
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

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Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Tertiary Education and Research Act 2022 and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by education and training providers in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary schools, all age schools, secondary schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Response

Introduction

We welcome a few of the proposals, for example the development of level 1 and 2 qualifications seem generally sensible. However, we have many concerns about aspects such as the integral skills qualification. We would encourage Qualifications Wales to ensure that all schools and providers, such as further education colleges, are involved in any approaches to co-construction of vocational qualifications. In addition, we would encourage Qualifications Wales to reconsider the mapping of the four purposes in qualifications. The four purposes are intended to be developed across the curriculum and creating qualifications to assess them may not be particularly helpful. When considering the proposals to develop these qualifications, we would welcome an opportunity to reflect on whether all of the suggested qualifications are required. Many of the aspects can be provided through engaging learning experiences but do not necessarily need to be supported with a qualification.

Key points for further consideration include:

- Further clarity around assessment arrangements, including NEAs and digital assessments and the impact of these on learners and centres
- We value the positive move towards ensuring that both Welsh and English language assessments are available across the full range of qualifications. It will be important to ensure that supporting resources are available in both languages well in advance of the commencement of teaching towards the new qualifications
- We suggest that further consideration must be given to accessibility of these qualifications for all learners, including those impacted by socio-economic factors. This is a particular concern for some practical subjects and with the implementation of digital assessments
- The proposals do not always consider the potential costs for centres and their current budget pressures and the implications of schools potentially recruiting new staff with the necessary specialist knowledge of vocational or technical education which may create nugatory competition with other providers
- The proposals do not consider the useful partnerships and collaboration between schools and other providers. It would be important to ensure that any co-construction involves all partners involved.
- The proposals do not consider the benefits or costs for establishing new partnerships with other providers particularly for the skills for work and vocational qualifications
- The integral skills qualification, including skills for life, skills for work and integral skills project proposals are a concern. It would be important that integral skills are integrated into other assessments and qualifications. It is also important to note that many of these skills do not necessarily require a qualification. We do not believe it would be helpful to develop a qualification linked to the CWRE guidance and do not feel it is helpful to map the four purposes to each part of this qualification.

Position statement

Estyn would like to engage in a wider discussion about the full offer for 14-16 year olds. This should include:

- The role of general, vocational and technical qualifications and progression routes.
- Partnership delivery models between schools, colleges and training providers that ensure impartial advice and guidance for learners and high quality delivery of vocational experiences and qualifications.
- Consideration of whether creating a qualification is the best 'vehicle' to validate/exemplify learners' wider skills and experiences related to the skills for life and work.
- Further discussion about vocational and technical routes for learners from 14 years onwards and how young people can experience vocational and technical education and training to make better informed choices regarding their progression into further learning, training or work.

The proposals relating to the Skills for Work units are based on using the content of the CWRE toolkit and guidance as content to be assessed in a qualification. This was not the purpose of the toolkit or guidance and we would advise against this approach as there could be unintended consequences in creating qualifications at entry level, level 1 and level 2 on aspects of impartial advice and guidance and career planning which should be based on the quality of the support given and impact on helping young people make informed decisions.

In the skills for life units, the proposals do not outline how existing experiences and non-accredited awards could be used to deliver high quality experiences to young people, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme or first aid certificates offered through third sector organisations like St John's Ambulance or the Red Cross.

We do not feel that it is helpful to attempt to map each of the four purposes to the qualification proposals. The four purposes are intended to be developed across the curriculum and assessing them as part of a qualification is unhelpful and likely to have unintended consequences.

There is only a brief mention of school partnerships with other providers or organisations in the design and delivery of the skills suite and the pre-vocational qualifications. In several of our thematic reports¹, we have noted the lack of positive/effective partnerships between secondary schools and other providers, particularly colleges, work-based learning providers or employers in helping young people to gain these skills for life and work and to be well-informed to transition to further education, training or employment.

¹ [Partnerships between secondary schools and employers](#) (2020); [partnerships between secondary schools and colleges](#) (2021), [impartial advice and guidance for 14-16 year olds](#) (2022); [review of 16-19 curriculum](#) (2022)

We believe that the proposals for pre-vocational qualifications should be informed from the Vocational Qualifications review which is due to report in the summer. Our [16-19 curriculum thematic report](#) noted that young people do not know enough about vocational pathways – this is noted in the [14-16 thematic report](#) on impartial advice and guidance provided by Careers Wales advisers. Often this is due to staff in schools who do not know enough about non-academic routes. Previously, with the 14-19 learning pathways policy, schools and colleges were funded to work collaboratively to provide vocational options for 14-16 year olds across a local area. While our 16-19 curriculum report notes that where there is transparent, effective and strategic planning in the relationships and collaboration between schools and other providers, learners have a broad and balanced post-16 curriculum offer. However, this is inconsistent across Wales and in a majority of local authority areas collaboration between schools, further education colleges and work-based learning providers has reduced, restricting options for learners.

The proposals would benefit from further discussion to consider the quality and extent of existing school-college link courses/experiences or the pilot junior apprenticeship programme. Estyn will be reviewing in the autumn term and in time, consideration should be given to outcomes of this thematic review.

Overall, we would encourage Qualifications Wales to reconsider these proposals in light of our comments and would welcome an opportunity to engage in more detailed discussions about how best qualifications or other experiences can be developed to benefit all learners whilst also supporting the Curriculum for Wales.