

# Qualifications to suit the new curriculum and the role of the third sector

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide some informal feedback to Welsh Government on plans for qualifications to be updated to match the new curriculum, and the potential role for the third sector in supporting transition and delivery.

We welcome Qualifications Wales' plans to overhaul qualifications so they are appropriate for the new curriculum, and more broadly, so that young people are able to access the appropriate recognition for the skills and experiences gained through education that enable them to be active citizens. We also welcome the transparent approach to the consultation timetable, which enables the third sector (and others) to plan time to consult with their stakeholders before responding.

Our experience working with educators, illustrates the impact the structure of qualifications has on what young people learn. For example, in recent years, it has been increasingly challenging to engage young people aged 14+ who are working towards their GCSEs in pupil enrichment activities; studying to exams dominates the timetable, despite the relevance of pupil enrichment to young peoples' employability, and their broader roles as active citizens, and as the future drivers of our society, economy and culture.

## 2. Key points

- We have submitted a previous paper about the vital role the third sector will play in the delivery of the new curriculum; this will extend to delivering the integral/wider skills and four purposes towards the achievement of qualifications.
- We support the continuation of the GCSE title. It is well understood in the education sector (FE and HE), by employers, and by other stakeholders such as parents inside and outside of Wales.
- We support an approach of flexibility in assessment arrangements, as this is beneficial for varying needs of learners.
- The simplification of the qualification landscape is welcomed – certainly removing qualifications that are never used.
- We feel it is vital that GCSEs reflect the new curriculum, or implementation of the *Successful Futures* will be impeded. However, as the curriculum gives a broad framework, with schools expected to develop specific curricula suited to their locality, it should be absolutely clear the evidence required for each qualification and how success should be measured. As a sector, we expect to give more detailed feedback in our areas of speciality at the next consultation stage, once the final version of the curriculum is published.
- In light of the emphasis on skills development and experiential learning in the new curriculum, a GCSE should mean a young person has had the opportunity to work on projects including those in their community and with employers, where they've needed to develop and use integral/wider skills AND understood the context of what they are learning. We would emphasise here that the third sector can play a strong part here both as employers themselves, and through the range of pupil enrichment activities offered. An

element of quality control will be important here, along with ensuring third sector education practitioners also have access to professional learning so they fully understand the new curriculum and qualifications frameworks.

- As submitted previously, we know that engagement with pupil enrichment activities can be patchy and depend on enthusiastic teachers rather than approaches being embedded within schools (with some notable exceptions). We welcome the expected changes to the new curriculum that will go some way to addressing this, but we have to combine this with the inspection framework and other accountability methods ensuring well-written school level ensure pupil enrichment activities are embedded in the delivery of qualifications.
- When testing for integral/wider skills, we must ensure that every child, no matter their situation, background, social context, any protected characteristics etc has the same level of opportunity to demonstrate and develop those skills.
- The Skills Challenge Certificate is an important part of Welsh Bacc delivery and does already assess many of the integral/wider skills. It is appropriate that it continues to be one of the qualifications offered to demonstrate wider/integral skills. However, the skills can and should be incorporated into GCSEs and vocational qualifications rather than simply tackled as an 'add on' in the Skills Challenge or other skills-based qualification. Incorporating the integral/wider skills into all qualifications at this level will ensure contextualised learning for every subject. Integral/wider skills are highly valued by employers and are seen as integral to the requirements for new recruits. This approach would fundamentally change the way subjects are taught, driving cross-curricula project working. It would also change the way young people think and approach challenges. This ultimately is the aim of the new curriculum.
- Ultimately, from the employers' perspective, including the third sector, there is a need for consistency and clarity.
- Regarding the provision of qualifications in Welsh, we welcome the strong approach to bilingualism but would want reassurance that valuable subjects are not lost unnecessarily if awarding body cannot offer qualifications in Welsh. Could additional support/funding be made available? Would a more pragmatic approach work better at least for a time?
- We also believe that the third sector will be essential in supporting teachers to embed wider skills and the Four Purposes when teaching to qualifications.

### **3. Recommendations**

- (i.) Ensuring third sector has access to professional learning opportunities related to the new curriculum**
- (ii.) Continue to recognise the third sector's role in delivering the new curriculum and associated qualifications**
- (iii.) Recognise within the new National Curriculum the contribution third sector and more generally voluntarism can make in encouraging and promoting active citizenship**

*The third sector education group*

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