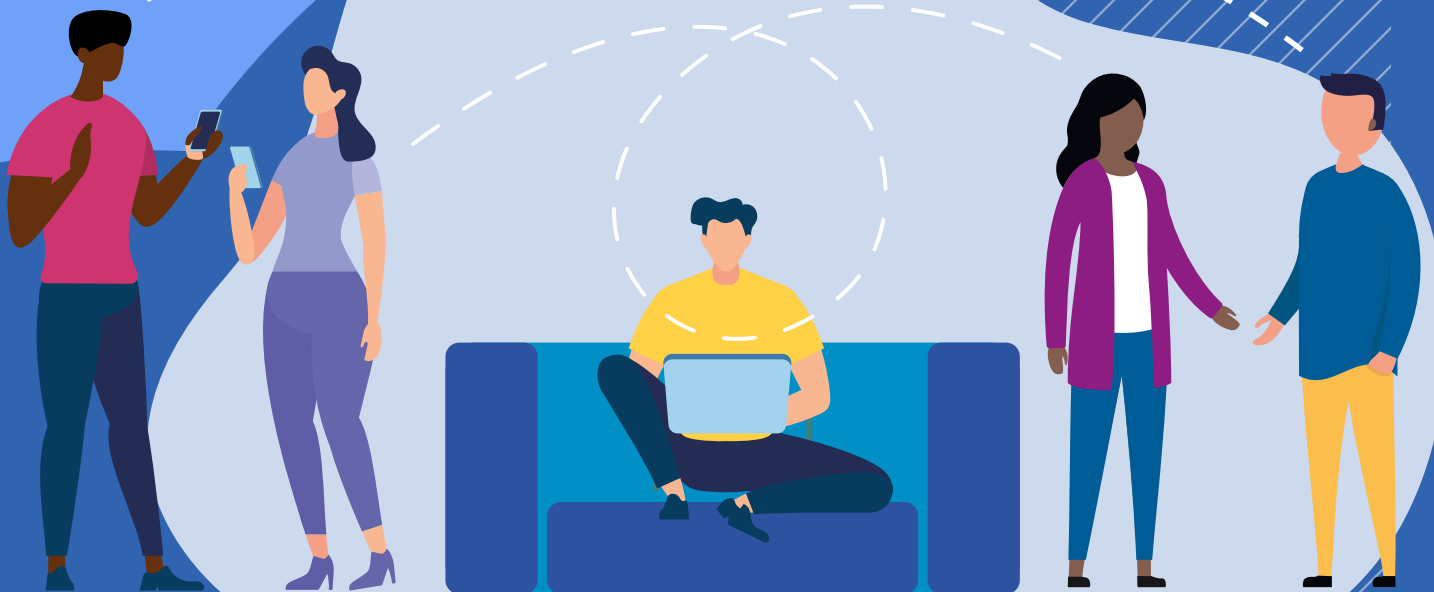




THE FULL 14-16 QUALIFICATIONS OFFER

Decisions Report

January 2024



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1. Summary

- 1.1. The Curriculum for Wales (the Curriculum) has been taught in all pre-16 education settings in Wales since September 2023. It sits at the heart of what learners aged 3 to 16 study and how they are taught, enabling them to experience a broad and balanced curriculum reflecting six areas of learning and experience.
- 1.2. Each centre¹ is now responsible for designing its own curriculum in line with the [Curriculum guidance](#) and qualifications play an important role in this. So, we're reforming publicly funded qualifications for learners aged 14 to 16.
- 1.3. As the first part of these reforms, WJEC is already developing new [Made-for-Wales GCSEs](#). This report focuses on our decisions about the qualifications that will be developed to sit alongside GCSEs - replacing the vast majority of existing qualifications eligible for public funding for the 14-16 age group.
- 1.4. It follows extensive collaboration, engagement, and consultation on the [Full 14-16 Qualifications Offer](#) between March and June 2023. We are very grateful to everyone who has engaged with us on this journey. There were more than 500 responses to our consultation, all of which have helped inform our decisions. Our consultation approach is explained in [Section 8](#).

Our vision for the new National 14-16 Qualifications

- 1.5. Working with a wide range of stakeholders, we have developed a vision for qualifications for learners aged 14 to 16, that will:
 - help learners realise the four purposes of the Curriculum
 - offer flexibility and choice for centres to meet learners' needs
 - reflect the Curriculum's principles of progression
 - enable learners to progress successfully to post-16 learning and training
 - provide an equitable and bilingual choice of qualifications and pathways
 - support positive mental health and wellbeing
 - promote positive teaching and learning experiences encourage learners to make meaningful connections across their learning

¹ In this report, we use 'centre' to refer to all 14–16 education settings

- include relevant, authentic and engaging assessment
 - reflect the diversity of learners and the world they live in
 - make best use of digital technology
- 1.6. The qualifications outlined in this report will be taught from September 2027. Whereas new Made-for-Wales GCSEs will be taught in schools from September 2025 (or, in some cases, September 2026)
- 1.7. Each centre must select the right combination of qualifications to meet the needs of its learners. The qualifications discussed in this report should be viewed as a key part of a comprehensive new national offer, replacing all current 14-16 qualifications, from which centres can choose. Learners' needs should be a key consideration for centres when making these choices.
- 1.8. It is important to remember that qualifications are only part of a broader range of achievements and experiences that learners gain throughout their education. Different qualifications serve different, often multiple, purposes. As well as supporting teaching and learning, they also help individuals to progress in life, learning and work.
- 1.9. The qualifications offer for future learners described in this report has been guided by three principles; it will be:
- aligned with the Curriculum for Wales
 - coherent and inclusive
 - available in Cymraeg and English
- 1.10. Introducing new qualifications can have an impact on teachers' workloads and on the choices that are available to learners. These impacts are a key consideration for us and for the awarding bodies we regulate. We will work closely with centres, Welsh Government and others to identify and shape the guidance, support and resources educators need to help them prepare confidently for these new qualifications.

Our decisions

1.11. [Table 1](#) provides information on our decisions about a range of work-related, foundation and skills qualifications that will be available from September 2027. These will form the constituent parts of what we are calling the new National 14-16 Qualifications. More detail about our findings, how we reached our decisions, and [what happens next](#), is available later in this report.

Table 1: Summary of Decisions

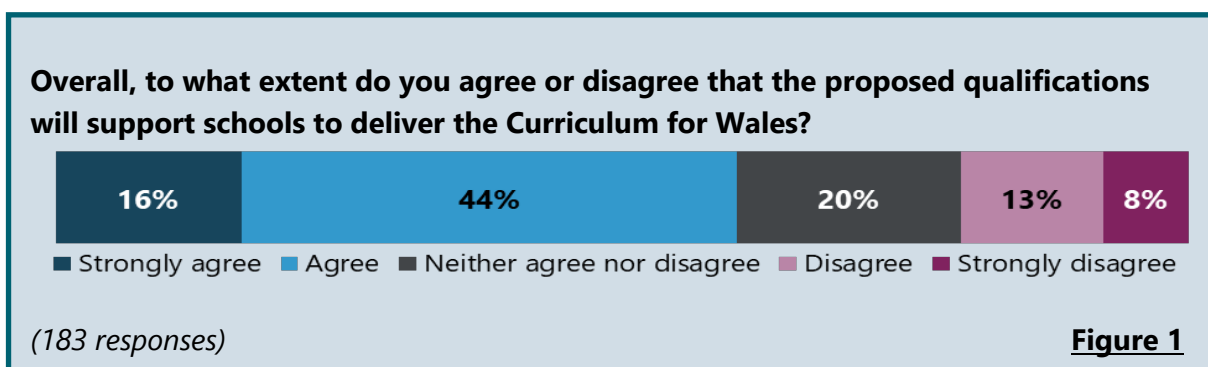
Decision	Summary	Information
1	We will proceed with development of a project-based qualification, to be known as Personal Project .	Full details
2	We will proceed with the development of a suite of Skills for Life and Skills for Work qualifications.	Full details
3	We will proceed with development of a suite of bilingual qualifications in work-related subjects to be called VCSE (Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education) at level 1/level 2 and called Foundation at entry level/level 1.	Full details
4	We will proceed with development of a range of Foundation qualifications relating to areas of learning and experience.	Full details
5	We will continue to explore options for one or more Foundation qualifications in Cymraeg to enable learners to make the best possible progress.	Full details

Table 2: The new National 14-16 Qualifications from September 2027

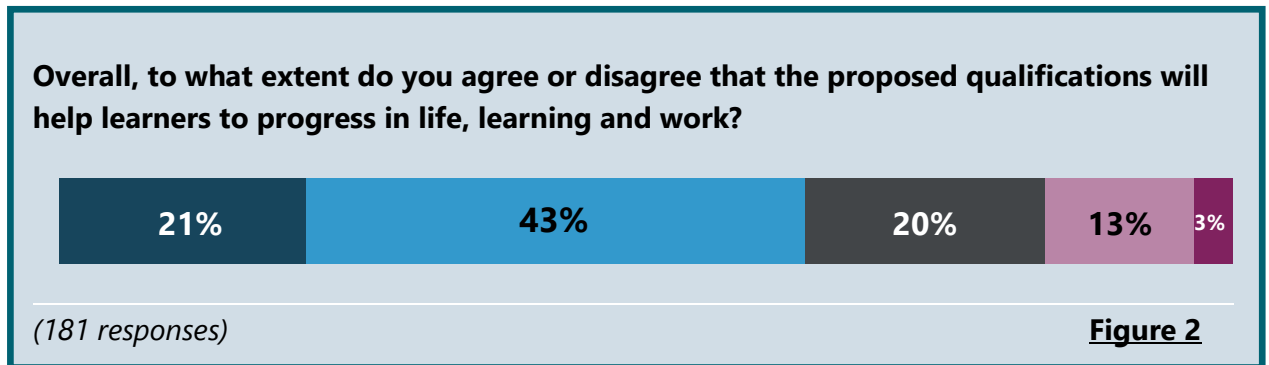
GCSEs	VCSEs	Skills Suite	
		Skills for Life & Skills for Work Awards, Certificates and Diplomas	Personal Project
<p>27 GCSEs <i>(plus related qualifications)</i></p> <p>13 VCSEs <i>(plus 3 other subjects TBC)</i></p> <p>level 1 / level 2 <i>120 GLH*</i></p>		<p>28 Skills for Life units 19 Skills for Work units</p> <p>entry level, level 1 or level 2 <i>60–240 GLH</i></p>	<p>Any subject of learner's choice</p> <p>entry level, level 1 or level 2 <i>60 GLH</i></p>
Foundation General Subjects**	Foundation Work-related subjects		
<p>8 General subjects <i>(plus Cymraeg TBC)</i></p> <p>15 Work-related subjects</p> <p>entry Level / level 1 <i>120 GLH</i></p>			
<p><i>*GLH = average number of guided learning hours per qualification</i></p> <p><i>** details about international language pathways TBC</i></p>			

2. Consultation overview

- 2.1. We received 509 individual responses to our consultation, which we promoted across all our communications channels and directly with stakeholders through webinars and our dedicated audience groups.
- 2.2. Several of the consultation questions used a Likert scale to indicate scale of agreement or disagreement with our proposals. Responses to each question indicated more agreement than disagreement in each case.
- 2.3. The charts included in this report summarise responses to the English and Cymraeg versions of the consultation which were hosted on our Have Your Say engagement platform. Responses in other formats were also considered and were broadly consistent with the data from our engagement platform, in terms of level of agreement with the proposals.
- 2.4. While the question responses suggest clear support for each of our proposals, we considered all comments and views that were expressed. Section 8 gives more detail on the responses and our approach.
- 2.5. The consultation also included two overarching questions about the proposed offer as a whole.



2.6. Respondents broadly agreed that the proposed qualifications will support centres to deliver the Curriculum. There was feedback that the proposed qualifications could enhance the Curriculum and improve choice for all learners. Some respondents commented that the proposals support breadth, depth, and progression. Others were concerned that the offer may be too broad and not as clearly linked to the Curriculum as the GCSEs.



2.7. Respondents broadly agreed that the proposed qualifications will help learners to progress in life, learning and work.

2.8. Below, we summarise our findings and outline how they have shaped our decisions on each of the three proposals.

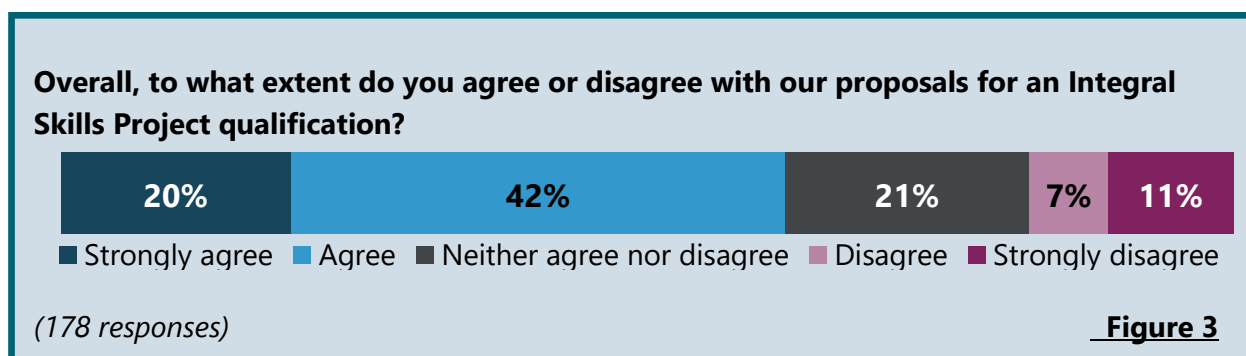
3. Skills qualifications

3.1. We proposed creating a national **Skills Suite** of qualifications to develop learners' **Skills for Life** and **Skills for Work** aligned to the four purposes of the Curriculum. These new bilingual qualifications would span entry level to level 2 and would include:

- a standalone **Integral Skills Project** qualification that would focus on assessing integral skills - this single-unit qualification would take around 60 hours to complete, be available at entry level to level 2 and be graded *Pass*, *Merit* or *Distinction*
- a flexible range of units covering a broad range of learning related to **Skills for Life** and **Skills for Work** - these would be available at entry level to level 2, with each unit certificated individually and graded *Pass* or *Fail*, enabling learners to take different combinations of units to achieve qualifications ranging in size and level

Responses about the Integral Skills Project

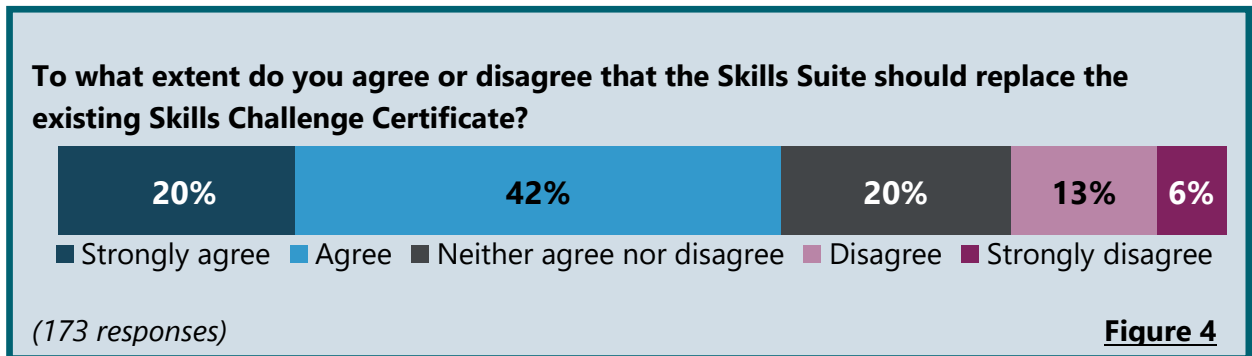
3.2. Respondents broadly agreed with the proposal for an integral skills project qualification



3.3. There was strong support for learners being able to choose a topic and to work independently. There was also support for learners being able to contextualise the qualification within wider programmes of study. Some commented that the qualification could support STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) learning and other cross-curricular skills.

3.4. Those disagreeing with the proposal, suggested that the current 'Individual Project' within the existing Skills Challenge Certificate is appropriate, and that a standalone project qualification may be perceived as less valuable.

3.5. Respondents were broadly supportive of the proposal that, collectively, the new Skills Suite should replace the Skills Challenge Certificate. Those in support noted that the project qualification aligned with the ethos of the Curriculum and would be a popular and relevant choice for learners.



3.6. Some teachers raised concerns about a potential increased workload in changing from the Skills Challenge Certificate.

3.7. Following the consultation, some stakeholders suggested changing the qualification title to 'Personal Project'. We agree and will be adopting this title.

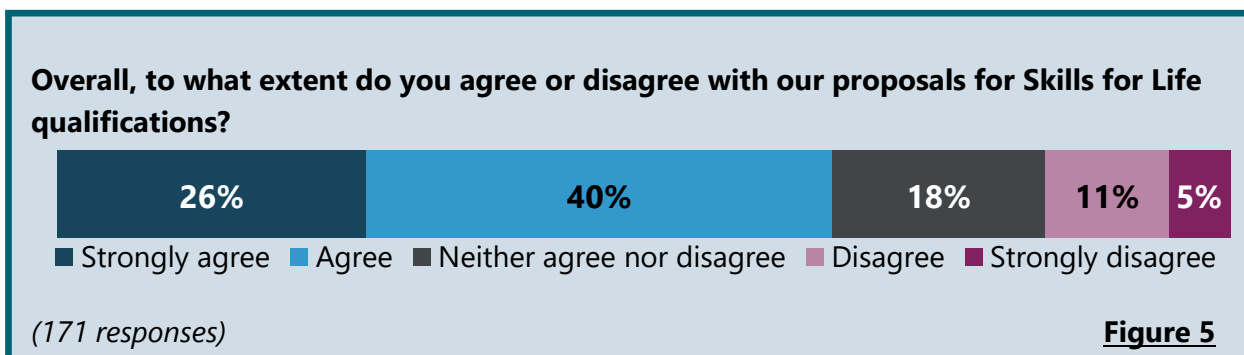
Decision 1: We will proceed with development of a project qualification.

The qualification will:

- be titled **Personal Project** - available at entry level, level 1 and level 2
- as a working assumption, be 60 guided learning hours
- as a working assumption, be graded *Pass, Merit or Distinction*
- be completed by learners on a topic of their choice
- be assessed on the application of the integral skills of 'planning and organising', 'creativity and innovation', 'critical thinking and problem solving' and 'personal effectiveness'
- be designed to enable learners to demonstrate their skills through a wide range of evidence types
- have assessment requirements that are set by the awarding body, marked by teachers and externally quality assured

Responses about Skills for Life

3.8. Respondents broadly agreed with the proposal for **Skills for Life** qualifications.



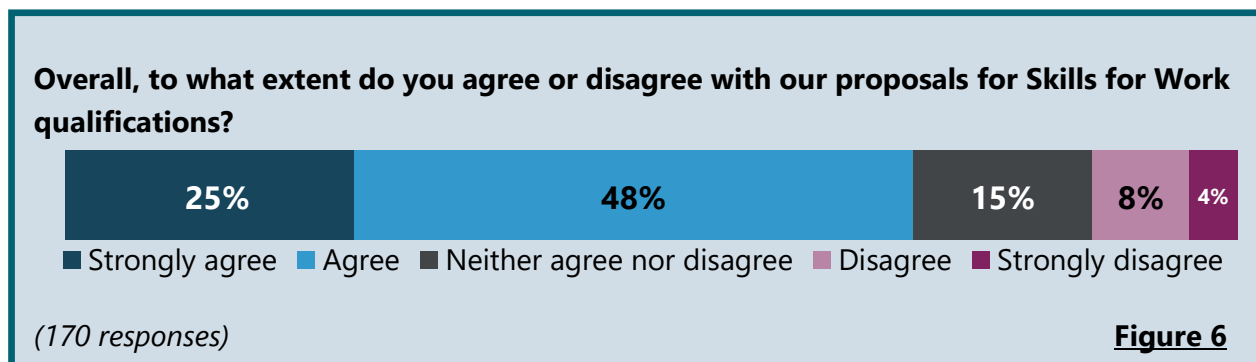
3.9. Those in favour commented that the range of proposed topics was lacking from the current qualification offer or, where topics did exist, that they were not offered to mainstream learners. They suggested that **Skills for Life** units could support all learners (whether taking GCSEs or not), their communities, and their future workplaces. Words used to describe the proposed topics included "broad", "relevant" and "engaging".

3.10. Some feared the units would only be offered to learners who were less able to access traditional qualifications whereas the skills would, they suggested, benefit all learners. Some stakeholders suggested that removing 'beginner' from unit titles would raise their perceived value. We agree and have revised several titles to reflect this.

3.11. Some additional units were suggested. Cookery and food preparation was mentioned several times and is now included in the list. We have also added three units relating to the [religion, values and ethics requirement](#) of the Curriculum and which lend themselves to delivery as part of the suite. Some of the other suggestions could, we feel, be covered within existing titles, and we will consider these as we proceed.

Responses about Skills for Work

3.12. Respondents broadly agreed with the proposal for **Skills for Work** qualifications.



3.13. Those who agreed noted the value of the qualifications, both in offering cross-curricular opportunities to learners and in encouraging the development of skills to support progression into post-16 study and to future employment.

3.14. Some expressed concern that having a choice of units could lead to inconsistency between centres.

Responses about the whole Skills Suite

3.15. Respondents broadly agreed with the proposal for a **Skills Suite** as a whole, with comments received such as "this is long overdue" and that it includes the "skills all learners need for an effective career and work life".



3.16. Some parents, teachers and learners expressed the view that learners need to develop skills for everyday life, if they are to become happy and healthy individuals. Many respondents stressed the importance of health, wellbeing and sustainability. These topics, they said, were particularly important in the context of both the climate crisis and post-pandemic health issues.

- 3.17. Many centres deliver some similar topics, but some commented that the current offer is not coherent. Centres have to pick from a very wide range of qualifications, across multiple awarding bodies, to achieve what the Skills Suite will offer. Many respondents emphasised that the Skills Suite would benefit all learners regardless of ability or aspirations.
- 3.18. Centres will have flexibility to reflect the breadth and balance of their curriculum in the combinations of qualifications available. Many supportive comments noted the 'real-life' experiences, as emphasised in the four purposes of the Curriculum, that the units would support.
- 3.19. Respondents welcomed that the skills qualifications would consist of units which could be certificated separately. They also welcomed the emphasis on practical assessment and learner experiences. Many described the proposals as inclusive. Others welcomed the intention to explore opportunities for digital assessment.
- 3.20. Some, who disagreed with our proposal, expressed concern as to whether the Skills Suite would be perceived to be valuable to learners. Others questioned if it would be recognised within future Welsh Government performance measures. Several respondents suggested that, although the Skills Suite is what learners need, and what employers and teachers want, if it does not result in a GCSE, or is not included within performance measures, centres may not timetable it.
- 3.21. Teacher workload and the manageability of the Skills Suite was noted as an area for consideration. Some wanted more about detailed content and assessment arrangements. Some comments appeared to be based on speculation about what these might include.

Ensuring alignment with the Curriculum

- 3.22. We continually liaise with Welsh Government to ensure that new qualifications align with policy intentions. In developing our decisions we have considered how skills qualifications could be timetabled and understand that some centres may require guidance to help select unit combinations.

- 3.23. We will ask awarding bodies to produce example combinations of skills units to support centres in securing learning and teaching across key areas of the curriculum. This approach could also help centres to manage the transition from the current Skills Challenge Certificate.
- 3.24. As we develop, test and agree the approval criteria for these new qualifications we will continue to liaise with Welsh Government to ensure that our thinking aligns with their policies.

Decision 2: We will proceed with the development of a suite of Skills for Life and Skills for Work qualifications.

The **Skills for Life** and **Skills for Work** qualifications will:

- consist of a wide and flexible range of units covering a broad range of learning related to skills for life and skills for work
- be available at entry level, level 1 and level 2 (units and qualifications)
- focus on purposeful and authentic learning with a requirement for learners to reflect on their learning prior to certification at qualification level
- be non-prescriptive in terms of detailed content, allowing a wide range of learning experiences, opportunities and interests to be included within the broad titles of the units
- support learners in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills in the context of the Curriculum’s areas of learning and experience, and its guidance on [careers and work-related experiences](#)
- support opportunities for learners to develop cross curricular and integral skills
- be graded *Pass* or *Fail* (units and qualifications)
- be designed to enable learners to demonstrate their skills through a wide-ranging choice of evidence types both within and across units
- consist of bite-sized units of around 10 or 20 GLH
- have assessment requirements that are set by the awarding body, marked by teachers and externally quality assured
- be designed so that units can be certificated individually where a learner does not achieve a full qualification
- be accompanied by guidance for teachers which, amongst other things, exemplifies a combination of units that could help centres to implement the requirements of the Curriculum for all learners
- be available in different combinations of units to achieve qualifications ranging in size from 60-240 GLH – see below

Skills for Life	Skills for Work	Skills for Life and Work
Award: 60 GLH Certificate: 120 GLH Diploma: 240 GLH	Award: 60 GLH Certificate: 120 GLH Diploma: 240 GLH	Award: 60 GLH Certificate: 120 GLH Diploma: 240 GLH

Each of these qualifications will be available at entry level, level 1 and level 2 – the level and title of qualification achieved will be determined by the combination of units taken.

Table 3: Revised list of Skills for Life units

Current Skills for Life unit title	Title used in consultation (if amended)
Equality, diversity and inclusion	
Healthy lifestyle	
Financial literacy	
Skills in the natural environment	<i>Learning in the outdoors</i>
Exercise for all	<i>Exercise for beginners</i>
Online safety	<i>Online safety and resilience</i>
Mental health and wellbeing	
Community participation	
Teamwork	
Basic first aid	
British Sign Language	
Home management and maintenance	
Faiths and beliefs in the local community	<i>Religion, values, and ethics - these units are not intended to support all statutory guidance in this area</i>
Ethical choices	
Values for life	
Understanding self and others	<i>Relationships</i>
Everyday law	<i>Rights and responsibilities</i>
Looking after others	<i>Looking after children</i>
Food planning and preparation	<i>New</i>
Practical gardening	<i>Gardening</i>
Democracy in action	<i>Politics for beginners</i>
Personal safety	
Art and crafts	<i>Originally included 'for leisure' in the titles</i>
Music, dance and drama	
Digital film and media	
Science and technology in everyday life	<i>Technology in everyday life</i>
Sustainability in action	<i>Sustainability</i>
Healthy Relationships	<i>Relationships and sexuality education</i>

Table 4 : List of Skills for Work units

Overarching topics	Skills for Work units
<p>Exploring self and society</p> <p>Learners develop an understanding of the purpose of work in life, both for themselves and society as a whole</p>	<p>Personal development planning <i>(personal qualities, values, interests, skills and needs)</i></p>
	<p>Fairness and inclusion in the workplace</p>
	<p>Working in Wales</p>
	<p>Sustainable economic development</p>
<p>Widening horizons</p> <p>Learners become increasingly aware of the range of opportunities available to them, broadening their horizons</p>	<p>Exploring career pathways <i>(including going to university, apprenticeships, training, and employment)</i></p>
	<p>Jobs of the future <i>(including green jobs)</i></p>
<p>Overcoming barriers</p> <p>Learners develop the attitudes and behaviours required to overcome barriers to employability, career management and lifelong learning</p>	<p>Building a growth mindset</p>
	<p>Business finance</p>
	<p>Applying for jobs</p>
	<p>Interview and confidence techniques</p>
	<p>Overcoming barriers</p>
<p>Exploring opportunities</p> <p>Learners explore opportunities through a variety of meaningful experiences in learning, work, and entrepreneurship</p>	<p>Work experience <i>(including volunteering)</i></p>
	<p>Career creativity <i>(dream jobs and realistic plans)</i></p>
	<p>Enterprise venture</p>
	<p>Customer service</p>
<p>Developing adaptability and resilience</p> <p>Learners develop resilience and ability to adapt in response to challenges, choices and responsibilities of work and life</p>	<p>Rights and responsibilities in the workplace</p>
	<p>Understanding the changing labour market <i>(local and national)</i></p>
	<p>Using IT in the workplace</p>
	<p>Wellbeing <i>(including work/life balance)</i></p>

4. Pre-vocational qualifications

- 4.1. We proposed a suite of pre-vocational qualifications designed for delivery, in Cymraeg and English, to learners aged 14-16, from entry level to level 2, in a range of broad occupational areas.

Table 5: Proposed list of 'Pre-vocational' qualifications

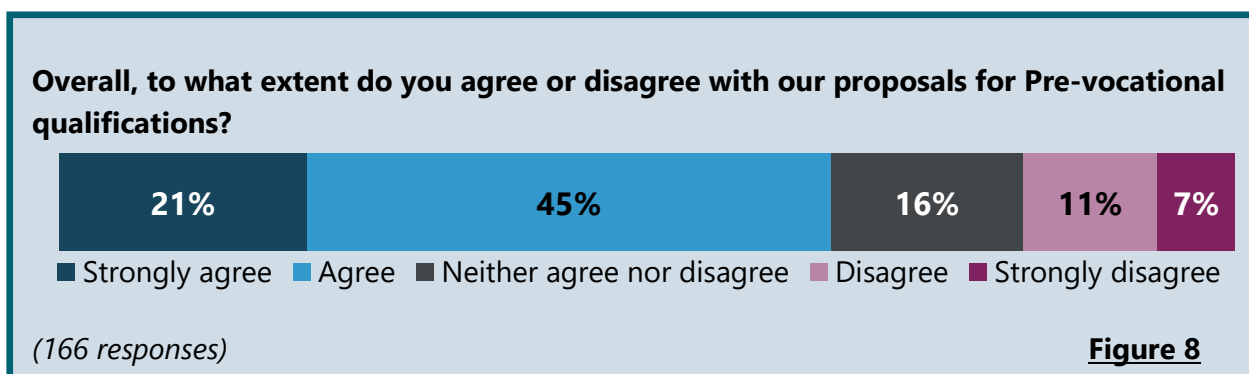
Proposed subject	entry/ level 1	level 1/ level 2
Agriculture, horticulture and forestry	Yes	Yes
Animal care	Yes	Yes
Built environment	Yes	No ^{*2}
Business, accounting and finance	Yes	Yes
Creative and media production and technology	Yes	Yes
Engineering	Yes	No*
Environmental conservation	Yes	Yes
Hair and beauty	Yes	Yes
Health and social care & childcare	Yes	No*
Hospitality and catering	Yes	Yes
Motor vehicle maintenance	Yes	Yes
Performing arts	No ^{**3}	Yes
Public services	Yes	Yes
Retail and customer service	Yes	Yes
Sport, leisure and recreation	Yes	Yes
Travel and tourism	Yes	Yes

² *In our consultation we said that we did not propose to secure pre-vocational qualifications in these subjects at level 1/level 2 to avoid overlap with new GCSEs.

³ **In our consultation we said that we did not propose to secure pre-vocational qualifications in performing arts at entry/level 1 to avoid overlap with Foundation qualifications.

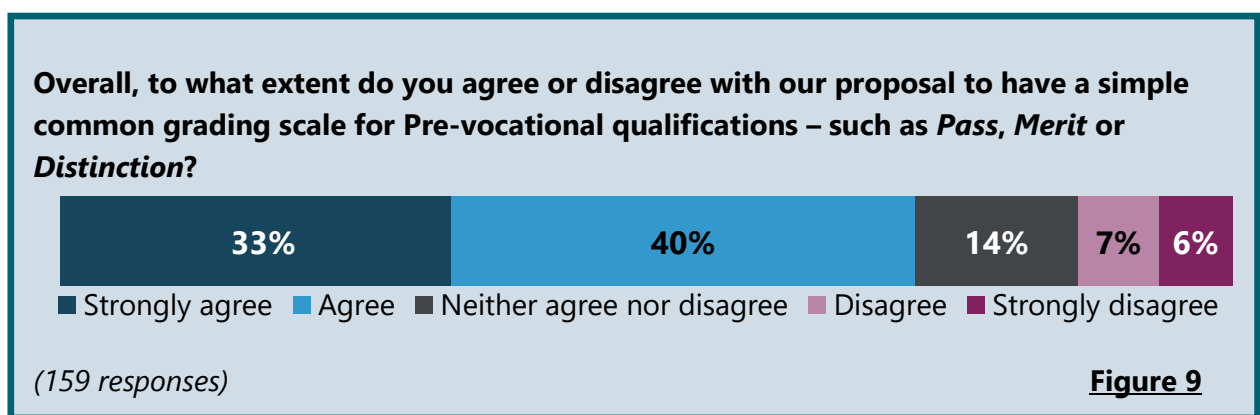
Responses about 'Pre-vocational' qualifications

- 4.2. Respondents broadly agreed with the proposal for pre-vocational qualifications. Many commented that the qualifications would prepare young people for the working world, allowing opportunities to try potential pathways and to have their achievements recognised.



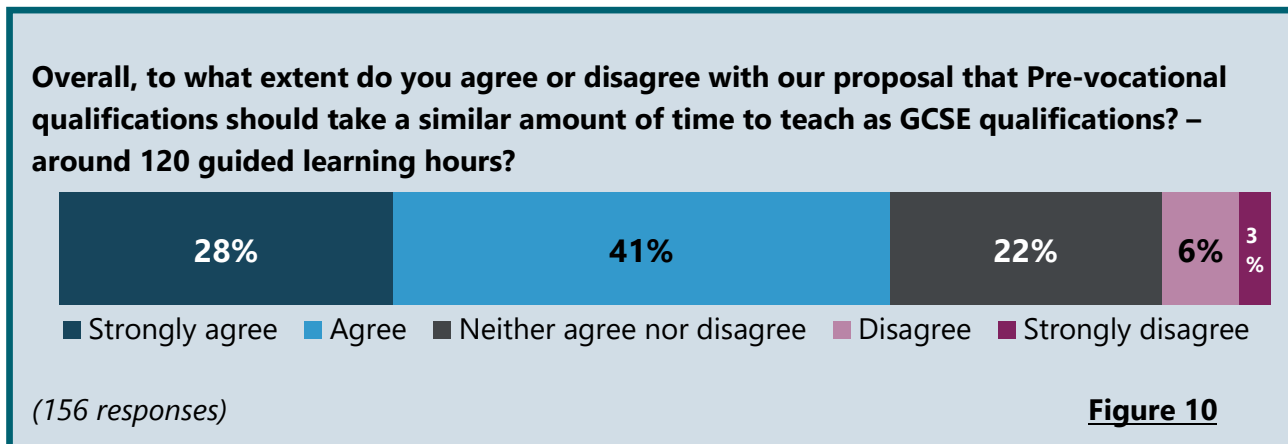
- 4.3. Some mentioned how they would support learners in preparing for their next steps, whether that's further education or employment, and were supportive of the focus on practical elements of the subjects for learners who may be unsure of their future pathway.
- 4.4. Many welcomed the qualifications as being necessary to engage some learners who do not perform at their best with GCSE subjects. They suggested that pre-vocational qualifications could be more accessible, with a focus on application and experiences, supporting alternative pathways for learners.
- 4.5. Some welcomed that the qualifications would be bilingual.
- 4.6. While many respondents noted that the introduction of these qualifications would support more practical learning for learners, some wider considerations were raised.
- 4.7. Some commented on the potential impact of any future Welsh Government performance measures on the choices that centres will make available for learners.
- 4.8. Some asked whether there would be funding to support delivery of the Pre-vocational qualifications, such as for school/college links, continuing professional development and resources.

- 4.9. Some respondents were concerned that the qualifications may need costly specialist resources to deliver and might be difficult for a centre to manage.
- 4.10. Some respondents from colleges felt that vocational qualifications are best delivered through college partnerships, due to better availability of specialist resources and teaching staff.
- 4.11. Some commented that there should be improved school and college partnerships for negotiated contract.
- 4.12. Respondents broadly agreed with our proposal to have a simple grading structure, such as *Pass/Merit/Distinction* across pre-vocational qualifications.



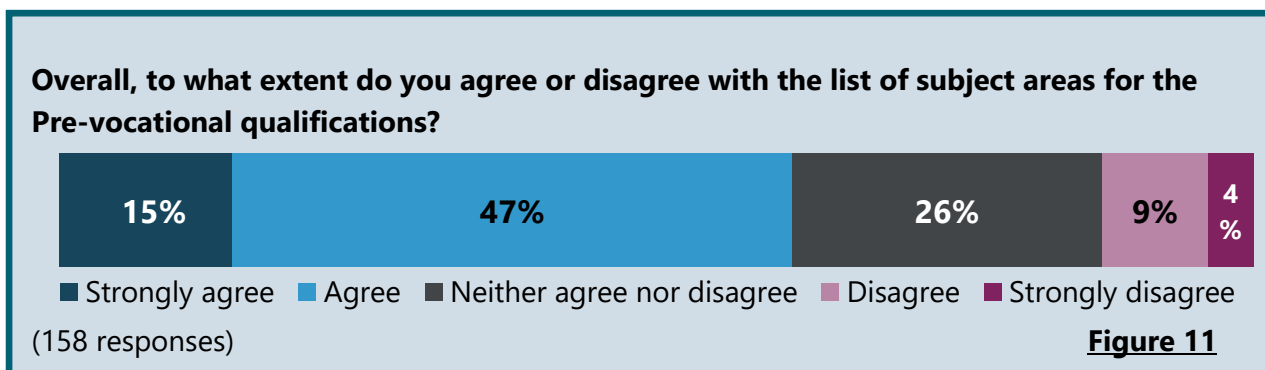
- 4.13. Those in agreement felt a *Pass/Merit/Distinction* grade range was simpler for stakeholders to understand, especially learners and parents/carers. They suggested that this approach would be useful for employers and could help distinguish between GCSEs and vocational subjects.
- 4.14. Some felt the proposed grading would provide a more consistent approach across the pre-vocational range, since it is already used for many qualifications. Others suggested that this grade scale is motivational for learners, helping to develop high expectations.
- 4.15. Whilst most welcomed grades such as *Pass/Merit/Distinction*, some expressed caution at grading differently to GCSEs with these respondents wanting to avoid negative comparisons with GCSEs. Some suggested that there should be commonality across the qualification framework across nations. Others suggested *Pass/Fail* as an alternative.

4.16. Respondents broadly agreed with our proposal that the GLH of the pre-vocational offer should be similar to those for GCSEs (120 to 140 GLH).



4.17. Overall, those who agreed considered the suggested length to be a fair and sensible approach, providing enough time to support practical delivery and tasks. Respondents commented that having qualifications the same size as GCSEs would help work-related qualifications to be seen as equal to GCSEs, support timetabling and enable centres to plan effectively.

4.18. Respondents broadly agreed with the proposed subject list, with comments suggesting that the qualifications would be seen as relevant, valuable, and recognised by colleges and employers.



4.19. Respondents commented that these subjects are practical and will enable learners to have a balanced and broad set of choices. Many claimed that the list covers a wide and useful range of subject areas, across numerous employment sectors. Some commented that the subject list was more streamlined than the current offer, yet still appealing to young people who are interested in studying vocational pathways at 14-16.

- 4.20. While many agreed the subject list would provide a broad range for centres to choose from, we were asked to consider whether the breadth of subject areas reflects current and future labour market opportunities.
- 4.21. A few asked us to consider including ICT/digital as a pre-vocational qualification, but did not present a clear rationale for this. We remain of the view that the Foundation, GCSE, and certain parts of the Skills Suite together with the requirements of the Curriculum and the [Digital Competence Framework](#) provide sufficiently for the assessment of digital skills.
- 4.22. One respondent asked for performing arts at entry level/level 1. We considered this, but overall, there was insufficient justification to make such an addition. An equivalent Foundation qualification is already proposed.
- 4.23. Other specific subjects were suggested, but it was unclear if there would be sufficient demand for these. However, our initial list of subjects may be added to over time, if a need is identified.

Post-consultation developments

- 4.24. Since the end of the formal consultation, we have continued follow-up discussions with stakeholders. Whilst there is strong support for the proposal overall, some schools and further education colleges continue to express concern with aspects of the planned changes..
- 4.25. A key concern for schools is about the three subjects - built environment, health, social care and childcare, and engineering - in which we did not propose new pre-vocational qualifications, due to existing plans to develop them as GCSEs. Some respondents suggested that not including them in the pre-vocational offer would reduce options for, and therefore disadvantage, some learners.
- 4.26. Some further education colleges have reiterated their concerns around the proposed qualifications, including the use of 'Pre-vocational' as a title, since it could reduce the perceived status of these qualifications. They wanted it to be clear that such qualifications taken in schools could support transition to post-16 vocational courses at a range of levels.

- 4.27. Another concern was that teachers in schools may not have the knowledge, understanding and skills to teach work-related subjects to a high standard, which could undermine the quality of the offer.
- 4.28. Colleges also highlighted that the proposal did not cater for learners who require larger, more technical, larger vocational qualifications, such as those currently used on junior apprenticeships or in college-based learning through school or local authority partnerships.

Titling

- 4.29. Having reflected on these discussions, we are confident that there is a place for a range of pre-vocational qualifications within the new [National 14-16 Qualifications](#), at both entry/level 1 and at level 1/level 2. However, we have looked again at the titling of these qualifications.
- 4.30. We considered a range of options and decided that **Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education (VCSE)** is the most appropriate for the level 1/level 2 qualifications. The use of **VCSE** can help with parity of value with GCSEs and is a distinct title that separates these qualifications from more specialist qualifications taken post-16. It will also help communicate the distinction between qualification types to employers and others.
- 4.31. We then had to determine what to call the entry level/level 1 qualifications in the pre-vocational space. Since we are using 'Foundation' for entry/level 1 qualifications to go with our new Made-for-Wales GCSEs, we believe that pre-vocational qualifications at entry/level 1 should also be called **Foundation qualifications**.
- 4.32. We acknowledge that our decisions will require clear communication to build public awareness and ensure that our new Made-for-Wales qualifications.. brands are valued and understood.

Subjects where GCSEs are currently planned

- 4.33. We are currently considering whether we should proceed with the current plans to develop GCSEs in built environment, health, social care and childcare, and engineering, or whether to bring these subjects into the VCSE offer, given that this might be a better category for these learning domains. We will engage further with stakeholders before making this decision.

14-16 teaching and learning partnerships

- 4.34. We remain of the view that it is valuable for all 14-16 learners to be able to choose more vocational and practical subjects, alongside GCSEs, helping to build parity of value across academic and vocational subjects. We see VCSEs and Foundation work-related qualifications as being different from those studied post-16 in further education colleges.
- 4.35. We have listened to those in further education colleges, who feel that there are risks if qualifications in all or some vocational subjects are taught in schools. We understand that this perspective derives from a desire that learners should benefit from vocational courses in the best possible setting, with appropriate resources and skilled teaching.
- 4.36. We are keen to work with further education colleges to explore options to support schools so that they can confidently and effectively deliver these subjects.
- 4.37. We are updating our [designation policy](#) to align with our 14-16 vision. We will be consulting upon a revised policy in which we intend to propose that we will continue designating (as eligible for use on funded courses for 14-16 learners) those qualifications which can be demonstrated to fulfil a particular need for younger learners, and where specialist resources and teaching are required. These are likely to be the same qualifications offered to learners aged 16-19, allowing those learners studying them early (through school-college partnerships or, for example, on junior apprenticeships) the ability to progress more quickly through further education.
- 4.38. We encourage continued and improved links between schools, colleges and industry, and we will be asking awarding bodies to ensure that they engage closely with further education colleges to ensure that post-16 transition routes are clear.

Decision 3: We will proceed with the development of a suite of qualifications in work-related subjects.

These qualifications will:

- be titled **VCSE (Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education)** at level 1/level 2 and titled **Foundation** at entry level/level 1
- be 120-140 GLH per qualification
- be designed to be deliverable within the reasonable resources available to schools (but not limited to delivery in schools)
- support progression into post-16 vocational study
- be designed to develop learners' knowledge, understanding and skills using practical-based (application) approaches
- have a consistent grading system such as *Pass, Merit, Distinction or Distinction** - with clear mapping across of **VCSEs** to equivalent GCSE grades
- be available in the range of subjects and levels set out in [Table 6](#)

Table 6: List of VCSE and Foundation qualifications

Subject	Foundation entry/level 1	VCSE level 1/level 2
Public services	Yes	Yes
Health and social care, and childcare	Yes	To be determined
Engineering	Yes	To be determined
Built environment	Yes	To be determined
Motor vehicle maintenance	Yes	Yes
Hospitality and catering	Yes	Yes
Sport, leisure and recreation	Yes	Yes
Travel and tourism	Yes	Yes
Agriculture, horticulture and forestry	Yes	Yes
Animal care	Yes	Yes
Environmental conservation	Yes	Yes
Hair and beauty	Yes	Yes
Creative and media production, and technology	Yes	Yes
Business, accounting and finance	Yes	Yes
Retail and customer service	Yes	Yes
Performing arts	No	Yes

5. Foundation qualifications

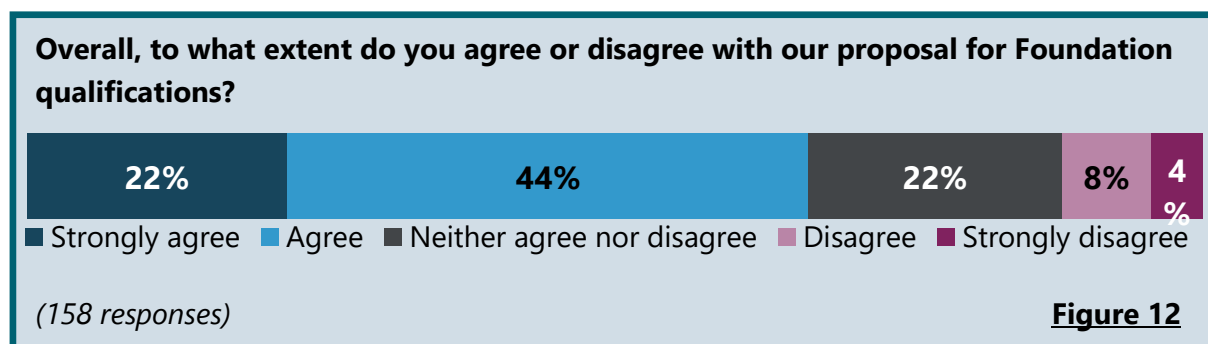
- 5.1. We proposed a range of qualifications at entry/level 1 that learners would be able to take, as part of their learning journey through the Curriculum's areas of learning and experience. We outlined and asked for views on our proposal not to have a standalone Foundation qualification in health and wellbeing.
- 5.2. We also asked stakeholders if they felt there was a need for:
- a standalone Foundation qualification in religion, values and ethics
 - separate qualifications to cater for learners who use English or Cymraeg as an additional language

Table 7: Proposed list of Foundation qualifications

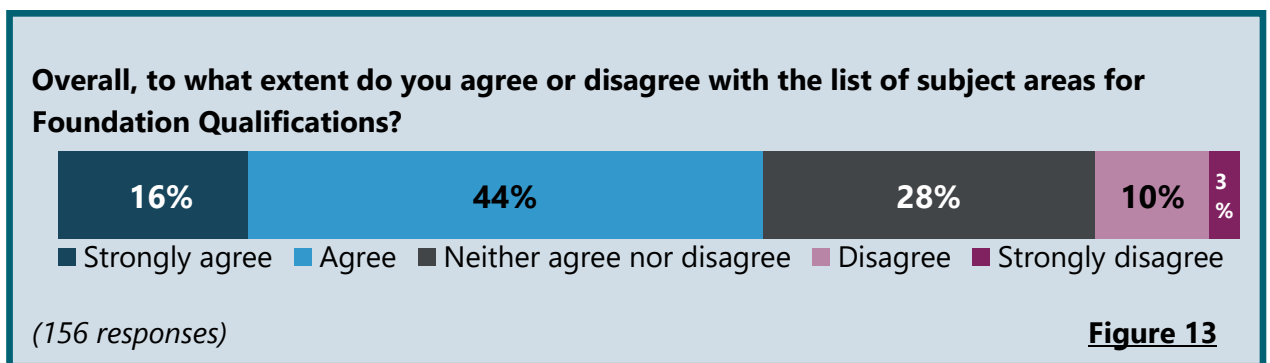
Area of learning and experience	Proposed Foundation qualifications
Expressive arts	<i>Expressive arts</i>
Health and wellbeing	<i>See Skill qualifications proposals</i>
Humanities	<i>Humanities</i>
Languages, literacy and communication	<i>Cymraeg Core Cymraeg English International languages pathways</i>
Mathematics and numeracy	<i>Mathematics and numeracy</i>
Science and technology	<i>Combined science Digital technology Design and technology</i>

Responses about Foundation qualifications

- 5.3. Respondents generally supported the Foundation qualifications proposal.



- 5.4. Many felt that these qualifications would help to plug gaps that they perceive to exist and provide a suitable pathway of learning for some learners.
- 5.5. Many noted the current lack of choice for learners with additional learning needs. Accessibility was a key theme with the majority stating the importance of recognising that GCSEs will not be accessible for some learners. Some commented that the proposal would provide parity across subject areas and would enable schools and other learning providers to deliver courses that are better targeted to meet learners' needs.
- 5.6. Some noted value in having options for those who do not feel confident enough to sit GCSEs. They felt that the Foundation qualifications would give learners opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence to a more comfortable level, improving their engagement and helping them to feel valued.
- 5.7. Some of those who disagreed with the proposal questioned the value of Foundation qualifications and worried that they may be chosen as an 'easy option' for learners who might otherwise achieve a GCSE. While some expressed the view that learners do not value F and G grades at GCSE, a few expressed the opposite view.
- 5.8. Respondents generally agreed with the proposed list of Foundation subjects.



- 5.9. Many commented that the list provides flexibility, allowing pupils a degree of choice that may align more closely to their interests. They felt Foundation qualifications could support later progression to GCSEs if desired. Comments included that the list of subject areas meets students' needs, is fit for purpose, and is closely aligned to the Curriculum.

- 5.10. When asked for comments on what else we should consider, 'value' and 'validity' emerged as the strongest themes. Many stressed that it would be important to ensure that the qualifications are seen as having merit. Many believed strongly that the current offer at this level is sometimes not well valued and wanted better recognition for the Foundation qualifications.
- 5.11. Some respondents commented that it would be important to understand the relationship between a level 1 outcome at Foundation level and a level 1 outcome at GCSE (and, by implication, at VCSE). We will be considering this issue carefully in our development work during the next stage of the project.
- 5.12. Many pointed out that the awards/qualifications will need to be promoted as positive and aspirational qualifications and not simply as sub-GCSE qualifications to avoid the risk of them being undervalued by learners, parents, and employers.
- 5.13. Respondents felt strongly that the qualifications would require a campaign to raise employer understanding, ensuring stakeholders are fully aware of the changes to the Curriculum and to qualifications.

Responses about qualifications in Cymraeg

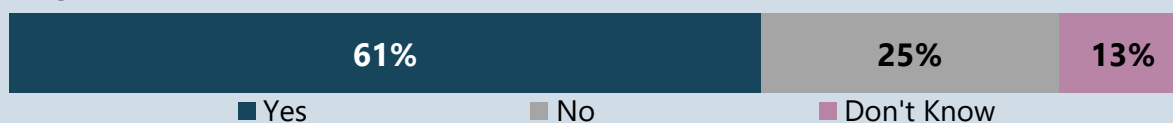
- 5.14. Our proposal included introducing Foundation qualifications in Cymraeg and Core Cymraeg within the Language, Literacy and Communications area of learning and experience. As we said in the consultation, decisions about which qualifications to offer and how they should be designed and assessed can help contribute to a national approach aimed at increasing the number of Welsh speakers.
- 5.15. We have been clear from the outset that we support and are fully committed to contributing to the Welsh Government's [Cymraeg 2050 strategy](#). Welsh Government recently consulted on proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill. This Bill intends to place the national target of a million Cymraeg speakers on a statutory basis and give a firm legal basis to the concept of a Welsh language continuum. It will establish a specific linguistic outcome for all learners to confidently speak Cymraeg by the time they leave statutory education at 16.

- 5.16. Any decisions on our proposals for qualifications in Cymraeg must support the intentions of the [Welsh Education Bill](#). Following our consultation, we have continued discussions with Welsh Government and other stakeholders. These discussions have highlighted a range of issues which merit further consideration. We are therefore continuing to explore options for one or more Foundation qualifications in Cymraeg. We will publish our final decision on this later in 2024
- 5.17. It is worth noting that as part of our GCSE decisions, we will create a set of three new Welsh language qualifications to align with the Curriculum. This includes a new integrated [GCSE Cymraeg](#) for learners in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, a new [GCSE Core Cymraeg](#) for learners in English-medium settings, along with a new [additional qualification](#) for learners in English-medium settings who are ready to progress further and more quickly their skills in Cymraeg.

Responses about religion, values and ethics qualifications

- 5.18. We asked about the need for a standalone Foundation religion, values and ethics (RVE) qualification, as well as units within the Skills for Life qualifications.
- 5.19. While there was broad support for this some important comments and concerns were raised by respondents.

We are proposing to create a Foundation qualification in humanities, as well as units within the Skills for Life qualifications in religion, values and ethics. In addition to these, do you consider there is a need for a standalone Foundation qualification in religion, values and ethics?



(142 responses)

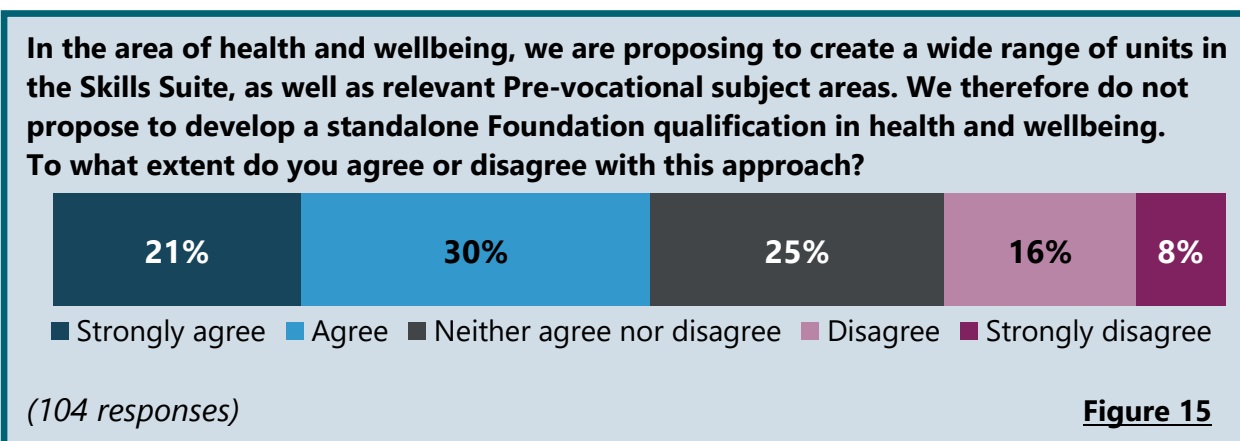
Figure 14

- 5.20. Some respondents suggested that the removal of a short course option for GCSE Religious Studies would necessitate a standalone qualification in RVE. Others argued that this would help centres deliver their statutory obligations to all learners.

- 5.21. In contrast, the most common reason cited by those not in favour of a standalone qualification was that the nature of the RVE guidance (and many of the topics included within it) did not lend itself to being assessed through a formal qualification.
- 5.22. Having carefully considered all of the consultation responses and further engagement post-consultation, we have decided not to proceed with a standalone qualification in RVE.
- 5.23. Instead, we have added [three new Skills for Life units](#) to those proposals. These will provide opportunities to consider and explore a number of the RVE topics identified within the Curriculum guidance. Centres will be able to choose whether, and to what extent, to incorporate delivery of these units in order to meet their statutory requirements. Learners will also be able to choose, if they wish, topics related to RVE for their [Personal Project](#) qualification.

Responses about health and wellbeing

- 5.24. We asked about the need for a standalone Foundation subject in health and wellbeing, in addition to the proposed Skills for Life units.

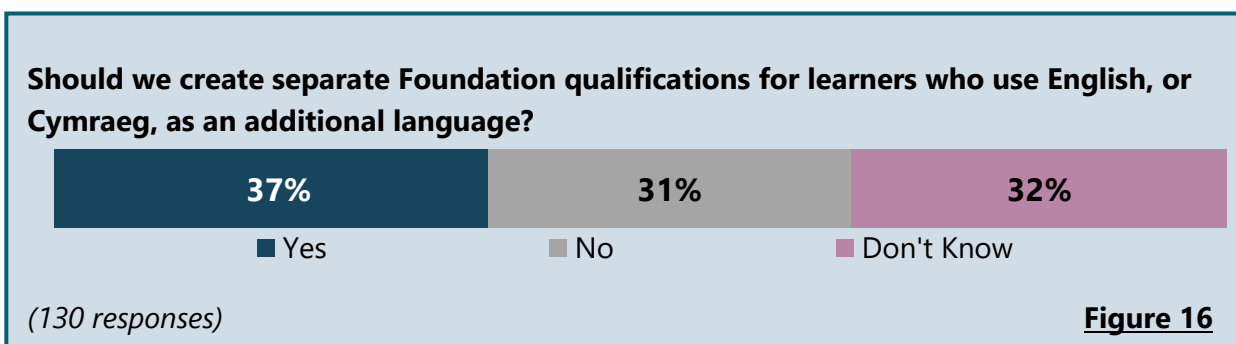


- 5.25. Views were divided in response to this question. Many felt that health and wellbeing is integral within the proposed Skills Suite and relevant pre-vocational subjects. They stressed the need for learners of all abilities to access a health and wellbeing offer and that the qualifications proposed are suitable. To create a new standalone qualification would appear to be duplication of other parts of the offer and therefore superfluous.

5.26. Where people disagreed, it was generally out of concern that this area of learning and experience was not being given the same status as other areas, given the importance of health and wellbeing to society.

Responses about English or Cymraeg as an additional language

5.27. We asked whether we should create separate Foundation qualifications for learners who use English, or Cymraeg, as an additional language. This elicited a divided response.



5.28. The comments associated with these responses revealed a lack of clarity about the question, with some relating to the provision of assessment materials in the medium of Welsh, rather than in relation to specific qualifications for those learning either English or Cymraeg as an additional language.

5.29. Having considered the matter further, we are of the view that there is no clear argument in favour of having separate qualifications for those learning English or Cymraeg as an additional language, in the 14-16 age group. The range of qualifications that are already proposed, including Foundation qualifications, should provide sufficient routes for learners to be assessed whatever their starting point.

5.30. In summary, we will not be developing qualifications in English as an additional language or Cymraeg as an additional language.

Maths and numeracy

- 5.31. In June 2023 we stated that we would delay publication of final design requirements (approval criteria) for a new level 1 qualification in number, measure and data. On further reflection and informed by responses to this consultation, we have decided that we will not be progressing with that qualification. Instead, as we take forward our proposals for a Foundation qualification in maths and numeracy (entry level to level 1), we will seek to incorporate relevant aspects of the previously planned level 1 qualification.

Decision 4: We will proceed with the development of Foundation qualifications, related to areas of learning and experience.

Decision 5: We will continue to explore options for one or more Foundation qualifications in Cymraeg to enable learners to make the best progress possible along the Welsh language continuum.

Foundation qualifications will be available in the following subjects, bridging entry level and level 1.*

Area of Learning and Experience	Foundation Qualification Subject
Expressive arts	Expressive arts
Humanities	Humanities
Languages, literacy and communication	English *International language pathways
Mathematics and numeracy	Mathematics and numeracy
Science and technology	The sciences Digital technology Design and technology

*International language pathways will be available up to level 2

6. Impact assessment

- 6.1. Alongside the consultation, we published our [initial integrated impact assessment](#) in relation to our proposals. The assessment provided an overview of potential cost and delivery impacts of the proposals on different groups of stakeholders, including learners, schools, awarding bodies, employers, and the wider qualification system.
- 6.2. It set out our view of the potential regulatory impacts of the proposals in relation to different groups, including any cumulative impacts that have been identified across our proposals.
- 6.3. We identified and considered these impacts as we developed our proposals and sought to minimise any additional burden as far as possible. We outlined and sought views on potential impacts during the consultation.
- 6.4. We explained that we would use the consultation feedback from the to update our integrated impact assessment and inform our final decisions.
- 6.5. In response to the feedback, we have reviewed the options available to us, including reconsidering the proposed range of qualifications and units. Furthermore, we have also continued to engage with a wide range of stakeholders following the consultation.
- 6.6. Our [updated integrated impact assessment](#) sets out the additional impacts relating to our decisions around qualifications or units to support the religion, values and ethics aspect of Curriculum, the range and nature of units within Skills for Life and Skills for Work and around qualifications to support learners make the best possible progress in Cymraeg.
- 6.7. We have previously stated that while we are acutely aware of the need to minimise the burden of our proposals, some cost and delivery impacts are unavoidable. However, we are of the view that the decisions we have taken strike the right balance between competing considerations and that the impacts are commensurate with the changes needed to realise our vision for the New 14-16 Qualifications Offer.
- 6.8. For further detail of how our assessment of potential impacts has shaped our decisions and our work, please see our [updated integrated impact assessment](#).

7. Next steps

Timeline

- 7.1 We know that if these changes are to be introduced and managed successfully, there needs to be an effectively planned approach to providing the resources, professional learning and specialist input that will be necessary. Timely and clear information will be essential to help schools plan and resource the qualifications that will be on offer. Our planned timeline for the roll-out of these qualifications is outlined in [Figure 17](#).
- 7.2 We want to be confident that schools will be able to choose from the full range of qualifications intended to support the Curriculum. We also want the qualification offer to be viable and sustainable. To support that position, we do not intend to restrict the market through either a selection or commissioning process.
- 7.3 Instead, we will work closely with awarding bodies over coming months to build on our co-creative approach and help make sure that stakeholders continue to be involved along the journey.

The Full 14–16 Qualifications Offer Timeline

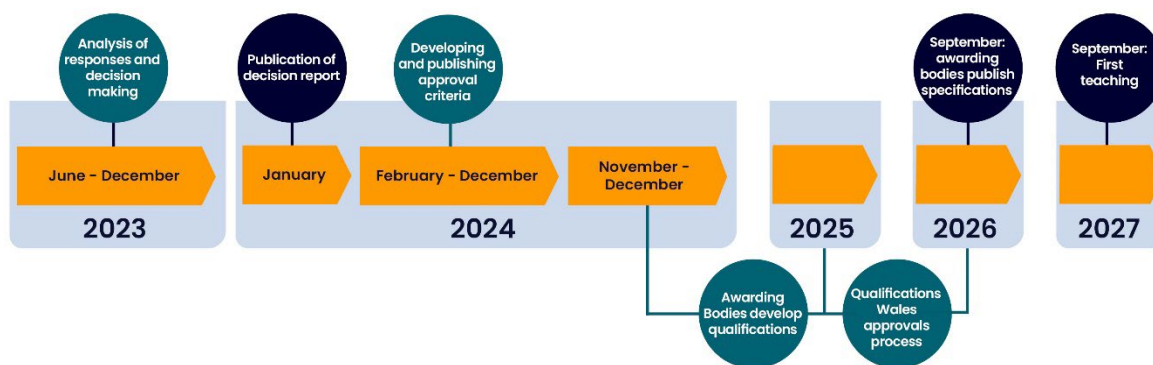


Figure 17

- 7.4 Once approval criteria have been agreed, awarding bodies will take forward the work on designing the detail of the new qualifications. From 2025, awarding bodies can start to submit qualifications for us to review. We will only approve qualifications once we are satisfied that they meet the requirements set out in our approval criteria.
- 7.5 Once a qualification is approved, the awarding body will publish the final specification and sample assessment materials a year before first teaching. This will provide teachers with preparation time.
- 7.6 Throughout this time, we will continue to work closely with awarding bodies, Welsh Government and others, to identify and secure the guidance, training and resources that will be required to support schools in planning for, and delivering, the new qualifications.
- 7.7 We will also work with post-16 education and training providers and employers, to ensure that these new qualifications appropriately support learners' progression to further education, training, or employment.

Managing the transition

- 7.8 To secure a fully inclusive range of qualifications that inspire and prepare learners for life, learning and work, we want to exercise greater control over what qualifications are available to 14 to 16-year-olds. To do this, we will continue to apply the guiding principles on which we have previously consulted, to shape how we decide which qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds should be eligible for public funding.
- 7.9 These principles are that qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds should be:
- aligned with the Curriculum for Wales
 - coherent and inclusive
 - available in Cymraeg and English
- 7.10 The qualifications outlined in this report will replace the vast majority of qualifications currently designated for learners aged 14-16. This means that many qualifications currently offered in schools will cease to be publicly funded from September 2027 (for learners commencing Year 10 in that year).

- 7.11 In exceptional circumstances, we may consider a small number of additional qualifications for designation as eligible for funding. These may include qualifications in community languages or those used in post-16 settings for younger learners. We are developing a process by which, exceptionally, awarding bodies may apply for a qualification to be designated as eligible for funding for this age group. We are currently updating our designation policy to reflect this and will be consulting soon on this change.

Establishing the new National 14-16 Qualifications

- 7.12 We know from previous reforms that, when making large-scale changes to qualifications, it is important to make the right decisions about the pace at which changes happen.
- 7.13 In September 2025, 20 new [Made-for-Wales GCSEs](#) will be taught for the first time, with further new Made-for-Wales GCSEs following in 2026.
- 7.14 In September 2027, the remaining qualifications that make up the new [National 14-16 Qualifications](#) will be taught for the first time. In 2025 and 2026 schools will still be able to choose from a range of 14-16 qualifications (other than GCSEs) currently available in Wales. To bridge the gap between the first teaching of new GCSEs and teaching of the new [Foundation](#), [VCSE](#) and [Skills Suite](#) qualifications outlined in this report. These will cease to be fundable for cohorts starting in September 2027 – from that point onwards all learners will need to start on the new suite of Made-for-Wales qualifications.
- 7.15 The Curriculum is designed to give schools autonomy and to adapt over time. It is therefore right that the qualifications available continue to evolve. We have carefully considered how new qualifications can be introduced without disadvantaging any cohort of learners and while enabling schools to develop their capacity at an appropriate and manageable pace.
- 7.16 Once the new qualifications are introduced, we will monitor their delivery and evaluate the extent to which they have achieved their intended benefits. We will collaborate with Welsh Government to ensure this work supports and feeds into their wider evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales.

8. Annex

Consultation approach

- 8.1. To gather feedback on our proposals, we launched a public consultation which was open for responses between 14 March and 14 June 2023.
- 8.2. We hosted the consultation on our [Have Your Say](#) engagement platform, where respondents could find the proposals, information about the consultation process and a survey to gather their feedback. To make the consultation accessible to young people we also created a youth-friendly version.
- 8.3. The consultation survey had a separate section on each proposal. It also included a section on the proposals as a whole and a section asking about potential impacts. Respondents did not have to complete the full survey; they could respond to the questions which interested them the most.
- 8.4. To take part in the survey, respondents had to register on the platform and provide some additional information, such as their role and the local authority in which they are based. We used this information to gauge the reach of the consultation and to help interpret the responses. Respondents under 13 needed parental or guardian consent to register.
- 8.5. In addition to the survey, upon request, we provided a PDF version of the proposals and accompanying questions. Respondents could then either email or post their responses to us. Respondents were also able to receive a more accessible easy read version of the proposals and survey via email.
- 8.6. Using a survey allowed us to reach a wide audience. Participants could respond at a time convenient to them. The survey also provided a manageable way to collect data and provided a consistent structure for analysis.
- 8.7. The questions on the proposals typically asked about overall views on each proposal, as well as particular aspects that respondents agreed or disagreed with (for example the list of subject areas for the Pre-vocational qualifications). Respondents were also asked to consider whether there was anything else we should think about in relation to each proposal.

Respondents

8.8. We received 509 responses in total, with the breakdown by mode of completion illustrated in [Table 8](#)

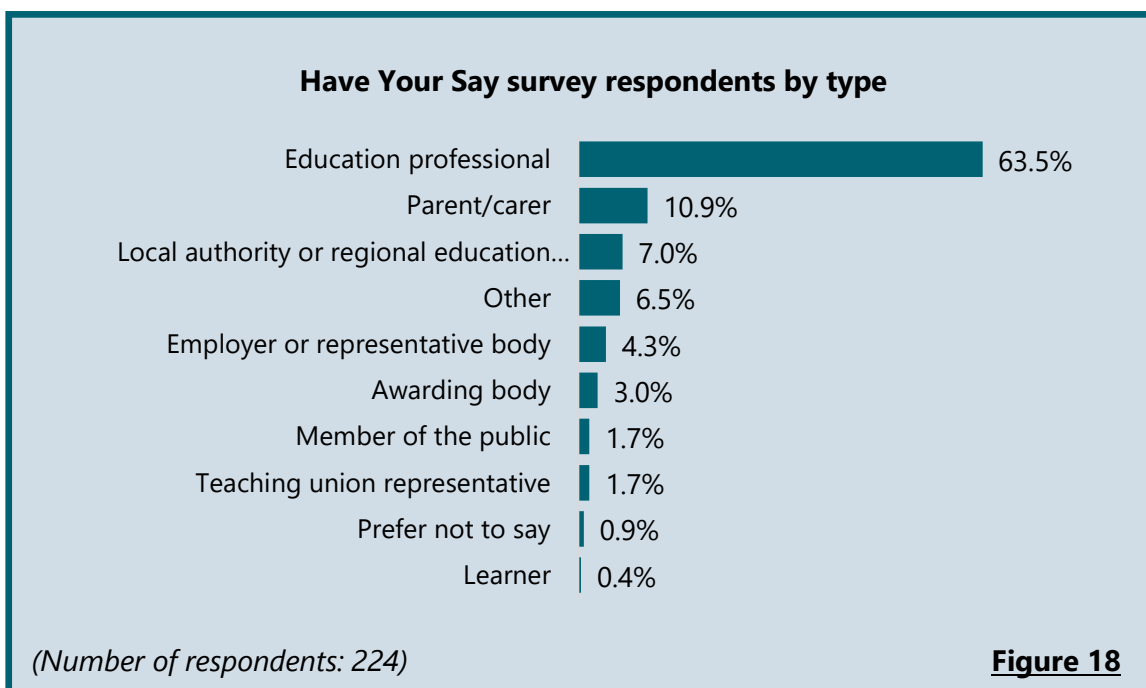


Table 8: Breakdown of consultation responses by mode of completion

Method of completion	Responses
Have Your Say/Dweud Eich Dweud platform	224
Easy read version	260
Alternative format	15
Total:	509

- 8.9. A wide range of stakeholder types responded in various forms, including education professionals, learners, parents and carers, local authority, regional consortia, teaching unions, awarding bodies, employers or representative bodies, and others key stakeholders. When registering for Have Your Say, users are asked to self-identify. The breakdown of respondents by these categories is shown in Figure 18. The majority of respondents were education professionals (63.5%), followed by parents/carers (10.9%). Some respondents may also fall into a category other than the one they selected.
- 8.10. Although very few Have Your Say respondents described themselves as learners, the majority (96%) of Easy Read responses were from learners.
- 8.11. Some responses were submitted on behalf of organisations, including membership and representative organisations, and represented the views of more than one individual.
- 8.12. Although we received responses from a variety of stakeholders, participation in a consultation is always voluntary and self-selecting. Those who respond may have a particular interest in the consultation topic. Therefore, we should be cautious not to generalise findings to the broader population.

Analysis

- 8.13. The closed responses were summarised into descriptive statistics which are presented throughout this report. These show the proportion of respondents who indicated whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with each proposal. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage, therefore some totals may not match the sum of other rounded figures.
- 8.14. We systematically analysed all open-ended responses to the consultation, this involved categorising information provided by respondents into overarching themes. Further information on this process can be provided upon request.