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# The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales: A qualitative review of its impact

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# **The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales: A qualitative review of its impact**

**Arad Research Ltd.**

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Sara James

Knowledge and Analytical Services

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff CF10 3NQ

Tel: 029 2087 6812

Email: [sara.james@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sara.james@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

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## **Glossary of acronyms**

ACCAC - Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales / Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm Ac Asesu Cymru

ACL - Adult and Community Learning

AO – Awarding Organisations

CQFW - Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales

ECVET - European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

ELWa - Education Learning Wales

EQARF - European Quality Assurance Reference Framework

EQF - European Qualifications Framework

ESCO - European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations

FE - Further Education

FHEQ - Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

HE - Higher Education

HEFCW - Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

HEI - Higher Education Institution

NQF - National Qualifications Framework

Ofqual - Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

QALL - Quality Assured Lifelong Learning

QCF - Qualifications and Credit Framework

QF-EHEA Frameworks for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area

RPL - Recognition of Prior Learning

SCQF - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SSC - Sector Skills Council

# 1 Background to the Study

## Reasons for the study

- 1.1 The Department for Education and Skills of the Welsh Government commissioned Arad Research to undertake a qualitative review of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and make recommendations for any future framework for Wales.
- 1.2 The implementation plan (2003-2014) for the CQFW has now been completed. The Review of Qualifications<sup>1</sup> vision of a simplified qualifications system and the increasing operational responsibility for the regulation of qualifications in Wales - re-enforced by the announcement, in July 2013, on divergence of general qualifications between Wales and England<sup>2</sup> - have highlighted the need to formulate an appropriate strategy on the future structure and direction of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.

## Aims and objectives

- 1.3 The objectives for the qualitative review were to:
  - Understand the impact the CQFW has had in Wales;
  - Determine if the structure, purpose, features and benefits of the CQFW should be reviewed;
  - Set out the key functions that a future Credit and Qualifications Framework could fulfil and the key elements that it would need to include in order to meet its objectives.

## Development of the CQFW

- 1.4 The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) was formally adopted by the Welsh Government in 2002 and launched in 2003. It is an overarching structure designed to provide greater clarity on the qualifications system and includes higher education, regulated qualifications and quality

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/revofqualen/implementing-the-review-of-qualifications/?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2013/gcsesalevels/?lang=en>

assured lifelong learning (QALL)<sup>3</sup>. The CQFW brings all recognised learning into a single unifying structure. It is designed to be an inclusive model in that it looks to incorporate all kinds of learning, whether formal, regulated learning, work-based learning or informal and non-formal learning. Its implementation phase has run from 2003-2014.

- 1.5 The development and delivery of the CQFW was initially managed by the Welsh Government through three strategic partners – ACCAC (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales), ELWa (Education Learning Wales) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). In 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government transferred the functions of ELWa and ACCAC into the Welsh Assembly. This then meant that the CQFW development was a partnership between the Welsh Assembly Government and HEFCW, with the CQFW team sitting within the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.
- 1.6 The CQFW aims to encompass all learning and all learners, and to enable recognition and comparison of achievements from all types of education and training activity. The framework recognises full and partial completion of qualifications and the diverse range of education and training activity within and outside the regulatory and funding arrangements.
- 1.7 The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales is underpinned by five key goals, to:
  - enable everyone to develop and maintain essential skills;
  - encourage people to become lifelong learners;
  - exploit the knowledge in businesses and educational institutions;
  - encourage business and workers to gain new skills;
  - and help people within their communities to develop new skills.
- 1.8 The CQFW allows learners to explain to others the relative value of their award and enables them to transfer their knowledge and skills between career paths, providers and countries. They will be able to benefit whether they are learning in the workplace, in the community, at school, college or university. The

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<sup>3</sup> Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL) enables individuals to appropriately reflect their achievements to support progression personally and professionally. The Quality Assured Lifelong Learning mechanism allows bespoke in-house company training, continuing professional development, and other learning to be recognised and awarded credit.

framework provides a flexible structure that allows key stakeholders such as employers and educators to respond to change, promote transfer and progression, and create relevant and tailor-made learning opportunities.

1.9 The CQFW utilises three common principles:

- expression of achievement as learning outcomes;
- the demands made by that learning on the learner (level);
- the volume of learning achievements (credit).

1.10 Together, these create a model that is able to embrace and underpin all types and styles of learning across the whole education and training environment. The CQFW merges the concepts of learning achievements (credit) and the demands made by that learning on the learner (level) to create a system that is able to embrace all types and styles of learning and all qualifications.

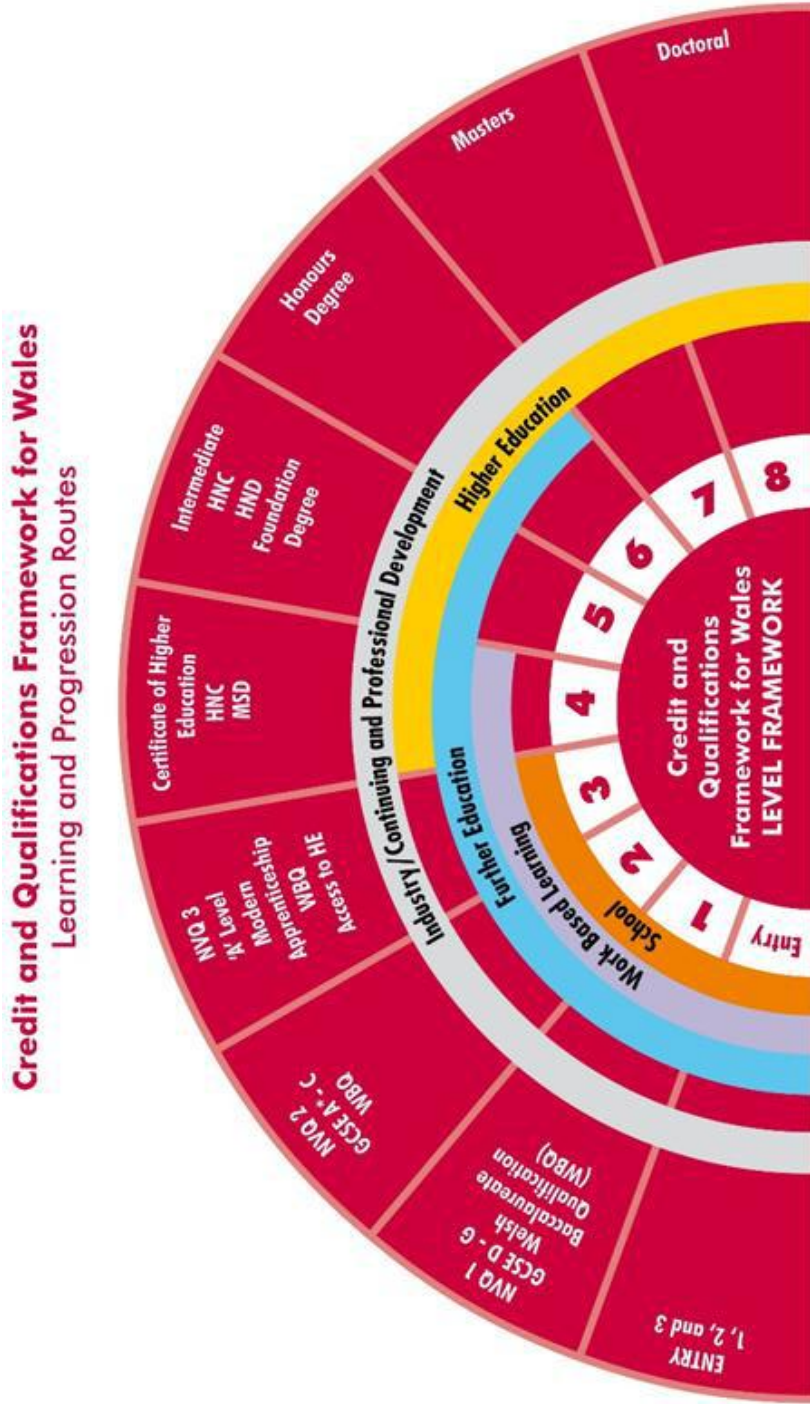
1.11 Credit is:

- a currency for learning achievement that provides a measure of learning outcomes achievable in learning time at a given level; and
- an award made to learners in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level

1.12 One credit equates to learning outcomes achievable in 10 hours of learning time, which is in line with the approach taken in other credit frameworks across the UK. The descriptors are comparable across Wales, Northern Ireland and England and have been aligned with Scotland.

1.13 The design, role and scope of the CQFW is further illustrated in two diagrams, the 'fan' diagram and the 'pillar' diagram. These are included overleaf. Further information is also available at [www.cqfw.net](http://www.cqfw.net)

Figure 1: The fan diagram



The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales was introduced in 2003 as a fully inclusive learning framework. The Levels capture all learning from the very initial stages (Entry) to the most advanced (Level 8). The Fan diagram illustrates the levels and examples of qualifications and learning provision that are included in it.

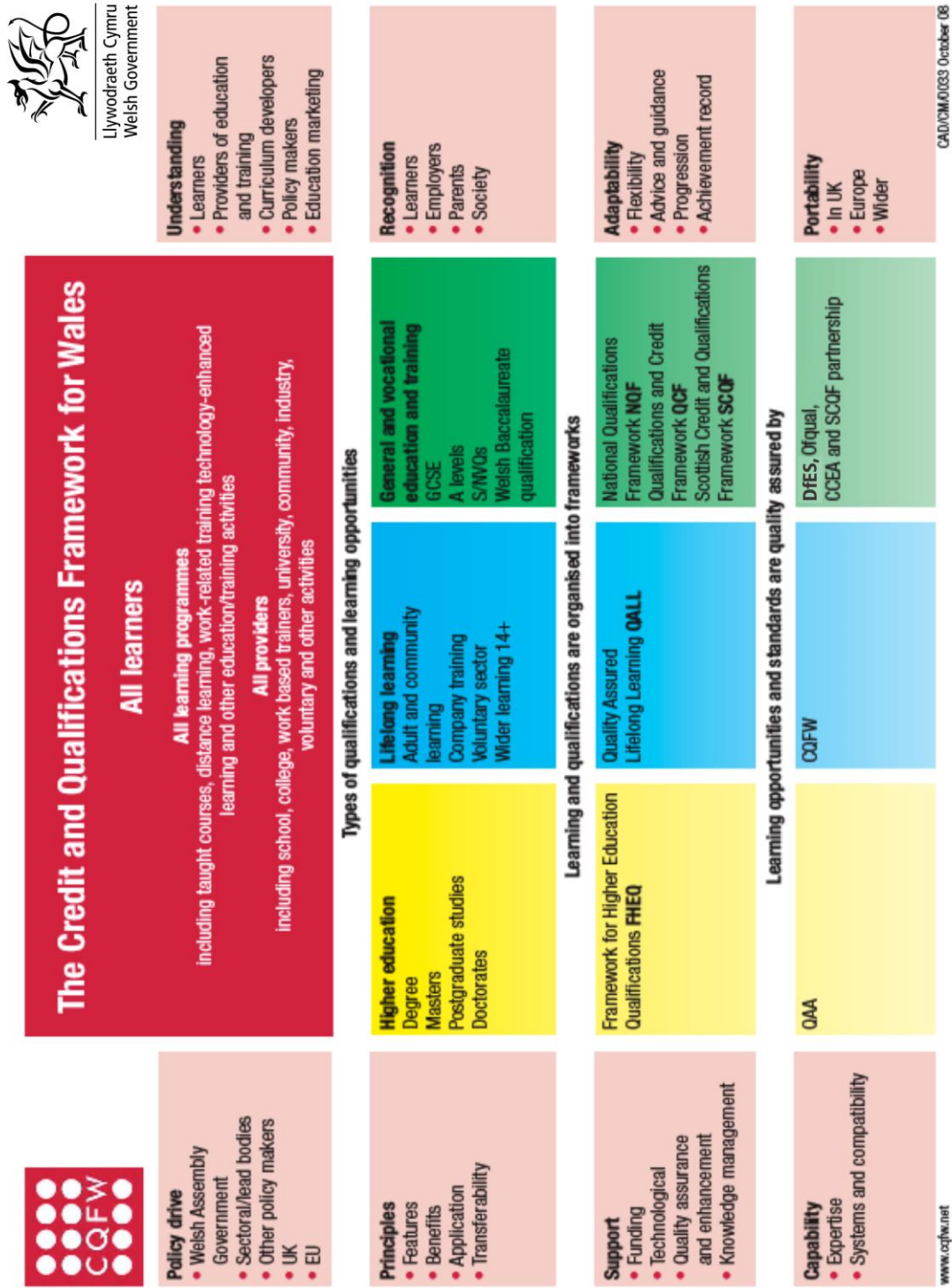
For further details contact the CQFW Secretariat:  
Tel: 01443 663 663 Fax: 01443 663 653  
E-mail: info@cqfw.net Visit: www.cqfw.net



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Figure 2: The pillars diagram



## Structure of report

- 1.14 This introductory section provides a short background to the development and implementation of the CQFW and its proposed aims and objectives. **Section 2** of the report outlines the key findings of the study and includes recommendations for the future of the CQFW. **Section 3** of the report presents an overview of the methodology used for the study. **Section 4** presents a review of documentary evidence relating to the impact of the CQFW in Wales. **Section 5** of the report presents a review of international evidence relating to the development, implementation and evaluation of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in a selection of countries. **Section 6** examines stakeholders' understanding of the role of the CQFW and their use of it within their respective organisations and sectors. **Section 7** looks at the benefits of the CQFW in Wales and examines some of the learning and progression it has helped support. **Section 8** examines perceived weaknesses of the CQFW and barriers to engagement. **Section 9** presents stakeholders' views on the continuing need for the CQFW and the key elements required for its development.
- 1.15 Case study examples of engagement with the CQFW are included in Appendix 1. References are included in Appendix 2. A full list of respondents to the Review and the project steering group is included in Appendix 3. Additional methodological tools and details are set out in Appendices 4, 5 and 6.

## **2 Key findings and recommendations**

### **Awareness of the CQFW and its goals**

- 2.1 Stakeholders who responded to the evaluation generally have good levels of awareness of the CQFW and its roles. For many stakeholders across the education and employment sectors the CQFW has a practical role as an information tool which provides a common, coherent understanding of the value of qualifications and effectively illustrates the structure of the qualifications system in Wales. It is also considered to articulate clearly with other UK, sector-specific and wider international frameworks, thereby enabling potential progression and mobility for learners and encouraging lifelong learning.
- 2.2 Evidence from the review of international examples of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in section 5 illustrates similar strategic goals and roles to the CQFW. These roles include NQFs being used as tools to provide information, widen participation, ensure flexibility and portability of qualifications as well as linking to wider aims of national education and training systems that promote inclusivity and lifelong learning. Like the CQFW, these frameworks have also supported a common credit currency based on notional learning time and qualifications levels, representing different levels of complexity of the learning and skills content of the qualification.

### **Engagement with the CQFW**

- 2.3 The CQFW is strongly embedded in certain sectors, notably higher education (HE) and adult and community learning (ACL) and closely aligned with qualifications outcomes and organisational standards. For other sectors, however, there was less engagement with the CQFW and this was more dependent on organisational needs, levels of awareness and sector specific projects funded by the Welsh Government. Strategic stakeholders perceived engagement with the CQFW to be low among employers and most learners. These stakeholders also considered that the CQFW is currently not a driver for policy in Wales and that there is thus a need to increase awareness of, and buy-in to, the CQFW across the education and employment sectors.

## **Strengths of the CQFW**

- 2.4 Stakeholders from all sectors considered one of the main impacts of the CQFW to have been its role in allowing for greater recognition of prior and informal learning through the Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL) pillar. This was thought to have a particularly important impact on disadvantaged learner groups and links closely to wider Welsh Government lifelong learning and anti-poverty strategies. The CQFW was considered to have contributed to providing and mapping this recognition, raising learner aspirations and promoting progression opportunities. The case studies in Appendix 1 of this report provide further examples of impact relating to these groups.
- 2.5 Linked to this impact was the CQFW's role in facilitating the recognition of non-mainstream provision, enabling providers to develop innovative curriculum offers for learners at the margins of formal education and training. Stakeholders also considered that the CQFW, and associated Welsh Government and EU funding of specific projects, has encouraged a broader range of organisations to develop more consistency and opportunities through the lifelong learning route. As illustrated in the case studies, these specific projects have delivered benefits for learners including skills development, gaining qualifications and recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- 2.6 The CQFW was often referred to by stakeholders as supporting a “common currency” of credit that has made it easier to articulate and communicate achievement across sectors, levels and geographical areas. The level descriptors were considered to have had a beneficial impact in terms of developing consistency and therefore trust between stakeholders in the education sector. This consistency has contributed to allowing learners to clearly understand what their qualifications were worth and to map the various learning and progression pathways, allowing additional flexibility and choice for learning journeys.
- 2.7 Some stakeholders pointed to the learning and economic benefits of using the CQFW as a tool to avoid duplication of learning and address learner drop out. It was noted that this was particularly useful in sectors with a very mobile workforce such as the health sector, creative and cultural industries and prison services. The CQFW was also reported to deliver benefits through promoting sufficient commonality through compatibility with other UK and European

Frameworks, thereby enhancing mobility of learners, clarity of information, progression opportunities and quality assurance.

### **Weaknesses of the CQFW**

- 2.8 However, there was widespread opinion among stakeholders that, despite the aims and ambitions of the CQFW, it was not being used in practice as much as had been hoped across the education and employment sectors. Stakeholders outlined a range of reasons for the lack of uptake and embedding across the sectors. These included a lack of senior level strategic support from the Welsh Government, perceived complexities relating to the language and guidance used during the implementation phase, levels of bureaucracy and paperwork surrounding recognition, and time and resource issues to assess experiential learning, particularly for employers.
- 2.9 At a wider level stakeholders noted that the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) (which is an integral part of the CQFW) is the dominant framework in terms of UK-based employers, awarding organisations and Sector Skills Councils.
- 2.10 It was also felt that learners and employers are currently more focused on full qualifications, thereby negating potential engagement with the CQFW.
- 2.11 Some stakeholders considered that CQFW implied a parity of all qualifications and seamless progression routes that did not exist in reality. These stakeholders thus considered that the articulation between the three pillars hasn't therefore necessarily worked as well as it should as a result of this lack of clarity.
- 2.12 These issues are reflected in some of the evaluations of other international NQFs detailed in section 5 and it is clear that there are common issues affecting their design and implementation. These include a lack of user-friendliness and poor overall levels of stakeholder understanding and engagement with NQFs; lack of relevance to some employers and industry; lack of embedding in the design and development of learning programmes and qualifications offered; and weaknesses in articulation across sectors.

### **Future role of the CQFW**

- 2.13 The large majority of stakeholders from across all sectors support the continuation of the CQFW and its embedding at the heart of the ongoing design, delivery and use of qualifications in Wales. For these stakeholders, the

CQFW provides currency, inclusivity and links to wider goals to promote lifelong learning and progression. The current, and potential ongoing, divergence between the Welsh and English education systems was mentioned by cross-sector stakeholders as an opportunity to use the CQFW to articulate effectively the qualifications landscape in Wales as its identity and education system becomes more distinct.

2.14 While support for the continuation of the CQFW was strong, stakeholders from across sectors considered that its current low profile and lack of strategic investment was limiting its potential for impact and use across all sectors in Wales. It was considered by some stakeholders that the Welsh Government should treat the CQFW as a flagship policy and invest in it. There were also suggestions that better alignment with other Welsh Government policy areas would lead to greater embedding and mainstreaming of the CQFW. Furthermore, there was some support for more clear alignment and articulation of the links to the EQF and with frameworks used across the rest of the UK.

### **Design and governance**

2.15 For the large majority of stakeholders the design and content of the CQFW was largely satisfactory. Its flexibility and adaptability was seen as a key current strength and something to build on. Suggestions for improvement included that the CQFW be used as a tool to avoid duplication of learning and support the design and building of new qualifications, again, particularly relating to any Wales-only designed qualifications. As part of this process some stakeholders suggested that National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Welsh Baccalaureate should be included to further reflect ongoing changes in the Welsh system and enhance its potential for use.

2.16 The majority view of those stakeholders who did feel qualified to comment on future governance was that the CQFW continue to be managed by the Welsh Government. These stakeholders, representing views from all sectors, outlined that governance arrangements should be broadened, however, with the continued involvement of HEFCW as well as Careers Wales, Qualifications Wales and other stakeholders such as employers' representatives.

2.17 The formation of a strategic and operational group along the lines of the Credit Common Accord Forum was considered essential to support promotion and

implementation of the CQFW in the future. For some, the Scottish model of governance with the establishment of a charitable educational trust with a partnership board consisting of the Association of Scottish Colleges, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, Scottish Qualification Authority (Regulator) and Universities Scotland provides an effective example of a dedicated, broad-based partnership approach.

2.18 From these stakeholder views it appears that the preferred future direction for the CQFW links to the goals of a 'functional' NQF. Its main goals are to provide a language and route map to make it easier for learners, parents, education professionals and employers to understand progression routes between qualifications and the relative demands of qualifications. A functional NQF can also provide a common currency which can be used to increase the consistency and accountability of credit transfer and as a tool for the accreditation of prior and informal learning. These goals are further illustrated in section 5.

2.19 The recommendations that follow offer suggestions to support this preferred approach and goals.

### **Recommendations**

2.20 The Welsh Government should respond to strong levels of stakeholder support for the continuation of the CQFW when developing future strategies relating to qualifications and learning.

2.21 Future development of the CQFW should focus on realistic, achievable and measurable goals for its design and implementation. These should link to the aims and objectives of a 'functional' NQF, supporting a common currency for learner achievement and progression.

2.22 The Welsh Government should use the CQFW to articulate the changing qualifications landscape in Wales and support the design and use of new Wales-only qualifications.

2.23 The future role and functions of the CQFW should be a prominent part of discussions among the key stakeholders concerned with management of qualifications and the Qualifications Wales Advisory Board in taking forward the outcomes of the Review of Qualifications.

- 2.24 The Welsh Government should ensure greater senior, strategic level support for the CQFW in order to increase its profile and use across government and the wider education and training sector. This process should be linked to the four recommendations above.
- 2.25 This process should be also supported by an effective and ongoing communications and marketing strategy for the CQFW.
- 2.26 The Welsh Government should explore the potential benefits and challenges of closer alignment of the CQFW with the European Qualifications Framework and other EU educational tools such as European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF), European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) and recognition of informal and non-formal learning.
- 2.27 This process should be supported by a commitment to continuing to work with other UK countries to ensure maintenance of common standards, compatibility and cooperation.
- 2.28 A strategic and operational group along the lines of the Credit Common Accord Forum should be established to ensure more effective strategic development, promotion and implementation of the CQFW in line with the findings of this review and future policy requirements. This should include the Welsh Government and HEFCW as well as Qualifications Wales, Careers Wales, Colegau Cymru, Awarding Organisations and other stakeholders such as employers' representatives.
- 2.29 Future development of the CQFW requires an increased focus on evaluation to illustrate how CQFW is meeting its objectives. Lessons from other countries outlined in Section 5 should form part of this process.



### **3 Methodology**

3.1 The section provides an outline of the methodology used to deliver the qualitative review of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). An initial inception with the project steering group clarified the aims and objectives of the study. The group has since been involved at all stages of the study, reviewing methodological tools and the primary fieldwork framework, providing suggestions for stakeholder contacts and commenting on the draft and final reporting stages.

#### **Desk-based literature reviews**

3.2 This stage of the project involved undertaking two desk-based literature reviews, each with a different approach and purpose.

3.3 The first literature review involved secondary analysis of current literature relating to the implementation of the CQFW in Wales provided by the Welsh Government and other stakeholders such as Agored Cymru and Colegau Cymru. This literature included the CQFW Implementation Plan and Handbook 2009-14 and other documentation relating to the role and impact of the CQFW since 2009, including final reports relating to specific CQFW-funded projects. The aim of this review was to source examples of the potential and actual impact of engaging with the CQFW on organisations and learners across the education and employment sectors. This literature review forms section 4 of this report.

3.4 Examples of good practice illustrating the impact of engaging with the CQFW and some of the benefits and challenges involved were identified from these documents to produce case studies which are set out in Appendix 1. The case studies have been structured to provide a background to the respective projects, the activities undertaken and the progress and outcomes of engagement with the CQFW, and provide examples to illustrate the evidence gathered through other methods. A full list of all documents used for this element of the study appears in Appendix 2.

3.5 Arad also conducted a wider literature review of research relating to national qualification framework (NQF) policy and practice elsewhere in the world. This has allowed for initial analysis regarding Wales's progress towards a NQF in comparison with other countries as well as offering scope to identify good

practice and potential lessons for Wales for any future envisaged role, design and implementation of the CQFW. For the international review Arad worked with an expert in NQFs. The methodology used involved identifying a range of countries where NQFs have been developed and the drivers for this development. A range of documentation was then sourced from these respective countries' Ministries of Education websites and other sources as well as international organisations such as the ILO and the European Commission. The appraisal of the literature took into consideration reports of greatest relevance to the review questions, established trends and emerging findings, and the validity or trustworthiness of individual studies' findings according to research design, methods of data collection and data analysis, theoretical approach, and relationship between claims made and evidence presented.

3.6 The two desk-based reviews fed into the design of the primary fieldwork framework and development of the interview proforma outlined below as well as providing evidence for the final report and case studies.

#### **Primary fieldwork framework**

3.7 To ensure that the study effectively captured the impact of the CQFW and stakeholder views on its future a framework was designed to guide the research around a set of core themes. The framework has three main headings, namely:

- Impact of the CQFW;
- Assessing ongoing need for a CQFW; and
- Future design and delivery of the CQFW

3.8 The framework provides a summary of these three headings as well as listing the main and supplementary questions from the interview guide. It also outlines how the guide and the framework are addressing the specific aims of the study.

The framework ensured that data and evidence was:

- collected systematically – helping to inform the design of data collection tools and identifying where qualitative and quantitative methods are required;
- organised according to evaluation themes or subjects; and

- analysed in a way that ensures that the objectives of the Review have been delivered.

**Table 1: Primary fieldwork framework<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Theme 1: Review of the CQFW</b>	<b>Theme 2: Assessing ongoing need for a CQFW</b>	<b>Theme 3: Future design and delivery of the CQFW</b>
<p><b>Overview of theme:</b></p> <p>Initial focus on understanding and awareness of the role of CQFW amongst stakeholders. Focus on organisations' use of the CQFW and collecting and analysing stakeholders' views on the positive and negative impacts of the CQFW since its introduction. Additional focus on impact of the CQFW on mainstream and informal learning and comparison with other UK Frameworks. Any quantitative data collected through the data review will also be included under this theme relating to how the CQFW has operated and its impact.</p>	<p><b>Overview of theme:</b></p> <p>Focus on stakeholders' views on the ongoing need for the CQFW and the potential benefits and challenges of continuing it. Also focus on stakeholders' views regarding the most and least useful current elements of the CQFW.</p>	<p><b>Overview of theme:</b></p> <p>Focus on the design and delivery of any potential future CQFW. Collecting stakeholder views relating to design and delivery including types of learning to be included and omitted; future governance and infrastructure for delivery. Additional focus on potential benefits and challenges of proposed design and delivery changes and lessons from good practice at an international level and incorporating any lessons learned from Theme 1 into this part of the study.</p>

### **Interviews with key stakeholders**

3.8 The framework guided the development of an interview proforma which was used to undertake telephone interviews with key stakeholders in the education and employment sectors in Wales and across the UK. The interviews covered the themes and questions outlined in the Framework and the qualitative data

<sup>4</sup> Please note the full framework is enclosed in Appendix 6

collected fed into the draft and final reporting stages. A full list of interviewed stakeholders is provided in Appendix 3. A copy of the interview proforma is included in Appendix 4 of this report.

- 3.9 Interview respondents were proposed by the Welsh Government policy team and the project steering group, or identified by the Arad team during the course of the desk-based review. The focus was on strategic stakeholders in the sector rather than learners or parents. Some stakeholders have given views based on their engagement with learners however learners have not been consulted with directly as part of the study. A sampling framework was produced to guide this process and is included in Appendix 5 of this report. Stakeholders were divided into groups according to their respective sectors e.g. Further Education, Higher Education, Awarding Organisations, Local Authorities, employers, Welsh Government representatives and national and international stakeholders. Arad developed a list of 136 individuals from which to carry out an estimated 60 phone interviews in January, February and March 2014. The aim was to sample as broad a range of stakeholders as possible during the fieldwork phase to allow Arad to take a balanced approach to the review and ensure that all sectors' views were represented. The sampling framework outlines the initial numbers of stakeholders to be contacted, the target sample and the sample numbers achieved. Arad undertook a total of 69 telephone interviews and received an additional five written responses to the review. Most stakeholder groups were well represented in terms of the planned target numbers. There were, however, no responses from schools from a target of six and the report therefore does not reference any schools' views relating to the CQFW. There are no clear reasons as to why no schools responded to the consultation process. Future research in this field should therefore consider further targeting of the schools sector where necessary. Only one private training provider from a target of four responded although National Training Federation Wales, the representative body for organisations delivering training in Wales, did provide its views. Telephone interviews generally lasted about 40 minutes. Responses were analysed using the primary fieldwork framework outlined in section 3.7.

## **Reporting**

3.10 For the final reporting stage Arad was guided by the framework in presenting evidence. In summarising findings from such a wide variety of stakeholders Arad aimed to reflect and represent evidence submitted in an accurate and balanced way. The final report has three main goals, to provide a review of the impact of the CQFW in Wales; to outline whether the structure, purpose, features and benefits of the CQFW should be reconsidered; and to set out the potential key functions and key elements of the CQFW in the future.

### **A note on the evidence**

3.11 In conducting this qualitative review of the CQFW Arad has had limited sources of qualitative data and no quantitative data upon which to draw. The international review of evidence notes this situation is common regarding the evaluation or review of NQFs in other countries with a lack of literature regarding their impact and no common evaluative methodology or indicators to measure impact. The majority of countries detailed in the international review are taking steps to address this lack of data by setting up longitudinal studies to collect and analyse data, supported in some cases by in-depth surveying of stakeholders including learners. While there are undoubtedly ongoing challenges to evaluating and attributing impact to NQF's any future investment in the CQFW should take these developments into account. This is one of the recommendations arising from the study.

## **4 The anticipated and realised impacts of the CQFW – a review of evidence**

- 4.1 This section draws together evidence from documents which set out the role and impact of the CQFW, and includes literature setting out potential and anticipated impacts, as well as some evidence of its impact.
- 4.2 A range of benefits from engagement with the CQFW are illustrated for both learners and learning providers from the literature reviewed for the study. Although considerably less emphasis is placed on weaknesses of the CQFW in the evidence provided, the burden on resources that the process of developing an accredited course places on learning providers is also highlighted.
- 4.3 A number of texts suggest the key benefit of the framework is that it provides common recognition of a diverse range of learning and qualifications types, which allows them to be valued in a consistent and standardized way. Sheehan (2013) suggests the CQFW allows for comparison of achievements and parity of esteem to learning or training irrespective of where and how it is provided. The QALL pillar of the CQFW is noted as providing formal recognition for the diversity and quality of learning and training provided. For example, Burns and Spear (2011) claim that the recognition of learning outside Higher Education and General and Vocational Training is an important concept in Wales as it reflects an understanding that all learning wherever and whenever it takes place should be valued and recognised. The benefits and weaknesses of the framework are explained in the literature according to different user groups, namely: learning providers, which includes employers; and learners, which includes employees.
- 4.4 For learning providers, the CQFW provides an effective platform by which learning can be shared and participation expanded between partnerships or different parts of large organisations. For example, the Welsh Local Government Association's (WLGA, 2013) CQFW project involved collaboration between different local authorities in Wales to develop common training units under the CQFW. This joint-working enabled established

programmes such as Connect to Care to be utilized by other local authorities, as they shared best practice. Similarly the Cultural Venue Operations Apprenticeship Framework (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2014) developed QALL units that were relevant across all cultural venues, including museums, housing associations and libraries. This sharing of learning creates greater awareness of the range of learning available across large organisations and helps to avoid duplication. For example, Burns and Spear (2014) cite a case study of the accreditation of Repetitive Manual Handling Training for staff moving from NHS trust to trust or even between wards, which provided quality assurance and a demonstration of competence which removed the need to carry out further duplicate training.

- 4.5 For employer learning providers the CQFW provides particular benefits. The National Training Federation Wales (NTFW) (2012) and Sheehan (2013) explain that the implementation of credit infrastructure within the CQFW makes it more responsive to the needs of employers, enabling employees to achieve the skills and qualifications that employers need. For example, the Betsi Cadwalader University (BCU) Local Health Board (2013) developed accredited training packages for their staff which were written and delivered by clinicians, and found because training was then linked to service and clinician need it was better able to develop transferable skills among the workforce and theory could be quickly implemented into practical application. Similarly, Eliesha Cymru (2013) developed a recognised training course in Knowledge and Information Management and in so doing found that units could be developed quickly to respond to new industry needs, allowing accredited training to be piloted before qualifications were fully developed.
- 4.6 The literature also provides examples of a cultural change taking place within employer organisations in their approach to training their workforce, as a result of recognition of in-house training. By empowering employers to identify and develop recognised training packages, the BCU Local Health Board (2013) identified a new enthusiasm and commitment to delivering education and training to the workforce. In a similar way, the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS) (2013) found that allowing an organisation's own personnel to deliver a training programme to a national standard increased local capacity in a cost effective way. This raised

commitment to the value of workforce development within the organization and gave them the confidence and appetite to seek external recognition for their professionalism and standards.

- 4.7 The Alliance Sector Skills Council Wales case studies add that the accountability of an organisation is strengthened if they can demonstrate that they train their staff on an a recognised programme, which can in turn increase funding opportunities. Sheehan (2013) explains that the CQFW provides quality endorsement of the content and level of training units provided, which reinforces its status and value and improves motivation among staff. Allowing employers to identify more easily the amount and level of learning achieved by employees and applicants, the CQFW enables employers to be more precise in identifying skills levels required and can be used in appraisals and the review of post grading's. This in turn raises the profile and status of employment in the sector. The NTFW (2012) also highlights that recognised learning can reduce the repetition of non-recognised learning and provide employers with the opportunity to join forces with other employers to create qualifications relevant to their sector.
- 4.8 The literature reviewed identifies various benefits of the CQFW, and particularly the QALL pillar of the framework, for learners. It notes the effectiveness of QALL in introducing those with low educational attainment to more formal learning in achievable, bite size pieces, and providing an understanding of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and evidence. The Family Learning Report (Burns, 2013) explains that the impact on learners of QALL accreditation of family learning included improved confidence in their ability to learn and engagement with further learning. Similarly, CWVYS (2013) found that increased recognition of non-formal and informal workforce learning in Voluntary Youth Work organisations resulted in more than 70% of students stating an intention to undertake further accreditations or qualifications.
- 4.9 For learners who have studied abroad, the CQFW provides a formal process for accrediting learning outcomes achieved abroad that do not count towards a learner's home qualification. The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (2014) reports that 'Mobility units' can be recognised and recorded on the learner's transcript or recognised as



additional credit, which is quality assured by the Welsh Government. Further, the Welsh Government (2013) reports that it has been working with the Welsh Refugee Council to demonstrate how the CQFW could be used to recognize the prior learning of new arrivals to Wales as part of a UK recognised qualification.

- 4.10 Flexibility and transferability are recognised as further benefits of the CQFW (NTFW 2012). In its 'Handbook for Learning Providers' (2012) the National Training Federation Wales notes that flexibility and transferability are further benefits of the CQFW for learners, and that the Framework helps them understand the difficulty and study requirements of each qualification more easily. It allows learners to take qualifications unit by unit at their own pace until they have achieved the credits needed for a whole qualification, or they can 'bank' the units and put them towards a complete qualification at a later date. Learners can be assessed and awarded through 'recognised prior learning' (RPL) for other learning and achievements that haven't been certificated, and claim 'exemption' if they already have the skills and knowledge for a unit. The system allows learners to transfer credits between units and qualifications and transfer their knowledge and skills between career paths, providers and countries. Supporting transferability between the CQFW and frameworks in other countries, the Welsh Assembly Government (2009) found that evidence showed a broad consistency of the CQFW with the EQF by demonstrating clear links between the level descriptors of the two frameworks.
- 4.11 Particular benefits were identified for employees as learners when the in-house training that they undertook was accredited under the CQFW. National recognition of knowledge and skills gained at in-house training days encouraged a more positive attitude towards engaging with training, and provided assurance that the training was of a consistent quality and therefore transferable across the sector. For example, the increased use of QALL in the cultural venues operations apprenticeship framework in Wales (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2014) meant that training, which would previously have been set by each employer with an emphasis on the needs of their particular business, was now delivered to a consistent standard with content approved by the sector as a whole.

4.12 The key weakness of the CQFW that emerges from the literature is the burden placed upon learning providers' resources by the process of developing a unit, gaining accreditation and developing the expertise and infrastructure to fulfil the awarding organisation's processes and paperwork requirements. The WLGA (2013) reports that the time and resources required to design and develop accredited programmes, exacerbated by the lack of good information available from some awarding organisations, meant that local authorities spent more time understanding accreditation options and the process for accreditation than they anticipated. The WLGA suggested that there is therefore a need for an intermediary or support structure for employers to address this issue. Further, different awarding organisations were found to have differing options and approaches to accreditation. It was suggested that employers would benefit from a common approach to the QALL accreditation on the part of awarding organisations, and a clear process, through which employers can be guided. This should include a list of accredited learning already available via the CQFW, to avoid unnecessary duplication when developing in-house programmes.

## 5 Lessons from International Experience of NQF Evaluations

### Background

- 5.1 National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) emerged as important policy instruments in the 1990s. There had already been partial qualifications frameworks in place for specific purposes – for example, the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NICAT) and Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) systems for determining credit transfer between higher education qualifications and also the concept of levels used in vocational qualifications. But the concept of an all-embracing framework covering all national qualifications was slower to emerge, perhaps because it required cross-sectoral consensus. The first such frameworks were developed in New Zealand and in UK countries (Tuck, 2007); these were made possible because of a policy drive in these countries towards the development of education and training systems based on specified outcomes and on modularisation, both of which supported the awarding of formal national recognition to learners for the successful completion of smaller blocks of learning than had hitherto been certificated (Coles, 2006).
- 5.2 In countries developing these early NQFs, the qualifications landscape was becoming increasingly complex for learners to navigate and to plan progression across, as well as within, education and training sectors. NQFs were one response to that complexity and typically, for example in the Scottish framework, provided a route map and a common “currency”. An overarching NQF diagram (sometimes supported by a national database of qualifications) served as the route map while the common credit currency was based on qualifications levels, representing different levels of complexity of the learning and skills content of the qualification, and notional learning time, defined as “one credit = 10 notional learning hours”<sup>5</sup>.
- 5.3 It is important to note, however, that not all of the early NQFs fitted this model. For example, the New Zealand model was complex, with its NQF

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scqf.org.uk/The%20Framework/> for example

being only a sub-set of qualifications on the national register of qualifications, while the Australian model included an all-inclusive diagram but no system of common currency.

- 5.4 The promise, and perhaps the rhetoric, of the early NQFs in countries such as New Zealand, Scotland and Australia had considerable influence on other countries that were considering reform of their education and training systems. This was a time, around the turn of the century, when such developments were particularly active, with countries such as Uganda and Jamaica seeking to reform their often colonially-based systems and with new nations such as Uzbekistan and Macedonia emerging from the radical political re-shaping of Eastern Europe and Eurasia following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the changes in the Balkan region. The importance of NQFs as tools in the redevelopment of national education and training systems was also highlighted by international agencies such as the European Union, the OECD and World Bank; in some cases, the development of an NQF was a condition of donor funding to support wider educational reform (Allais et al, 2009). Such emphasis on NQF development was not, at that time, based on any evaluation of the impact of early NQFs but rather on the premise that NQFs were a fundamental component of reform focussed on outcomes-based learning and equality of opportunity across education and training sectors (OECD, 2006).
- 5.5 The scale of expansion of NQF developments around the world has been considerable; it is likely that the number of countries which have, or are developing, NQFs now exceeds one hundred (Grainger et al, 2012). This scale of development may be linked to the need for portability of qualifications in an increasingly global education and labour marketplace and to the link between qualifications systems and the goal of lifelong learning. The aims of many NQFs, such as providing information, widened participation, flexibility and portability of qualifications and parity of esteem, accord well with the wider aims of national education and training systems that promote inclusivity and lifelong learning.

- 5.6 Given the existence of trans-national communities such as the European Union (EU), the Caribbean Community and the South African Development Community, it is also no surprise that a more recent development has been the emergence of transnational qualifications frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which was launched in 2006. The EQF is seen by the European Commission as an important policy support for mobility of labour between member states and for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2008).
- 5.7 Finally, it is important to note that of the many countries now engaged in NQF development work, not all are working towards an all-sector model such as that of Ireland, Scotland or Wales; for example, Switzerland and the Czech Republic are developing separate frameworks for vocational and higher education, while Italy's framework includes only higher education qualifications (CEDEFOP, 2013).

### **NQF rationale and purposes**

- 5.8 The early NQF developers in countries such as New Zealand and Scotland were responding to policy directions such as widening access to higher education and modularisation of qualifications that highlighted the need for a route map and a common currency as a means to explain the growing complexities of the qualifications available to learners and as a means to support increased learner movement across sectoral boundaries – for example, between vocational education and higher education. Developing and emerging countries such as South Africa saw great potential for the use of an NQF as a shaper of educational development. Attempts have been made to develop a typology for NQFs based on their ambitions to transform education and training systems and their strategies for doing so (Allais et al, op cit). The typology distinguished between the more functional ambitions, such as improving understanding and promoting progression between learning programmes, and more systemic ambitions, such as to support economic transformation and promote lifelong learning. The typology

also takes account of whether the starting point for the NQF is the existing education and training system or the desired future system.

5.9 The typology therefore places NQFs on a continuum between purposes summarised as “communications” and “transformational”, with “reforming” as a middle point. “Communications” NQFs such as those of Australia and Scotland start from the present system; lead to incremental change and are a tool for change; are bottom-up, voluntary and relatively non-regulatory. “Transformational” NQFs such as those of New Zealand and South Africa start from the desired future system; are drivers of change for radical transformation; are top-down, statutory and/or regulatory. The typology can also be applied to individual sectors of the NQF – for example, the intention to have all vocational qualifications in England and Wales replaced by National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) was transformational.

5.10 Allais and her co-authors have argued from international comparisons that early attempts to draw lessons from NQF development and implementation suggest that transformational NQFs have faced the greatest problems of implementation. Young (2005) notes that the body charged with implementing a transformational NQF may not have the required resources, political backing or stakeholder support to drive the level of change envisaged

### **Evaluation of NQFs**

5.11 NQFs are often introduced as part of a wider national education and training reform agenda; for example, in South Africa the NQF was part of a wider transformation of education and training by the new post-apartheid government. It may therefore be very difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the impact of the NQF on the system from other reforms.

5.12 At the “Qualifications Frameworks in Europe” conference in Glasgow in 2005, one delegate asked, on the post-it note wall, “Where is the transferable, sound empirical evidence of the usefulness (effectiveness and efficiency) and impact (in the education system and the employment

system) in the countries with NQFs???? (WOW!).” The report of the conference (Raffe, 2005) says that the question did not receive a direct answer.

5.13 Eight years on, and with so many countries developing, implementing or operating NQFs and so much international collaboration and information-sharing on NQF development and implementation, it is striking that there is still remarkably sparse literature on evaluated impact of NQFs – and indeed no common evaluative methodology. Much of the literature that does exist tends to be concerned about the extent to which implementation has taken place, rather than about the impact of the NQF on its wide range of users and stakeholders. Even relatively recent works on developing and implementing NQFs in the Middle East, although they provide a thorough overview of the NQF experience of a range of countries, are significantly silent on evidence of impact of those NQFs described (Grainger op cit).

5.14 Of those evaluations that have taken place, the following sections look first at those frameworks that had a perspective beyond a single jurisdiction – the EQF and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This is followed by a summary of evaluations covering a single jurisdiction – Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Ireland and South Africa.

### **International evaluative studies**

#### *Evaluation of the European Qualifications Framework*

5.15 The EQF’s purpose relates principally to the need for greater coherence between the qualifications systems of EU member states in order to support portability of qualifications and mobility of labour. The focus of the EQF to date has been on encouraging member states to reference their national qualifications systems to the EQF. Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, publishes annual reports on developments in NQFs in Europe. The most recent, for 2012, confirms that these frameworks are considered a key way of making qualifications easier to understand and compare within and between countries). NQFs are increasingly used to encourage wider changes in

education and training. For instance, during 2012 some NQFs were opened up to include qualifications awarded outside the formal public system. However the reports also recognise that since the referencing process by which member countries relate their own NQFs to the EQF has been running behind schedule in many countries, the potential impact of the EQF has been limited (Cedefop op cit).

#### *Evaluation by the ILO of NQFs in 16 countries*

5.16 This evaluation was carried out between 2009 and 2010. A quote from the foreword of the ILO report sets its purpose in context. “At its core, the research asks discomfoting questions; such as whether NQFs are sometimes being relied on to provide a technical solution to complex social objectives or whether some countries are developing NQFs based on the rhetoric surrounding them rather than on the evidence of their effectiveness.” (Allais, 2010) The work was carried out by individual researchers in each of the sixteen countries; Scotland’s NQF was included, as was the NVQ framework in England, but Wales was not one of the countries involved.

5.17 The ILO study found little evidence of the impact of the NQF in the sixteen countries studied, nor indeed clear strategies to measure such impact. Nor was evidence found of clear indicators against which to measure success or systematic reporting of successes and failures of the framework so that lessons could be learned. Also, the study found lack of clarity on whether any successes claimed were due to the NQF or to other parallel reforms.

5.18 The ILO report has not been free of controversy, with South Africa being particularly critical of the methodology’s limitations and suggesting possible inherent bias because of the choice of experts to report in each country (Keevy, 2011)

#### **National evaluative studies**

##### *New Zealand*

5.19 New Zealand is generally credited with having created the first NQF; its introduction was part of a national reform programme built on the



adoption by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) of the outcomes-based qualifications model developed in Scotland in the 1980s. New Zealand's NQF was introduced in 1991; it might therefore be expected that New Zealand had considerable opportunities to conduct evaluations of the impact of their NQF. This is not the case in practice, however, because the implementation of the NQF in New Zealand became a highly-contested issue, especially among higher education providers, and led to considerable policy uncertainty over a prolonged period (Young, op cit). In addition, the position of the NQF in the New Zealand system was complex in that it was a subset of NZQA's national register of qualifications and its website KiwiQuals.

5.20 A targeted review of the qualifications system was carried out in the late 2000s, commissioned by NZQA. The reports concluded that (Parker et al, 2009; Vermillion et al, 2009)

- nearly all learners were unaware of KiwiQuals, the public face of the national register, or that its site belonged to NZQA – and most staff, students and parents had never used KiwiQuals nor had heard of the website
- very few learners or employers were aware that a comprehensive list of quality assured qualifications exists; anyone using the register needed to be knowledgeable about the system to make sense of the information
- the large number of very similar qualifications on the register further confused and frustrated some industry groups, learners and providers; qualifications data was often different depending on its source, making it difficult to know if register information is current
- the NQF was often mistaken for the New Zealand qualifications register (it was actually a subset of that register); learners and employers did not know that the register was the overarching qualifications framework for New Zealand or that there were three different types of qualifications on the register.

5.21 The review therefore concluded (NZQA, 2009) that that the current qualifications system

- was generally poorly understood by the people for whom it was designed
- lacked relevance to some employers and industry
- lacked coherence, user-friendliness, clarity and currency
- had allowed the ongoing proliferation of qualifications that are substantially identical
- was confusing because the NQF is a subset of the national register of quality assured qualifications.

5.22 Among a package of seven major policy changes proposed to address the outcomes of this review, one was that New Zealand should develop a unified national qualifications framework. The New Zealand Qualifications Framework would be the single source of information for New Zealand qualifications, and this information would be transparently available to the public as well as consistently shared among government agencies. The unified national qualifications framework is now in place; NZQA published the requirements of the new NZQF in late 2013.

5.23 It could be argued that the disappointing findings of the evaluations were inevitable, given the highly-contested history of both the NQF and the NZQA itself and given the confusion between the NQF, the register and KiwiQuals.

### *Australia*

5.24 The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), introduced in 1995, was one of the first to include qualifications from all sectors (Wheelahan, 2010). However it attracted criticism for the acceptance by the body responsible for the AQF of the premise that learning in the school, vocational and higher education sectors was fundamentally different in nature and therefore that the framework would not feature a common currency for credit. Despite the issue of guidelines on credit transfer, data showed that very few students progressing from the Australian Diploma and Advanced Diploma (the equivalent of Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma in the UK) into a degree programme were granted any credit, despite the AQF diagram showing

that these titles were used in both vocational and higher education sectors and at the same levels.

5.25 Apart from such credit transfer information, no data was available on the impact of the AQF, although criticism of its limitations persisted over time (Keating, 2008). In 2010, the Australian Government proposed, as part of a much wider reform agenda, that fundamental changes were needed to the AQF and created a new body to take responsibility for it.

5.26 The original AQF's limited success in increasing pathways was one of the problems that the new AQF sought to solve. The Australian Government had set ambitious targets for participation in and attainment from post-compulsory education and training; success would require pathways between sectors to be at the centre of the design of qualifications and the design of the AQF, rather than an afterthought (Wheelahan, op cit).

5.27 The new AQF Council's critique (AQFC, 2009) of the original AQF was that it

- was seen as effectively three separate frameworks, with one for each sector
- had fallen behind international developments
- was slow to accommodate changing circumstances
- did not assist credit and articulation across sectors
- contained descriptors that were considered inadequate and conciliatory, and
- had had minimal impact in the schools and higher education sectors.

5.28 The new AQF, introduced from 2011 has a system of levels and an approach to credit transfer that are much more akin to frameworks elsewhere (AQFC, 2013). Its role is to

- provide consistency between qualifications through its structure of levels, credits, descriptors and specifications
- manage differences between sectoral interests, in particular to create a better connected higher education sector.

5.29 As part of the proposed reform, an impact analysis was conducted. This was not intended to be a measure of the impact of the original AQF but an impact analysis of the major changes being proposed to the design to create a new AQF. No evidence was cited in the resulting report (Buchanan et al, 2010) on the effectiveness of the original AQF design, despite its longevity. The report argued that robust data on the paths learners and workers follow (and which employers draw upon) was scarce – because protocols for gathering such information were limited and the cost of collecting such information was great. The report argued for the setting up of longitudinal studies to provide data on the reformed AQF because, despite their complexity and cost, it would be otherwise be very difficult to make judgements about the impact of specific policy interventions. Given the scale of resources devoted to national education and training reforms, it was argued that investment in such data collection would be a small price to pay.

#### *Ireland*

5.30 The Irish NQF was introduced in October 2003. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) commissioned a review in 2008 by an international team of the extent to which the framework and related policies on access, transfer and progression had been implemented and of their initial impact.

5.31 The report of the study (NQAI, 2009) included consideration of the impact of the NQF on promoting learners' access and pathways between qualifications. An assessment of overall progress on access, transfer and progression was hindered by the lack of data available to the study team. The review therefore recommended that the significant gaps in data, which emerged as a cross-cutting theme in the study, be addressed. In particular, data gaps relating to the availability and use of pathways and their outcomes for learners should be addressed by the relevant bodies. It was specifically recommended, with a view to establishing the value of the NQF from a learner perspective, that the NQAI (more recently merged into Quality and Qualifications Ireland)

should undertake a longitudinal study of a cohort of learners as they navigated their way through the framework.

5.32 Despite the gaps in data, the review concluded that there was some evidence that:

- progression routes into higher education and training had increased and become more transparent
- there was considerable interest in and demand for the recognition of prior learning, but that there were inconsistencies and gaps in policies and use of recognition of prior learning and credit transfer
- at that stage in the NQF's development, awareness and understanding of it appeared to be somewhat disjointed and depended on the level of engagement of individuals, either as administrators or teachers within institutions, as learners, employers or as other stakeholders

5.33 Despite the lack of hard data, the report concluded that the NQF had established itself with a high level of prominence and visibility on the landscape of Irish education and training and in the structure of education and training provision in Ireland. As a result, the Framework was beginning to have an impact on the lives of learners. It was providing a language to underpin their choices in education and training. It was encouraging new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. It was stimulating the development of provision in new areas, and opening up new opportunities for transfer and progression.

#### *Scotland*

5.34 The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was one of the earlier NQFs; it was developed by a partnership of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Scottish office and the Scottish Government. Its name was chosen to reflect the intention to incorporate and extend the existing SCOTCAT higher education credit transfer system. The SCQF was designed to build on the nearly twenty years of reform of education and training in Scotland; its purpose was therefore to consolidate past reforms and to support future reforms, rather than being transformative

itself. An early decision of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), to increase awareness and use of SCQF levels and credit points, was to incorporate these into the Scottish Qualifications Certificate, which records secondary school and post-school achievement of units, courses and group awards, including HNC and HND.

5.35 An early evaluation of the SCQF was carried out in 2004, commissioned by the (then) Scottish Executive and the development partners. It was a small scale qualitative study looking at the initial impact of the SCQF in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE). The research was based on a sample of specialists, practitioners and stakeholders from national organisations, FE/HE institutions, employers and professional bodies. The evaluation (Gallacher et al, 2005) found:

- that people’s knowledge and understanding of the SCQF varied according to the extent to which they used it. It was high among those FE and HE staff who have used it, but more limited among other staff within institutions, other stakeholder groups, and the wider community
- respondents from all sectors reported positive perceptions of the Framework, although some felt that early “hype” has encouraged unrealistic expectations. Many felt that progress has been slow
- that there was little evidence that SCQF had contributed much to the development of articulation and credit transfer arrangements between FE and HE institutions beyond providing a language and tools to underpin arrangements, despite its positive impact on curriculum development, programme planning and admissions arrangements.

5.35 Among the recommendations, the report suggested:

- widening the SCQF to include community learning and development, and vocational and work-based qualifications
- new management structures for SCQF to increase the pace of development and implementation.

5.36 One outcome of that review was the setting up of new arrangements to manage the SCQF. From 2006, it has been managed by a formal

partnership company whose board reflects its key stakeholder groups under an independent chair.

5.37 More recently, the SCQF Partnership has established a new programme of evaluation. This has involved a review in 2010/11 of progress of embedding the SCQF within HE, FE and Training Providers and of the impact the SCQF has had on those sectors. This was followed by a review in 2012/13 of the perceptions, awareness and understanding of the SCQF as well as its impact and use among learners in FE and HE, schools, workplaces and Community Learning and Development along with an evaluation of the understanding, awareness and perceptions of the SCQF among management and teaching staff in schools. The final strand, in 2013/4, is focusing on employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors to evaluate awareness, perceptions and understanding of the SCQF across a broad spectrum of employers and employment types.

5.38 The first review in 2010/11 (Kerson Associates, 2012) concluded that

- the SCQF is used by FE Colleges and HEIs to inform the design, development and/or delivery of all credit rated provision offered. The exception was Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) which were not all yet credit rated into the SCQF. Further work was needed to ensure that institutional quality assurance processes took account of SCQF credit and to ensure that staff were trained in the practical use of the SCQF level descriptors and credit rating guidelines.
- the SCQF was not being used in any significant way in the development of workbased programmes - the exception being the component parts of Modern Apprenticeships which were credit rated where possible into the SCQF.
- the new Advanced Apprenticeship Frameworks, introduced from April 2012, should be credit rated into the SCQF to help explain their relationship to existing workbased provision.
- the use of the SCQF was not well embedded in the design/development of learning programmes and qualifications

offered by Training Providers and that employers were aware of the SCQF but still did not fully appreciate its value to their business.

- learners were becoming more aware of the SCQF levels, particularly FE learners planning progression and/or articulation to advanced level study in HE. However further work was required by the SCQF Partnership to promote understanding and use of the SCQF, especially since some providers continued to use predecessor definitions of credit and, in HE, to reference programmes to predecessor systems of levels.

5.39 The second review in 2012/13 was based on focus groups, online questionnaires (including 1444 learners) and in-depth interviews (250 parent interviews). The review (Ashbrook Research and Consultancy, 2013) found that that

- Around half of learners overall (53%) were aware of the SCQF, with awareness levels varying from 63% among learners at school to 44% for learners in the community. Having SCQF levels and points listed on the certificates issued by the SQA played a significant role in promoting awareness of the SCQF.
- Many learners were aware of the SCQF or were making use of it, with learners in school most likely to be making use of it and those within university and the workplace least likely to be doing so. Among those using the SCQF, most believed it had been of value to them, especially learners in school.
- Whilst many teachers in management and guidance/pastoral care roles had a well-developed understanding of the SCQF, classroom teachers had very limited levels of understanding and did not see it as a priority. Around a third of parents interviewed had heard of the SCQF, with mixed levels of understanding.

*South Africa*



5.40 South Africa was among the first of the developing economies to adopt the concept of an NQF as a fundamental element of the extensive post-apartheid rethinking of its education and training system. The South African NQF was seen by government to promise transformation, by providers to promise parity of esteem, and by employers to promise skilled manpower to address skills shortages. Aid donor organisations built the development of an NQF into their funding agreements. It has been argued since that expectations – seeing the NQF as an instrument of redress that could be used by the new post-apartheid government to transform the education and training system – were unrealistic and that failure to meet the expectations was inevitable (McBride and Keevy, 2009).

5.41 Partly in response to a critical review of its implementation of the NQF, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) attempted to establish a programme of evaluation of the NQF, with support from South Africa's partners, Scotland and Ireland. The study was designed as a longitudinal review based on successive evaluations or cycles of the impact of the NQF that would take place every two to three years. The research design was longitudinal and comparative, starting with a baseline study in 2003 (the first cycle), and followed by successive studies using the same set of 17 "impact indicators". The second cycle was completed in 2005, while the third cycle was initiated in 2006 but was not completed.

5.42 The second cycle was reported on in 2005, almost ten years after the setting up of SAQA to establish the NQF (SAQA, 2005). The conclusions were that

- The NQF was found to have had a high positive impact in three of the 17 areas - Nature of learning programmes; Organisational, economic and societal benefits; Contribution to other national strategies. Key strengths here were seen as the positive impact of an outcomes-based approach to education: learner motivation being increased by certification; greater emphasis on application of knowledge and skills, and clarity of learning.

- By contrast, the NQF was found to have had a minimal or mixed impact in eight of the 17 areas including Effectiveness of qualification design; Uptake of qualifications and achievement; Quality assurance practices; Redress practices; and Portability of qualifications.
- portability of qualifications continued to be seen as problematic because the quality of qualifications was still often felt to reside in the institution rather than in the standards and because of the unwillingness of certain sectors of education or training to trust the qualifications gained in other sectors.
- Moving between academic and vocational qualifications remained difficult; there was no parity of esteem for vocational education; and co-operation between formal education and the world of work and training remained limited.
- The NQF was not found to have had a negative impact in any of the 17 areas.

5.43 Since the second cycle, SAQA has reviewed the evaluation methodology, including comparison with other countries' approaches, and it has been concluded that the methodology pursued to date should not be continued; evaluations based on representative sampling were seen to be problematic and the approach used by Scotland for its evaluation of the SCQF was seen as more likely to be effective (Keevy, 2013).

5.44 The outcome of the deliberations in South Africa is that, ten years on from the first discussion of an evaluation programme, little conclusive information has emerged on impact – and the original evaluation methodology has been found wanting. Reviews of the extent to which the NQF has been successfully implemented have however shown that initial ambitions for the South African NQF were hugely over-optimistic; for example, very large numbers of qualifications accredited onto the NQF have never been taken up by providers or learners.

## *Conclusions*

5.45 The typology of NQFs described earlier does suggest an important question for those considering the development of a new, or the review of an existing, NQF. Is the NQF mainly functional in nature, or does it also have a strategic purpose?

5.46 If functional, an NQF's basic intentions might be to

- Provide a set of benchmarks to ensure that qualifications between education sectors and between employment sectors are fair and consistent. The use of these benchmarks could be advisory or could be regulatory. The benchmarks, for example in the form of NQF level descriptors, might be expected to be used by government, regulatory bodies, employer organisations and providers when developing courses and qualifications to ensure that the demands made on learners by the course or qualification is appropriate to the course or qualification's intended level.
- Provide a language and route map to make it easier for learners, parents, education professionals and employers to understand progression routes between qualifications and the relative demands of qualifications.
- Provide a common currency which can be used to increase the consistency and accountability of credit transfer and advanced standing decisions and which can also be used as a tool for the accreditation of prior and informal learning.

5.47 If more strategic in focus, the NQF might additionally be intended to generate, or support the generation of, benefits such as increased uptake of lifelong learning, key skills levels in the population, skills in the workforce, economic competitiveness, and social inclusion and mobility. Experience in other countries suggests that such wider strategic intentions are unlikely to be measurably attributed to the NQF, given that it could not achieve these ambitions without a wide range of other policy reform measures being in place.

5.48 The experience of evaluations of those NQFs that have been in place for some time suggests that hard evidence of the impact of the NQF itself is hard to find. That may be because it is inherently difficult to cost-effectively survey the huge number of potential users of an NQF, even if only the three functional ambitions listed above are being investigated. Scotland and Ireland have perhaps provided the best evidence here, although in both cases there are many caveats; Scotland in particular seems to have been successful because the SCQF was not seen as too radical, because the SCQF partners have worked hard to take stakeholders along with the development and because the SCQF has never had a heavy regulatory purpose. When wider strategic intentions of an NQF are included in evaluation, the additional challenge emerges because most countries have developed NQFs in association with other significant reforms to their education and training systems and in such circumstances it is difficult to attribute impact to the NQF as a single policy instrument.

5.49 One common feature across countries that have implemented NQFs is the difficulty in accessing data that would allow greater quantitative analysis of pathways and progression routes followed by learners within and between education and employment.

5.50 In the context of trans-national frameworks, the reports on the implementation of the EQF point out that most countries which did not previously have an NQF are developing one first and then referencing it to the EQF; only one has worked in the opposite direction. Given the considerable and growing convergence between the EQF levels and other NQFs, it is interesting to speculate whether countries which are evaluating and reforming their mature NQFs might in future consider adopting outright the EQF levels and descriptors as their future framework, especially in areas such as the UK countries, Scandinavia and the Benelux countries where education, training and employment borders are particularly porous and hence could be well served by a common set of anchor points or benchmarks.

5.51 In summary,

- The development of an NQF has become an international norm as part of national reform programmes for education and training systems, although the claims made for NQFs are yet to be substantively shown to have been delivered
- Clarity is needed on the intended scope of an NQF, especially on whether it is intended to be functionally orientated or aimed at transformational change
- Those NQFs that have been intended to be transformational have had the greatest problems in implementation and potentially the greatest challenge in evaluation because of the difficulty of separating out the impact of surrounding reforms
- There is considerable consistency in the design of NQFs around level descriptors and credit value based on notional learning time, in some areas supported by the emergence of trans-national frameworks such as the EQF
- There has been no internationally agreed approach to evaluation of NQFs, although the most common approach has involved targeted sampling of stakeholders and users; an associated theme in different countries has been the difficulty in collecting and analysing data that might provide evidence of impact of the NQF in areas such as credit transfer and progression pathways
- In comparison to other countries, the situation in Wales is particularly complicated because of the inter-relationships between CQFW, QCF, FHEQ and the EQF. The CQFW is also unusual in comparison to other NQFs in that it is seen as a meta-framework. As such, and in contrast, for example, to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, it does not have its own autonomous set of level descriptors, instead using the descriptors agreed for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

## 6 Awareness of the CQFW

### Perceived functions of the CQFW

6.1 Generally the role of the CQFW was well understood by the vast majority stakeholders who contributed to the research. For many stakeholders across all parts of the education sector it has a practical function as an information tool to categorise and map all qualifications delivered in Wales from Levels 1 to 8. Some stakeholders also referred to its role in developing a 'common currency' to allow for comparability of qualifications and to provide those involved in learning in Wales (learners, employers, providers etc.) with a common understanding of the value of qualifications. Its role was therefore seen as a tool to help people to understand the qualifications system in Wales and focus on the content of qualifications and enable flexibility for learners.

*The CQFW works well - it's a coordination framework for stakeholders, this coordination factor is important, it provides a language that people can use – the language of levels and credits. It would be hard for certain sectors within education to talk to each other without it.*

Qualifications sector stakeholder

*It's an attempt to bring qualifications into some sort of coherent relationship. It gives a common language and makes them understandable.*

FE College representative

6.2 This coherence and clarity, and the CQFW's position in articulating learning and education in Wales was also outlined by stakeholders. As one stakeholder put it, '*it gives qualifications in Wales some kind of structure to what is a 'formless' arrangement.*' The alignment of different sectors such as QALL (Quality Assured Lifelong Learning), higher education (HE) and regulated qualifications was considered to be effective in illustrating and promoting the structure of the qualifications

system in Wales. It was noted by some stakeholders that the qualifications landscape is complex, and that the CQFW helps to map the system more clearly.

- 6.3 For others the primary role of the CQFW is a tool that supports learners' progression between different levels of learning. For these stakeholders, the CQFW provides a range of ways of presenting and mapping progression through a credit-based system. For some stakeholders, particularly those working in adult and community learning (ACL) and HE, it also supports the process of encouraging people back into education, training and the workplace. A range of stakeholders from across the education sector highlighted the CQFW's links to overarching Welsh Government social justice and inclusion strategies through this facilitation of lifelong learning and progression opportunities.

*In a world where more and more learning takes place outside general education e.g. in the workplace, informal learning or 'unconventional' spheres of learning, the CQFW can articulate learning and learning outcomes.*

HEI representative

- 6.4 Some stakeholders operating at a wider UK level - including HEIs, UK and international governmental organisations, and awarding bodies' representatives - emphasised the CQFW's role in providing parity with other qualifications frameworks. Respondents from these organisations reported feeling that the Framework provides a clear 'read across' and articulates properly with the different systems in the UK such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in England and Northern Ireland, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as well as sector specific frameworks (e.g. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications) and international frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) through its common level descriptors.

6.5 Some stakeholders expressed the view that these linkages were essential for certain elements of their work, e.g. some awarding organisations and Sector Skills Councils noted their use of the CQFW as a reference point when designing or planning qualifications for use across the UK while Welsh HE institutions' outlined its use for their admissions strategies. Comments such as these can therefore be seen in the wider context of promoting employee and learner progression and mobility at a pan-UK and wider international level, another perceived goal of the CQFW.

*The role of the CQFW is to provide transparency and outline the relationship between qualification levels – this is its main focus. Other frameworks also aim to provide transparency, however the CQFW also includes details of how it links to lifelong learning (LLL) as well as a credit transfer element – so it goes further than just providing transparency. It is a more ambitious framework therefore than most other frameworks in Europe.*

International stakeholder

6.6 While most stakeholders demonstrated a strong awareness of the CQFW and the roles it plays across the education and employment sector some with a strategic overview of the sector, including Welsh government officials, also expressed doubts as to whether this awareness of the CQFW was replicated more widely throughout the education sector in Wales. This was perceived to be particularly the case amongst employers and learners, and in some areas of the Welsh Government. Reasons for this perceived lack of awareness are explored further in section 8, which looks at the barriers to engagement with the CQFW.

### **Awareness of the CQFW's goals**

6.7 There was less recognition or awareness of the five key goals associated with the CQFW (outlined in section 1 of this report). It was



noted by some stakeholders that these goals refer to wider Welsh Government aspirations for education, learning and employment in Wales outlined in policy and strategy documents. A broad range of education stakeholders in Wales pointed to the CQFW having a wide variety of uses as an enabling tool, a facilitator, a lever and a categorisation tool. It was suggested by some of these stakeholders that, while these were all useful functions for the CQFW, the framework itself does not deliver learning and is not a key factor in people's decisions to engage in learning.

- 6.8 Several stakeholders, with experience of working at a wider international level, reported feeling that this is not unique to Wales. They noted that frameworks internationally are usually a relatively minor element of education and training systems. This viewpoint was also largely borne out in the case studies of international qualifications and credit frameworks undertaken for this evaluation (see Section 5).
- 6.9 Nevertheless, for a minority of stakeholders, including an adult continuing learning representative, a governmental organisation representative and an international stakeholder working with NQFs, the aspirations for the CQFW are 'too grand' and 'pitched at the wrong level' and 'people therefore expect too much from it'. For these stakeholders a set of clearer and more modest goals could support greater awareness and buy-in to the CQFW.

*It can support the strategies delivered by others in pursuit of these goals – but the CQFW (as a framework) will not determine whether these goals are achieved.*

Welsh education sector stakeholder

### **Higher Education Sector views**

- 6.10 For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who responded to the evaluation there was common agreement that they are institutionally engaged and aligned with the CQFW. For them the CQFW is a 'core reference point' in terms of administering and managing academic standards with several noting that their institutional standards also make

reference to the CQFW. At a strategic level it was noted that the HE funding method in Wales is based on credit and that this has been an important element of the CQFW's implementation across the sector.

- 6.11 Individual respondents from Welsh HEIs considered that the CQFW is well understood within specific departments of their respective institutions, outlining that programme directors, admissions and examinations officers all have a good understanding of its role and use it as a 'common currency' when working across the sector. Respondents reported that, from their own experience and knowledge, the CQFW is embedded in validation methods within their respective institutions.
- 6.12 All HEI representatives considered the CQFW as an important enabling tool for institutions to compare learning, articulate qualifications and help learners to upskill. Again, departments engaged in admissions and widening access were mentioned as examples where it was regularly used. The CQFW was reported by several HE stakeholders to help employers and employees avoid duplication of training by enabling them to calibrate knowledge and achievements already acquired, and build on this through the recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- 6.13 Specific examples provided by HE institutions include the CQFW being used in the development, approval and accreditation of new learning programmes and in the five year periodic reviews, as well as working with professional statutory bodies e.g. in the engineering and health sector for programme specification. One HE institution reported having worked with employers and used the CQFW as a basis for recognising credit previously awarded to managers and senior staff wanting to progress to new qualifications.
- 6.14 The level descriptors were also considered an important tool and are used for guidance and articulating processes for learning taking place both within and outside the sector. Several HEI respondents reported that the CQFW was essential for their admissions staff to articulate the links between FE, HE and schools. This had assisted their understanding of learning and processes from Level 3 onwards as well as progression opportunities. One HE sector representative noted that the CQFW helps keep HE provision aligned with the Framework for

Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) at a wider UK level and the Qualifications of Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

6.15 Evidence gathered in this study demonstrated that the CQFW is strongly embedded within the HE sector in Wales. Stakeholders with a strategic overview of the HE sector and senior representatives from institutions considered that it has encouraged flexibility of learning within the sector. Several noted that the facility to validate modules in different institutions has helped widen access to HE to non-traditional learners. Some institution representatives also pointed out that it has become part of codified standards and expectations within the sector.

*It's enormously beneficial. It enables standards – commonality – acceptance. It helps with the management of programmes, it keeps them on track and in line with standardisation and gives clarity to the landscape in Wales. It links to levels, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, they're all key aspects of it.*

HEI representative

6.16 At a more strategic level, several HEI representatives and stakeholders with experience of the sector reported that linking the framework to the further education sector and employers has been beneficial to outline progression pathways and credit values. It was also noted by all HE interviewees that they are operating in global market places where learning and progression are essential and that the CQFW enables the sector to illustrate the Welsh offer, reference it as part of the Bologna process<sup>6</sup>, and map it against wider qualifications frameworks in the UK and European Union.

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<sup>6</sup> The Bologna Process is a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries designed to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher education qualifications. The intention is to allow the diversity of national systems and universities to be maintained while the European Higher Education Area improves transparency between higher education systems, as well as implements tools to facilitate recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility, and exchanges between institutions.

*It's pretty well understood. It has been with us for a while. Anyone involved in admissions and quality assurance and programme development in the HE sector will be aware of it and use it. It's a conceptual tool but has still been used administratively.*

HEI representative

6.17 Anecdotal evidence from several HEI interviewees suggest, however, that there is little awareness and knowledge of the Framework among learners. One recently led a discussion with the Students Union about standards and reported that 'they didn't really understand it' and that it is 'not really on their radar'.

### **Further Education Sector stakeholder views**

6.18 Based on the evidence collected during interviews it appears that FE institutions are engaged with the CQFW, but to a lesser extent than the HE sector. A number of colleges that contributed to the evaluation explained that the CQFW was 'part and parcel of how they structure their courses'. They reported that the CQFW has become part of the 'fabric of the system' and is used to explain value and progression to parents and learners. One college representative gave specific example of using the CQFW to work with a major local employer to set out what level and type of qualifications they required. Representatives from several colleges also use to promote understanding among staff of the form and structure of the qualifications landscape in Wales.

6.19 It is less clear, however, as to the level with which the CQFW is sustainably embedded within the FE sector. Some FE college representatives noted that, while individual colleges and the wider sector were initially receptive to the CQFW, it was now not being used as frequently in strategic decision making and has, as one representative put it, '*drifted off the agenda*'. It was reported that where specific training projects had been funded by the Welsh Government there was more awareness however these projects have largely lacked sustainability and were seen as a 'piecemeal' rather than a sector-wide approach.

6.20 Strategic stakeholders with an overview of the FE sector and several FE College representatives themselves considered that the main potential reason for this lack of embedding was that colleges', learners' and employers' current focus is on full qualifications. They noted that the delivery of 'bite size' modules of learning was more prevalent in the adult and continuing learning and work based learning sectors, which are engaged with the QALL pillar to a much stronger degree. These issues are further outlined in the barriers to engagement in section 8 which also reports on issues regarding bureaucracy and the perceived complexities of using the CQFW.

*There is a move towards full types of qualifications and a decrease in flexibility. It's now easier for government and providers and awarding organisations to fund nice, coherent chunks of learning, however, are they getting the right people onto the right courses? It should be about progressing learners at the end of the day.*

Adult and community learning stakeholder

### **Other stakeholder views**

6.21 For other stakeholders within the education and employment sectors their use of, and engagement with, the CQFW depended on their organisational needs and roles. As outlined in the previous section the main perceptions of roles for the CQFW were as an information and guidance tool regarding levels and values of qualifications, and as an enabling tool to facilitate progression and lifelong learning opportunities. This largely focused around stakeholders using the CQFW to ascertain the levels and values of certain qualifications, mapping potential progression routes, and assisting in the design and development of qualifications to meet the specific learning needs of employees and learners.

6.22 One local authority representative explained the CQFW was useful as a tool to understand potential career progression opportunities for learners. Another local authority reported it used the CQFW in relation to adult and community learning, using it with employers to ensure the right

training is provided in the area to meet local needs. An international stakeholder reported making use of the CQFW to understand the qualifications system in Wales and also to compare the CQFW with forty other qualifications frameworks across the European Union.

6.23 One Sector Skills Council (SSC) outlined that it has helped them work with employers in Wales, as they need to recruit across the UK and thus need to know how qualifications fit into the Welsh system and vice versa. Another SSC reported that specific CQFW-related funding for companies had led to delivery of additional training and recognised training procedures and qualifications. The small number of employers who contributed to the evaluation reported less direct contact with the CQFW. One outlined that they employ external training providers who use the CQFW to source qualifications to meet their skills requirements. Another reported using the fan diagram when engaging with providers about what they want a qualification to allow staff to achieve.

6.24 For those awarding organisations (AO) with a strong focus on Wales the CQFW was seen as an essential tool; however, among those with a more UK wide focus the QCF and NQF were, perhaps unsurprisingly, the main tools for both understanding and offering qualifications. For example, for one awarding organisation working closely with the QALL Pillar, the CQFW's level descriptors are an intrinsic part of the units they design, deliver and award. Another AO had worked closely with the Welsh Government on a range of specific projects. Other UK-wide based awarding organisations reported that they use QCF and NQF for designing, developing and offering qualifications in Wales, rather than the CQFW. They nevertheless acknowledged the compatibility of the CQFW with other UK frameworks and its role in ensuring comparability and progression.

*Just because we don't use the CQFW it doesn't mean it is not doing its job. If its purpose is to be a meta-framework, then it is fulfilling its purpose, but it doesn't do any more than that.*

Awarding organisation

6.25 Welsh Government stakeholders suggested that the CQFW is embedded at certain levels of Government, although one representative considered there is a 'perception problem' with it across some divisions of DfES and other departments. Some of these stakeholders noted that some Welsh Government training has been accredited and certified through CQFW regulatory processes but this has been a 'piecemeal approach' and there has been little mainstreaming of it. For some, the CQFW's internal development across Government has been hampered by frequent ministerial change and a lack of engagement from senior staff across some departments.

### **Awareness and use of the fan and pillar diagram**

6.26 Stakeholders also reported on their use of the fan and pillars diagram as part of their use of the CQFW as an information and enabling tool. The vast majority of stakeholders were aware of the fan diagram, had positive views on it, and used it when necessary, many regularly. For them the fan diagram was a very useful tool, with a clear logical structure to indicate value, levels, comparability and progression routes and opportunities as well as bringing all FHE qualifications into one place. Some stakeholders also pointed to its clarity in terms of terminology and providing an overview of the Welsh system that can be used to explain at a wider UK and international level.

*The fan diagram is a really good way of demonstrating where vocational training will place you and how that compares with academic qualifications.*

Sector Skills Council

6.27 There was less detailed understanding of the pillar diagram, and more sporadic use of it. Some respondents, particularly those outside the HE and ACL sectors, were unaware of it or only had a partial knowledge of it and it was considered to be less accessible and more complicated than the fan diagram. One stakeholder outlined that the pillar diagram was more of a 'network of learning' and useful for careers advisors and those

working in adult learning. Nevertheless the pillars were outlined as useful for some in the HE sector, particularly when working with the ACL and voluntary sectors and the QALL pillar.



## **7 Benefits of the CQFW**

### **Recognition of informal learning**

7.1 There was cross-sector agreement that one of the main benefits of the CQFW was that it allowed for greater recognition of prior and informal learning through the QALL pillar. This was thought to have a particularly important impact on disadvantaged learner groups with low levels of education, such as the homeless, offenders and adult learners engaged in adult and community learning programmes. For groups such as these who have ‘dropped out’ of the education system, recognition of achievement is highly valued, and the CQFW was considered to assist in providing and mapping this recognition while allowing learners to progress from informal and bite-sized learning to more formal qualifications, thus raising aspirations.

*It has enabled providers to develop much more innovative curriculum offers for non-traditional groups e.g. NEETs, Community Education. The ideas of units of learning are still a very useful addition to the mainstream curriculum.*

FE Sector Stakeholder

7.2 Some of these issues are further illustrated in Case Studies 1 and 5 (Refugee Inclusion Strategy Action Plan and Clwyd Alun Housing Association) in Appendix 1 of this report.

### **Common currency**

7.3 The principles of credit - supported by the CQFW - were often referred to by stakeholders as a ‘common currency’ that has made it easier to articulate and communicate achievement across sectors, levels and geographical areas. As noted in the previous section, higher education providers in particular found that level descriptors helped them work more effectively with employers, and to map credit and awarding to HE and FE level requirements, including making the link to the FHEQ.

Additionally, they reported that common descriptors have enabled them to be more accurate and explicit in their programme descriptions, which has been important for programme approval.

- 7.4 The adoption of the principles of credit by higher education institutions was seen by stakeholders within the HE sector in Wales to have prompted a consistent approach whereby all universities offered comparable qualifications on a universally accepted model. Commonly agreed level descriptors were considered particularly useful in instances where there were different awarding organisations, regulators or operating frameworks. In these situations the common currency of the CQFW was felt to promote consistency and therefore trust between all stakeholders.

*The CQFW does give standards, commonality, and acceptance. This is what we expect it do re: levels. It helps with the management of programmes, it keeps them on track and in line with standardisation and gives clarity to the landscape in Wales. It links to levels, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, they're all key aspects of it.*

HE sector Stakeholder

### **Benchmarking and mapping**

- 7.5 By aligning learning to CQFW level descriptors, the Framework was perceived by some stakeholders to 'level the playing field' and provide a benchmark for all learning. For many stakeholders across sectors the CQFW allows learners to clearly understand what their qualifications are worth and what learning and progression pathways they could take. They considered that this process has the potential to enhance engagement with learning and perceptions of its value, again linking to wider Welsh Government strategies. In addition to helping learners, various sector stakeholders felt that the CQFW was contributing to greater understanding of the size and quality-assured value of credits and qualifications.

## **Flexibility**

- 7.6 A broad range of stakeholders appreciated the flexibility that the CQFW facilitates. These included representatives from Awarding Bodies, Sector Skills Councils, Training providers and third sector organisations. Specific examples include the flexibility allowed for in a learning journey, as new units can be accredited and introduced and learners could choose from a wide variety of non-traditional learning routes. The CQFW was considered to help employers and employees avoid duplication of training by enabling them to calibrate knowledge and achievements already acquired and build on this through the recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- 7.7 Several stakeholders, including employers and Sector Skills Councils who have engaged in the CQFW, pointed to the learning and economic benefits of using the CQFW as a tool to avoid repetition of learning. It was noted that this was particularly useful in sectors with a very mobile workforce where there was value in not having to repeat learning, such as the health sector, the creative and cultural industries and prison services.
- 7.8 Some of these issues are further illustrated in the review of literature in Section 4 and Case Study 3 (Betsi Cadwalader University Local Health Board, Using the CQFW project in NHS Wales) in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 7.9 While sector specific examples of good practice were noted, however, at a wider strategic level doubts were expressed about levels of employer engagement with RPL. This is further examined in section in 8.6

## **Widening scope of providers and provision**

- 7.10 The opportunity to add new units to the QALL pillar of the CQFW was considered by several AO's and Sector Skills Councils, Welsh Government officials, third sector representatives, and local authority representatives to have opened up the framework to recognise a wider range of provision, enabling providers to develop innovative curriculum offers for non-traditional groups of learners, such as those not in education, employment or training (NEET). Stakeholders demonstrated

awareness of sectors or industries with traditionally weaker links to recognised education and training provision such as the cleaning industry, estate agents, housing associations, libraries and family learning initiatives that had used the CQFW to recognise and unitise learning.

*The QALL pillar has been particularly valuable and provides rigour/quality assurance to previous learning and ensures that the outcomes are met. This has enabled us to develop relevant and bespoke learning opportunities, and this has been a particular benefit for learners.*

Adult and community learning Stakeholder

7.11 In terms of the Adult and Community Learning sector several third sector organisations, FE college representatives and sector skills councils plus an Awarding Body considered that development work has encouraged a broader range of organisations to use the CQFW positively and work with learners at the margins of society. Agored Cymru are currently working with SSCs (under the Sector Priorities Fund Pilots)<sup>7</sup> to encourage formal recognition and consistency across sectors using it. It has also been used in particular projects as part of a roll out to encourage different groups to use QALL to support their training including some of the sectors and industries outlined above. Sector Skills Councils also noted that some employers had used the CQFW to establish recognised training procedures and qualifications, rather than relying on in house training modules.

7.12 Some of these issues are further illustrated in the literature review in Section 4 and in Case Study 3 (Driver Certificate of Professional Competence) and Case Study 5 (Clwyd Alun Housing Association) in Appendix 1 of this report.

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<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/allsectorpolicies/europeansocialfund/projects/spfp/?lang=en>

## Transferability outside Wales

7.13 Stakeholders who operate at a UK-level generally had more awareness of the CQFW's links to other UK and international frameworks. All HE providers stressed the importance of their respective institutions operating in an international market place, and explained that mobility was an essential aspect of Higher Education. Stakeholders working at a UK level including awarding organisations representative bodies, FHE representatives, and regulatory bodies considered that the CQFW dovetails satisfactorily with the other qualifications frameworks in the UK. They noted similarities such as the 'overarching scope' and 'commonality between systems' and 'relationships designed to overcome difference through the common articulation of levels.'

7.14 There was some concern expressed, however, that ongoing divergence between the Welsh and English education systems may impact upon mobility, clarity, progression and quality assurance. Several stakeholders working at a UK level noted Ofqual's ongoing review of the QCF which may have implications for the future development of the CQFW. One stakeholder considered this process is focusing on '*the quality of the qualification rather than the system devoted to common outcomes.*' Ongoing flexibility to deal with the changing qualifications landscapes in Wales and England was therefore considered essential by awarding organisations.

*A concern for members is any possible divergence of the English and Welsh systems following the Richard review.<sup>8</sup> This could have implications around how the CQFW will relate and portability of qualifications. UK-wide companies in particular may find this challenging given the need for internal consistency.*

Awarding organisation representative

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.schoolforstartups.co.uk/richard-review/richard-review-summary.pdf>

7.15 While noting the benefits of this flexibility there was views from across the education sector that divergence also presented an opportunity to use the CQFW as a central tool in redefining the qualifications landscape in Wales. This issue is further explored in section 9.

*England is moving away from credit but there's still an appetite for it in Wales. CQFW gives more consistency and control over lifelong learning routes through QALL and links to the Welsh Government's lifelong learning policies.*

Welsh Government official

7.16 In terms of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), stakeholders who had engaged including representatives from FHE, awarding organisations and Government officials considered that it shares the same vision and goals as the CQFW. In contrast to the CQFW, however, it promotes a strong partnership model which allows all key stakeholders to be engaged. One stakeholder noted that it also had strong employer engagement through its use for job specifications and descriptions. It was noted that the SCQF also has strong quality assurance embedded in its work and role, a separate credit rating service and a strong secretariat to support all its activities. As one government stakeholder put it, *'In Scotland it's a live framework, it's being reviewed and promoted constantly'*.

7.17

## **8 Weaknesses of the CQFW**

### **Lack of awareness, understanding and engagement**

8.1 The majority of stakeholders from across all sectors considered, despite the aims and ambitions of the CQFW, it was not being used in practice as much as had been hoped. Those with a strategic overview of the sector noted that although there were some examples of sector specific projects that had made good use of the CQFW, the concept had not taken off on a wider scale. Despite work carried out by the Welsh Government on engagement with the CQFW, there was a cross-sector view that the framework had not sufficiently permeated the consciousness of the public, employers and learners.

*It's a really good idea, but it just hasn't worked in practice.*

Sector Skills Council

8.2 According to stakeholders factors contributing to this lack of awareness and engagement included the complexities of language, and guidance associated with the CQFW. For some stakeholders guidance on QALL and RPL was perceived to have been written with awarding organisations in mind, as the language was too complicated for employers, independent training providers and learners. Stakeholders from all sectors felt that the language used in CQFW-related documentation was familiar to those who worked in the education sector, but learners, parents, employers and even some practitioners would not understand and therefore engage with it well.

*The slow uptake and lack of embedding in some sectors is down the lack of understanding of the guidance documents which are too complex.*

Adult and community learning stakeholder

### **Administrative burdens**

- 8.3 Similarly, high levels of bureaucracy linked to perceived amounts of paperwork and decision making processes surrounding recognition was considered difficult to navigate and therefore off-putting to many outside the education sector. Stakeholders in particular highlighted the need for the CQFW to be more user-friendly to learners in the workplace. The framework was thought currently to be aimed more at learners in educational institutions, whereas employees needed to understand more clearly how gaining credits could help them in their career progression, with more information on how to study, where they can study and what options are open to them.
- 8.4 Some of these issues are further illustrated in the literature review in Section 4 and Case Study 4 (Local Government CQFW Project) in Appendix 1 of this report.

### **Barriers to employer engagement**

- 8.5 At a strategic level stakeholders considered that too few employers appear to be engaged with the CQFW – or are even aware of it. It was noted that the annual Employer Skills Survey doesn't make reference to the CQFW and that it was '*not on the radar*' for most employers. Reasons outlined by stakeholders for this lack of engagement included resources and time required to engage and the previously mentioned complexities of doing so. It was also noted by some SSCs that the QCF is the dominant framework in terms of UK-based employers and these employers may often not be prepared to invest in something that is potentially only going to apply in Wales. As one stakeholder put it, '*no one is chasing the CQFW.*'

*There have to be incentives for companies and assistance to take them through the process, it's not easy. It's finance versus training. In principle companies want it but they are not buying into it for these reasons. It takes a lot of time to capture training and qualifications and often they move onto the next problem.*

Sector Skills Council



*We struggled to get employers to engage. The key issue was a lack of funding; this is what prevented them from engaging with the project, as it meant that they would be losing money if they undertook the work.*

Sector Skills Council

### **Recognition of prior learning**

8.6 Stakeholders including employers, SSCs and FE sector organisations highlighted that mapping and documenting RPL could be an onerous and complicated task for providers compared to the perceived benefits of engagement. For them, the complex approach to assessing experiential learning discouraged employers, providers and awarding organisations to engage with it and some stakeholders pointed to the ‘financial disincentives’ of promoting flexible learning. At a more strategic level stakeholders commented that credit accumulation and transfer currently means little in ‘the collective consciousness of learners in Wales’, who are focused on full qualifications rather than credits.

*Bite size credit hasn't really happened in the way it was expected to, full qualifications are what learners and employers want at the moment – it's linked to our learning programmes, the core of them is the main qualification. RPL is struggling to be recognised.*

FE College

*It's a huge job for qualifications providers to map and document RPL, it's easier for them to say 'just do the course again!' Not many centres have developed expertise in the tools of the CQFW, and there has been a reluctance to engage on their part too.*

FE sector strategic stakeholder

### **Other barriers**

8.7 There were also some stakeholder views that the CQFW implied a parity of all qualifications on a particular level that did not exist in reality. One respondent argued that academic and vocational qualifications could not

be equated as, for example, NVQ Level 4 does not include the level of critical and academic thinking that is required for the equivalent academic qualification. The disparity of qualifications within a single level was also perceived to mistakenly imply that learners can progress seamlessly from one level to the next. Those with an overview of the sector considered that the articulation between the three pillars / sectors doesn't always function, and that this lack of clarity has confused and frustrated some employers and learners.

### **Lack of strategic investment from the Welsh Government**

- 8.8 Stakeholders from across the education and employment sector also raised doubts regarding the current strategic investment being placed on the CQFW by the Welsh Government. It was noted by several with a strategic overview of the sector that the Welsh Government's recent policy statement on skills<sup>9</sup> doesn't place much focus on the CQFW or its potential role in the new Welsh qualifications landscape. Several also pointed out that it was also not prominent in the findings and focus of the Review of Qualifications.<sup>10</sup>
- 8.9 Stakeholders also noted the disbanding of the Credit Common Accord Forum (CCAF) which involved a wide range of key stakeholders and '*kept credit high on the agenda*'. It was felt that this has further impacted on the CQFW's profile and recognition. There was thus some confusion as to how new funding and planning and regulatory models would integrate the CQFW, if at all.

*It wasn't mentioned at all in the final Review of Qualifications report so I am unsure what its value is and whether the Welsh Government values it. It doesn't seem to be a highly prized product so where do they want to take it? Perhaps there are better ways in which the Welsh Government could exploit it given that it links to policy imperatives*

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<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government (January 2014), *Policy statement on skills*  
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/140129-policy-statement-on-skills-en.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government (November 2012), *Review of Qualifications for 14-19 year olds in Wales*  
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/121127reviewofqualificationsen.pdf>

*relating to social justice and the entitlement of learners to receive recognition.*

Awarding organisation

## 9 Future role of the CQFW

### Continuation of the CQFW

9.1 A large majority of stakeholders from across all sectors supported the continuation of the CQFW. For these stakeholders, the CQFW's most essential roles are as a single unifying framework for comparison and progression and to illustrate the value and fit of qualifications through a mapping of the qualifications landscape in Wales. There was thus strong support that the CQFW should be embedded at the heart of the ongoing design and delivery of qualifications while continuing to be flexible to change and relevant to the changing needs of individual learners, education and training stakeholders, employers and the wider Welsh economy.

*The CQFW is still valid, as in what it can facilitate – it's an enabling tool. If it's not being used to its full effect at the moment that doesn't necessarily mean that it's not a useful tool.*

Adult and community learning stakeholder

*Education is a devolved area – what credence would there be in applying other countries' frameworks rather than our own? What credibility would our education system have without one? In terms of accreditation, approval, validation, it's an essential part of the Welsh education landscape.*

HE stakeholder

9.2 For supporters of continuation the CQFW is also a facilitator, and a potential lever for reform. Current, and potential ongoing divergence, between the Welsh and English education systems was mentioned by a broad range of stakeholders from across the education and employment sectors as an opportunity to use the CQFW to effectively articulate the qualifications landscape in Wales as its identity and education system become more distinct.

- 9.3 One stakeholder working at an international level noted NCFs take time to gain currency and that this is often reflected in the limited amount of use and understanding regarding frameworks when they initially develop. This viewpoint is reflected in the examples of international QCFs outlined in section 5 and the resultant strategies in some countries towards developing a more critical mass in terms of use and awareness.

#### **Addressing issues regarding role and profile**

- 9.4 While there was strong agreement that abandoning the CQFW or 'letting it wither' would be a retrograde step it was equally acknowledged that there were issues regarding its current role, profile, governance and implementation as reported in the previous section. For stakeholders from all sectors these issues were felt to limit the CQFW's potential for impact and use across all sectors in Wales. It was noted by many cross-sector stakeholders that there are other current priorities in the education sector and no particular incentives for take-up amongst sectors where it is currently less used e.g. with employers, sector skills councils and awarding bodies.

*Everybody talked about it when it was launched so maybe it's time for a refresh and a focus on integrating employability skills and how it can be better linked to the world of work so that employers can look at it – and use it – with confidence. It is fit for purpose however and the Welsh Government need to take it out of its comfort zone.*

Sector Skills Council

- 9.5 Supporters for the continuation of the CQFW considered that a more progressive and sustained use of the Framework had to be found. It was therefore suggested that there should be significantly more focus on raising its profile by the Welsh Government allied to sustainable funding to support this process. With this strategic and financial investment it was considered that the CQFW could be part of the new landscape in Wales based on high quality, rigorous assessment, and application of Welsh 14-19 qualifications.

## **Proposals to enhance impact and engagement with CQFW**

9.6 There was strong support for the retention of the CQFW from stakeholders across the education and employment sectors. Stakeholders outlined additional suggestions to enhance its roles, governance and delivery to support this retention and address the challenges outlined above, and in the previous section. For almost all stakeholders the design and content of the CQFW was largely satisfactory and its flexibility and adaptability was seen as a key current strength and something to build on. Stakeholders did, however, consider that the CQFW could play a more strategic role and be part of the process of recognising ongoing changes to learning and qualifications in Wales.

*The CQFW is not currently sufficiently reflective of what Welsh education policy is aiming for. It's not distinct enough from the QCF. Stakeholders don't use it enough and therefore it can't become more a policy driver e.g. for the validation of formal learning.*

International stakeholder

9.7 Suggestions for improvement from those interviewed included that the CQFW should play a greater role as an information tool, providing clearer and more detailed information on the qualifications landscape in Wales as divergence gathers pace. It was also suggested that it can play more of a strategic role as a tool to avoid duplication of learning. It could also support the design and building of new qualifications, again, particularly relating to any Wales-only designed qualifications. As part of this process some stakeholders suggested that National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Welsh Baccalaureate should be brought into it to further reflect ongoing changes in the Welsh system and enhance its potential for use.

9.8 To potentially deliver a broader, flexible and more central role for the CQFW some suggestions for changes to governance were proposed. Stakeholders with a strategic overview of the sector felt that any new partnership for governance has to be broad-based in order to promote

embedding at all levels. These stakeholders – and several others from sectors such as HE, FE and ACL – considered that the Welsh Government should treat the CQFW as a flagship policy and invest in it and, as such, a high-level approach was therefore essential. There were also suggestions for better alignment with other Welsh Government policy areas to lead to greater mainstreaming of the CQFW.

*It can't be outside government in Wales but it shouldn't be a tool of government either. It has to be broad based yet embedded – FE, HE, Community Learning. Other stakeholders from the employment sector should be represented too. There has to be a higher profile for it.*

HE stakeholder

9.9 For some stakeholders, providing views on the governance and monitoring of the framework was outside their current experience and role. The majority view of those who did feel qualified to report was that the CQFW should remain in the Welsh Government. It was noted that the Welsh Government affects all parts of the education and learning sector in Wales and the CQFW's biggest potential strength is that it can be implemented across the education sector in Wales as a whole.

9.10 While it was generally considered that the Welsh Government should retain control of the CQFW, it was suggested that new governance arrangements should be broadened to involve HEFCW, Careers Wales and Qualifications Wales and other stakeholders such as employers' representatives. Some stakeholders indicated the need for more enhanced joint-ownership of the CQFW, ensuring that it is seen as a live framework with its remit and coverage the subject of regular review.

*Employers have to have a bigger stake in it, there has to be pan-sector engagement and approval. Employers are end users for qualifications, they therefore have to be at the centre. If it's only focused on suppliers and providers they'll focus on its commercial value rather than the demands and needs of users.*

Sector Skills Council

- 9.11 The formation of a strategic and operational group along the lines of the Credit Common Accord Forum was therefore considered essential to deliver this broad based approach to governance. No detailed responses were provided as to what the potential roles of this Forum could entail. However, several respondents noted the usefulness of the previous CCAF in ensuring ongoing stakeholder buy-in and awareness of the CQFW, and its role in providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to have a say in its implementation.
- 9.12 Several stakeholders outlined the potential for CQFW to be closely linked to the formation of Qualifications Wales to ensure greater use of CQFW in partnership with other key stakeholders. Stakeholders from the HE and ACL sector noted, however, that the primary roles of Qualifications Wales will be focused on the regulation and awarding of general qualifications, and that this could potentially limit its linking role to the CQFW which embraces all formal and non-formal learning in Wales.
- 9.13 There was some support for more clear alignment and articulation of the links to the EQF, particularly in the context of divergence from England. Strategic stakeholders considered that it is currently a central reference point for alignment. This was supported by views from international stakeholders that Wales should become a stronger part of the EQF advisory group to enhance the value of the CQFW. The current work of Colegau Cymru, which is engaging with the EQF on behalf of the Welsh Government<sup>11</sup>, was noted and it was suggested that they can be a part of this process.
- 9.14 A more holistic approach was thus considered to be needed to ensure ongoing comparison and equivalence of the CQFW with the EQF. This process was linked to the mobility of learners and workers, international vocational education and training (VET), benchmarking, relevance and Wales' role and standing in a global education market place. It was also

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk/en-GB/creditqualifications-18.aspx?showsignin=1>



noted by stakeholders in the adult and community learning sector that the EU is putting systems in place to recognise informal and non-formal learning and the CQFW can link directly to this through the QALL pillar.

## Appendix 1: Case Studies

### Case study 1: Refugee Inclusion Strategy Action Plan, 2013

#### Background

The Welsh Government's Refugee Inclusion Strategy Action Plan<sup>12</sup> outlines its commitment to supporting refugees to be able to make a meaningful contribution to communities in Wales. Extending education and training opportunities feature prominently in the Action Plan, originally published in 2008, and one action refers to '[promoting] awareness of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales amongst organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers.'

#### Activity

The Welsh Government has, as part of its implementation strategy for the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales, produced communication materials for Young Learners, Adult Learners, Employers and Careers Advice and Guidance practitioners and has contracted with partner organisations to raise awareness. It has worked with the Welsh Refugee Council to raise awareness of the CQFW amongst the organisations who work with and advise refugee and asylum seekers in Wales.

The Welsh Refugee Council has worked with the Welsh Government to demonstrate how the CQFW could be used to recognise the prior learning of new arrivals to Wales, as part of a UK recognised qualification. A series of dissemination events has raised awareness of the CQFW with organisations delivering frontline advice, ESOL and vocational training to refugees, asylum seekers and migrant Workers across Wales.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/communitycohesion/publications/refugeeactionplan/?lang=en>

The WRC has produced a leaflet on the benefits of CQFW for new arrivals to Wales, which are available online in 8 languages for advisers to download. The WRC has also completed a series of workshops on the CQFW and its benefits for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. With the National Training Federation for Wales, A4E, Acorn and TSW the WRC has worked on a pilot to recognise the prior learning of refugees.

### **Progress and outcomes**

Two refugees have now successfully completed their training and accreditation of prior learning from their country of origin. A further 4 are due to undertake this process.

### **What happens next?**

DfES will examine the findings of DPIA and WRC's accreditation of prior learning project to ascertain whether it would be viable to expand this into a sustainable Recognition of Prior Learning service for refugees in Wales who are currently unable to access other forms of training or employment. This would provide people with evidence of employability skills in a short and low cost time period.

## **Case study 2: Driver Certificate of Professional Competence, Skills for Logistics 2013**

### **Background**

The Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) which took place in 2013 was a project that enabled bus, coach and lorry drivers to gain national recognition through CQFW for the knowledge they gained through mandatory training. Discussion with employers and drivers in Wales showed a desire to have formal recognition within qualification frameworks for this training; to add value to the driver's periodic training experience and support the industry goal of raising levels of self-esteem and professionalism in the sector. The project developed nine CQFW units mapped against the most popular Periodic Training subjects currently offered by employers and training organisations in Wales.

### **Progress and outcomes**

The beneficial outcomes of the project included that employees gained national recognition of the knowledge they had gained in their periodic training. This was significant because many drivers had not engaged in any form of training for some time and may have left school with few academic qualifications. The recognition of the training via CQFW credit reinforced the status and value of the training programmes drivers were following and helped to develop their confidence to undertake further training and qualifications. Further, employers believe that linking periodic training to recognised qualifications would raise the profile and status of employment in the sector and add value that enhances the Driver CPC periodic training offer in Wales. Employers also reap the reward of up-skilled and motivated drivers, and the project contributed to the industry ambition to raise the professional status of the 5,200 professional bus/coach drivers and around 13,100 Large Goods Vehicle drivers in Wales.

### **Case study 3: Betsi Cadwalader University Local Health Board, Using the CQFW project in NHS Wales (Mental Health and Learning Disabilities), 2013**

#### **Background**

The Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Clinical Programme Group (CPG) in North Wales undertook a project to look at the development of qualifications and credits to support a competency based approach to developing the workforce. Traditional educational programmes, written and delivered by staff from Further and Higher Education were seen within the CPG as being too generic and not meeting specific clinical needs, while in-service training was sporadic and variable in its quality. The CPG therefore needed very specific education and training in a timely manner. The project developed 9 new training units aligned to the workforce modernisation agenda in NHS Wales.

#### **Progress and outcomes**

The project outputs evidenced positive impacts of quality assured lifelong learning, specifically:

- The project empowered clinicians working in BCU to identify and develop accredited training packages and units. This empowerment provided an enthusiasm and commitment to new ways of identifying and delivering education and training in North Wales
- Quality assured in-service training units are now linked to service and clinician need in BCU providing a 'transactional education' process and transferrable skills. This means theory is quickly implemented into practical application, which in turn proves beneficial for the quality of care given to patients and ultimately patient outcomes.
- Units that were developed and delivered to meet a clearly defined clinical role were more successful than those aimed at a more generic skilling of staff

- The project has broken down barriers between education and service and there is evidence of cultural change amongst staff in relation to CQFW training needs. Using the educational approach established in the project, it was decided that a competency based approach to developing programmes across all CQFW levels would be undertaken in BCU in line with NHS Wales's service modernisation agenda. New roles would link with workforce planning to ensure a re-designed workforce is produced.

*'.....deciding and defining education by clinicians that work in the area is great and I think that is a really good principle. I don't think we do it often enough. What this does is it defines very clearly what we expect people to be educated to and provides a flexible and transferable process'*

**Unit Leader, BCU Local Health Board, North Wales**

#### **Case study 4: Local Government CQFW Project, 2013**

##### **Background**

The development of in-house learning in local authorities in Wales has traditionally been managed locally and independently of one another. Learning is often tailor-made to meet organisational needs within each authority, and there are still many learning programmes that are not accredited or recognised externally.

##### **Activity**

The CQFW project provided an opportunity to use the accreditation of quality assured learning to both recognise in-house learning provision through an established Welsh Government framework and support increased collaboration between local authorities, utilising the CQFW as a universal platform by which learning programmes can be shared between authorities in

the regions, across local government and potentially the wider public sector. The WLGA invited local authorities to submit 'expressions of interest' for collaborative projects that would accredit in-house learning for use by local government across the region or nationally. Accredited units were submitted with final reports/evaluations for each work programme at the end of March 2013.

### **Progress and outcomes**

Without exception all of those involved in delivering the project have developed a greater understanding of the CQFW, the differences between awarding organisations and the accreditation of learning within the QALL pillar. It has increased the knowledge, expertise and therefore the capacity within local government to take forward future activity in this area. This increased capacity provides the opportunity to share expertise more widely, with lead authorities involved in the CQFW project able to transfer this knowledge and expertise within regional networks. In the South West region this has already taken place, with Neath Port Talbot County Council providing support and guidance to colleagues in the City and County of Swansea Council around the accreditation of in-house learning.

Working together has created greater awareness of the range of learning available across local authorities. This greater awareness and the wider availability of recognised in-house learning via the CQFW can support sharing and avoid duplication.

### **Barriers and areas for improvement and suggestions for change**

The project highlighted that developing and accrediting learning programmes with a broader range of partners and different organisational priorities to satisfy is harder and more time consuming to achieve, due to the substantial investment in time required to complete the task. The North Wales work programme had to be withdrawn as it was not possible to complete accreditation within the timeframe of the project. This was due to the

difficulties in gaining time and resource commitments from partners, coupled with the complexities of co-designing and developing programmes for use across six local authorities.

The work on the project highlighted a lack of good information for employers. It is assumed that those developing in-house programmes understand the publicly funded learning infrastructure, differences in accreditation options provided by the awarding organisations, the process for accreditation via the CQFW and the CQFW itself in terms of the regulated and QALL pillars. A significant amount of time and effort was wasted at the outset trying to understand all of the above aspects, which was further confused by a lack of clarity from some awarding organisations

A lack of detailed knowledge around the CQFW and also the process to accredit in-house learning via the QALL pillar is further hampered by the inconsistency, range of options and approaches from different awarding organisations. The experiences of local authorities throughout the project would suggest that the format and structure used when designing in-house programmes is different to that of awarding organisations and a significant amount of time was required to develop units to meet their expectations and demands.

Employers would benefit from a clear process and if possible a common approach to the CQFW QALL accreditation process by awarding organisations that is user friendly, considers employer needs and guides employers through the process. Agored was the only awarding organisation that appeared to have a clear process in place to support accreditation that was easily accessible, user friendly and had a clear pricing structure.

More diversity is needed in the range of awarding organisations actively supporting accreditation through the CQFW QALL pillar, with better knowledge and support for employers. A great deal of time was wasted at the outset by local authorities trying to engage with awarding organisations, many



of whom they already had an established relationship with, around the accreditation of their in-house learning via the CQFW QALL pillar.

Not all of the awarding organisations authorised and able to accredit learning via the CQFW fully understand the QALL pillar, are active in this area or have a process for accrediting learning via this mechanism. Conflicting information was being provided and a number of delays were experienced, not least in rewriting or redefining units to meet changing demands from different awarding organisations as it became clear that some did not have a clear process or could offer accreditation via the QALL pillar.

These issues put the successful delivery of many of the work programmes at risk, more time was required than originally anticipated as a result to complete the work and conflicting demands within local authorities put significant pressure on internal resources. Ultimately it increased costs as additional resources were required by employers to complete the project within agreed timeframes.

## **Conclusions**

The process of accreditation has usefully raised awareness of some of the programmes already available on the CQFW, both in terms of regulated qualifications and the QALL pillar. Local authorities undertook a more rigorous assessment of their original ideas to ensure their suitability for accreditation, and in doing so established that there are some existing accredited programmes that would meet the needs originally identified. It would be useful for employers to be able to readily access a list of accredited learning available via the CQFW, in terms of both regulated and quality assured lifelong learning. Greater awareness of the options available might avoid unnecessary duplication when developing in-house programmes and also better engage employers in the publicly funding learning infrastructure on which they sometimes rely, strengthening relationships with Sector Skills Councils, Standard Setting bodies, awarding organisations and others

## **Case study 5: Clwyd Alun Housing Association, 2013**

### **Background**

Clwyd Alyn Housing Association provides supported accommodation for 16 – 25 year old single, vulnerable and homeless people, across the 4 counties of North Wales and in 8 of the projects deliver our ODEL (Opening Doors, Enhancing Lives) Learning and Training Programme. The programme is made up from Agored QALL units mainly from Sector 14 (preparation for life and work) and each of the units are chosen around the support and life skills provided in each project.

The reason for setting up this programme was to encourage and motivate clients (most of which are NEET with many being excluded from education) to engage in a safe, comfortable and familiar environment. The units are delivered in small groups or one to one if needed.

### **Progress and outcomes**

The individual units provide bite sized pieces of learning which enable clients to start achieving, and the units are considered as the building blocks to future development. Some learners from the programme delivered in 2013 progressed to further CQFW / QCF qualifications in 2014 and employment positions following participation in the course and based on their ODEL/Agored Cymru certificates.

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## **Appendix 3: List of contributors**

### **Interview respondents**

Aberystwyth University  
Agored Cymru  
Airbus  
ATL  
Bangor University  
Cardiff and Vale College  
Cardiff University  
Careers Wales  
Cedefop  
Ceredigion County Council  
City and Guilds  
Cogent SSC Ltd  
Coleg Cambria  
Coleg Llandrillo  
Colegau Cymru  
Construction Skills  
Consultant  
Creative and Cultural Skills  
Denbighshire County Council  
Duke of Edinburgh Award  
DWP  
Eliesha Training  
Estyn  
Federation of Awarding Bodies  
Federation of Small Businesses Wales  
FSB Wales  
Glyndŵr University  
Gwynedd Council  
HEFCW  
HEFCW  
HEFCW  
JCQ  
Maritime Skills Alliance  
Menter Môn  
Merthyr Tydfil College  
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council  
National Training Federation Wales  
Newport Council  
NIACE Dysgu Cymru  
Ofqual  
Open University  
Pearson (Edexcel)  
Pembrokeshire College

Powys County Council  
QAA  
Skills Active  
SQCF  
SSE  
Swansea Council  
Swansea University  
Torfaen County Borough Council  
University of South Wales  
University of Wales  
WCVA  
Welsh Government  
WJEC  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
YMCA

### **Written responses**

Bridgend Engine Plant  
Coleg y Cymoedd  
iNet Wales  
Institute of the Motor Industry  
Skills for Justice

### **Project Steering Group**

Agored Cymru  
Careers Wales  
HEFCW  
Qualifications and Regulation Division, Welsh Government  
Social Research and Information Division, Welsh Government



## **Appendix 4: Interview proforma for stakeholder interviews**

### **Evaluation of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales**

#### **Interview guide**

Arad Research has been commissioned to evaluate the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). The aim of the evaluation is to undertake an evaluation of the CQFW and make recommendations for any future national qualifications framework.

As part of the evaluation of the CQFW, Arad will collect the views of a broad range of stakeholders on the following:

- The impact of the CQFW to date;
- The need for the CQFW to continue; and
- Features of the design and delivery of any future CQFW.

This document sets out the broad questions to be asked, along with the supplementary questions that will be used to focus on particular topics.

For background information on the CQFW and its main goals please refer to the accompanying information sheet enclosed in an annex along with the fan and pillar diagrams.

Theme	General questions	Supplementary questions	Background information/ prompts
	1. What do you understand to be the role of the CQFW?		<p>The five key goals of the CQFW:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enabling everyone to develop and maintain essential skills</li> <li>• encouraging people to become lifelong learners</li> <li>• exploiting the knowledge in businesses and educational institutions</li> <li>• encouraging business and workers to gain new skills</li> <li>• helping people within their communities to develop new skills.</li> </ul>
	2. How does your organisation make use of the CQFW?	Do you find the fan and pillar diagrams helpful in your work? If not, why not?	<p>This section will also explore use of the CQFW and could be related to aspects such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The diagrams, level descriptors, credit values and the specific uses that organisations have for the CQFW e.g. as a communication tool (general information and guidance; to explain the qualifications landscape and the pathways within it; as part of advice on course admission, selection and progression routes; as part of guidance for employees on a company's CPD programme; using units in QALL to accredit learning activities)</li> <li>• as a basis for specific decision-making e.g. as a quality criterion for approval of new teaching material, courses, qualifications, publications; as the basis for funding for learning programmes; as a criterion for decisions on admissions, credit transfer/advanced standing; for accreditation of prior or informal learning; for companies, as a criterion for recruitment and for selection to CPD.</li> </ul>

	3. What have been the main benefits of the CQFW?	Please provide specific examples to support your answer	Benefits, weaknesses and barriers could relate to the key goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enabling everyone to develop and maintain essential skills</li> </ul>
	4. What have been the main weaknesses of the CQFW?	Have there been barriers to stakeholders' and beneficiaries' engagement with the CQFW?  Is the CQFW not being used for any reason? Please explain your answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>encouraging people to become lifelong learners</li> <li>exploiting the knowledge in businesses and educational institutions</li> <li>encouraging business and workers to gain new skills</li> <li>helping people within their communities to develop new skills.</li> </ul> <p>The CQFW also set out to provide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarity</li> <li>Flexible and quality assured recognition of learning</li> </ul>
	5. How extensively is the CQFW being used across the education and training system in Wales?	Please provide comments relating to both the formal and informal learning sectors if possible.	<p>This could relate to the individual pillars of the CQFW as well the specific sector in which the interviewee works.</p> <p>The pillars of the CQFW are:</p> <p>Higher Education Lifelong Learning General and Vocational Education and Training</p>
	6. How does the CQFW compare with other qualifications frameworks in the UK?	How effective is the CQFW compared to other qualification frameworks?	National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework(SCQF)
<b>Assessing need</b>	7. Do you believe there is an ongoing need for the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales?	Explore the reasons behind the choice and relate to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most useful current elements of the CQFW, and those most important to keep</li> <li>Least useful current elements of the CQFW, and what could</li> </ul>	<p>Potential elements to be discussed might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level descriptors</li> <li>Learning outcomes</li> <li>Assessment criteria</li> <li>Credit values</li> </ul>

		<p>be removed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If we did not have a Qualifications Framework for Wales what difference would it make?</li> </ul>	
<b>Future Design and delivery</b>	8. What changes would you make to the CQFW?	<p>This could be related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design – e.g. what changes would you make to the Fan and Pillars diagrams?</li> <li>Content and scope (i.e. types of learning included)?</li> <li>Name?</li> <li>Implementation and ongoing operation?</li> <li>Governance?</li> <li>Monitoring?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What would be the potential benefits of these changes for your organisation? What would be the potential challenges?</li> <li>What would be the potential benefits of these changes for key stakeholders and beneficiaries? What would be the potential challenges in ensuring flexibility, choice and progression for learners?</li> </ul>	Types of learning could include HE, QALL, Regulated
	9. How could the CQFW best link to other UK Frameworks and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe any particular examples of good practice that you know of in the design and/or use of qualifications frameworks – either in the UK or beyond. What makes them successful?</li> </ul>	Including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

## Appendix 5: Sampling Framework

### 1. Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this document is to define the sample of individuals and organisations who will be invited to contribute to the evaluation of the CQFW. The research will target those individuals within organisations with experience of engaging with the Framework and, particularly, those with strategic or management responsibility.

### 2. Background

A list of individuals has been provided to Arad by the Client along with additional suggestions from the Steering Group. The list comprises individuals from a range of sectors and organisations in Wales who have had direct or indirect involvement with the CQFW or have expressed an interest in its development and implementation in the past. Arad has developed a list of 136 individuals from which to carry out the required 60 phone interviews in January and February 2014. Arad intends to sample as broad a range of stakeholders as possible during the fieldwork phase and to this end has included individuals from the further and higher education sectors, the employment and skills sectors, local and national stakeholder organisations, awarding organisations and Welsh Government representatives. The target sample set out below draws on the list of names and organisations provided by the Welsh Government and will allow Arad to take a balanced approach to the evaluation, assessing the key elements outlined in the evaluation framework.

*Table 1: Sampling framework*

SECTOR	TARGET GROUP / NOTES	Numbers to be contacted	Target sample per sector	Sample achieved
Further education	Head of admissions Include Principals / Chief Executives	18	6	10 + 1 written response
Higher education	Head of admissions Include VCs / Chief Executives	16	6	8
Schools	Head teachers – will approach 12 secondary schools, three per consortium, including English/Welsh-medium; urban/rural; larger/smaller schools.	12	6	0
SSCs	Send to relevant (Welsh) contacts in SSCs where possible; include SSCs covering WG priority sectors	15	6	8 + 2 written responses
Local authority contacts	WLGA Chairs of each of the consortia x 4 14-19 Network Coordinators Adult Education officers (via NIACE DC)	20	8	9
Private training providers	Names via Welsh Government and NTFW	8	4	1
Employers	Drawn from employer contacts provided (to include larger employers and SMEs)	6	3	2 + 1 written response

Welsh Government	Names and contacts provided (plus others from wider Welsh Government teams/departments)	7	4	6
Awarding organisations	Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) Wales, WJEC, OCR, City and Guilds, Edexcel, Pearson, EAL, Agored Cymru,	8	4	5
National stakeholder organisations	ASCL ATL Careers Wales CBI Cymru Colegau Cymru CWVYS Estyn FSB Wales HEFCW NIACE DC NAHT NASUWT NTFW NUS Cymru NUT Cymru	20	10	16 + 1 written response
UK/international contacts	CCEA; CEDEFOP; QQI (Ireland); David Raffe (Scottish representative); Prof Michael Young (IOE, London); OFQUAL	6	3	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>74</b>

## Appendix 6: CQFW Review framework

<b>Theme 1: Review of the CQFW</b>	<b>Theme 2: Assessing ongoing need for a CQFW</b>	<b>Theme 3: Future design and delivery of the CQFW</b>
<p><b>Overview of theme:</b></p> <p>Initial focus on understanding and awareness of the role of CQFW amongst stakeholders. Focus on organisations' use of the CQFW and collecting and analysing stakeholders' views on the positive and negative impacts of the CQFW since its introduction. Additional focus on impact of the CQFW on mainstream and informal learning and comparison with other UK Frameworks. Any quantitative data collected through the data review will also be included under this theme relating to how the CQFW has operated and its impact.</p>	<p><b>Overview of theme:</b></p> <p>Focus on stakeholders' views on the ongoing need for the CQFW and the potential benefits and challenges of continuing it. Also focus on stakeholders' views regarding the most and least useful current elements of the CQFW.</p>	<p><b>Overview of theme:</b></p> <p>Focus on the design and delivery of any potential future CQFW. Collecting stakeholder views relating to design and delivery including types of learning to be included and omitted; future governance and infrastructure for delivery. Additional focus on potential benefits and challenges of proposed design and delivery changes and lessons from good practice at an international level and incorporating any lessons learned from Theme 1 into this part of the study.</p>
<p><b>Related main and supplementary (in italics) questions in the interview guide:</b></p> <p>1. What do you understand to be the role</p>	<p><b>Related main questions and supplementary (in italics) in the interview guide:</b></p> <p>7. Do you believe there is an ongoing need for the</p>	<p><b>Related main and supplementary (in italics) questions in the interview guide:</b></p> <p>8. What changes would you make to the CQFW?</p>

<p>of the CQFW?</p> <p>2. How does your organisation make use of the CQFW?</p> <p>3. What have been the main benefits of the CQFW?</p> <p>4. What have been the main weaknesses of the CQFW?</p> <p>5. How extensively is the CQFW being used across the education and training system in Wales?</p> <p>6. How does the CQFW compare with other qualifications frameworks in the UK?</p> <p><i>Do you find the fan and pillar diagrams helpful in your work? If not, why not?</i></p> <p><i>Have there been barriers to stakeholders' and beneficiaries' engagement with the CQFW?</i></p> <p><i>Is the CQFW not being used for any reason? Please explain your</i></p>	<p>Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales?</p> <p><i>Explore the reasons behind the choice and relate to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Most useful current elements of the CQFW, and those most important to keep</i></li> <li>• <i>Least useful current elements of the CQFW, and what could be removed</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Please provide comments relating to both the formal and informal learning sectors if possible.</i></p> <p><i>If we did not have a Qualifications Framework for Wales what difference would it make?</i></p>	<p><i>This could be related to :</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Design – e.g. what changes would you make to the Fan and Pillars diagrams?</i></li> <li>• <i>Content and scope (i.e. type of learning included)?</i></li> <li>• <i>Name?</i></li> <li>• <i>Implementation and ongoing operation?</i></li> <li>• <i>Governance?</i></li> <li>• <i>Monitoring?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>What would be the potential benefits of these changes for your organisation? What would be the potential challenges?</i></p> <p><i>What would be the potential benefits of these changes for key stakeholders and beneficiaries?</i></p> <p><i>What would be the potential challenges in ensuring flexibility, choice and progression for learners?</i></p> <p>9. How could the CQFW best link to other UK Frameworks and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)?</p> <p><i>Describe any particular examples of good practice that you know of in the design and/or use of qualifications frameworks – either in the UK or beyond. What makes them successful?</i></p>
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<p><i>answer.</i></p> <p><i>How effective is the CQFW compared to other qualification frameworks?</i></p>		
<p><b>Addressing the specific requirements of the study</b></p> <p>What do stakeholders (learning providers, employers and others) consider to be the positive and negative impacts of the CQFW since its introduction? (<i>Questions 3,4,5 and 6 and supplementary questions</i>)</p> <p>What quantitative evidence exists to show how the CQFW has operated and what does this evidence show about its impact? (<i>Client has outlined there is little quantitative evidence available however Arad is working with Steering Group to source any relevant data</i>)</p>	<p><b>Addressing the specific requirements of the study</b></p> <p>Should the qualification structure continue to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Level descriptors?</li> <li>(ii) Learning outcomes?</li> <li>(iii) Assessment criteria?</li> <li>(iv) Credit values?</li> </ul> <p>If not what should be changed, removed or added?</p> <p><i>Question 7 plus supplementary questions</i></p>	<p><b>Addressing the specific requirements of the study</b></p> <p>What changes would you make to the CQFW Fan Diagram and Pillars Diagrams?</p> <p><i>Question 8</i></p> <p>What are the anticipated benefits of a CQFW?</p> <p>What are the anticipated downsides of a CQFW?</p> <p>What the scope of a CQFW should be and why? Including what types of learning (i.e. HE, QALL, Regulated) should be included in the CQFW?</p> <p>What should not be in the CQFW and why?</p> <p>How would you ensure that there is an appropriate infrastructure to deliver:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Flexibility?</li> <li>2. Choice?</li> <li>3. Progression for all learners in Wales?</li> </ol> <p>Should the working name of the CQFW remain the same?</p>

		<p>How would you promote understanding and acceptance of the CQFW amongst stakeholders, learners and employers?</p> <p>Who should have overall governance of the framework?</p> <p>Who should have the operational responsibility of the framework?</p> <p>What other governances, checks and balances should be in place and who might be involved?</p> <p>What understandings do you have of the above and what benefits and disadvantages do you believe these initiatives might bring?</p> <p><i>Supplementary questions and discussion points following question 8</i></p>
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