

National Assembly for Wales
Children, Young People and Education Committee
QW 22
Qualifications Wales Bill
Evidence from : Coleg y Cymoedd

Consultation questions

The Explanatory Memorandum prepared by the Welsh Government describes the Bill's main purposes in the following terms:

The Bill provides for the establishment of Qualifications Wales as the independent regulatory body responsible for the recognition of awarding bodies and the review and approval of non-degree qualifications in Wales. Qualifications Wales will also, along with the Welsh Ministers, be responsible for preparing a list of priority qualifications, designated as such by reason of the significance of the qualification, having regard to the needs of learners and employers in Wales. The intention is, through the establishment of Qualifications Wales, to strengthen the oversight of qualifications and of the qualification system in Wales.

The Bill is intended to address the four main limitations of the current system. These are outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum as:

- there is no single organisation that is dedicated to ensuring the effectiveness of qualifications and the qualification system;
- there are no powers to prioritise qualifications and to thereby focus regulatory activity where it is most needed – with the result that there are large numbers of regulated qualifications but limited resources to ensure effectiveness;
- there are no powers to select a single provider of a given qualification to ensure that learners across Wales take the same qualification; and

- the capacity to drive forward the strategic development of qualifications within the current arrangements is too limited – creating a risk that Wales’ qualifications will not be held in as high esteem, nationally and internationally, as those in other nations.

The Bill provides Qualifications Wales with the following principal aims, and it must act compatibly with these when exercising its functions:

- a) Ensuring that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and
- b) Promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system.

Question 1 – Is there a need for a Bill for the purposes outlined above?

Yes.

If you believe there is a need for the Bill, what are the main issues that need to be resolved?

Simplifying the qualification system in Wales would appear to be important – there are currently too many students doing courses that don’t necessarily result in employment or progression on to other courses – need to ensure all qualifications are fit for purpose and enjoy public/employer confidence; there is also simply too wide a variety of qualifications, as pointed out by Alison Wolf in her review – a slimmed down version of the current offer is important to ensure quality and relevance.

The prioritisation of certain qualifications over others seems to be essential in order to ensure the education system is meeting the needs of the Welsh Government, the Welsh economy, private employers and, of course, students themselves; the potential downside of this, however, is that there may be financial and wider staffing implications within schools/colleges, as the curriculum is adapted – this may mean that

there are skills shortages in certain areas, and over-supply in others, leading to a potential need to re-train appropriately qualified staff (which has a financial implication) or even to train more staff in those priority areas.

Government may need to be mindful of the need to make adequate provision in its budgets for a number of years to ensure there are no unintended consequences in delivering on the main purposes of the Bill.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	✓
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 2 – Do you think the Bill, as drafted, delivers the stated objectives as set out in the Explanatory Memorandum?

Yes

If not, how do you think the Bill should be amended to take account of this?

N/A

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	✓

Question 3 – Are the sections of the Bill as drafted appropriate to bring about the purposes described above?

Yes.

If not, what changes do you believe need to be made to the Bill?	
N/A	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	
<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	✓
<p>Question 4 – Has the Welsh Government correctly identified the four main limitations of the current arrangement, and will the two principal aims the Bill sets for Qualifications Wales, as well as the eight matters which it must have regard when exercising its functions, effectively address these limitations?</p>	
Yes.	
If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?	
<p>The establishment of an independent Qualifications Wales organisation has apparent advantages, primarily helping to guarantee consistency across all centres in Wales, allowing stakeholders to make direct and accurate comparisons between regions, schools/colleges and candidates, and remove the element of competition between Exam Boards, which can lead to certain subjects or awarding bodies being chosen because they are perceived to be ‘easier’. However, there is also some concern over this, in that the creation of, in effect, a monopoly could lead to a lack of the rigour and accountability that a free market system can help to create; it also means that it is absolutely incumbent on the awarding organisation to ‘get it right’, if there is no alternative for centres.</p> <p>Similarly, it is essential that we develop a suite of qualifications in</p>	

Wales that have the confidence of Higher Education institutions and employers outside the country (in England and elsewhere) – rigour and value are of the utmost importance in the portability of qualifications across the UK borders and in the wider geographical context of Europe.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

✓

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

Question 5 – What are your views on the proposals for determining ‘priority qualifications’ and, within these, ‘restricted priority qualifications’?

Simplifying the qualification system in Wales would seem to be important because it is perceived, under current arrangements, too many learners undertake learning that doesn’t necessarily result in a qualifications that lead to progression either to the next level of learning or employment. There is a need to ensure all qualifications are fit for purpose and enjoy public/employer/other stakeholder confidence.

If you think there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

The principle of simplifying the qualifications system in Wales seems to be understood but any new system must be robust and capable of comparison with qualifications in place across the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, so that Welsh learners are able to compete on an even playing field with those seeking work or further and higher education places outside of Wales.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	✓
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 6 – What are your views on the commissioning type process Qualifications Wales would undertake under the Bill, in respect of restricted priority qualifications?	
<p>The process in place to prioritise and commission those qualifications must instil public confidence. Therefore, ‘commissioning boards/panels’ should be made up of independent members to include a range of stakeholders who have particular affiliation with the sectors where those qualifications sit.</p>	
<p>If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?</p>	
<p>Creating Boards/Panels that are sector specific in nature e.g. independent engineering employers are part of the panel commissioning engineering quals etc etc.</p>	
<p>How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)</p>	
<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	✓
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 7 – How will the Bill change what organisations do currently and what impact will such changes have, if any?	
<p>In terms of the organisation, the impact will be minimal in terms of delivering learning programmes, however, if there is a need to re-train or employ new staff to deliver prioritised qualifications then this</p>	

will have financial impact on the organisation.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

We believe that Welsh Government need to be mindful of this and make financial provision to cover any unintended consequences during the implementation of the Bill.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

✓

Question 8 – What are the potential barriers to implementing the provisions of the Bill (if any) and does the Bill take account of them?

Meeting the principal aims of the Bill itself by ensuring public confidence in the Welsh qualification system and ensuring qualifications within the Welsh system are effective in meeting the needs of all stakeholders.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

By undertaking a comprehensive risk assessment of all the issues identified in the consultation responses with key stakeholder groups.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

✓

<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 9 – Do you have any views on the way in which the Bill falls within the legislative competence of the National Assembly for Wales?	
No.	
<p>Question 10 – What are your views on powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (i.e. statutory instruments, including regulations, orders and directions)?</p> <p>In answering this question, you may wish to consider Section 5 of the Explanatory Memorandum, which contains a table summarising the powers delegated to Welsh Ministers in the Bill to make orders and regulations, etc.</p>	
<p>There needs to be an amount of confidence and trust in the powers entrusted to Welsh Ministers and we believe that the powers delegated to Ministers in section 5 of the memorandum are appropriate.</p>	
<p>Question 11 – What are your views on the financial implications of the Bill?</p> <p>In answering this question you may wish to consider Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum (the Regulatory Impact Assessment), which estimates the costs and benefits of implementation of the Bill.</p>	
<p>In terms of the tables in Part 2 and the commentary below various options, we feel that although most costs are in part met within budgets already in situ for Welsh Government. However, the unintended consequences of the prioritised qualifications outlined above in terms of the impact of those on individual education providers/establishments needs to be factored into Welsh Government thinking.</p>	

There is currently a deficit of highly qualified entrants into the educational teaching profession so there needs to be some thinking around how the very best talent is channelled into the profession. Teachers spend a significant amount of time shaping the young entrepreneurs of the future and good teachers can have fundamental effect on a young person's (or older learner) future direction of travel.

Question 12 – Are there any other comments you wish to make about specific sections of the Bill?

Merely to emphasise that the need to ensure that the principal aims of the Bill are met to assure all stakeholders that the qualifications in Wales are effective, meaningful and promote public confidence across wider geographic regions of the UK, Europe and the world.