



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



# Pilot qualifications

*Guidance for awarding bodies*

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# Piloting qualifications: guidance for awarding bodies

This document provides advice and guidance for awarding bodies submitting proposals for pilot qualifications via the web-based accreditation system (WBA). In particular, it gives information about completing the pilot qualification questions on the WBA system.

## What is a pilot qualification?

Qualifications can be submitted for accreditation as pilots if one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- The qualification has experimental or uncharacteristic elements to its design or its quality assurance system.
- One or more aspects of the qualification directly challenges existing regulatory arrangements (criteria or code of practice requirements).
- The qualification is subject to external performance indicators or unique requirements that cannot be met by current provision.
- The qualification to be piloted contains some potential risk to learners, centres or awarding bodies. (Note that risk management and contingency plans need to be in place to minimise any risk to learners.)
- For specified reasons, delivery of the qualification is deliberately restricted to selected centres, awarding bodies, timelines and/or regional areas, and is not, therefore, available on a national basis.

Qualification pilots can be initiated by the regulators of external qualifications in England (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; QCA), Wales (Department for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning and Skills; DCELLS) and Northern Ireland (the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; CCEA) or by awarding bodies. The regulators will sometimes commission a qualification pilot to meet a specific purpose, for example to trial a new GCSE. An awarding body can submit a pilot qualification proposal, or, if one or more of the circumstances listed above apply, the regulators can request that a normal qualification proposal be resubmitted as a pilot qualification proposal.

## General requirements for pilot qualifications

If an awarding body intends to submit a qualification for accreditation, which it considers to be innovative and which may challenge existing accreditation criteria and models, it should contact the regulators and discuss whether the qualification needs to be piloted before wider implementation. The awarding body needs to establish dialogue with its contact at the regulators to discuss how to proceed and decide on the information that may need to be included in the pilot proposal. All pilot proposals must be submitted and approved via the WBA system before the relevant qualification can be accredited as a pilot.

Pilots are restricted in terms of the types and/or numbers of candidates and centres that can take part, and they normally have a short period of operation and certification. In addition, an independent evaluation<sup>1</sup> is required to assist in making a judgement about whether the intended purposes of the pilot have been met. If a pilot requires the suspension of regulatory criteria,<sup>2</sup> the awarding body will be asked to provide a justifiable rationale for this course of action. Where the accreditation of such a qualification sets a precedent that has an impact on the criteria or accreditation process, this change will be communicated to all awarding bodies.

The period of accreditation for successful pilot applications will be limited, normally to the duration of the pilot, and the awarding body will need to resubmit qualifications for accreditation via the WBA – amended as necessary – before the qualifications can become more widely or nationally available. The regulators will be responsible for liaising with UCAS, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and relevant government departments, where appropriate.

In cases where a pilot programme is interrupted or terminates before the end of the agreed period, the awarding body and the regulators will jointly consider the impact on learners and ensure the fair treatment of all registered candidates.

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<sup>1</sup> An independent evaluation is commissioned either by the regulators or the awarding body.

<sup>2</sup> *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*. QCA/04/1293).

## Questions about pilot qualifications on the web-based accreditation system

To date, questions and help text on the WBA Pilot screen have not prompted awarding bodies to provide sufficient information about their pilot qualification proposals. In March 2008 the questions and help text were amended, requiring awarding bodies to provide a rationale for requesting pilot status for their qualification proposal and giving clearer guidance on the level of information required for each question. All the questions on the WBA Pilot screen are detailed below, with the amendments shown in italics.

### 1. Provide a rationale for this qualification proposal to be accredited as a pilot qualification

**Help text:** *Qualifications can be submitted for accreditation as pilots if one or more of the following circumstances apply:*

- *The qualification has experimental or uncharacteristic elements to its design or its quality assurance system.*
- One or more aspects of the qualification directly challenges existing regulatory arrangements (criteria or code of practice requirements).
- *The qualification is subject to external performance indicators or unique requirements that cannot be met by current provision.*
- *The qualification to be piloted contains some potential risk to learners, centres or awarding bodies. (Note that risk management and contingency plans need to be in place to minimise any risk to learners.)*
- *For specified reasons, delivery of the qualification is deliberately restricted to selected centres, awarding bodies, timelines or regional areas, and is not, therefore, available on a national basis.*

**2. State whether you wish to seek suspension of any qualification criteria or subject criteria requirements or any qualification type/code of practice requirements and provide a rationale for this request**

**Help text:** *Specify exactly which criteria or any qualification type / code of practice requirements you wish to be suspended, ensuring an accurate and detailed (including the paragraph number, and if necessary, bullet point number) reference to the criteria within The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004). Note that statutory requirements, including those relating to disability and inclusion, cannot be suspended.*

**3. Provide details of the monitoring and evaluation programme that will be used for this pilot**

**Help text:** Awarding bodies are required to attach a pilot evaluation plan to their qualification proposal. The plan must:

- *clarify the objectives of the pilot*
- *specify those aspects of the pilot to be reviewed*
- *identify the timeframe of the pilot implementation and evaluation*
- *propose the methodology to be used for the evaluation, which should include a balance of qualitative and quantitative data*
- *specify the 'opt-out' policy for centres and individuals*
- *indicate if consent is required from learners under the age of 18 years*
- *outline the cost of the evaluation activity (and who will pay for this)*
- *indicate key reporting points and deliverables*
- *include a degree of independent assessment*
- *include a review of the pilot in terms of the qualification's impact on a diverse range of candidates.*

#### **4. Briefly explain how the pilot will be managed**

**Help text:** Awarding bodies must include *details about the staff members who will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the pilot*, proposals for advisory/steering groups, including the proposed membership of these groups, and contingency plans for non-compliance with the pilot arrangements.

#### **5. Provide a concise breakdown of the funding arrangements for this pilot qualification**

**Help text:** Awarding bodies must include the proportion of total funding provided by awarding bodies, *the regulators of external qualifications* or other bodies.

#### **6. Provide details of the guidance and support materials to be supplied to centres**

**Help text:** Awarding bodies must include *details of support available for centres, in-service training (INSET) and other guidance and support materials, including approximate dates of events and/or publications.*

#### **7. State if there are any potential risks to the implementation of this pilot and how these will be managed**

**Help text:** *These risks may include (but are not limited to) delivery within and to centres, examiner supply, specialised resources, financial costs, learners and timetables.*

## **Pilot evaluation protocol**

The *Pilot evaluation protocol* (QCA/08/3589) provides guidance for awarding bodies on how to complete an evaluation plan for their pilot qualification proposal.

Awarding bodies will be asked to provide a comprehensive pilot evaluation plan before accreditation, which complies with the requirements of the *Pilot evaluation protocol*.

Awarding bodies will be asked to submit interim and final evaluation reports to the relevant regulatory contacts after accreditation, on a timeline agreed at accreditation.

The regulatory contacts will provide feedback to the awarding body on these reports.



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