the scope of research and analytical activities undertaken was appropriate. A number of recommendations for strengthening activities in future reviews were made and these are being taken into account in the planning of the next reviews.

We also commissioned learner engagement research to inform the Health and Social Care review and, separately, to inform the development of the 2017 GCSE and A level Approval criteria.

We have also started discussions with the Welsh Government and Ofqual on data-sharing arrangements. Ofqual have historically undertaken much of the data collection work on behalf of Wales, but we intend to take on responsibility for collecting data and publishing statistics on Welsh learners within the next 12 months and are currently developing our strategy and our capability for doing so.

In the next year, we will continue to develop our research function, commissioning and undertaking research activities into a range of relevant areas.

As we develop our expertise, we look forward to becoming an integral part of the education research community in Wales.

Teacher-led assessment in post-14 education & training: a literature review

We aim to build evidence and understanding that will underpin our decisions.

Teacher-led assessment (TLA) is an important part of most countries' assessment approaches. In recent years, although England has moved to more end-of-course (linear) examinations, in Wales teacher assessment still forms a significant part of high-stakes qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in Wales and is the predominant method of assessing many vocational qualifications.

For the purposes of this study, TLA is any assessment activity carried out by someone who is responsible for students' learning, and which contributes to the summative assessment of a qualification.

In March 2016, we commissioned Colegau Cymru to undertake a detailed literature review of teacher-led assessment in post-14 qualifications. The scope of the review was very broad: the literature surveyed covered a period of 20 years, and a number of different countries.

The review found a pattern over the last 20 years that demonstrates a gradual move towards systems of teaching and learning that fully integrate assessment, evaluation and accountability. This pattern can be clearly seen in countries which are generally considered to have a good reputation for their provision of education; the most prominent of these countries include Finland, Australia and, more recently, Scotland.

This initial piece of research has shown that, although it is not straightforward to simply adopt aspects of other countries' systems, a number of high-performing countries do share similar traits, in terms of preferences and strategic direction. It is also evident that there are many challenges to successfully adopting TLA, but that the benefits of investing in getting it right are clear.

Good summative TLA can improve formative assessment of learning, a key factor in the determination of high-quality teaching and learning. TLA has traditionally been regarded as less reliable than externally-set assessments such as examinations, but closer inspection, as indicated by this study, reveals that when TLA is well managed, reliability can be significantly enhanced. TLA is also more likely to offer valid and engaging learning experiences and assessment activity to learners.

This review is by no means a fully comprehensive exploration, but it lays the path for a closer look at aspects of TLA by Qualifications Wales in the future. As TLA continues to play a significant role in Wales, we can use this understanding to begin to take forward work in other areas, such as considering best practice for vocational qualifications, and how this mode of assessment can be used and strengthened in future qualification development and quality assurance.

Policies

During our first year, we have developed and published a number of regulatory policies to meet the requirements of the Qualifications Wales Act 2015 and to fulfil our functions as the regulator of qualifications in Wales. We have published a number of interim policies, with the intention of reviewing these following the outcomes of our Regulatory Strategy project.

Since 21 September 2015, we have published the following regulatory policies:

Policies relating to the new regulatory tools defined in the Qualifications Wales Act:

- Restricted Priority Qualifications Policy
- Priority Qualifications List Policy
- Fee Capping Policy

Policies relating to our enforcement and monitoring activity:

- Complaints about awarding bodies
- Taking action when things go wrong
- Regulatory incident management
- Interim monitoring statement

Rules and criteria for our processes:

- Rules about applications for awarding body recognition
- Rules about applications for Approval and Designation of qualifications
- Approval criteria, criteria for Designating a qualification, conditions of Approval and further provisions about Designation

Policies outlining our approach to external processes:

- Interim joint working statement
- Interim provision of services statement
- Regulatory services charging policy statement
- Consultation policy

Policy outlining the process for appeal:

- Regulatory appeals

Policies relating to the eight matters:

- Interim Welsh medium and Bilingual Qualifications Policy

Changes to the Standard Conditions of Recognition:

- Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition

Regulatory documents relating to qualifications:

- Qualification and Component Levels
- Qualification and Subject Approval Criteria for GCSEs and A levels
- Requirements for setting specified levels of attainment for GCE and GCSE qualifications
- Additional Standard Conditions of Recognition for GCSE and GCE qualifications
- Wales Summer 2016 Data Exchange Procedures
- Priority Qualifications List

Simplifying the qualification system

Many stakeholders use the number of regulated qualifications as an indicator of complexity within the qualification system. As part of our early work we committed to reviewing qualifications listed as eligible for public funding in Wales and to removing those that had not been awarded for some time.

As a result of this work we successfully removed over 17,000 unused qualifications; this resulted in the migration of just over 11,000 qualifications to the new system, QiW. This work has made it easier for stakeholders to identify qualifications eligible for public funding that are available within Wales and has had an immediate effect on the task of simplifying the system.

We intend to repeat this work periodically to ensure that the data contained within QiW remains current, and we envisage that this work will continue to reduce the number of regulated qualifications over time.



Strategic Priority 2:

A quality-assured supply of qualifications

Learners in Wales take qualifications that are valid, with outcomes that are fair and reliable, and that are respected widely as a result of rigorous independent regulation.

Strategic Priority 2:

Under this Strategic Priority, our aim is to ensure the quality of qualifications throughout their lifecycle. We protect the interests of learners by making sure that qualifications meet the required standards, and, where appropriate, we take action to make sure that this remains the case.

To do this, we maintain appropriate regulatory relationships with awarding bodies. Where new qualifications have been designed for learners in Wales, we monitor them closely, and we have oversight of qualification outcomes.

Our regulatory framework is appropriate, fair and proportionate; it encourages transparency and clarifies the accountability of recognised awarding bodies.

Key achievements towards meeting this strategic priority this year have included:

- The development of a robust process for considering the recognition of awarding bodies;
- Increasing the level of monitoring for high-stakes qualifications;
- The successful implementation of a rigorous process to Approve reformed GCSEs and A levels for first teaching from 2016;
- Overseeing the successful award of the summer GCSE and A level examination series.



“I am glad that we have a recognised body that oversees the qualification sector and happy that we have not followed English policies. It is also heartening to know that there is a national qualifications body that has to facilitate and promote the Welsh-medium provision.”

Llinos John, assistant head at Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr, Gowerton

Recognising awarding bodies

Recognition

Before an awarding body can offer regulated qualifications in Wales, it must be ‘recognised’ by Qualifications Wales. Recognising an awarding body means that we consider it to meet the standards necessary, as expressed through our Criteria for Recognition, to be capable of awarding qualifications properly.

When we were established in September 2015, we automatically recognised awarding bodies that had been previously recognised by the Welsh Government, which meant that there was no need for them to reapply for recognition in Wales. Before we were established, any organisation that wished to become a recognised awarding body in both Wales and England would submit their application to Ofqual, who would then manage the recognition process. Where appropriate, the Welsh Government would ensure that any Wales-specific issues were considered, and on the rare occasions where an awarding body was seeking recognition solely in Wales, they could apply directly to the Welsh Government.

Once we were established, we reviewed the approach to recognition in Wales and introduced a new, wholly independent, recognition process through which all awarding bodies now have to apply directly to us for recognition.

This allows us to review submissions independently against our Criteria for Recognition and so make decisions that are not consequential to decisions taken about recognition elsewhere.

We check every application for recognition against our own published recognition criteria to ensure that the applicant is fully compliant and can demonstrate that they will have the appropriate resources, systems and arrangements in place to design, deliver and award their qualifications in Wales. We have also reviewed the type of feedback we give to awarding bodies applying for recognition; we now offer more detailed feedback, particularly on areas where there is insufficient evidence of awarding bodies’ compliance with our criteria.

During 2015/16, we received 13 expressions of interest from organisations wanting to become awarding bodies recognised by us; of these, we received two formal submissions. We reviewed both these submissions thoroughly against our recognition criteria, and both were deemed to show areas of non-compliance. Neither of these organisations were granted recognition; however, we fed back information about the areas of non-compliance and the organisations are able to re-submit their applications to us if they wish to do so.

Following successful application, recognised awarding bodies must comply with our Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition and any other relevant regulations that would be applied to their organisation and their qualifications. We monitor them via their annual Statements of Compliance, to make sure that they do this.

Once we recognise an awarding body, all of its qualifications taken by Welsh learners are regulated by us, unless they opt to exclude any of them.

Recognised awarding bodies may surrender part of their recognition by informing us of qualifications, or descriptions of qualifications, that they would either like to offer as unregulated qualifications, or not offer at all.

In these cases, the unregulated qualifications cannot carry the Qualifications Wales logo on the certificates issued to learners.

Three of our recognised awarding bodies have surrendered part of their recognition this year. Over the next year we will continue to work with each of our awarding bodies to ensure all are aware of their ability to surrender some of their qualifications from regulation and to ensure that we continue to keep accurate information regarding their scope of recognition.

The number of recognised Awarding Bodies as at 21 September 2015 was **133**

During the year, **12** awarding bodies fully surrendered Recognition

The number of recognised Awarding Bodies as at 31 August 2016 is **121**

Approving/Designating qualifications

Approved and Designated qualifications are provided by recognised awarding bodies and are eligible for use on publicly-funded programmes of learning for learners under the age of 19.

Designated qualifications are not necessarily unique to Wales, and are usually available to learners in other countries of the UK. Approved qualifications are mainly awarded in Wales and will have met Approval criteria that ensure they meet the needs of learners in Wales.

Designation

Before we Designate a qualification, we require awarding bodies to assure us that the qualification is relevant in a Welsh context, that it is appropriate for the age range and has evidence of both demand (from learners) and support (from users of the qualification) in Wales. We will be reviewing our Designation policy and processes over the coming year.

The vast majority of Designated qualifications are vocational qualifications, and we assess levels of support from relevant sector/professional bodies or industry representatives when we consider applications. In particular, in relation to qualifications in the field of early years, childcare and social care, there must be evidence that the qualification is supported by the Care Council for Wales.

Some reformed GCSEs and A levels are also Designated qualifications, as we have established plans to ensure that learners benefit from the continued availability in Wales of GCSEs and A levels in subjects that are not being reformed here, but which are being reformed in England.

We will consider for Designation any GCSE, AS or A level qualification provided that:

- i) it is offered by an awarding body that we regulate;
- ii) it is not in a subject being reformed for Wales; and
- iii) it is accredited by Ofqual.

We require awarding bodies to have published policies on the availability of the Designated GCSEs, AS and A levels through the medium of Welsh. The awarding bodies need to confirm whether or not a particular qualification will be available through the medium of Welsh and, if so, how centres can request Welsh-medium assessments and supporting materials.

Before 1 April 2016, recognised awarding bodies would initially apply for Designation via RITS, the online regulatory IT system that was managed by Ofqual on behalf of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This then fed into the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales (DAQW).

In April 2016, we launched the database ‘QiW’, Qualifications in Wales, which was designed to be an independent system. Awarding bodies now submit qualifications for Designation directly onto QiW, which has enabled us to have far greater control over the process and to make quicker Designation decisions.

We produced an evidence guide for awarding bodies to use when they submit qualifications. Over the coming year, we will work with our recognised awarding bodies to check that all of the detailed information within individual qualification records is current and accurate.

Approval of GCSEs and A levels for first teaching in 2016

The process of reforming general qualifications for first teaching in September 2016 was underway before Qualifications Wales was established.

Between June 2015 and September 2015, GCSE Geography, the GCSE Science suite, GCSE Food & Nutrition, GCSE Physical Education and GCE Welsh Second Language qualifications were first submitted to Welsh Government for Approval. WJEC then submitted the remaining draft specifications and sample assessment materials to Qualifications Wales between September 2015 and January 2016.

We developed and implemented a rigorous process to oversee the Approval of these qualifications. The process for Approving qualifications for first teaching in September 2016 was completed on 5 May 2016 with the Approval of GCSE Spanish.

List of subjects reformed for first teaching in September 2016:

GCSE	GCE AS & A level
Geography	Welsh Second Language
Modern Foreign Languages (French, German & Spanish)	Drama
Music	Music
Science suite of qualifications:	Physical Education
Biology	Geography
Chemistry	Modern Foreign Languages (French, German & Spanish)
Physics	Religious Studies
Science (Double Award)	
Applied Science (Double Award)	
Applied Science (Single Award)	
Drama	
Physical Education	
Food & Nutrition	
Art & Design	

Deferral of GCSE History and GCSE Religious Studies

In March 2016, we took the decision to defer the first teaching of two qualifications (GCSE History and GCSE Religious Studies) from September 2016 to September 2017. We took this decision for the following reasons, based on the central principle that schools should have sufficient time to prepare for the new qualifications:

- i) Draft specifications for these subjects had not been made available as early as for other subjects.
- ii) We did not expect these qualifications to be ready for Approval until the summer term had started. This meant that Approved specifications and sample assessment materials would not be published bilingually until well into the summer term, which would create too much time pressure for schools.
- iii) We knew that the time pressure would have been particularly profound for these subjects, as the changes being made to the structure and content of both qualifications required significant changes to how they would be taught.
- iv) We understood, based on projections at the time, that updated teaching and learning resources to support these subjects would not be available until the autumn term.
- v) We concluded that the number of schools not already using the WJEC specification was low. These schools could not use the reformed GCSEs in England so would need support in making an interim move to WJEC. However, this was manageable. While we recognised the burden this decision would place on those schools, and the need to offer them appropriate levels of support, we considered that the benefit of deferring these qualifications for the majority of schools outweighed this issue.

We wrote to headteachers in Wales to explain our decision and the factors that had influenced it. We also arranged for WJEC to offer bespoke training events specifically for schools affected by our decisions. These events were free of charge and their aim was to help schools to switch from the qualifications they currently offer, for one year, until the reformed qualifications are introduced.

Approval of general qualifications for first teaching in 2017

At the end of the 2016 Approvals process, we undertook a full 'lessons-learned' exercise, which led to the re-development of Approval documentation and processes, and included engagement with WJEC to look at strategies to reduce the timescales for the 2017 process.

The process to Approve reformed general qualifications for first teaching in September 2017 started in March 2016, with the recruitment and training of a new group of external subject experts, as well as detailed planning of the 2017 timeline.

A notable feature of the 2017 Approval process is the use of our own Qualification Approval Criteria and individual Subject Approval Criteria. As described under Strategic Priority 1, we have developed these to ensure that Welsh qualifications are fit for purpose for learners in Wales. Doing this ends the need to rely on criteria that reflect the structure of general qualifications in England.

The 2017 Approvals process consists of a number of key components. These are set out in the flowchart below.



The process began with the first submission of the draft GCE Maths and Further Maths specifications at the end of June 2016, followed by GCSE Business, GCE Government & Politics and GCSE Computer Science in July and GCE Law in August 2016. The remaining 2017 subjects have their first submissions in September 2016.

Provided the materials that we receive meet our requirements, we currently aim to have all of the GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for which we have published design criteria Approved by March 2017.

Relationships with other regulators

Qualifications Wales has developed good working relationships with the three other qualifications regulators in the UK; Ofqual in England, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in Scotland and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland.

We have met regularly with our fellow regulators to discuss strategic and operational issues relating to both general and vocational qualifications.

During the summer 2016 examination series, there was frequent communication between Wales, England and Northern Ireland, as the majority of general qualifications were still awarded on a three-country basis. In the future, as a suite of general qualifications are developed specifically for Wales, this will be less common, and the focus will be on our mutual interest in maintaining standards across GCSEs, AS and A levels.

As an independent regulator, we make decisions on clear and transparent principles with learners' long-term interest in mind. We also recognise that learners and employers value the portability of qualifications across national boundaries as many of the qualifications we regulate are the same as, or similar to, qualifications that are offered and awarded in England and Northern Ireland. We work closely with other regulators to maintain the quality and reliability of these qualifications.

Our commitment to working in a collaborative manner with Ofqual can be seen in the published Memorandum of Understanding between our organisations. We are currently finalising a similar arrangement with CCEA in Northern Ireland.

We also collaborate with our fellow regulators in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. In January 2016, we hosted a five-country meeting for government officials and regulators (from Wales, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland) to share best practice in relation to qualifications and qualification systems.

Monitoring and compliance

In our first year, we set out to increase the amount of monitoring activity undertaken, particularly in the case of reformed qualifications. Since September 2015, these qualifications have included GCSEs, AS levels, the Welsh Baccalaureate and Essential Skills Wales qualifications.

Awarding body Statements of Compliance

Awarding bodies are required to complete an annual Statement of Compliance showing any areas where they believe that they are not, have not or may not in the future be compliant with our Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition.

The Statement of Compliance is a key monitoring tool that supports our intelligence-led and risk-based approach to regulation. We use the information and evidence collected from statements of compliance, alongside other information and evidence, to prioritise our monitoring activity.

In autumn 2015, we received completed Statements of Compliance from 129 awarding bodies. Of these, 78% (101) declared current and future compliance, whilst 22% (28) declared current and/or likely future non-compliance.

There were no common themes or patterns of non-compliance disclosed in the statements. The most frequently disclosed declarations of non-compliance were against conditions H3 (monitoring the levels of attainment for a qualification) and D3 (reviewing the approach of a qualification).

We identified that the quality of the responses, and the amount of detail included in the Statements of Compliance varied significantly. As a result, we requested additional information and/or evidence from over half (53%) of all awarding bodies, primarily due to the lack of detail in some sections of the statements.

We issued action plans to 28 awarding bodies to monitor their progress towards compliance. These action plans have been scrutinised over the past 12 months. Of these, five action plans were ongoing by 31 August 2016, and continue to be closely monitored.

Following a review of the 2015 statements of compliance process, we took the decision to change the process for 2016 to improve its rigour. As a result, we are requesting additional evidence from awarding bodies this year to support their statements of compliance.

Awarding body monitoring

Alongside revising the statement of compliance process for 2016, we have developed our approach to monitoring awarding bodies through a programme of audit activity. Our audit programme will start in 2017. To begin with, the programme will focus on the awarding bodies that we identify as posing the greatest potential risk to the Welsh qualifications system, as they are the organisations that award the most certificates in Wales. During the year, we requested information from all awarding bodies on their top five operational risks. This information will be used to inform our future monitoring activities.

Vocational qualifications monitoring

We have been closely monitoring the implementation of revised Essential Skills Wales qualifications which were available for first teaching in September 2015. The work to date has focused on ensuring that an appropriate range of assessment materials was made available in time for the first learners completing the new qualifications.

We also included some significant monitoring activities within our work on the Sector Review of qualifications and the qualification system in Health and Social Care (including childcare and playwork), such as the in-depth technical review of the most commonly taken qualifications in the sector. We reviewed the specifications, assessment and quality assurance materials for these qualifications as well as a sample of learners' work across different levels, qualification types and subjects.

Looking ahead we have been developing a future programme of vocational qualification monitoring, to run in parallel with the programme of Sector Reviews which is already under way. Initially, this monitoring will focus on the qualifications with the highest number of awards in Wales which do not fall within the scope of our proposed programme of Sector Reviews.

General qualifications monitoring

The main focus of our monitoring of general qualifications has been the implementation and award of reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate for first teaching from September 2015. As part of our monitoring programme, we have gathered the views of teachers and learners through focus groups and online surveys. The feedback we have gathered will be used to inform our ongoing monitoring of these qualifications. We will continue to seek the views of learners and teachers as part of our monitoring work.

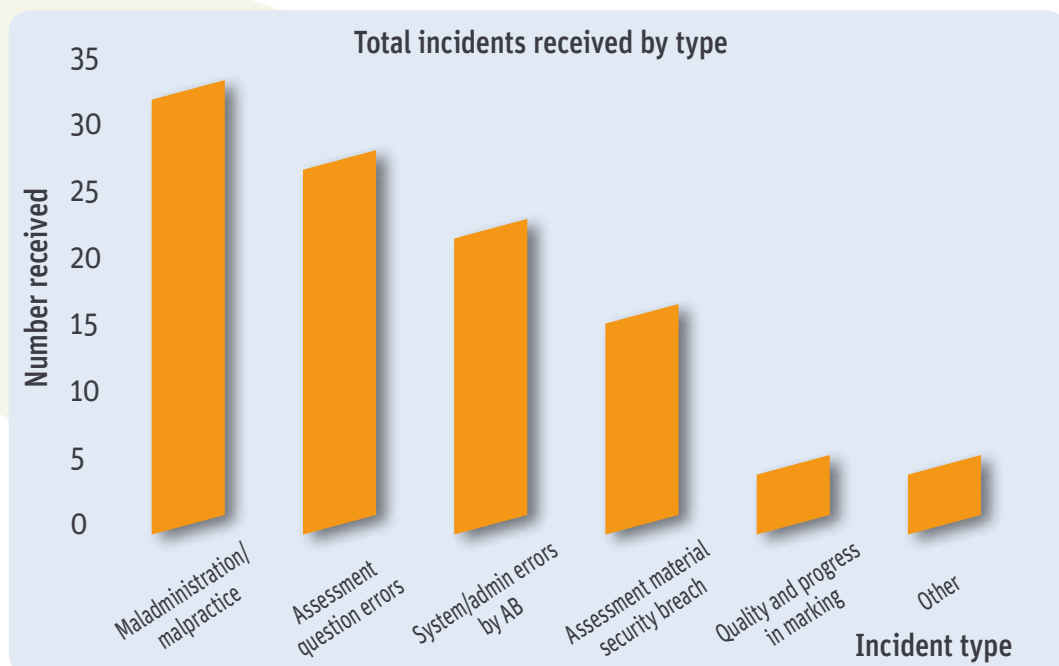
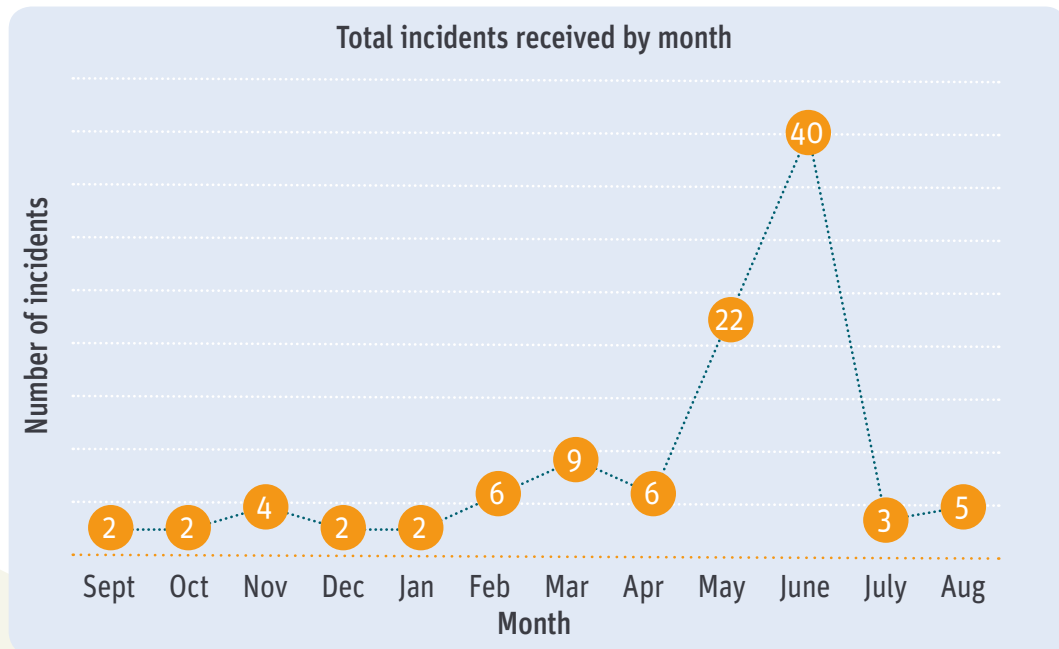
Over the past year, we have observed a range of awarding body meetings. The focus of our monitoring work is to ensure that the awarding body in question is following appropriate processes and is complying with regulatory requirements when developing assessment materials, marking and awarding qualifications.

We have observed 25 question paper evaluation committees (QPECs), 15 examiner/moderator conferences and 24 awarding meetings. Our monitoring of the summer 2016 examinations series did not identify any significant concerns with WJEC processes. Our general qualifications monitoring plans are in place for 2016/17; we will once again focus on the implementation and award of the reformed Wales-only qualifications, which will include the first awards of reformed GCSEs.

Incidents that may affect learners

Condition B3.1 of the Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition places a duty on an awarding body to notify us when it has cause to believe that any event has occurred or is likely to occur which could have an adverse effect. Incidents may originate outside Wales, but have the potential to impact upon Welsh learners. The vast majority of incident reports that we received during the reporting period related either to very minor issues or resulted in a limited impact.

We have received 107 notifications during the year from 18 awarding bodies. The majority (65) of the incidents received related to the summer 2016 examination series. The graphs below show the distribution of notifications received throughout the year.



We have closely monitored the actions taken by the awarding bodies to ensure that any adverse effect for learners is avoided. Where an incident has affected learners, we have ensured that the awarding body has taken appropriate action to minimise the impact of the incident and to prevent future recurrences, wherever possible.

The maintenance of standards

The summer 2016 examination series was the first major series with Qualifications Wales as the regulator in Wales. 2016 was also the first year of divergence, where candidates in Wales were sitting Wales-only qualifications in the first wave of reformed subjects.

We worked closely with WJEC to prepare for each examination series via two working groups set up in the general qualification Reform Programme: the Standards and Awarding Group (SAG) and the Qualification Delivery Management Group (QDMG). Additionally, we continued to develop positive relationships with both Ofqual and CCEA via regulators' meetings and other specific three-country working groups. Collectively, the regulators engaged with awarding bodies, both via specific meetings and in discussion with the Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ).

We worked with the Welsh Government to establish clear working guidelines on updates to be provided during the awarding and results period, including early sight of our publications. The Qualifications Wales and the Welsh Government Information Sharing Group (ISG) was set up to ensure the smooth transition of regulatory functions in this first summer examination series.

Before the start of the summer examination series, we wrote to all schools in Wales, setting out our regulatory approach to awarding, giving details of changes to qualifications and to the post-results enquiry service.

Reviewing the Welsh Baccalaureate

The new Welsh Baccalaureate was designed in response to the 2012 *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19 year-olds in Wales* and was introduced for first teaching in September 2015. It was reformed to give better coverage of the wider skills that employers and universities look for from learners.

The Welsh Baccalaureate now includes a new Skills Challenge Certificate qualification, which assesses skills such as literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving, planning and organisation, creativity and innovation and personal effectiveness. At the advanced level, the Skills Challenge Certificate is equivalent in size and demand to an A level; it is also graded in the same way and carries the same UCAS tariff points.

Overall, the Welsh Baccalaureate is viewed very positively by stakeholders, and there is widespread support for the reforms that have been put in place. However, stakeholders informed us that the introduction of the new suite of qualifications had brought a number of challenges.

Our review identified a number of issues in relation to some aspects of the new Welsh Baccalaureate:

- many resources, training and support materials needed to help deliver the new qualifications were not available until after teaching had already started in September 2015;
- the documents setting out requirements and guidance were unclear and; they also included unnecessary duplication and some inconsistencies;
- many centres were not aware of the requirement to use the e-portfolio system when making initial plans to deliver the Skills Challenge Certificate;
- more guidance and exemplar materials were required to support reliable and consistent assessment of the Skills Challenge Certificate.

We moved quickly to investigate these issues and to determine what action was needed. In March 2016, we published a report on the findings of that investigation, making 11 recommendations, which addressed the causes for concern.

One of the recommendations to be implemented is that Qualifications Wales should review in detail how the Skills Challenge Certificate is assessed and structured. This work is due to take place in autumn 2016, with a view to publishing a final report in spring 2017. We also recommended that WJEC, regional consortia and ColegauCymru should receive funding from us to continue to deliver training and guidance for centres in order to support the delivery and assessment of the Skills Challenge Certificates. A further recommendation was that we should work with other stakeholders to conduct an evaluation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate following the 2017 summer awards. The evaluation will include evidence gathered from summer 2016 and 2017, as well as direct feedback from learners and providers.

Our initial review of the Welsh Baccalaureate has enabled us to respond quickly to the issues raised. Where issues are outside our direct control, we have informed the relevant organisations, asking them to consider taking appropriate action. Moving forward, stakeholders can be confident that we will keep the Welsh Baccalaureate under close monitoring scrutiny so that it can continue to be successfully implemented for the benefit of learners in Wales.

GCSE, AS and A level standard-setting

Historically, Ofqual has taken the lead in the regulation of three-country qualifications, deferring to the Welsh Government (and now Qualifications Wales) for qualifications with cohorts dominated by learners in Wales. We continue to work with Ofqual to manage qualifications co-regulated across three countries at a time of increasing operational and policy divergence.

Summer 2016 has seen the first award of new AS qualifications that are offered in Wales only. Setting the appropriate standards for these qualifications was challenging and we worked with WJEC to develop awarding principles that we then published. The priority during awarding is to align standards over time. In doing so this should ensure that, with all things being equal, a student who got a particular grade in a subject in one year should get the same grade the following year. This well-established ‘comparable outcomes approach’ should therefore mean that a student taking a new specification is not disadvantaged by an unfamiliar qualification.

The standard-setting process takes place during the award phase of qualifications and is closely monitored. As the regulator, we review the award outcomes and are mindful of the following three principles:

1. fairness for learners
2. public confidence in the results being issued
3. maintenance of standards over time

Although the way in which qualifications are assessed differs across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, a shared GCSE and A level brand remains and we continue to work across regulators with the aim of reinforcing stakeholders’ confidence in the currency of these qualifications.



“The University of Bath values the work that Qualifications Wales has carried out to develop the integrity and robustness of the qualifications framework in Wales.”

“In particular Bath strongly supports the reforms to the Welsh Baccalaureate Core and has agreed that any student achieving a B grade or better in the Core qualification will qualify for an alternate offer for any undergraduate degree course except those in our Mathematics Department.”

Mike Nicholson, Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions, University of Bath

NO ENTRY
EXAMS IN
PROGRESS
DIM MYNEDIAD
ARHOLIAD
AR Y GWEILL

General qualification results

The overall GCSE, AS and A level results for Wales this summer were stable, with some small shifts both up and down, which can be considered normal variation. In some subjects, performance has improved, whereas in others it has fallen. This is to be expected, since cohorts vary from one year to the next, in both size and ability.

AS and A level results summary: Wales

In comparison with 2015 results:

A levels

- the proportion achieving A* was down 0.7 percentage points to 6.6%
- the proportion achieving A* and A was down 0.4 percentage points to 22.7%
- the proportion achieving A* to E was unchanged at 97.3%

AS levels

- the proportion achieving A was up 1.8 percentage points to 18.0%
- the proportion achieving A-E was up 1.5 percentage points to 88.3%

Reformed AS subjects

Students in Wales have taken the first reformed qualifications in 14 AS subjects this summer: Art and Design, Biology, Business, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, English Language, English Language and Literature, English Literature, History, Physics, Psychology, Sociology, and Welsh (First Language).

As 2016 was the first year of awarding these new qualifications, we required WJEC to use the established 'comparable outcomes' approach to ensure students are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. The comparable outcomes approach ensures that variability in outcomes at the national level is limited. When qualifications change, however, there is typically more variability in individual school and college results and this was the case this year.

Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate

There has been a slight increase in Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate entries this year, from **10,529** in 2015 to **10,756** in 2016. 89.8% achieved the Advanced diploma; an increase of 2.5 percentage points from 2015. 94.4% achieved the core certificate, up 2.2 percentage points from 2015.

For the Advanced core certificate:

- the proportion achieving A* was up 6.3 percentage points from 2015, to 18.5%
- the proportion achieving A* and A was up 9.5 percentage points from 2015 to 51.0%

GCSE results summary: Wales

In comparison with summer 2015 results:

- the proportion achieving A* was up by 0.1 percentage points to 6.1%
- the proportion achieving A* and A was up by 0.2 percentage points to 19.4%
- the proportion achieving A* to C was unchanged at 66.6%
- the proportion achieving A* to G was unchanged at 98.7%

Although the overall entry numbers appeared to be stable, in some subjects, there was a considerable change in entry patterns. GCSE Mathematics, GCSE English Language and GCSE Science all saw a significant movement in entries from previous years and further details of the effect of this on outcomes is given below.

GCSE Mathematics

The entry figures for GCSE Mathematics have fluctuated over recent years as more students have been entered in the November examinations. Additionally, this summer, there was a decrease in the number of 15 year-olds and an increase in post-16 year-olds sitting the qualification, due to qualification reform and government policy. Therefore, a more valid year-on-year comparison can be drawn from data for the academic year, (that is, combining both the November and summer results).

Outcomes for 16 year-old students this academic year compared to the 2014/15 academic year are shown in the table below:

	2014/15 cumulative %	2015/16 cumulative %	Difference %
A*	6.8	7.5	0.7
A*-A	16.0	17.4	1.4
A*-C	63.7	65.5	1.8
A*-G	97.9	98.7	0.8

GCSE Science Suite

GCSE Science saw a 23% overall increase in entries to 23,941. This entry increase reflected students moving from vocational science courses to the GCSE Science qualifications as schools anticipated changes to school performance measures due in 2018. These entry changes resulted in overall candidate outcomes falling:

- the proportion achieving A* was down 0.4 percentage points from 2015 to 1.1%
- the proportion achieving A* and A was down 1.2 percentage points to 6.6%
- the proportion achieving A* to C was down 6.9 percentage points to 50.6%
- the proportion achieving A* to G was down 1.1 percentage points to 97.1%

GCSE English Language

More students took GCSE English Language in the January series and, as for GCSE Mathematics, a more valid year-on-year comparison can be drawn from data for the academic year, that is, combining both the January and summer results.

Outcomes for 16 year-old students this academic year compared with the 2014/15 academic year are shown in the table below:

	2014/15 cumulative %	2015/16 cumulative %	Difference
A*	3.1	2.8	-0.3
A*-A	13.8	13.6	-0.2
A*-C	64.5	64.2	-0.3
A*-G	99.2	99.2	0.0

Welsh Bacculaureate

This is the first year that the new Post-16 Welsh Bacculaureate has been awarded, with the following Skills Challenge Certificate outcomes:

National Post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate (Welsh Bacculaureate)

	2016
Candidate entries	1,259
Candidates awarded the National Post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	1,015
% achieving the National Post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	80.6%

Foundation Post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate (Welsh Bacculaureate)

	2016
Candidate entries	908
Candidates awarded the Foundation Post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	859
% achieving the Foundation Post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	94.6%



Relationships with awarding bodies

As a regulator, we need to maintain effective appropriate and professional relationships with those we regulate, so that we can work together to achieve compliance. This benefits learners and the qualification system as a whole. We want to strike a balance between good working relationships with awarding bodies and, as the body that regulates them, keeping an appropriate degree of separation.

Throughout our first year, we have developed good relationships, both with individual awarding bodies, and their representative bodies: the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) and the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB). From the outset, we wanted to be aware of the challenges facing awarding bodies, to involve them in our thinking and to work with them in the interests of learners.

We have developed a strong working relationship with WJEC. We recognise that, as the sole provider of Approved general qualifications in Wales, they have a significant impact on learners in Wales.

As well as maintaining regular contact with awarding bodies during our day-to-day work, we have held joint events and meetings, we involved them both in the early stages of the work we are undertaking to develop our regulatory approach, and in our reviews.



Strategic Priority 3:

Build Qualifications Wales' capability and capacity

Qualifications Wales is confident that it is effective and efficient in fulfilling its Principal Aims and is continually evolving to add value to the education system in Wales.

Strategic Priority 3:

Our goal is to build capability and resilience within Qualifications Wales. We do this by continually developing and maintaining our corporate and internal control systems – aligning ourselves with best practice in the public sector.

We aim to foster a culture that is professional and agile, visibly centred on the needs of learners, and which embodies a coherent and congruent set of values and behaviours. We aim to have effective operating practices and processes that meet corporate and stakeholder needs.

In looking ahead and continually reviewing our role we will focus particularly on potential developments or changes that deliver benefit to learners.

Our key achievements towards meeting this strategic priority this year have included:

- Recruiting our staff and completing a successful induction programme;
- Developing our values;
- Setting up the corporate functions required for the brand-new organisation;
- The development and launch of our new regulatory database – Qualifications in Wales (QiW);
- Substantial development of our staff.

Making a regulator

In September 2011, the Welsh Government launched the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19 year-olds in Wales*, which ran until November 2012. Following extensive consultation and evidence-gathering, the Review made 42 recommendations for the improvement of the qualification system in Wales, all of which were accepted by Welsh Ministers in February 2013.

Among recommendations that set in motion the programme of general qualification reform in Wales, the Review concluded that “decisions about qualifications in Wales must be taken in Wales in a strategic way and on the basis of what is best for our learners and our economy.” The Review proposed the establishment of a “single body... that is responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of all non-degree level qualifications available in Wales”. The Welsh Government committed to creating such a body: Qualifications Wales.

The purpose of the proposed new body was to operate independently of government and develop a new approach to regulation, allowing Wales to pursue its own direction in terms of the types of qualifications that are delivered to learners in Wales, and to make sure that qualifications are consistently and fairly delivered and awarded across Wales.

Qualifications Wales came into being on 6 August 2015, through the Qualifications Wales Act. The Act removed responsibility for the regulation of non-degree qualifications from Welsh Ministers and transferred it to the newly-established regulator.



On 21 September 2015, we took up our full powers, which gave us a range of functions in relation to the qualification system.

We came into being amidst a period of considerable qualification reform. The devolution of education policy in the UK had resulted in increasing divergence of qualifications and regulation between Wales, England and Northern Ireland. As a result, there was a growing awareness of the need to bring a robust, independent and consistent approach to the regulation of qualifications and the qualification system in Wales to maintain public confidence and to safeguard the longer term interests of Welsh learners.

In September 2015 the reform of GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Bacallaureate was already well underway. We assumed responsibility for overseeing the effective implementation of qualifications that had been approved by the Welsh Government for first teaching from September 2015.

This included:

- monitoring the award of new AS levels in 2016 (and new GCSEs and A levels in 2016 and 2017);
- Approving the remainder of new qualifications for first teaching in 2016; and
- setting the design and Approval criteria for the final set of reformed qualifications that are due for first teaching in 2017.



“Qualifications Wales has really hit the ground running, and we have been delighted that they have been keen to engage with us and listen to our concerns. We are looking forward to building a long-term professional relationship.”

Tim Pratt, Director, ASCL Cymru

Building capacity

Recruitment

From the start, we recognised that, as a knowledge-based organisation, we needed to focus on our people and on building our intellectual capital. To do this, we recruited people from a wide range of relevant backgrounds, seeking a balance between experience, perspective and expertise. We planned our recruitment carefully to ensure that critical roles would be in place before we became operational in September 2015.

As Qualifications Wales was a brand-new organisation, this was a significant piece of work, with multiple recruitment exercises running in parallel, and the added challenges of appointing employees to an organisation that did not yet exist.

All our senior staff had been recruited by June 2015; the biggest phase of our recruitment took place in July, finalising appointments to start in the second week of September. During summer, some employees began working in corporate roles, to make sure that we had the facilities, IT and people in place ready to take on our role as regulator from 21 September.

The vacancies that we advertised attracted considerable interest; the Qualifications Managers, Officers and Assistant posts drew a large number of applicants from a range of backgrounds. We have been able to recruit an excellent team from many different sectors, including education practitioners (teachers, lecturers, head teachers), awarding bodies, other regulators, the Welsh Government, Estyn, the Office of National Statistics, local authorities, police, other sponsored bodies and the private sector. This means that we can take a fresh approach to challenges and view them from different perspectives.

At the same time as recruiting, we also ensured the transfer of skills and knowledge from colleagues who had experience of qualification regulation within the Welsh Government. The Chief Executive and Director of Policy and Research, along with five other senior staff, transferred directly to Qualifications Wales from the Welsh Government; another seven came through secondments (ranging from four months to two years) to help establish the new organisation.

A year on, the majority of our recruitment is complete, with plans in place to recruit and fill any remaining vacancies.

Our structure

We aim to use our powers and capabilities to add value to the qualification system, and to the Welsh education system as a whole.

With this in mind, our functions are structured into three separate directorates: **Regulation, Policy & Research, and Finance & Corporate Services.**

Our Policy & Research directorate draws in and analyses information and data to allow us to work as an evidence-based organisation. We use the understanding that we gain to inform the development of our regulatory approach and policies and to shape our approach to qualifications and the qualification system in Wales. Where change is needed, our development and commissioning team can use our powers to develop design criteria or commission new qualifications.

The Regulation directorate carries out our core work as a regulator, safeguarding the validity and reliability of qualifications. The Approval and Recognition team consider applications and decide whether new awarding bodies should be recognised or whether new qualifications should be Approved or Designated. This team sits in a separate directorate to the team involved in commissioning to ensure that they provide independent quality assurance.

The Monitoring and Compliance team oversee awarding bodies and their delivery of qualifications, using a range of tools including annual statements of compliance and monitoring.

Our two Associate Directors have cross-cutting responsibility for vocational and general qualifications. These senior roles are responsible for ensuring that we have a coherent strategy for both academic and work-related qualifications.

Our Corporate Services function supports the rest of the organisation to deliver our objectives. The Directorate is made up of seven very small teams who have professional specialisms in IT, HR, finance, procurement, facility management, communications, external relations and corporate governance. In all cases, their work involves understanding and ensuring our compliance with public law and relevant Welsh Government public sector policies. They ensure that we operate in a compliant and safe manner, with proper governance over our decision-making and with our staff's well-being in mind.

The Corporate Services directorate is collectively responsible for helping Qualifications Wales to make the best use of its resources (people, finance, and physical assets). It helps the organisation to run efficiently, and makes it easy for regulatory and policy staff to do their jobs, ensuring that external stakeholders are informed and able to engage effectively with our work. Staff are also encouraged to use their expertise to contribute to the wider aims of the organisation in relation to qualifications and the qualification system.

Building and IT

Our office is in Newport. We took it over as an empty shell and were able to fit it out with the aim of creating a bright, inspiring, connected, cost-effective operation and environment that encourages the best out of our teams and allows us to collaborate flexibly with our stakeholders.

We have taken a modern and flexible approach to IT, using the latest technologies. Our staff access cloud services through a 'two-in one' detachable tablet, which avoids duplication of desktops, laptops and video/telephone equipment. The tablets are used seamlessly, whether at desks, in meetings or outside the office. Investment in good audio equipment has made video-conferencing and document-sharing effective, allowing us to work and communicate flexibly.

We have adopted a holistic approach to information security. By clearly identifying the opportunities and risks associated with information assets we implement security by design from the outset, rather than having to retrospectively lock things down to manage risk. An ongoing programme of interactive training on information security awareness helps to ensure that our staff form an additional layer of protection, rather than presenting an additional level of risk. In June 2016, we applied for Cyber Essentials (a Government-backed scheme to help businesses to protect themselves against cyber threats) and were quickly accredited; with one small action, we will shortly secure Cyber Essentials Plus.



Qualifications in Wales (QiW)



The QiW ('Qualifications in Wales') project was initiated a few weeks after we were established. Although the Welsh Government had started some preliminary work to gather requirements, we needed to make decisions quickly and procure a developer in a short period of time.

The project objective to replace the existing database of qualifications, DAQW, was challenging, mainly due to the scale of the development required, and because contractual arrangements for DAQW could not be extended beyond 31 March 2016. DAQW was closely linked to RITS, Ofqual's qualifications database, which was also due to be decommissioned at this time. These circumstances gave us the opportunity to sever our operational dependency on RITS and to create a stand-alone system specially tailored for Wales.

We began by reviewing all the requirements that had been gathered previously, then completed a procurement exercise to select our development partner for this significant project. The company chosen had both the technical skills and cultural approach that we were seeking. In planning the project, we adopted the 'Agile' approach to software development so that we could respond to requirements in a flexible and creative way.

One of the main priorities of the project was to keep stakeholders involved. We established a QiW User Group to manage expectations, gather ideas and test features as they were being developed. We invited stakeholders to take part in design and testing groups, and we included them in face-to-face sessions, where they gave their feedback on the product. We also gave regular demonstrations to our staff to keep them up-to-date with the work.

The positive responses we received helped us to be confident that we were on track. When the system was ready, we delivered training sessions on how to use it, which included publishing guidance documents and online video tutorials. We also worked closely with Ofqual to coordinate the switch over from DAQW/RITS to minimise the impact of change, and to ensure that all the appropriate qualification records were migrated over to the new database accurately.

The QiW project was completed on time and within budget. The system is simple to use and built to a high quality.

The project has been included among the finalists for the UK IT Industry Awards for 2016 for project excellence, in the Best Not-for-profit Project category. The announcement of the awards will take place in November 2016.

Feedback on QiW indicates that we have substantially enhanced the services offered to our external users, staff and partners and that they find it quicker and easier to search for and extract information. We have moved on to considering opportunities for further developments, working through additional requirements and involving stakeholders.



Staff induction

From day one, we focused on bringing our new staff together as one team. Our aim is to make the most of the skills, knowledge and expertise of our staff, working together intelligently, in a professional and nurturing environment.

Our Senior Leadership Group started on 1 September 2015 and began a three-week induction programme, which the remainder of the organisation joined in week two.

The first week focused on our priorities as an organisation and our business plan, whilst also considering how team leaders would build their teams. We delivered leadership training to support this.

The subsequent two weeks were focused on ensuring that everyone had an understanding of our legislation, the principles of regulation and of assessment, and were able to use our technology effectively. To develop understanding of our operating environment we also invited stakeholders from awarding bodies, colleges and schools to explain their perspectives and hopes for the future.

We gave the new members of staff a chance to have their say in how we would shape ourselves, and together developed our organisational culture and values:

Our Values

We will work in the interests of learners in Wales and for the public good, adopting the following core values:

We are:

- passionate about what we do;
- thoughtful in the approaches that we take;
- collaborative in the way that we work;
- striving for simplicity without being simplistic.



Staff development

We are committed to developing our staff, and in particular, we are looking at building leadership capability at all levels within the organisation. In September 2016, we are due to commence an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) programme for selected Qualifications Assistants and Officers. We also plan to provide further leadership training for our Senior Leadership Group and develop the skills of those line managers in the middle of our organisation.

Over the past year, we have provided both organisation-wide and individual training, ranging from advanced regulatory assessment training and stakeholder engagement, through to finance, procurement and FOI/Data Protection training. We have also provided training to the Executive Team and the Board in relation to governance and working with the media.

Setting up our corporate functions

Over the first few months, we used our teams' experience to develop our corporate policies, procedures, systems and ways of working. We developed our corporate functions – setting up our finance, procurement and HR system applications – and trained our staff on our new processes. As a small organisation, we have carefully considered our business continuity arrangements, ensuring appropriate separation of duties, but maintaining resilience. We also involve staff in reviewing our processes on an on-going basis to continually improve.

We developed our communications and external relations functions, setting up our website, twitter feeds and our newsletters to school and colleges and to awarding bodies to act as effective communications channels. We also set up a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) application to track stakeholder engagement.

We completed our health and safety and environmental policies and created our governance arrangements and internal controls, including our approach to risk management and our scheme of delegation. We established our Board and Committee arrangements and our Management Board and decision-making processes.

We are pleased to report that our internal audits provided a 'Satisfactory' rating for financial controls, electronic data management and risk management and a 'Substantial' rating for our governance arrangements. Our 2015-16 Annual Accounts were audited by the Wales Audit Office and received an unqualified audit report.

Qualifications Wales as an employer

In our first reporting period, we assembled a 69-strong team to deliver the organisation's aims and plans. We strongly believe that the culture within our workplace should be professional and visible, and we nurture and encourage the development of our capable staff. Our workforce continues to grow and evolve and we are all very proud of what we have achieved in this first short period.



Our people

As an organisation that relies on the knowledge and skills of its people to deliver its functions, getting the right team in place from outset was vital.

In our qualifications and regulation roles, we have focused on taking people with broad assessment skills and experience in various aspects of education, who want to make a difference. As a result, we have benefited from a team who come from across the qualifications system – giving us a wide range of different perspectives. Our corporate team also have diverse backgrounds in both the public and private sectors, and they bring with them the expertise required to build our new organisation and to support our regulatory functions and activities. We are committed to developing our staff and will be encouraging staff to move around the organisation to learn new skills.

The following profiles give a snapshot of some of our staff, two of whom have already progressed within the organisation since joining.



DENVER DAVIES



**Current role: Senior Regulator,
Monitoring and Compliance**

I lead a team responsible for monitoring the award of both general and vocational qualifications, and the overall compliance of awarding bodies.

I'm a fluent Welsh-speaker from west Wales. I went to school at Ysgol Gyfun Maes-yr-yrfa before studying History at Swansea University.

In 2001, I started working in qualifications regulation at ACCAC, the qualifications and curriculum authority for Wales, where I worked on both curriculum and general qualifications regulation. In 2006, I transferred to the Welsh Government when ACCAC was merged into it.

In 2010, I joined the Welsh awarding body, Agored Cymru, which offers vocational qualifications and accredited learning across Wales. This role provided me with invaluable experience of the challenges facing awarding bodies and hands-on experience of managing the systems that underpin awarding activity. I believe that this experience and the understanding of the impact of regulation on awarding bodies is of great benefit in my current role with Qualifications Wales.

KERRY DAVIES



Current role: Qualifications Manager

I oversee the monitoring of general qualifications (GCSEs and GCEs).

I grew up in Wales, took a degree in Pathobiology and then secured a job as a Biology teacher in Hastings. After some years as Head of Biology and then Head of Science, I relocated to Wales as Curriculum Deputy in Cwmbran in 2003; my first taste of working in a Welsh school. After six years, I became a head teacher in Caerphilly.

Since working at Qualifications Wales, I have learned a huge amount about the wider qualification system and regulation in general. After 23 years in schools, I am acutely aware of the challenges faced by centres in successfully implementing curriculum reform and ensuring that qualifications are delivered effectively. I also understand the huge demands on school leaders' time and energies, and the reality of day-to-day life in a busy school.

At all stages of a qualification life cycle there are rigorous processes and procedures in place. In all honesty, I was oblivious to some of these in my previous roles; I now see the challenges from a different perspective. When you work in schools, you can sometimes be guilty of assuming you are the only ones who care. I have realised that this is not the case, and that there is a strong and shared desire to get things right for our learners in Wales.

CERYS JONES



Initial role: Office Assistant
Current role: Qualifications Assistant

I support the team managing the approval and designation of qualifications.

I graduated in July 2015 with a First Class Honours degree in Welsh. As a second-language Welsh-speaker, I am now very proud to say that I am fluent.

My first job was at the Welsh for Adults Centre in Swansea University. I moved to Qualifications Wales in October 2015 and can honestly say that having been given the opportunity to work in such a new and exciting organisation has been very rewarding. I have had endless opportunities to grow my experience.

I joined as an Office Assistant in Finance and Corporate Services, where I supported the facilities and finance teams. I received various training opportunities and was allowed to observe qualifications panel meetings. In June I was promoted to Qualifications Assistant.

Working in Qualifications Wales, my confidence in speaking Welsh has improved further from being able to use it on a daily basis. All in all, starting full-time work for the very first time has been an exciting and enjoyable experience for me, rather than a daunting one!

JACK THOMAS



Initial role: Intern
Current role: Qualifications Assistant

I support the Associate Director of Vocational Qualifications, having completed a successful internship.

Having graduated from Cardiff Metropolitan University in 2014 with a degree in Educational Studies and Welsh, I worked as a teaching assistant in an inner-city school in Cardiff. I joined Qualifications Wales at its inception, as its first Intern.

I have had the opportunity to see the early developmental work within Qualifications Wales and to be part of its progress. Throughout my internship, I have had the opportunity to work within four different teams.

I have particularly enjoyed being part of cross-team projects and working with different individuals from a variety of backgrounds. I have been very lucky to have real learning and development opportunities, as well as sound coaching, feedback and support. Each working day is different, and I have been encouraged to contribute actively to each team, with my contributions being listened to and valued.

Both Cerys and Jack have successfully applied for the Institute of Learning and Management (ILM) Level 3 award in Leadership and Management, being delivered for Qualifications Wales.



Strategic Priority 4:

Deliver Public Confidence

Qualifications Wales is recognised widely as an expert independent body, and engenders public and professional confidence.

Strategic Priority 4:

Our purpose here is to be active in raising public understanding of the role and activities of Qualifications Wales and the qualification system in Wales, and this will partly include effective communications with engaged stakeholders.

We are proactive in averting issues or potential failures within the qualification system. Our choices and decisions are transparent, and we will satisfy our accountability to the National Assembly for Wales in the fulfilment of our functions, and to the Welsh Government in the use of public money: demonstrating good value to both.

Specifically regarding the Welsh Government, we will maintain our collaborative relationship with them, ensuring that there is a high level of trust and connectivity, whilst retaining the independence of Qualifications Wales.

Our key achievements towards meeting this strategic priority this year have included:

- Actively engaging our stakeholders to increase our mutual understanding of what is happening in the qualification system;
- Commissioning a long-term study to look at perceptions of public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system;
- Communicating effectively with our key stakeholders to ensure their understanding of our role and purpose.



“I am impressed by Qualifications Wales’ desire to listen to the voice of the profession in order to be aware and fully understand our challenges and frustrations.”

“It has established itself as a recognised, increasingly independent national body and has gained an understanding of the Welsh education context. It has recognised challenges and has made a few very confident and sensible decisions e.g. postponing the delivery of some new GCSE specifications for 12 months and as a result has gained considerable respect from practitioners.”

Dewi Lake, Head of Ysgol y Moelwyn

Public confidence

Our Principal Aims require us to ensure that qualifications and the qualification system meet the needs of learners in Wales, and to promote public confidence in both qualifications and the system.

The general public care passionately about education and have confidence in qualifications when they believe in their value and the strength of the qualification system.

Qualifications need to demonstrate a learner's knowledge, skills and understanding, and be a reliable measure of attainment – so that there is a fair reflection of their learning. Ultimately they have to enable the next step in someone's life, whether that be further studies or the world of work.

The qualification system is strongest when the different organisations involved work effectively together. Qualifications are important, so people must be able to rely on the system working well, and on the occasions where it doesn't, prompt effective action will be taken.

Our job is to oversee all of this. The qualification system is complex and involves the actions of many different organisations. It is inevitable that things will occasionally go wrong and, if needed, we are there to take swift and effective action – with learners at the heart of our work.



So how do we promote public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system?

Regular dialogue with stakeholders

In all that we do, we seek effective and active engagement with our stakeholders to ensure that we understand what is happening across the system. For every project that we undertake, we develop an agreed approach to engaging with stakeholders; we seek the views of our stakeholders and partners, we benefit from their experience, and we learn from them. We engage widely through our consultations and Sector Reviews with employers, learning providers, professional bodies and learners to find out how confident they are with the current qualifications. We seek advice and opinions, and we identify improvements that can be made.

Our work on Sector Reviews for vocational qualifications is an example of this approach. Throughout this first review, stakeholders have expressed their confidence in our methodology for listening and gathering evidence, and we will continue with this way of working as we move into other sectors.

This approach isn't unique to Sector Reviews and our review of the implementation of the new Welsh Baccalaureate qualifications provides another excellent example of how we involved a wide range of learners and teachers at both schools and colleges to understand a problem. Our prompt response to the issues raised, and our practical actions, have bolstered confidence in both the qualification and the system.

Use of experts

We source subject experts with experience of teaching and assessment in their subject to help us to develop criteria against which new qualifications will be considered for Approval, to carry out those judgements when qualifications are submitted for Approval and to support our monitoring activity. This means that the public can be confident in our work, knowing that we have drawn on a significant level of expertise.



Transparency

Sometimes we have to take difficult decisions for the long-term benefit of learners. When this happens, we are transparent and consistent in our decision-making process, giving clear reasons for what we do.

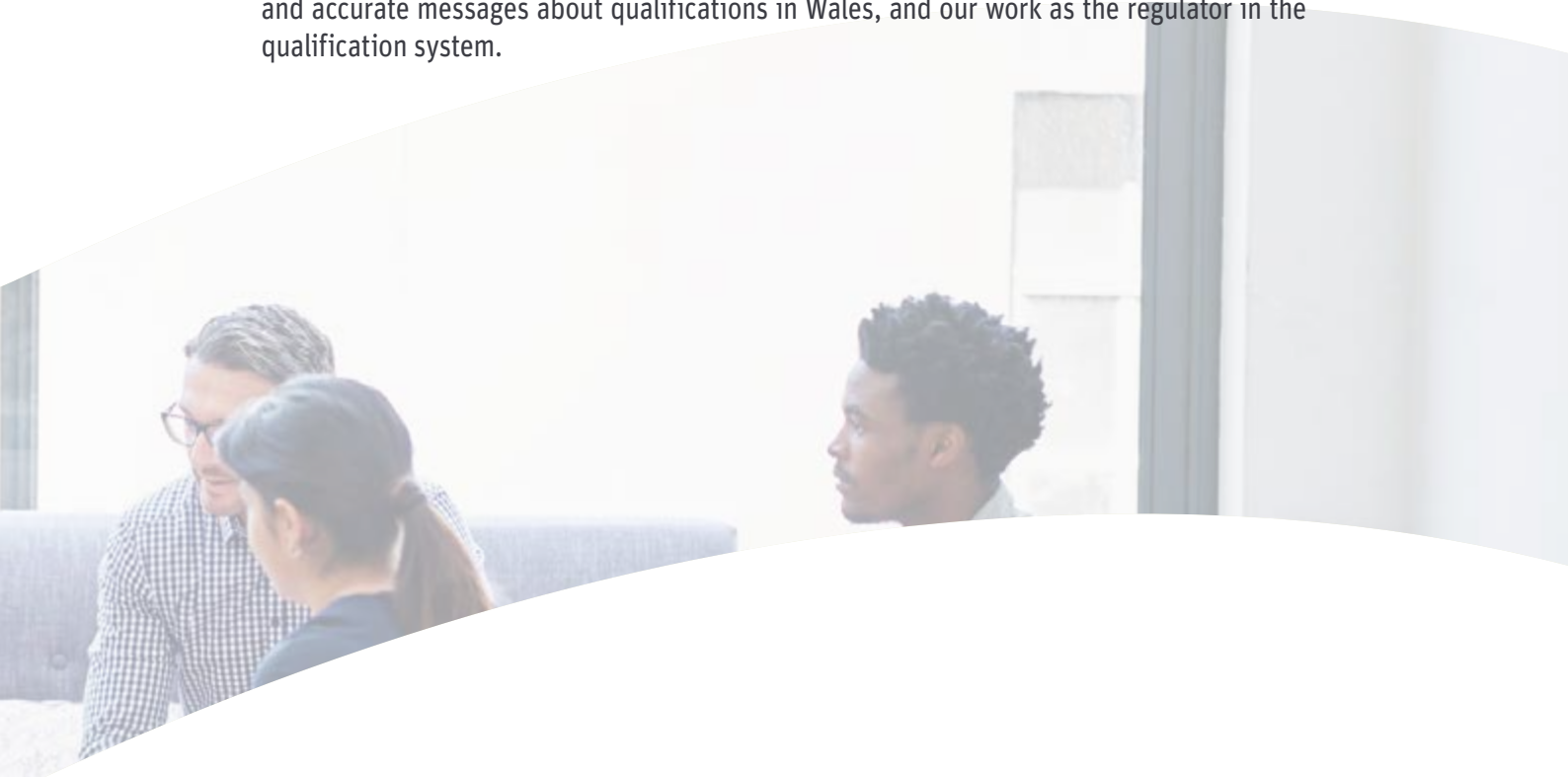
This was demonstrated in our decision to defer the introduction of the new GCSE History and GCSE Religious Studies to give teachers and students proper time to prepare, with access to bilingual materials and resources. By working with those affected, and clearly explaining our decision, we have increased their confidence in the overall approach to reform.

Effective communication

In order to secure public confidence in qualifications, we also work to increase public and stakeholder confidence in Qualifications Wales as an organisation. To do this, we actively work to increase the public's understanding of what we do, and how we fit into the qualification system as a whole. We have developed a bilingual website, which clearly describes our responsibilities and our work, and we also make use of social media to disseminate information and to stimulate debate.

Working with the media

We know that the perception of confidence can often change quickly, on the basis of events or issues in the media that are outside our control. Our approach is to give the media access to accurate and up-to-date information, and to seek to ensure the communication of clear and accurate messages about qualifications in Wales, and our work as the regulator in the qualification system.



Measuring public confidence

Qualifications Wales has commissioned a longitudinal study over four and a half years, looking at perceptions of public confidence. The first wave of research was conducted in late 2015 and early 2016. The aims of this research project, Measuring Confidence in Qualifications and the Qualification System in Wales, are to:

- identify the levels of confidence in the qualification system in Wales amongst stakeholders;
- measure the impact of Qualifications Wales on levels of confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system;
- identify the key strengths of Qualifications Wales in promoting confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system and identify any constraints and issues impeding effectiveness, or opportunities for improvement;
- make recommendations on how Qualifications Wales can improve public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system in Wales.

The research method includes engagement with 50 stakeholders over the period of the study and the survey of 1,000 adults across Wales, using four key questions relating to public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system in Wales. Stakeholders include schools, pupils, teachers, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Further Education (FE) colleges, key strategic stakeholders, employers and employer representatives.

This will be undertaken in three phases, one every two years, and will provide a measure with which to track confidence.

We expect to publish findings from the first stage of this research in late 2016, and to report on Stage 2 of the study in 2018 and on the final stage in 2020.



Working with our stakeholders

We operate within, and have oversight of, the Welsh qualification system. In doing this we have to be connected with those who have an interest in the system.

This is how we have engaged with our key stakeholders over the last 12 months:

Learners

Learners are the end beneficiaries of our work. Where possible, we have invited them to share their views with us in order to help shape our work. During the Health and Social Care Sector Review, we engaged extensively with more than 800 learners to gather their views on their experience of qualifications in the sector. During our work on Approval criteria, we also commissioned research through 26 learner focus groups (13 conducted in Welsh, and 13 in English) and 12 in-depth interviews with current learners and recent school leavers. We have also conducted a short survey amongst learners, their teachers and lecturers, to allow them to share their views of the summer exams.

Awarding bodies

Our role includes regulating, reviewing and monitoring the activities of awarding bodies. To do this, we have sought to develop effective and appropriate regulatory relationships with them. As a large part of what we do affects, and is affected by, awarding bodies, their feedback is important to us, and we place a high value on their views.

In April 2016, we held a workshop for awarding bodies as part of the regulatory strategy project. The aim of the workshop was to get awarding bodies' views on the strengths and weaknesses of our current regulatory approach as they had experienced it so far. The feedback we received was extremely constructive, and we were able to act on some suggestions quickly. As a result of the workshop, we implemented a range of new communications, including new web pages, a series of FAQs, and 'The Examiner', an e-bulletin specifically tailored for awarding bodies.

We also ran a workshop in May 2016 for awarding bodies to share the findings of our Health & Social Care review and our early thinking, and we regularly attend and present at the Federation for Awarding Bodies (FAB) conferences and events.

We have met with individual awarding bodies extensively on specific topics and meet with their representative bodies frequently. We have also hosted meetings on behalf of the representative bodies, which has allowed us to meet with a number of awarding bodies collectively, so that they can better understand our requirements and general approach.

As already mentioned in this report, we engaged extensively with awarding bodies during our development of QiW, given that they are a key user group.

Schools, colleges and work-based learning providers ('centres')

Our Centre Support Team maintain close links with centres, and arrange face-to-face meetings with headteachers, curriculum managers, department heads and examination officers. We issue a bi-monthly newsletter ('The Slate') to all centres across Wales.

In our qualifications reform work, we have engaged with a number of teachers, who responded to our consultation and attended our roadshow events to share their views with us in person. We also procure the services of a number of subject experts, many of whom are practising teachers, who contribute to the development of subject criteria for new qualifications, and help us to monitor the effectiveness of established qualifications.

We maintain close working links with regional consortia. During this financial year we have provided them with grant funding to enable them to support the introduction of new qualifications within schools and colleges.

In March 2016, we held a one-day Symposium for education practitioners, entitled '*The Power of Assessment*', which attracted a number of leading experts from across the UK. The event was supported by the Welsh Government, WJEC, the Association of School & College Leaders (ASCL) and the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA), and considered such topics as e-assessment and comparative judgement.

Higher education providers, employers and related organisations

We have a responsibility to make sure that qualifications are aligned to the reasonable needs of employers, higher education institutions and the professions, who rely upon them as indicators of learners' capability and skills. Our Associate Directors and the Head of External Relations maintain regular communication with contacts in higher education. We also engage with business representatives and employers in key sectors, involving them in reviews and consultations where appropriate.

During 2016, we produced our first of our annual Higher Education Guide for university admissions officers, explaining the qualification system and the current and forthcoming reforms, including the changes to the new Welsh Baccalaureate. We also visited those universities who receive significant numbers of Welsh learners.

Through our Sector Review of qualifications and the qualification system in Health & Social Care (including childcare and playwork), we engaged with a wide range of organisations, including the NHS, local authorities and private care and childcare providers who employ the learners who take these qualifications.

Other regulators

It is important that we work with other regulators to share approaches and learn from each other. We regularly meet with the qualifications regulators for the rest of the UK (Ofqual, CCEA and SQA) and in autumn 2015, hosted a five-country regulation seminar. We also meet regularly with Estyn and the Welsh Language Commissioner.

The qualification system in Wales





Forward look

As we move into our second year, we will build on the work completed to date.

The **table below** lays out some of our priorities:

Vocational Strategy	<p>We will be launching our Vocational Qualifications Strategy.</p> <p>One of the key elements of this strategy is our programme of Sector Reviews.</p>
New Sector Reviews in Construction and the Built Environment and ICT	<p>Following the positive response to our Sector Review of Health and Social Care we will be running two further Sector Reviews next year: Construction and the Built Environment, and Information and Communication Technology.</p> <p>Building on the experiences of the first Sector Review we will engage closely with stakeholders to understand their views on the effectiveness of qualifications and the qualification system in these sectors. We will also be taking an especially close look at some of the most popular qualifications. We expect to publish reports on these reviews in the late summer/early autumn of 2017.</p>

**Health & Social Care
– development of
qualifications**

We will be completing our consultation on our proposal to use our powers to restrict qualifications in Health & Social care. Subject to the outcome of this consultation, we expect to commence a procurement exercise to appoint one or more providers to develop these new qualifications.

**Reforming GCSEs
and A levels**

We will be working closely with WJEC on the reform of GCSEs and AS/A levels for first teaching in September 2017. We expect that all reformed qualifications will be Approved by March 2017. Starting in autumn 2016, we will be working with organisations tasked with supporting the introduction of these qualifications to establish the support and professional development that will be available to help schools to prepare to teach them. We will also identify how several GCSE and A level qualifications, in those subjects that have not been reformed in Wales, will be made available to learners in Wales.

Grants

We will manage the successful delivery of the grants that we have awarded and consider where grant intervention is required for the following financial year.



“Health, social care and childcare are vital services in Wales, and it is essential that workers have the right skills and knowledge to provide good quality care and support. The review ...will make a positive contribution to achieving this, and have a positive impact upon the lives of those who use care and support services.”

“As the Care Council makes the transition into Social Care Wales, we look forward to building on our relationship with Qualifications Wales and working collaboratively through a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the recommendations set out in the review.”

Sarah McCarty, Director of Workforce Learning and Development, Care Council for Wales

Monitoring plan

Our awarding body audit programme will start in 2017. We will develop our approach gradually, taking time to learn from each awarding body audit to establish a robust model for future audits.

We will be implementing our new Monitoring plan through which we will oversee the award of general qualifications, including the first award of the new GCSEs in Maths, Welsh, and English. We will also be focusing on high-volume vocational qualifications, including first aid, food safety and health and safety qualifications.

Commissioned research

We will be setting up arrangements to enable us to analyse more granular learner data to better inform our evidence-base.

We are considering commissioning research into a number of areas, including language acquisition and learner entry patterns.



Regulatory Strategy

We will be taking forward the development of our regulatory strategy, including a comprehensive review of the clarity and effectiveness of our Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition and the effectiveness of our overall approach. We will be consulting with our stakeholders throughout this project.

Welsh BaccaLaureate Review

In our review of the Welsh BaccaLaureate earlier this year, we recommended a further detailed look at how the Skills Challenge Certificate is assessed and structured, including the proportion of assessment of its individual components, and its place in the overall structure of the Welsh BaccaLaureate.

We will be taking this work forward in the 2016/17 academic year and seeking input from a wide range of interested stakeholders to inform our findings.

Welsh Government Curriculum Review

We will continue to work with the Welsh Government to provide advice on the implementation of the 'Successful Futures' curriculum review and to consider the potential impact on future qualifications reform.



The 'Post-16 Skills Plan'

We will continue to work with the Department of Education in England to understand and monitor the impact of their implementation of the 'Post-16 Skills Plan' resulting from the 'Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education' – chaired by David Sainsbury – and in particular, the impact it may have for learners in Wales.

Business Plan

We will plan and publish our business plan for the 2017-18 financial year.

Stakeholder engagement

We will continue to ensure effective stakeholder engagement – evaluating the effectiveness of our existing communications channels. We intend to hold an Awarding Body forum and also establish more regular communication channels with unions and the business sector.



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