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Key Stage 4 performance measures – summary of responses to stakeholder survey

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Audience	All those with an interest in performance measures.
Overview	This document summarises the results of the online survey 'Key Stage 4 performance measures'. The survey was open between 27 March and 30 April 2014.
Action required	None – for information only.
Further information	Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Qualifications and Regulation Division Department for Education and Skills Welsh Government Tŷ'r Afon Bedwas Road Bedwas Caerphilly CF83 8WT Tel: 01443 663725 e-mail: QualsReform@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Introduction

In March 2014 we invited your views on Key Stage 4 performance measures through a stakeholder survey. Here is a summary and analysis of the 26 responses received.

Responses

Q1. Do you think that the change from current threshold measures to Welsh Bac measures should be introduced in 2017 or 2018?

Ministers have already agreed that Welsh Bac attainment measures should replace the Level 1, Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive measures. The survey therefore only asked about timing of introduction of the change. The great majority of respondents (21 vs 4) including ten headteachers and three 14-19 network or consortium representatives, preferred 2018. Reasons mainly related to the need for information, preparation, and a year to focus on implementation for effective delivery. A number of respondents suggested a 'trial run' in 2017.

Q2. Do you agree that the capped points score should be changed to require GCSEs in Maths – Numeracy and in either English Language or Welsh Language within each learner's capped point score?

There was a slight majority in favour of this proposal (15 vs 11), with 8 out of 12 headteachers who answered being in favour.

Arguments in favour referred to the fundamental importance of literacy and numeracy skills and the importance of the GCSEs for individuals' career progression, international comparisons in these skills between Wales and other countries, and the need to make the capped points score more easily understood and less easy to 'manipulate'. One respondent noted that the change did not amount to double-counting as the Welsh Bac measure and capped points score had different purposes and encouraged different behaviours, but that this would need to be carefully communicated.

Arguments against related to the emphasis elsewhere on literacy and numeracy (eg, within the Welsh Bac), concerns about double counting and the impact on other subjects or qualifications and a broad curriculum. Some respondents suggested taking the best of a learner's GCSE Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy results, or using a separate CSI measure.

Q3. Do you think that GCSE Mathematics should also be required within each learner's capped points score?

Most respondents (18 vs 7) did not think that this qualification should be included.

Reasons included the fact that not all learners are expected to take this GCSE and the view that schools should retain the flexibility to make curriculum decision design

to meet the needs of learners, based on their abilities and progression routes rather than performance measures. Concerns were raised about disengagement if learners were encouraged to take the GCSE inappropriately. It was felt that the GCSE in Maths-Numeracy was sufficient to indicate competence in basic maths skills. One respondent advocated leaving the capped points measure unchanged for purposes of comparison over time. Others suggested using the best result of a learner's two maths GCSEs or using the core subject indicator to measure attainment in maths and science. Proposals were made for other ways of incentivising take up of GCSE Mathematics including setting suitable entry criteria for L3 courses and making progression implications very clear to learners. One respondent stated that the Welsh Government should ensure that all learners who could achieve GCSE Mathematics did take it, but did not wish to see performance measures used to achieve this. Some respondents suggested that GCSEs were not the appropriate or only qualification for measuring these skills.

Those who did feel that this qualification should be included cited maths being the single most important subject for learners progression, the importance of learners taking both maths GCSEs and having good mathematical reasoning as well as numeracy.

Q4. Do you think that the learner's best GCSE in a science subject should also be required within each learner's capped points score?

A small majority of respondents (13 to 10) did want to see science included in the capped points score.

Reasons included the importance and value for all learners of an understanding of science, selection of STEM subjects by more learners and the potential positive impact on the Welsh economy. There was a shared view that science had been in decline in recent years and needed encouragement. A few respondents commented on whether only GCSEs should count, with the majority considering that they should, and that in order to ensure fair comparisons between centred, alternative science qualifications should not count. One respondent stated that one science GCSE, along with the literacy and numeracy GCSEs, would give a 'comprehensive indication of a learner's competence in the most important basic skill areas for employers'.

Some respondents made suggestions for the design of the science GCSE suite, which have been passed on to the policy lead for GCSE development.

Reasons for opposing the inclusion of science included the fact that not all learners are interested in science, a view that schools should retain the flexibility to design the curriculum on the basis of learner needs and questions over its importance for all learners. Some suggested using the core subject indicator rather than the capped points score to incentivise science.

It should be noted that one respondent answered 'no' because 'one science is not enough', felt that this could marginalise some science subjects such as physics, or

could encourage single rather than double or triple science, and advocated incentivising more science GCSEs.

Q5. Do you think that any qualifications should be weighted within the capped points score?

Most respondents (20 vs 4) did not think that any subjects should be weighted

Reasons included the fact that respondents felt some subjects should be required in the capped points score and some were requirements of the Welsh Bac, and therefore weighting was not needed as well. Respondents were concerned about the impact on other subjects and about reducing flexibility for centres and learners to meet individual educational needs. There were concerns about potential for complexity and 'gaming' behaviours or unintended consequences developing, reducing transparency of the measure especially for learners and parents. Some respondents did not like the idea of some subjects or qualifications being seen as worth more than others or creating a hierarchy, and felt learners should be encouraged to do their best in all subjects. One respondent suggested that if some qualifications are of less value than others, this should be addressed directly rather than through performance measures. Others were concerned that weighting science might lead to centres favouring single science only.

Those who did think subjects should be weighted cited the importance of the subjects they felt should be weighted or the fact that they are currently classed as 'core' subjects. One respondent felt that arguments about complexity were irrelevant as many people do not understand the measures anyway. The qualifications suggested for weighting were English, Welsh (first and second language), maths and maths-numeracy and science.

Q6. Do you agree that neither the Welsh Bac qualification nor its core should count towards the capped points score?

The majority of respondents (15 to 8) agreed with this proposal. A number of respondents stated that they were unsure or required more information about the revised Welsh Bac.

Reasons were that attainment of the Welsh Bac is already going to be used as the main threshold measure and should not also be included within the capped points score as this would add confusion, be seen as double counting and reduce breadth of the curriculum and space within the measure for other subjects. It was noted that supporting qualifications within the Welsh Bac will count within the capped points score.

Those considering that the Welsh Bac should count towards the capped points score cited flexibility, ensuring that all qualifications taken by learners count towards measures, and the needs of all learners. One respondent made suggestions for the design of the new Welsh Bac (which have been passed to the policy lead) and proposed an approach under which this would be included within a best five and best eight measure.

Q7. Do you agree that for reporting from 2018, non-GCSEs in traditional science subjects should not count towards the capped points score?

Views were evenly divided on this question (11 yes 13 no) and there were strong feelings voiced on both sides.

Those agreeing with the proposal (ie in favour of only counting GCSEs rather than other qualifications in science) raised concerns over the academic rigour of some non-GCSE qualifications in science, for instance in relation to teacher assessed work. Some felt that the equal treatment of 'supposedly equal' science qualifications was the main contributory factor in 'false comparisons' and disparity across Wales in composition of the scores and thresholds. There were concerns that non GCSEs were 'easier' and that their inclusion had helped centres' scores more than learners' CVs. Some felt that for all core subjects, only GCSEs should count and that other qualifications in these subjects should never have been allowed. It was noted that the revised science GCSE suite must meet the needs of all learners.

Those disagreeing with the proposal (ie in favour of all qualifications in science counting) cited the importance of flexibility to meet individual learner needs and noted that alternative or applied courses, especially those without exams, have benefited and are more appropriate for some learners. It was felt that if qualifications were approved for use, they should be included in measures. One respondent in this group did however suggest giving GCSEs more weight to avoid schools 'playing the system'.

Q8. Are there any qualifications which you think should be considered for exclusion? Please state which qualifications you think should be excluded and give your reasons.

Only (2) respondents said yes.

Those saying 'no' noted the value of a broad curriculum and the importance of flexibility to meet a range of different learning needs. Some felt that rigour should be assured by the regulator and all approved qualifications should count towards measures. Others, while not having particular qualifications in mind, did consider that exclusions should be allowed on a case by case basis.

Of the two respondents saying 'yes', one said that many vocational qualifications 'add little value to a learner's employability but rack up significant points in performance indicators' and the other said that teacher assessed qualifications should be excluded, with external assessment being required for all qualifications.

Q9. Should the capped points score be changed from 'best eight' to 'best nine' or 'best ten'? If you think it should be changed, how many qualifications should be counted?

Most respondents (15 vs 6) did not think that the measure should be changed from eight qualifications.

Respondents generally felt that eight qualifications was 'about right', offered sufficient breadth for the average learner, focussed on 'quality rather than quantity' and was sufficient for all progression routes including higher education. It was pointed out that most schools will enable most learners to take more than eight, but that eight captures the achievements of learners for whom eight is appropriate. The concept of 'best' eight allows for recognition of a learner's highest achievements by using the best grades achieved, which gives an incentive for high ability learners to be encouraged to take more than 8. The 'best' would lose meaning if more qualifications were required. Some felt there was a danger of overloading learners or encouraging lower grades if more qualifications were required. Two suggested a reduction to 6 or 7.

However respondents noted that if many specific qualifications were required within the capped points score, more than eight 'places' might be needed to accommodate other subjects.

The respondents proposing an increase noted that many schools deliver at least ten qualifications per learner and raised concerns over schools limiting the number of options learners can take, particularly if some subjects are required within the measure. There were particular considerations in Welsh medium schools, where core subjects make up at least five of the eight, and non-core subjects often raise this to ten or more plus the Welsh Bac. Increasing the number of qualifications in the capped points score was seen as a way of assisting other subjects which might otherwise become marginalised.

Q10. Do you agree that there should be a maximum of two qualifications smaller than a GCSE within each learner's capped points score?

Views were fairly evenly divided, with a slight majority in favour of this suggestion (14 vs 11).

Those in favour felt this represented a balance between rigour and value on the one hand, and flexibility, breadth and motivation on the other. Some questioned why we have any short course qualifications and said learners should be encouraged to take full GCSEs. Elsewhere there was support for retaining short courses for the less academically able but restricting their use in measures to prevent the use of 'soft options' which would assist performance measure scores but not be valuable to learners for employment or further study.

Those opposed (ie thinking that more than two smaller qualifications should count) pointed out the need for flexibility to meet learner needs and encourage progression through 'stepping stones', especially at level 1. It was felt that short courses were invaluable in the context of the pressures on curriculum time and the fact that RE, PE and Welsh are statutory requirements.

Q11. Do you agree that four of the eight qualifications should be GCSEs (not equivalent qualifications)? If you disagree, how many should be GCSEs?

A majority of respondents (15 vs 9) agreed with this proposal.

Reasons included the ability to make fair and meaningful comparisons between learners and schools. More GCSEs were seen as supporting credibility, encouraging breadth and assisting with employability and progression to university. Four places for equivalent qualifications was seen as allowing sufficient scope for a variety of pathways.

Several respondent felt that either all eight qualifications should be GCSEs or that more than four should be GCSEs – for instance for parity with the progress 8 measure in England where 5 must be GCSEs and because some colleges might require five GCSEs for entry to higher level programmes of study. A requirement of 4 GCSEs was described as a ‘mild restriction’ especially if English/Welsh and Maths-Numeracy and science are required. This would already amount to two (or three) GCSEs – meaning that only two (or one) further GCSEs would be required to make the four. It was stated that this should be easily achievable by nearly all pupils.

Of those who disagreed with the proposal, reasons included learner choice and flexibility to meet all needs. There was no consensus about what other number would be appropriate. One thought incorrectly that the current measure required 5 GCSEs and that a reduction was being proposed (in fact it is a significant increase from none to four). One felt that four GCSEs provided a fair balance but still preferred the idea of full flexibility. One felt that three would align better with Welsh Bac requirements. Several felt that there should be no limit. Some compared the proposal favourably with the English position.

Q12. Do you agree that discounting arrangements should be considered on a case by case basis from 2017 onwards?

Almost all respondents (21 to 3) agreed with the proposal. It was described as sensible by many, and respondents acknowledged the complexities and different circumstances that apply to different cases. Respondents pointed to the need for a broad educational experience, but also the fact that different qualifications in similar subjects can differ greatly, and some can add value and should not be discounted (eg two maths GCSEs, double or triple science). Some were concerned about the rigour of certain qualifications.

Specific issues raised by respondents related largely to discounting between science qualifications, such as BTEC and GCSE in science. It was noted that any changes should not impact on cohorts that have already started a course. Practical concerns were raised about publication of discounting code tables and adaptation of management information systems to accommodate different approaches in Wales and England.

Q13. Do you agree that the score should be expressed differently to make its meaning clearer? If yes, what model would you suggest?

The majority of respondents (14 to 7) agreed with the general idea that the meaning of the capped points score should be made clearer. However it was noted that schools do understand it well, and that the meaning would become clearer ‘as the system beds in’. One respondent said that ‘we should educate stakeholders to

understand the capped point score better. Colleges could play a part by making offers based on Capped Point scores rather than number of qualifications’.

Those opposing the suggestion said it would add complexity and that it was schools’ job to educate parents and others about the meaning. One respondent felt that understanding by parents and learners was not the aim or a significant factor, and that it was more important to ensure measures were fit for the purpose of telling the Welsh Government how schools are performing in the areas which matter.

There was a variety of suggested approaches to making the score clearer. Two respondents commented that stakeholder focus groups might help to develop thinking. Ideas included:

- Convert to an average set of grades per cohort expressed as a number of points alongside (several votes)
- A level 1 and a Level 2 points score (level 2 equivalent to 8 C grade GCSEs)
- A range and average score (two votes)
- Actual numbers, including ‘one headline number’ and graphs – eg deciles of learners
- Numbers of learners achieving a certain score - graphical presentation
- Percentage (three votes), without worrying that very few schools would get near 100%, or making the percentage out of a target attainment level set by Welsh Government

Q14. Do you agree that subject to the assumptions stated, the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) should no longer be used?

The great majority of respondents agreed (15 to 5).

It was emphasised by a large number of respondents that their view was subject to the conditions stated about inclusion of core subjects including mathematics and science within the capped points score. Reasons for removing the CSI included simplicity, avoidance of duplication and the fact that the other changes proposed make the CSI redundant. One felt that the CSI acted as a barrier to provision of the right balance of qualifications appropriate to the learner. It was noted that CSI at KS2 and KS3 should be considered alongside KS4.

Those opposing the removal of the CSI pointed to the importance of STEM subjects and described the CSI as a ‘fundamental measure’ and as an ‘important measure of key qualifications in the core curriculum’ and pointed to its use to measure progress from earlier key stages.

Q15. Do you agree that there should be a greater emphasis on capped points scores than on threshold (including Welsh Bac) measures?

The great majority of respondents agreed (15 to 4).

Reasons included the encouragement of all learners to improve performance and achieve their full potential, placing learners rather than institutions at the heart of the system, giving recognition for learners’ attainment, and considerations of inclusion

and fairness. Respondents pointed to the current 'undue concentration on the C/D border'.

Some noted that this view was dependent on other changes being made as proposed.

Of those opposed to the proposal, one felt the Welsh Bac should be the main measure, and two felt that both types of measure should be equally emphasised.

Q16. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

15 respondents made other comments or suggestions.

The suggestions relating to performance measures included:

- Taking a strategic view of what the Welsh Government wants to measure
- Ensuring there is a clear message that VQs are valued, as they can be a route out of poverty and deprivation and into higher education
- Modelling the potential impact of changes or monitoring actual impact
- Introducing a measure for A*/A performance
- Making PISA measurements a statutory part of the performance measures, to improve currency and ensure schools take them seriously
- Using value-added, progress or destination measures
- Ending the 'blame culture'
- Taking into account the outcomes of the curriculum review

Comments related to wider issues included:

- Concern over take up of the new GCSE Mathematics and the requirement for maths-numeracy rather than either maths GCSE within the new Welsh Bac
- 'Too many changes at once' in Welsh education, and the need for time for planning and implementation and appropriate support to make them work for learners
- A concern over single specification for GCSEs
- A view in favour of exams rather than teacher assessment