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Consultation Document

Our qualifications – our future

Consultation on proposals to establish a new qualifications body for Wales

Date of issue: **1 October 2013**

Action required: Responses by **20 December 2013**

Our qualifications – our future

Overview	This consultation is about the establishment of a new qualifications body in Wales.
How to respond	Responses to this consultation should be e-mailed/posted to the address below to arrive by 20 December 2013 at the latest.
Further information and related documents	<p>Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request.</p> <p>The consultation documents can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/consultations</p>
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Data protection

How the views and information you give us will be used

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

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Ministerial foreword



Last year, the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales*,¹ chaired by Huw Evans, presented the Welsh Government with a convincing and well regarded report on the qualifications system in Wales. The *Review* emphasised the importance of ensuring that the qualifications taken by learners in Wales are recognised and valued worldwide, for the benefit of our learners, employers and our

economy. In January 2013 Ministers broadly accepted all 42 of the recommendations of the *Review*.

One of the most significant recommendations was that the Welsh Government should establish Qualifications Wales to be the single body responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of non-degree qualifications in Wales and, in time, for the development and awarding of most general qualifications in Wales.

The recommendation to establish Qualifications Wales was focused on the best interests of learners in Wales, not just as students, but as citizens of a bilingual nation with a rich and varied culture and economy. The proposals described in this consultation are born from the desire to strengthen and simplify the structure of regulation and awarding in Wales and to have qualifications that are more relevant and responsive to Wales' needs, both nationally and globally.

Our proposals will bring the quality assurance of qualifications in Wales into one independent body, Qualifications Wales, and will remove regulatory responsibility for qualifications from Ministers. In the longer term, Qualifications Wales will also take responsibility for awarding qualifications to 14 to 16-year-olds, such as GCSEs, as well as A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (Welsh Bac). The new body will provide a clearer, more coherent and robust landscape for the development of relevant and rigorous qualifications in Wales, meeting the needs of our learners.

In transforming our qualifications system in this way, we will be strengthening the position of Wales' qualifications. Qualifications Wales will provide an independent and authoritative point of reference for the Welsh Government and others in the field of education, training and employment. It will make awarding and regulatory decisions independent from political activity and it will be in a position to provide well-informed advice and evidence to support the development of policy.

Our partners in developing a system in and for Wales include learners, teachers, trainers, lecturers, awarding bodies, employers, universities, apprentices and parents. The establishment of Qualifications Wales will

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/revofqualen/>

support these partners in delivering and engaging with new and existing qualifications, ensuring a focus on quality that will lead to our qualifications being considered amongst the best in the world.

I am very excited by this development for our country. We will need new legislation to create Qualifications Wales and my officials and I now seek your views so that we can develop the detail of our proposals and achieve the best outcomes for Wales. This paper, along with the consultation on the Review of the National Curriculum and Assessment, which will be issued on 15 October 2013, forms the consultation for the proposed Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill. I invite and welcome your thoughts, observations and suggestions on these proposals so that together we can ensure that our qualifications are compared favourably with the best in the world.

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

Huw Lewis AM
Minister for Education and Skills
October 2013

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales* recommended that we, the Welsh Government, should establish Qualifications Wales to be the single body responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of non-degree qualifications and, in time, for the development and awarding of most general qualifications in Wales. Qualifications Wales will simplify the qualifications system in Wales, bringing together key qualifications functions relating to qualification design, development, awarding, support and quality assurance into a single, independent and authoritative body.
- 1.2 Our vision for Qualifications Wales is that it will:
- Simplify and professionalise the qualifications system;
 - Scrutinise, evaluate and improve qualifications within that system;
 - Support and engage with stakeholders;
 - Strengthen public confidence in, and information about, qualifications in Wales; and
 - Supply high quality qualifications to learners in Wales.
- 1.3 We propose that, from September 2015, Qualifications Wales will be responsible for the quality assurance of qualifications delivered in Wales and offered by awarding bodies. The Welsh Ministers will no longer have responsibility for their regulation. Qualifications Wales, as an independent statutory body, will be better placed to ensure that qualifications offered in Wales serve the cultural and economic needs of Wales and meet the needs of learners in Wales.
- 1.4 Qualifications Wales will be the principal authority on qualifications in Wales and it will provide professional advice to the Welsh Ministers on relevant matters as well as information, advice and support to a wide range of stakeholders. It will communicate the value of qualifications offered in Wales to stakeholders inside and outside of Wales.
- 1.5 In due course, Qualifications Wales will take on responsibility for awarding most qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds as well as A levels and the Welsh Bac. Having a single version of each of these key qualifications will reduce the inherent burdens and complexities that the current competitive market brings.
- 1.6 Qualifications Wales will be independent from the Welsh Government. It will take professional and autonomous decisions on qualifications. It will lead on aspects of qualifications policy development. It will report to the National Assembly for Wales on how it has fulfilled, and how it plans to fulfil, its functions.

2. The current position

Design, development and regulation of qualifications

- 2.1 Since 2006, responsibility for the regulation of “*relevant qualifications*”² and the development of qualifications policy in Wales has rested with the Welsh Ministers. These functions are carried out by officials from the Department for Education and Skills, in the Welsh Government, on behalf of the Minister for Education and Skills.
- 2.2 We, the Welsh Government, set requirements both for regulated qualifications and for the awarding bodies that offer them. We do this using a number of tools including ‘recognition’ (the approval of an awarding body to ensure it has the capability to offer qualifications before it can operate in the regulated system), and ‘accreditation’ (the review and approval of a qualification to ensure it meets the appropriate criteria before it is offered). An awarding body’s recognition is subject to ongoing ‘conditions of recognition’ and we monitor compliance with these conditions as part of our ongoing regulatory activity.
- 2.3 The level of detail set out in the requirements for qualifications tends to vary, with requirements for the main qualifications aimed at 14 to 19 year-olds, such as GCSEs or A levels, having more closely specified requirements than qualifications aimed at learners older than 19, such as vocational qualifications. Previously, much of the work to develop and publish these requirements has been undertaken jointly with England and Northern Ireland.
- 2.4 Qualifications are assigned a level indicating how demanding they are and some, mainly vocational qualifications, are allocated a credit value based on the average amount of time a learner is expected to take to complete the qualification. This allows qualifications to be compared and understood through the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).
- 2.5 The Welsh Ministers have a number of powers which they can use to ensure that awarding bodies do not breach the conditions of recognition. These include fining awarding bodies or issuing a direction. A direction can require an awarding organisation to take, or refrain from taking, a particular action and is enforceable by court order.

² The Education Act 1997 defines “*relevant qualifications*” as qualifications the Welsh Government must keep under review. Not all qualifications in Wales are regulated. While we regulate all GCSEs and A levels, and many vocational qualifications, many other qualifications are not regulated. Examples of these include established software user qualifications such as those that are provided by IT companies, qualifications overseen by other bodies or certificates issued by training organisations to show a learner has completed a short course.

- 2.6 We monitor and publish reports on qualifications offered by awarding bodies and also investigate complaints and malpractice in relation to qualifications.
- 2.7 The regulation of qualifications taken by learners in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Ministers. However, where the same qualification is offered in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, Welsh Government officials work closely with their counterparts across England and Northern Ireland. In England, this involves working with Ofqual and in Northern Ireland with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). Many vocational qualifications are also offered in Scotland and are regulated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The awarding of qualifications in Wales

- 2.8 The awarding of GCSEs and A levels currently operates in a competitive market structure with five awarding bodies offering these qualifications in Wales: AQA, CCEA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC. We publish some specific requirements for these qualifications which awarding bodies must meet. Within these requirements awarding bodies are then free to develop qualifications with the content and assessment structure that they believe best suits the needs of their providers. This means that qualifications with the same title often have significant differences.
- 2.9 Over 120 further awarding bodies are also recognised to offer other regulated qualifications in Wales and these mainly award vocational qualifications.
- 2.10 Schools, colleges and other learning providers are free to choose qualifications from any awarding body. Their choices can be influenced, for example, by the needs and/or preferences of learners, by performance measures for institutions, by funding restrictions, by a preference for specific content coverage or by the views of higher education institutes or employers.
- 2.11 Qualifications are awarded by awarding bodies once they are satisfied that learners have achieved the requirements of each award. For some qualifications, such as GCSEs and A levels, this involves making a decision on which grades learners have achieved. For these qualifications the methodology for confirming those decisions is set out by the Welsh Government, usually on the basis of an agreement with the regulators in England and Northern Ireland. Over recent years the methodology has been influenced strongly by the data available in England about learners in England.
- 2.12 For other qualifications, such as vocational qualifications, awarding decisions involve determining whether learners have provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate the level of competence required to achieve the qualification.

Teacher support

- 2.13 Each awarding body provides support to teachers and trainers in relation to the qualifications it offers. This may take the form of online or physical resources, circulars, updates, continuous professional development sessions or one-to-one advice. For example, some awarding bodies run professional development sessions for teachers to help them prepare for forthcoming changes to the design of a qualification or its assessment requirements.

National Occupational Standards

- 2.14 National Occupational Standards (NOS) describe what a person needs to do, know and understand in order to carry out a particular job role or function. NOS provide the basis for the development of vocational qualifications and apprenticeships in the UK. Sector Skills Councils, which are independent, employer-led, UK-wide organisations, work with stakeholders to develop NOS that describe industry occupational requirements. NOS are primarily used for qualifications and training purposes but can also be used for recruitment and performance management, career development, professional development and organisational design. We are represented on a four nation panel which agrees the annual allocation of funding for NOS and which approves all proposed and completed NOS activity. There is currently some debate about the future of NOS.

European Vocational Education and Training initiatives

- 2.15 We support European Union Vocational Training initiatives. Government officials are members of a UK co-ordination group delivering various European Union initiatives such as the European Qualifications Framework, the European Quality Assurance framework for Vocational Education and Training and the European directive on the validation of lifelong learning.

Quality Assured Lifelong Learning

- 2.16 We currently oversee Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL). QALL provides a structure for assessing and recognising learners' achievements. Whilst it doesn't lead directly to qualifications, it can provide a bridge between lifelong learning and formal qualifications, for a wide range of learners, including for example, some of our most disadvantaged citizens. It can also be used to fulfil a demand for bespoke learning and assessment provision for national organisations such as the Care Council for Wales. Not all learning is assessed or recognised and QALL applies to only a limited set of learning.

Information supply

- 2.17 There is a wide range of sources of information on qualifications in Wales, with much information being provided by individual awarding bodies. We manage the CQFW which helps to explain the qualifications system, and which provides a route for the recognition of other education and training in Wales. We also maintain a web-based database of regulated qualifications.³
- 2.18 We publish reports and studies on the qualifications system such as monitoring reports, market studies and broader investigations.⁴ Some reports have previously been published jointly with Ofqual and CCEA such as the Annual Qualifications Market Report.

³The Welsh Government maintains the Database of Approved Qualifications in Wales www.daqw.org.uk. In addition, through Ofqual, the Register of Regulated Qualifications further provides information on qualifications <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk>.

⁴ Examples of which can be found at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/qualificationregulation/regpublication/reports/>

3. The case for change

- 3.1 The *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales* worked closely with stakeholders to hear and record their views about the current system. A number of barriers to the effectiveness of the current system were identified through the review and some of these were brought into focus by events which occurred during and after the review.

Complexity

- 3.2 Wales, England and Northern Ireland are unusual among European countries in having competing awarding bodies delivering the assessment of the main qualifications taken in schools. Most other nations, such as Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, have a single national body which performs this role.
- 3.3 Having a market structure results in differences between similar qualifications offered by different awarding bodies. As a result, there are challenges in ensuring parity, such as the standard of work that a learner has to demonstrate to achieve a particular grade in different versions of the same qualification. It is important, but difficult, to ensure that no learner is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged. The work that is needed to determine this comparability is complex and time consuming and currently relies on sophisticated statistical comparisons. Despite this work, the scope remains for allegations or beliefs, whether true or false, that some qualifications are 'easier' than others.
- 3.4 We have the opportunity to reduce this regulatory burden and the associated bureaucracy while increasing confidence in the qualifications delivered in Wales. Allowing one body to deliver the only qualification in each subject area at each level will guarantee consistency across all centres in Wales. Stakeholders will be able to make direct comparisons between regions, schools, colleges and candidates without having to take account of varying course content or to rely on complex statistical data. A single qualification in each subject area and the removal of competition for qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels will remove any possibility that awarding bodies or qualifications are chosen, or are believed to be chosen, because they are the 'easiest'. There is scope to simplify the system, clarify responsibilities, minimise perverse incentives and reduce bureaucracy.

Conflicting priorities

- 3.5 Until recently, decisions about most qualifications were taken jointly with England and Northern Ireland. The formal establishment of Ofqual in 2010 as the qualifications regulator for England coincided with the gradual introduction of changes in qualifications policy in England

which were not mirrored in Wales. This has been further reinforced by recent announcements by the Secretary of State for Education in England of significant changes to GCSE and A level arrangements in England. These changes, as evidenced by the *Review*, were not supported by Welsh stakeholders, have challenged the context for collaborative working between regulators and have resulted, in part, in the regulation of shared qualifications becoming increasingly difficult. This was illustrated in the summer of 2012 when different decisions between regulators emerged in relation to the determination of results for GCSE English Language.

- 3.6 In broader terms, a single qualifications system across Wales, England and Northern Ireland is no longer considered appropriate for Wales within the context of devolved responsibility for education policy and the increasingly distinct education systems in operation across the UK. Wales needs its own qualifications system to meet the unique needs of the education community and wider population of Wales.

Cultural and economic needs in Wales

- 3.7 Historically, much of Wales' qualification policy has been heavily influenced by the requirements in England. Wales has an opportunity to be more responsive to the needs of our country while ensuring that qualifications taken in Wales are rigorous, robust and free from the undue influence of others. The current working arrangements limits our capacity to address Wales-only issues, such as subject content, for example in History or Geography, or to ensure continuity and coherence with the curriculum in Wales up to the age of 14. The time is now right for Wales to take greater ownership of qualifications offered in Wales.
- 3.8 As stressed clearly in the *Review*, our national qualifications system must meet the needs of all our learners. It must reflect our inclusive educational ethos and must respond effectively to the needs of a bilingual nation and our wealth of culture. Currently, the choice of Welsh-medium qualifications is variable, particularly for vocational qualifications, and work is needed to improve bilingual provision across the range of qualifications offered in our country.

The case for change – questions

1. Are there any other barriers to the effectiveness of the current system or are there any other weaknesses?
2. Are there any specific features in the current system that you would like to see retained?

4. Our vision

- 4.1 Recommendation 5 of the *Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales* said:

The Welsh Government should establish a single body (Qualifications Wales) that is responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of all non-degree level qualifications available in Wales. In time, Qualifications Wales should take responsibility for developing and awarding most qualifications for learners at 14 to 16. For learners post-16, Qualifications Wales should develop and award most general qualifications and should also regulate qualifications from other awarding organisations. The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales should work together to shape the national qualifications system for Wales and to rationalise and strengthen the processes for regulation and continuous improvement, learning from the model in operation in Scotland.

- 4.2 Our vision for Qualifications Wales is that it will:

- Simplify and professionalise the qualifications system;
- Scrutinise, evaluate and improve qualifications within that system;
- Support and engage with stakeholders;
- Strengthen public confidence in, and information about, qualifications in Wales; and
- Supply high quality qualifications to learners in Wales.

Simplifying and professionalising the qualifications system

- 4.3 Qualifications Wales will be the principal authority on qualifications in Wales and it will provide professional advice to the Welsh Ministers on relevant matters.
- 4.4 Qualifications Wales will, in time, bring together the key functions related to qualification design and development, awarding, support and quality assurance.
- 4.5 Qualifications Wales will focus its efforts on the quality assurance of key qualifications offered in Wales and, in particular, those qualifications which contribute towards the flagship qualification, the Welsh Bac. It will ensure that those qualifications, and the Welsh Bac itself, continue to be fit for purpose and meet the needs of learners, employers and learning providers across Wales and beyond.

Scrutinising, evaluating and improving qualifications within that system

- 4.6 Qualifications Wales will focus on practical and meaningful methods of quality assuring qualifications that are offered in Wales. It will operate a culture of continuous improvement, with a strong emphasis on review and evaluation. It will approve, scrutinise, review and evaluate qualifications offered in Wales and will expect awarding bodies offering those qualifications to take a similar approach to their own qualifications. There will be a clear focus on awarding bodies reviewing and self-evaluating in order to improve their offerings for the benefit of Wales, Welsh learners and their employability and the Welsh economy.

Supporting and engaging with stakeholders

- 4.7 Qualifications Wales will have a wide range of stakeholders. These will include learners, those who offer qualifications (such as awarding bodies), and those who deliver qualifications (such as schools, colleges, training providers). Those who offer pathways to learners, such as employers and universities will play a crucial role at all stages in the life-cycle of qualifications. The Welsh Government, and many national, economic, civic and cultural organisations, are also interested parties because of the role that qualifications play in developing the skills and knowledge for participation in the country's economy and culture.
- 4.8 Qualifications Wales will work with others to provide professional support to teachers and trainers in preparing learners for assessment in its own qualifications.

Strengthening public confidence in, and information about, qualifications in Wales

- 4.9 Qualifications Wales will be independent from the Welsh Government and will take professional and autonomous decisions on qualifications, including grading decisions and other qualifications' outcomes, as well as on the quality of qualifications offered by awarding bodies. It will also ensure that decisions about qualifications in Wales are made in Wales, free from undue influence from elsewhere. Qualifications Wales will be able to make evidence-based decisions using Welsh and international data, to ensure that its own qualifications are comparable with the best in the world and qualifications offered in Wales will be accepted across the UK, Europe and beyond.
- 4.10 Qualifications Wales will be the prominent and authoritative organisation for qualifications in Wales. Its visibility and independence will enhance the confidence in, and acceptability of, qualifications that are offered in Wales – both across the UK and internationally. Qualifications Wales will provide easily accessible and informative

advice and guidance for all interested stakeholders. It will publish relevant reports on its qualifications and qualifications offered by awarding bodies that it oversees.

Supplying high-quality qualifications to learners in Wales

- 4.11 Qualifications Wales will aim to provide qualifications which are, and are recognised as, world class. It will work with relevant stakeholders in Wales and beyond to continuously improve its activities. A single body, established to meet the needs of Wales, will help guarantee the provision of qualifications through the medium of English or Welsh, providing linguistic choice for learners, schools and colleges in a range of subject areas.
- 4.12 Qualifications Wales will ensure that the key qualifications that are specifically developed for, and taken by, large numbers of young people in Wales are relevant, robust, rigorous and fair. In a country the size of Wales there is no clear justification for young people to take significantly different versions of the same qualification in any one examination series. Moving towards a single body responsible for the awarding of the majority of qualifications offered to 14 to 16-year-olds, as well as A levels and the Welsh Bac, will simplify and strengthen the system of qualifications in Wales.

Our vision – questions

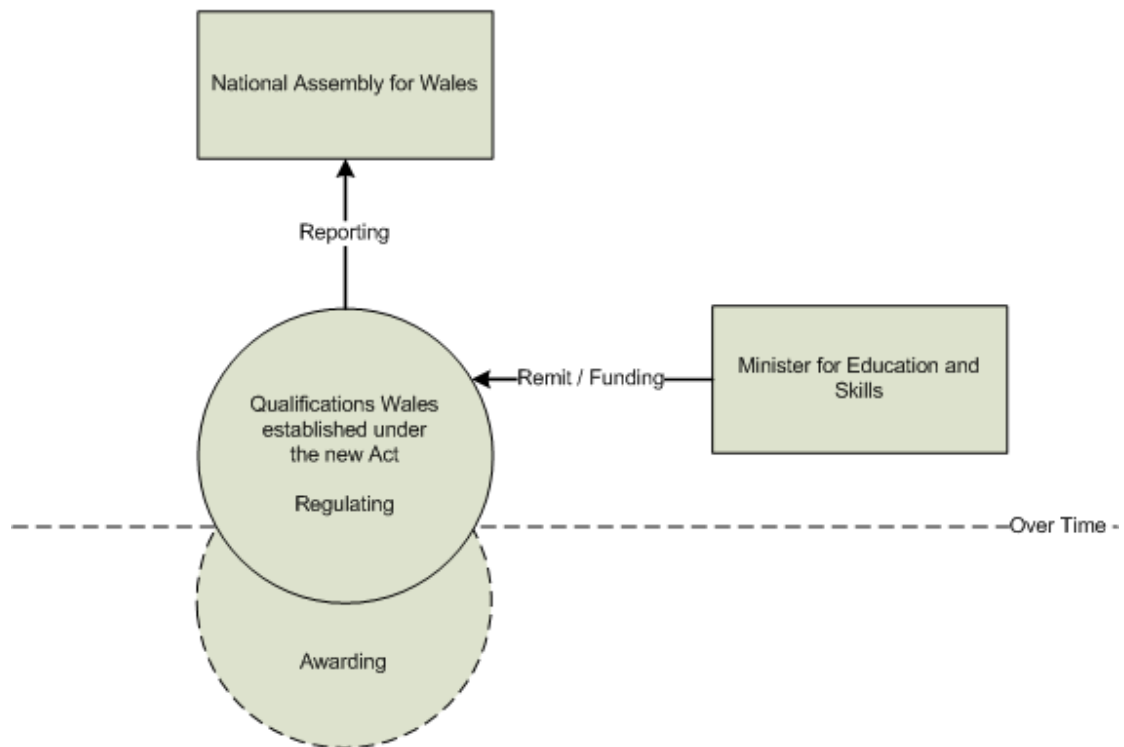
3. What are your views on our proposed vision for Qualifications Wales?

5. How we will achieve the vision

Governance and accountability

- 5.1 We propose to establish Qualifications Wales as an independent statutory corporation which will be equipped with a variety of statutory functions related to qualifications in Wales. Qualifications Wales will have a board that will be ultimately responsible for the delivery of the organisation's statutory functions. The Board and Chief Executive appointments will be public appointments made according to the Nolan principles on Standards in Public Life.
- 5.2 Given the high profile, high stakes and complex nature of Qualification Wales' future business, there will be a need to build strong accountability arrangements into the new system to assure Qualifications Wales' independence. For example, it is proposed that Qualifications Wales will be placed under a duty to lay an annual report before the National Assembly for Wales, which will detail how it has fulfilled its statutory objectives in the previous year and how it intends to do so in the future.
- 5.3 As the principal funder of Qualifications Wales, we, the Welsh Government, will also have a close working relationship with the new body. This will be through recurrent funding agreements, which will determine and provide Qualifications Wales' budget, and remit letters, which will set out the key responsibilities that the Welsh Government will need Qualifications Wales to fulfil, as well as the potential for intervention powers where necessary. The diagram below illustrates how we propose Qualifications Wales will be held to account.

Proposed Accountability and Reporting Arrangements for Qualifications Wales



- 5.4 The Welsh Government will continue to develop and set curriculum up to Key Stage 3 and will also retain the right to determine matters of qualifications policy, including, for example, some aspects of required content for qualifications at Key Stage 4. Qualifications Wales will be the foremost expert on qualifications and their delivery in Wales and, while it will have a key role in implementing Welsh Ministers' policies on qualifications, such as on key areas of qualification content, it will also develop and recommend policy to Ministers in its advisory capacity. As such, there will be a need specifically to enable, in the legislation, joint working between the Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales. There will also be a need to equip the new body with powers to provide advice to the Welsh Government, whether of its own volition, or following a request by the Welsh Government.
- 5.5 Qualifications Wales will be funded by the Welsh Government. We will explore the possibility of Qualifications Wales offering some products and services in and outside of Wales to provide an income stream to reduce the burden on taxpayers or to improve and invest in the offering in Wales. Care will need to be taken to prevent any negative impact on the needs of learners in Wales.

The functions of the new organisation

- 5.6 Qualifications Wales will have three broad functions:
- it will first establish itself as a quality improvement body which assures the quality of qualifications in Wales;
 - it will provide information, support and advice to stakeholders and to the Welsh Government; and
 - in due course it will be responsible for the awarding of most qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds as well as A levels and the Welsh Bac.
- 5.7 In the first instance, the functions of Qualifications Wales will focus on the quality assurance and oversight of qualifications delivered by external awarding bodies. The legislation required to establish the new organisation will replace the Welsh Ministers' existing regulatory functions and powers with a new set of functions and powers for Qualifications Wales. These functions and powers will enable Qualifications Wales to deliver a new model of regulation, focusing on quality assurance and the improvement of qualifications, whilst retaining some elements of the existing system to protect the interests of learners.
- 5.8 Qualifications Wales will have a role in providing independent information about qualifications to a wide range of stakeholders. It will communicate the value of qualifications offered in Wales to stakeholders inside and outside of Wales.
- 5.9 In time, most qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds in Wales, as well as A levels and the Welsh Bac, will be solely offered by Qualifications Wales. Qualifications Wales will do this either in its own right or working with existing awarding bodies. A competitive market is likely to continue to exist for many other qualifications including most qualifications for learners over 19, many vocational qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds and some qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds. Qualifications Wales will have oversight of these qualifications through the quality assurance process and awarding bodies will need to ensure their qualifications meet Qualifications Wales' requirements.

Quality assurance function

Purpose of quality assurance

- 5.10 Qualifications Wales will quality assure both its own qualifications and the qualifications of other awarding bodies with the aims that:
- content is relevant and sufficient, reflects the needs of Wales, and offers stretch and progression in work and/or education;

- assessment is valid and appropriate to the purposes of the qualification;
- the assessment of learners' work and the application of pass/fail or grading judgements are consistent, accurate and fair;
- for relevant qualifications, employers are confident of learners' employability;
- learners and others have confidence in the qualification;
- there is clarity and accuracy of purpose of the qualification; and
- learners and others receive and understand accurate information about qualifications.

5.11 Any form of oversight brings some form of burden and cost. Qualifications Wales must be satisfied that the benefits of quality assurance outweigh any burdens and costs. It should only quality assure qualifications where there is a need to do so, for example when:

- it can help improve qualifications offered in Wales;
- there is a need to determine if taxpayers are getting a good deal for publically fundable qualifications;
- it can bring confidence to the system; and
- the benefits of quality assurance by Qualifications Wales justify any monetary and administrative costs it, or the quality assured body, incurs.

5.12 Qualifications will not automatically be eligible for public funding solely because they are being quality assured by Qualifications Wales. Funding decisions will need to be taken by the Welsh Government which will take account of advice from Qualifications Wales.

Scope of quality assurance

5.13 As well as quality assuring its own qualifications (GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Bac) Qualifications Wales will prioritise the quality assurance of those qualifications, provided by other bodies, that feature in major programmes of learning. In this way Qualifications Wales will focus its activities on qualifications that most affect the life chances of learners progressing to further education, higher education or to employment. Many of these qualifications will be vocational qualifications for learners over the age of 16, especially where they form the main component of major programmes of learning such as the Welsh Bac or Apprenticeships. We propose to develop legislation that allows Qualifications Wales to determine the approach it takes to prioritising the qualifications it oversees in order for it to focus on those which it deems are best suited for the needs of Wales and Welsh learners.

- 5.14 We believe in and support apprenticeships in Wales and envisage that they can provide a basis for the future skills of our nation. Apprenticeships in Wales help to inspire success in the individual and bring huge benefits to the workplace. As one of the most important learning programmes in Wales it is important that there is proper oversight of apprenticeships to assure the quality of the qualifications, assessment and content within those programmes. We are proposing that Qualifications Wales should have a significant role in this oversight. This role will be defined over time as developments in the sector occur.
- 5.15 We are also proposing that Qualifications Wales should be able to quality assure the assessment of some types of lifelong learning. This learning provides a bridge between lifelong learning and formal qualifications including, for example, for some of our most disadvantaged citizens. Organisations offering these programmes would have the option to opt-in to quality assurance by Qualifications Wales, should they wish the learning they offer to be recognised in this way. We are currently commissioning an evaluation of the CQFW and QALL and this will provide Qualifications Wales with evidence through which to develop its role in the future.
- 5.16 Qualifications Wales will not oversee and quality assure *all* qualifications offered in Wales. While it is likely that only those qualifications which are awarded or quality assured by Qualifications Wales will receive public funding or be counted in providers' performance measures, outside those contexts, awarding bodies will be able to develop and offer non-quality assured qualifications. Some awarding bodies will choose not to be quality assured at all and will continue to sit outside the formal qualifications system, for example those offering qualifications in partnership with international IT companies. Providers will be able to choose to offer qualifications which are not quality assured by Qualifications Wales. Qualifications Wales will also not quality assure degrees and other similar courses as these are a matter for universities and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and the higher education funding councils.

How the quality assurance model will be implemented

- 5.17 Qualifications Wales' focus on quality assurance will be primarily on the qualifications offered by awarding bodies rather than on the awarding bodies themselves. Qualifications Wales will, however, monitor for systemic issues that may create risks to qualifications or learners in Wales and set certain requirements at the awarding body level.
- 5.18 Qualifications Wales will implement a model of quality assurance that is meaningful, productive and takes a partnership approach. It will focus its efforts on improving the system where evidence indicates improvement is needed most and where intervention is most likely to be effective. It is our expectation that awarding bodies choosing to offer

qualifications in Wales will be committed to meeting Qualifications Wales' requirements and those of the Welsh qualifications agenda.

- 5.19 Qualifications Wales will undertake some of the existing functions, such as the monitoring of qualifications and awarding bodies, which are performed currently by the Welsh Government. However, Qualifications Wales is likely to wish to seek stronger evidence that awarding bodies have engaged meaningfully with Welsh stakeholders prior to, during and after developing and awarding their qualifications.
- 5.20 Qualifications Wales will set high level design principles for qualifications that allow awarding bodies to deliver in Wales those qualifications that they also offer elsewhere such as in England and Northern Ireland (where these qualifications are not offered by, or on behalf of, Qualifications Wales itself). In these cases, awarding bodies will need to demonstrate how these qualifications meet the needs of Wales and that there is genuine demand for their qualification(s).
- 5.21 Qualifications Wales will apply a gatekeeping process for qualifications that are intended to be offered by awarding bodies to 14 to 19-year-olds. Awarding bodies will need to detail evidence in relation to purpose, relevance, value and progression routes of the qualification, and involvement in the development process of employer or next-stage education providers. Qualifications Wales' gatekeeping process will draw on expertise within relevant sectors. This will be in keeping with the recommendations in the *Review*. This will simplify the system and reduce the overall number of qualifications, leading to greater clarity for learners, employers and other stakeholders.
- 5.22 Qualifications Wales will empower awarding bodies to take responsibility for their qualifications. It will provide feedback and support to awarding bodies where it is appropriate to do so but it will also expect awarding bodies to review and evaluate their own qualifications and operations themselves. Greater emphasis will be placed on the ability of an awarding organisation to improve its own provision.
- 5.23 Awarding bodies will be judged, subsequently, against assertions they make at the beginning of a qualification's life. If it transpires that a qualification intends to support progression to a particular industry and during the delivery of that qualification evidence suggests that that is not the case, Qualifications Wales will hold that awarding organisation to account. Qualifications Wales will monitor whether awarding bodies are delivering the quality and outcomes of qualifications that they say they will deliver, and whether these are good enough. Qualifications Wales will set clear and robust requirements which it will expect awarding bodies to meet.

- 5.24 Many of the regulatory powers that the Welsh Ministers currently have will be granted to Qualifications Wales. These include but are not limited to:
- the power to set requirements for qualifications and awarding bodies;
 - the power to accredit qualifications, that is the review and approval of a qualification before it is offered;
 - the power to enter an awarding body's premises and inspect and copy documents;
 - the power to give a direction to an awarding body which requires an awarding organisation to take, or refrain from taking a particular action; and
 - the power to fine or recover costs from an awarding body.
- 5.25 Where things do go wrong learners, and others, have an expectation that Qualifications Wales will intervene and put things right. Qualifications Wales will use these powers to fine, recover costs and to direct, and other non statutory tools to mitigate the impact of, redress and prevent failures.
- 5.26 We will also seek to provide Qualifications Wales with powers to charge for its services, including its quality assurance functions. We would expect Qualifications Wales to consider, on a case by case basis when, and when not, to levy charges for services provided. It is important that any charging policy does not discourage valuable qualifications from being offered in Wales.
- 5.27 When making judgements, Qualifications Wales will use evidence already gathered and will not duplicate work already undertaken. For example, if a complaint is being investigated by another organisation and is dealt with to Qualifications Wales' satisfaction, it may decide it does not need to intervene. Qualifications Wales will focus its resources on where risk is most prevalent.
- 5.28 Qualifications Wales will have a duty placed on it to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest between its functions in relation to quality assuring awarding bodies' qualifications and its awarding functions. We will ensure that there is a separation of duties between its quality assurance and awarding functions, in order to secure the quality of the qualifications offered in Wales.

Provision of information

Provision of information, advice, and engagement

- 5.29 Qualifications Wales will be a key source of information about qualifications. Many stakeholders rely on information about

qualifications and the achievements of learners and, as the definitive authority on qualifications, Qualifications Wales will need to deliver high quality and accurate data. It will provide information, including maintaining an accessible, web-based database of qualifications. For the qualifications it awards, Qualifications Wales will publish relevant statistical information.

- 5.30 Qualifications Wales will have a role in explaining the qualifications system to stakeholders in Wales and further afield. Qualifications Wales will have a significant role to play in delivering the long-term UK wide communication strategy to promote and explain the qualifications available in Wales. It is important that our qualifications are fully understood in Wales, across the UK and beyond. This will help to support mobility for our learners and to underpin a flexible labour force. Existing tools such as the CQFW and European initiatives are likely to prove valuable. Qualifications Wales will need to engage with UK partners and with European colleagues on European initiatives.
- 5.31 Qualifications Wales will provide expert, independent advice to the Welsh Ministers on relevant matters. It will also engage with other relevant agencies, in and outside of Wales, to influence them and seek evidence from them. It will undertake relevant studies on qualifications in Wales to improve them and ensure that they remain relevant and fit for purpose.
- 5.32 Qualifications Wales will be fully transparent in its activities and findings. It will publish reports on its scrutiny and monitoring work, both for the qualifications it quality assures and the qualifications it offers.
- 5.33 Qualifications Wales will seek to develop working protocols with relevant bodies, such as other education establishments, both within and outside of Wales. These will include the regulators of qualifications in the UK. Qualifications Wales will develop these agreements to share information and intelligence to minimise the burden on those within the system and to benchmark qualifications within Wales against those outside of Wales. Where aspects of the system are not under its direct control, it will seek to influence other relevant bodies to secure the best outcomes for Wales.

Support and advice for practitioners

- 5.34 In order for qualifications in Wales to be delivered effectively it is not sufficient to have high quality qualifications. It is also vital that Wales has highly trained and well-prepared teachers, lecturers and learning providers. Qualifications Wales will work with others to ensure that relevant, high quality, support and training to teachers and trainers is provided. This support will be particularly necessary when new qualifications are introduced but will also be needed throughout the lifespan of qualifications. Over time, we will consider Qualifications Wales' role with regard to support and advice for practitioners. Its role

may be extended and developed as necessary to support a high quality education system in Wales.

Awarding function

- 5.35 Qualifications Wales will, in due course, be responsible for the awarding of most qualifications awarded to 14 to 16-years-olds as well as A levels and the Welsh Bac. At any point in time, there will be learners who are choosing, beginning, in the middle of, completing, or retaking qualifications and we have a duty to ensure that each cohort is best served by the qualifications that they are taking and that, in the transition to Qualifications Wales, no learner is disadvantaged or unfairly advantaged.
- 5.36 To minimise disruption to centres and learners, and to minimise the risk to the system, the move to a single suite of qualifications will be phased gradually. We must balance the need to make the right changes for the right reasons with the risk of making changes too quickly and jeopardising the delivery of qualifications to learners who are studying now. Awarding high profile and high stakes qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels is a complex and difficult task and we must ensure that learners continue to receive high quality qualifications and assessments at all stages of the transition process. Phased changes provide scope for a smoother transition from the existing system and minimises the disruption to, and impact on, schools and learners. We will work with Qualifications Wales to determine timescales for the transition period.
- 5.37 We propose that legislation should provide Qualifications Wales with awarding powers that are as flexible as possible in order to allow it to determine how best to fulfil its awarding function, both over the medium term and over the long term. Examples of ways it may deliver the Welsh qualifications agenda include:
- requiring that certain types of qualifications have a single assessment across Wales;
 - working with or merging with, one or more major awarding bodies;
or
 - commissioning or contracting with other organisations to deliver aspects of the awarding process for some types or groups of qualifications.
- 5.38 However, in exercising its awarding functions, Qualifications Wales will have accountability for key decisions about those qualifications such as the content, form of assessment, level of demand and, ultimately, the grades awarded.
- 5.39 Qualifications Wales will need to ensure that its qualifications are fit for purpose, are developed with the extensive engagement of

stakeholders across Wales and beyond and that they build on evidence of best practice and innovative approaches from around the world. It is proposed that the first qualifications to be awarded in the name of Qualifications Wales will be revised GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Bac. The Welsh Ministers own the brand names of these qualifications, in some cases jointly with Ofqual and CCEA, and the Welsh Ministers' ownership will be transferred from the Welsh Ministers to Qualifications Wales. Transparent and clear information on the content and demand of the qualifications will allow Qualifications Wales to offer GCSEs and A levels in Wales which are similar to GCSEs and A levels in previous years. However there may be differences in structure, content, and/or assessment compared with, for example, the Ofqual regulated qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds and 16 to 19-year-olds which emerge from reforms being proposed in England.

- 5.40 The Welsh Ministers will continue to have responsibility for the development of the national curriculum. Qualifications Wales will have responsibility for developing qualifications, and, having due regard to the national curriculum, should take the lead in developing the content of learning programmes that lead directly to qualifications at Key Stage 4 (mainly GCSEs). To ensure coherence with, and a smooth transition into, qualifications, the Welsh Government may specify certain requirements, usually pertaining to elements of content, such as the extent of coverage of Wales-specific issues or the links with literacy and numeracy standards.
- 5.41 Qualifications Wales will take on responsibility for the development of the majority of the assessment and quality aspects of these qualifications. For example, it may make decisions on what form of assessment is suitable for any particular subject. In taking the lead on this development work it will do so in consultation with interested stakeholders including teachers, subject and assessment experts and those who use the qualification for recruitment or progression purposes.
- 5.42 In time, most 14 to 16-year-old learners, and those taking A levels, will take qualifications which are awarded by Qualifications Wales. However, it will not be cost-effective for Qualifications Wales to award qualifications in all subjects. Some GCSEs and A levels, such as some foreign languages, have relatively low entries in Wales. Where it is not viable or practicable for Qualifications Wales to develop its own qualifications in such subjects, it will work with awarding bodies to enable them to deliver existing versions of their qualifications in Wales. These will be the exception and the vast majority of GCSEs and A levels will be offered by Qualifications Wales through the medium of English or Welsh.
- 5.43 In due course, as it starts awarding its own qualifications, Qualifications Wales will have the power to charge fees for its qualifications. We will review the funding model to schools, colleges and work-based learning

providers to consider whether the current model of funding of qualifications, where they pay an entry fee, is the most appropriate model.

Fitness for purpose

- 5.44 Qualifications Wales will secure the quality of the qualifications it offers and awards by quality assuring these qualifications. The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill will build objectives, as well as checks and balances, into Qualifications Wales' enabling statutory framework and governance structure to ensure that this happens. This could include providing Qualifications Wales with a statutory objective to deliver high quality, consistent qualifications to learners in Wales. In addition, Qualification Wales may be placed under a duty to report to the National Assembly or the Welsh Government each year on what steps it has taken to maintain or improve quality of the qualifications it offers. Consideration will also be given to any intervention powers required to raise standards when things go wrong. We will also place a duty on it to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest between its awarding functions and its functions in relation to quality assuring awarding bodies' qualifications.
- 5.45 Qualifications Wales will focus on the fitness for purpose of its qualifications. There are many different ways that a qualification can be classed as 'fit for purpose'. Our preferred measures are:
- whether a qualification does what it intends to do;
 - whether what it intends to do enables learners to progress; and
 - whether it measures learners' achievements effectively.
- 5.46 Qualifications Wales will ensure that its qualifications are fit for purpose by:
- ensuring that the qualification development process builds in broad, as well as detailed, consultation with stakeholders;
 - developing rigorous and meaningful review and scrutiny processes;
 - building in elements of external scrutiny to provide challenge at various points in the qualification's life cycle; and
 - using comparability data to benchmark learners' performance in Wales' key qualifications.
- 5.47 We have started dialogue with the relevant qualifications organisations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland to explore the development of a system of peer review to learn from each other and to compare qualifications. Qualifications Wales will work with these organisations to take this work forward.

- 5.48 Qualifications Wales will couple its quality assurance with additional evidence such as, for example, longitudinal studies, cohort data and other measures such as PISA, to measure how well learners are doing year-on-year and to measure the difficulty of qualifications. Qualifications Wales will measure its qualifications against other qualifications offered within Wales and beyond to ensure that its qualifications are comparable with the best qualifications around the world. It will publish its findings.

How we will achieve the vision – questions

4. What are your views on whether these proposed activities and functions will achieve the vision for Qualifications Wales?
5. What are your views on the proposed governance arrangements for Qualifications Wales?
6. What are your views on the proposed scope and functions of Qualifications Wales? Do you think its scope and functions are about right or should it have a different remit?
7. What should Qualifications Wales do to strengthen public confidence in qualifications offered in Wales?
8. How and to what extent do you feel that these proposals will have an impact on you, your organisation, learners and/or any particular categories of stakeholders?
9. Do you have any other comments?

6. Glossary

A level	The main qualification taken by 16 to 19 year olds.
AQA	An awarding body that offers a number of qualifications including GCSEs and A levels.
Awarding body	A body recognised by the Welsh Government to award credits and qualifications.
CCEA	An awarding body that offers a number of qualifications including GCSEs and A levels. It is also the regulator for non-vocational qualifications offered in Northern Ireland.
CQFW	The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. It enables recognition and comparison of achievements from all types of education and training activity.
Credit	An award made to a learner in recognition of the achievement of the designated learning outcomes of a unit.
Edexcel	An awarding body that offers a number of qualifications including GCSEs and A levels.
GCSE	The main qualification taken by 14 to 16 year olds.
Key Stage	Stages within the state education system.
Level	An indication of the relative demand, complexity and/or depth of achievement, and/or the autonomy of the learner in demonstrating that achievement.
NOS	National Occupational Standards. These are statements of the standards of performance individuals must achieve when carrying out functions in the workplace, together with specifications of the underpinning knowledge and understanding.
OCR	An awarding body that offers a number of qualifications including GCSEs and A levels.
Ofqual	The regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment. It aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by evaluating competencies in reading, mathematics and science.
QALL	Quality Assured Lifelong Learning. It provides a mechanism to recognise the knowledge or skills gained of a learner,

	measure the learning that has taken place, quality assure it and award credit for it.
The Review	The Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales.
Sector Skills Council	Independent, employer-led, UK-wide organisations designed to build a skills system that is driven by employer demand.
SQA	The Scottish Qualifications Authority. An awarding body and regulator in Scotland.
Welsh Bac	The Welsh Baccalaureate is a qualification available to 14 to 19-year-olds.
WJEC	An awarding body that offers a number of qualifications including GCSEs and A levels.