



Kirsty Williams AM  
Minister for Education  
By email - [DSME@gov.wales](mailto:DSME@gov.wales)

12 February 2019

Dear Minister

### **Qualifications for the new curriculum**

As the independent qualifications regulator, our responsibility is to make sure that qualifications meet the needs of learners in Wales and command public confidence.

The new Curriculum for Wales provides us with the opportunity to consider the purpose, design and availability of qualifications. While it is for Welsh Government to define the national policy context in which the curriculum and qualifications are delivered, we expect work associated with the design and development of new qualifications to form a significant part of our work over the next few years.

At our meeting with you before Christmas we touched on our plans for considering the implications for qualifications. In this letter we give more detail about how we will approach this important work.

We have worked with your officials and others across the education system to support the development of the new curriculum since its inception. As the draft curriculum has taken shape, we have been considering how we can make sure that qualifications continue to meet the needs of 16-year-olds once the new curriculum is introduced. Meeting the aims of the National Mission will require new qualifications to be available for first teaching from September 2025. We will also need to consider

whether any existing qualifications should continue to be available alongside new ones.

Renewing 14 – 16 qualifications will allow us to develop content and assessment methods that are fit for the future and help students to fulfil the core purposes of the curriculum. Ensuring that qualifications are closely aligned to the new curriculum will be crucial to its success, otherwise there is a risk of undermining the aims of the wider education reforms.

We want students in Wales to have an appropriate and coherent choice of engaging and trusted qualifications, which schools can combine and deliver effectively in Welsh and English.

An essential feature of our approach will be to ensure that teachers, students, and the wider education sector play a central role in shaping future qualifications. Recognising the important role that qualifications play in supporting learners to progress to further education and employment, we will also seek input from employers, colleges and universities from Wales and beyond.

Before we can determine the design requirements for new qualifications, it's important to consider why they are needed and to agree the purposes that they need to fulfil. By engaging with others, we want to agree what the purposes of new qualifications should be and to develop key principles for determining the nature of the future qualifications offer, including the mix of qualifications and subjects that should be available to 16-year-olds in Wales.

To ensure a firm basis for engaging with stakeholders and developing proposals for future qualifications, we will need clarity on key aspects of education policy. Between now and the summer, we will continue to work closely with your officials to address the following key policy questions:

- whether schools will be expected to offer a minimum range of qualifications to students;
- whether students will be expected or entitled to take a qualification from each area of learning and experience;
- how qualifications will feature in the new accountability arrangements, at a national, regional, county and school level;
- in particular, whether and how qualifications will feature in any indicators of school performance measures.

As part of our work it will be necessary to consider the title given to new qualifications. Our view is that the GCSE title offers substantial flexibility and could accommodate a wide range of different qualification design features to support alignment with the new curriculum. There is a strong argument for retaining a brand that is well-known and trusted by the public, employers and education providers across the UK and internationally. We will, therefore, work on the basis that new qualifications will continue to use the GCSE brand, but remain open to considering alternatives.

We are already looking at how the design of the Welsh Baccalaureate could be improved, and we expect to see a redesigned Skills Challenge Certificate being available to support the new curriculum, alongside any other new qualifications.

As this new curriculum is intended for 3 to 16-year-olds, we are not expecting it to have a direct impact on AS and A levels. As we progress with the work, however, we will identify and consider any potential implications for post-16 qualifications.

Through our extensive research, engagement and consultation activity over the coming months, we aim to develop and test a set of proposed principles that will shape the future qualifications taken by 16-year-olds who have followed the new curriculum. We expect to be able to offer you detailed advice by the end of 2019, which should enable a clear policy position to be confirmed in early 2020. This will coincide with the finalisation of the new curriculum, give schools the necessary clarity to plan for introducing the new curriculum, and allow for detailed design work to begin on individual qualifications.

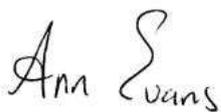
We know how important it is that new qualifications are available to schools in plenty of time for them to plan and prepare effectively, and to enable the timely development and delivery of professional learning for teachers and high-quality, bilingual teaching and learning resources. If we can agree a clear policy context and vision for future qualifications by early 2020, we are confident that new qualifications will be available to schools sufficiently early to support schools' needs.

We have already started to discuss early ideas with Welsh Government officials, pioneer schools, awarding bodies, assessment experts and Estyn. A number of research projects to gather teacher and student views on current qualifications are also underway. Between now and the summer we will expand and intensify our engagement with a growing range of stakeholders to help refine our thinking in preparation for a full public consultation in the autumn term.

The full programme of work to oversee the design, development, approval and introduction of new qualifications will require additional funding. We have already discussed with your officials the detailed funding implications for this work across the next five years.

We hope this letter helps to set out the collaborative approach we are taking to this important area of work. We look forward to working with your officials to develop a vision for qualifications in Wales that will support the aims and purposes of the new curriculum and prepare our young people for successful futures.

Yours sincerely



Ann Evans  
**Chair**  
**Qualifications Wales**



Philip Blaker  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Qualifications Wales**

cc  
Steve Davies, Welsh Government  
Rebecca Olney, Welsh Government