



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# Pilot qualification evaluation protocol

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# Pilot evaluation protocol

The purpose of the *Pilot evaluation protocol* is to support awarding bodies in the development of an evaluation plan for their proposed qualification pilots. It is intended as a guidance document only, but it reflects the requirements for evaluation specified in the web-based accreditation system (WBA). The protocol is also a useful reference for awarding bodies when compiling interim and final evaluation reports for accredited pilots.

## Focus of the evaluation

All pilot qualifications submitted to the regulators of external qualifications for accreditation via the WBA must include a pilot evaluation plan. The plan should outline how the pilot will be evaluated, and include an element of independent evaluation.<sup>1</sup> Awarding bodies will be asked to focus the evaluation on the extent to which the pilot satisfies the purpose(s) for which it was intended (as indicated in the answers to questions 1 and 2 of the Pilot screen in the WBA system).

## Scope of the evaluation

As part of the accreditation process, the awarding body and the regulators need to agree the evaluation plan. The plan must:

- confirm the purpose(s) of the pilot
- specify those aspects of the pilot to be reviewed
- identify the timeframe of the pilot evaluation
- propose the methodology to be used for the evaluation (see Methodology section below)
- outline the costs of the evaluation that will be paid by the awarding body

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<sup>1</sup> Which part of the pilot is independently evaluated will depend on the type of qualification, and should be agreed between the awarding body and the regulator as part of the WBA process.

- indicate key reporting points and deliverables
- include plans to evaluate achievement in the pilot learner group by disability, gender and 'race'.

## Objectives

The evaluation plan should be based on a clear and comprehensive statement of the aims and objectives of the pilot, its rationale and purpose as stated in the pilot proposal.<sup>2</sup>

The awarding body will be asked to review the evaluation plan regularly as the evaluation progresses, and relevant changes to contextual issues, for example changing government priorities or other deviations from the original plan, should be recorded. The evaluation plan forms a vital reference point for the evaluation findings and provides general feedback on the impact and operation of the pilot.

## Methodology

### **A balance of qualitative and quantitative data**

The evaluation should be based on an appropriate combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data on attainment and take-up, for example, can be better interpreted in the light of qualitative data. Collection and analysis of qualitative data is resource-intensive, however, so it is frequently difficult to collect sufficient information to gain a representative view. Nevertheless, pilots must be planned to yield adequate qualitative data upon which to base evaluative judgements. Using the two types of data in combination gives sufficient scope to the evaluation.

### **Diversity and inclusion**

The evaluation of the pilot should include a review of the qualification's impact on a diverse range of candidates, looking at disability, gender and 'race'. Entry and achievement data, and consultation with potential candidates and/or their representatives, can be used to inform this

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<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of a clear statement of this kind is an important insurance against unmanaged 'drift' in the focus of the development and refinement of the qualification, and in the interpretation of the evaluation findings.

review. Consideration should be given to the steps that can be taken to reduce the need for reasonable adjustments in the assessment of disabled candidates.

It is important that there are no barriers to entry or achievement for women or men, people with disabilities or for any ethnic group, taking into account the availability of access arrangements, reasonable adjustments or exemptions for disabled candidates, and special circumstances.

The evaluation should also examine and report on ways of promoting cultural diversity in the aims of the qualification and in what is required for candidates to know, understand and be able to do. (Cultural diversity is a broad term, which encompasses disability, gender and gender reassignment, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and religion/belief.)

### **Questionnaires, interviews and observations**

Questionnaires (web or paper-based) can be used to collect data from pilot centres; in-depth interviews, or focus groups of staff and learners can be used to explore particular issues and themes in more detail.

Questionnaires, interviews and observations should focus on the stated objectives of the pilot, as set out in the proposal, and might include the following:

- specific content of the qualification
- assessment arrangements
- the impact of the qualification on other qualifications and other provision
- any significant differences between current and previous versions of the qualification
- the relationship between the qualification, its delivery and learners' experiences.

### **Data sources**

Quantitative data on external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is available through awarding bodies' databases and through national data sets compiled and maintained by the regulators, for example:

- The pupil level annual schools census (PLASC)<sup>3</sup> data incorporates general fields, such as age and gender, and also holds candidate level information on prior scores, ethnic groups, learners with English as an additional language and social background (determined using reference data on postcodes and/or free school meals).
- The National Information System for Vocational Qualifications (NISVQ) is a data-collection programme managed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), which supplies data for analysis for the *Statistical first releases* for vocational qualifications in the UK. NISVQ holds candidate level data from a subset of awarding bodies offering accredited qualifications.

To minimise any additional burden on pilot centres, data should be obtained from national data sets, secondary sources or third parties whenever possible, rather than direct from centres. Where data do not exist or have not been collected, essential approaches to centres must be proposed by the awarding body and agreed by the regulators.

### **Possible data models**

A pilot evaluation plan could include one of the following comparative data models:

- model 1 – compare with the prior achievement of the pilot learner group
- model 2 – compare with a comparable learner group
- model 3 – compare with other qualifications.

The evaluation plan is likely to include at least one of these models, or a combination of them.

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<sup>3</sup> PLASC collects data from all maintained nursery, primary, middle, secondary and special schools, direct grant nurseries, city technology colleges, academies, non-maintained special schools and service children's education establishments. Post-16 learning aims are collected only from schools with sixth forms. Attendance data are expected from all pupils of compulsory school age. PLASC data cover England only, and there are no PLASC data for pupils in independent schools. Pupils with special educational needs may not be covered in the assessment data.

## **Secondary sources and third-party information**

Third-party evaluations and previous research should be used to contextualise and enrich the evaluation. They should also be used wherever and whenever they help to avoid the need to collect primary information. The use of all secondary and third-party information should be carefully assessed against the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act, since information collected for one purpose and by one agency may not automatically be used for other purposes by another. Conditions governing confidentiality of data collection and pilot reporting should be clarified for all participants.

## **Communication with pilot centres – coordination of awarding body and regulatory activities**

Both the awarding body and the regulators may want to gather data and information from pilot centres, including, if needed, visits to a selected sample of centres during the evaluation.

This data/information collection should be undertaken openly and with the full knowledge of the other party, as detailed in the evaluation plan, to:

- avoid placing any additional burdens on pilot centres (that is over and above those associated with a normal qualification)
- avoid placing conflicting demands on pilot centres
- collect data/information in a form that allows effective comparison with data/information being collected by the other party. (In some cases it may be appropriate to devise a common data protocol to ensure that data are in a similar form and structure to allow ready analysis/synthesis.)

## **Evaluation of assessment approaches**

This protocol is designed to assist awarding bodies and the regulators in the evaluation of pilot qualifications, which may include experimental approaches to assessment.

If an experimental approach to assessment is incorporated into a pilot qualification, the evaluation plan must include processes that allow adequate scrutiny of the validity, reliability and utility (including the manageability and cost-effectiveness) of that assessment approach.

The operation and technical performance of any non-experimental assessment approach is covered in the code of practice for the relevant qualification type and, therefore, should meet the requirements of that code.

### **Use and publication of evaluation findings**

The evaluation team, which may comprise staff of the regulators of external qualifications and the awarding body, and also external/independent consultants, must make it clear to all participants the reasons for data collection, its intended use and any plans for the publication of an evaluation report.

The primary use of all evaluation findings must be the refinement of pilots, leading to new and improved 'live' specifications.



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