

Vocational Qualifications Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting Notes & actions of meeting held on 18 February 2025

Qualifications Wales attendees:

Leanne Hallett	(LH)	Senior Qualifications Manager
Dean Seabrook	(DS)	Senior Qualifications Manager
Vicki Stockton	(VS)	Qualifications Manager
Lisa Mitchell	(LM)	Qualifications Manager
Claire Roberts	(CR)	Head of Strategic Engagement
Elaine Carlile	(EC)	Strategic Engagement Manager

Stakeholder attendees:

Yana Williams	(YM)	Chair of CC Curriculum and Quality Group
Barry Walters	(BW)	Chair of CC Strategic WBL Group
Kelly Edwards	(KE)	ColegauCymru
Jeff Protheroe	(JP)	ColegauCymru
Sarah John	(SJ)	NTfW
Kathryn Watkiss	(KW)	Welsh Government
Nick Herbert	(NH)	Welsh Government
Vivienne Wilfred	(VW)	Medr

Apologies:

Jo Richards	(JR)	Director of Qualifications Policy and Reform
Gareth Downey	(GD)	Senior Qualifications Manager
Ian Dickson	(ID)	Estyn

1. Welcome

- 1.1 EC welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies. EC updated the group on the appointment of Jo Richards as Executive Director Qualifications Policy and Reform following Cassy's retirement at the end of January. Jo has moved from her role as Executive Director Regulation, and Denver Davies has become the Interim Executive Director Regulation.
- 1.2 EC reviewed the notes, matters arising, and actions from the October meeting, confirming that all the actions were closed with the exception of action 2 which will be carried over to this meeting.. The ToR was updated as discussed in the October meeting and this was shared with the group in advance of this meeting.

Action 1: VW to share the current membership details of the apprenticeship steering groups with KE who will contact VW if additional representatives should be invited.

2. Welsh Government Update

- 2.1 Kathryn and Nick were welcomed to their first meeting of this group, and all members introduced themselves.
- 2.2 Kathryn introduced herself as a new member of the Welsh Government team, and is involved in taking forward recommendations from the Vocational Qualifications Review, and the Transitions to Employment Report.

- 2.3 Nick introduced himself as the new head of vocational qualification 16-19 delivery, and is due to take up his role next week. He is taking over the role from Stuart Evans who was previously a member of this group.

3. Medr Update

- 3.1 VW provided an update on Medr's review following on from the update provided in the October meeting. Recently the working groups in the Creative area on screen, animation and gaming met, with technical theatre lighting and sound and music meetings due shortly. Discussions to date have been very interesting, considering the levels of apprenticeships and the impact of AI in these industries.
- 3.2 VW noted that work on early years is progressing, with working groups to be set up in the next few weeks. Initial discussions for the construction and engineering reviews have started, including discussions with DS from QW. Some work is also taking place to commence the review of automotive frameworks.
- 3.3 VW noted that the updates to the SASW legislation, which includes increased credits for competency and knowledge, has been delayed due to the WG legislative process, but is expected to be introduced later this year.
- 3.4 The apprenticeship team in Medr is expanding, with one temporary member already in place and two permanent positions to be advertised soon.
- 3.5 JP requested that the window of opportunity that has arisen due to the delay in the SASW legislative process is used to consider, in Wales, the very recent announcement in England regarding the removal of the requirement for apprentices over the age of 19 to undertake English and maths functional skills qualifications to become qualified. He noted it would be best to make any additional amendments to SASW now due to the delay, rather than having to go through further changes at a later point. NH agreed to take discussions forward on this point.

<p>Action 2: NH to follow up discussions on potential changes to SASW with Medr, ColegauCymru, NTfW, QW and any other relevant stakeholders.</p>

4. Qualifications Wales

- 4.1 LH presented the new suite of hospitality and catering qualifications following extensive engagement by LM and the team with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the qualifications would meet industry needs and provide opportunities for learners to explore the Welsh context. The approval criteria for the new suite of qualifications will be published on 20 February. The [suite](#) includes qualifications for FE to cover occupational entry routes, and for both FE and WBL settings covering occupational competence. The new qualifications will be developed by the awarding bodies from March onwards and will be submitted to QW by July 2026 for approval. Specifications will be published by September 2026 and first teaching will commence in September 2027. Further information will be provided at the Sector Qualification Group which will be held on 18 March. There has been engagement with Medr to ensure that the new

qualifications will be included in apprenticeship frameworks, with Medr commencing the review of these frameworks in September 2026.

JP noted the request made by the Strategic WBL group to have the new qualifications available earlier, whilst acknowledging the time it takes to develop the qualifications and for centres to prepare for them. LH responded to say that this will be considered but noted that there is a high volume of qualification development taking place in Wales and in England and also the process of getting qualifications on to the apprenticeship frameworks needs to be factored into the timeline.

Action 3: LH to consider the request to have H&C qualifications available as early as possible, whilst balancing a range of requirements.

- 4.2 VS provided an update on the development of a new suite of land-based qualifications. As the current post-16 vocational land-based qualifications are coming to an end and the City and Guilds technical occupational qualifications are not suitable for post-16 learners in Wales, QW wrote to awarding bodies for expressions of interest in developing a new suite of qualifications to suit the needs of learners in Wales. Agored Cymru, BHS, Lantra and Open Awards are involved in the development of a suite of level 1, level 2 and level 3 qualifications. Some of the ABs are applying for the Welsh language grant to ensure that qualifications are available in both English and Welsh. Following a question from YW on provision of level 1 agriculture qualifications, VS noted that during discussions with FE, they are using the land based studies level 1 qualification which is continuing. It was therefore concluded that there was no demand for a new level 1 qualification at this point, but that will be kept under review.
- 4.3 VS also provided an update on the Hair and Beauty Sector review that is currently taking place. The team is currently engaging with FE colleges, WBL providers and employers. There is a [learner survey](#) open until 2 May. VS noted that during discussions with centres, there is significant demand for level 4 aesthetic qualifications within the beauty sector, driven by increased regulation in Wales. The findings from this sector review will be published in the autumn term.
- 4.4 EC provided an update on the development of National Qualifications. including the publication of [GCSE Wave 1 specifications](#) by WJEC for first teaching in September 2025. EC noted GCSE History has now moved to Wave 2 due to requests from teaching unions and directors of education to allow more time for preparation and resource development. It was noted that WJEC has published the Wave 2 [outline specifications](#) and that during the coming months the QW approvals process will take place so that approved specifications are published by WJEC in September for first teaching from September 2026. Wave 3 development for first teaching from September 2027, includes the VCSEs, foundation qualifications and the Skills Suite. QW published the [approval criteria](#) for these qualifications last November, and awarding bodies are currently applying for recognition by QW to develop and deliver the qualifications. An update was provided on challenges identified for post-16 provision with the integrated GCSE English Language and Literature qualifications and following meetings with WG, WJEC and the Cabinet Secretary, a menu of options for post-16 provision will be explored with FE. A

brief update on the high level [AS/ A level review](#) that WJEC will undertake was discussed, as well as the more substantial review of AS/ A level Welsh qualifications to ensure alignment with the Welsh Language Education (Wales) Bill.

- 4.5 BW thanked QW for considering the post-16 feedback in relation to GCSE English Language and Literature. SJ noted the full list of exemptions that are applicable to essential skills and these, along with the use of the initial WEST assessment, should be considered within certain post-16 provision. EC noted that these are considerations for the review of ESW qualifications. Following a question from YW about progression opportunities for learners who take the foundation level qualifications in school but may still need to progress to a level 1 qualification post-16, LH confirmed that some work is being undertaken in mapping the National Qualifications to post-16 progression routes at level 1. SJ noted that similar consideration is needed in relation to Jobs Growth Wales, which is not part of Medr's remit, but providers need to support learners' progression.

Action 4: QW to consider progression routes within pre-16 NQs to post-16 qualifications and to engage with relevant organisations to discuss the factors that need to be considered prior to the qualifications being delivered for first teaching from September 2027.

- 4.6 DS provided an update on the development work on the remaining construction occupational trades, inviting learning providers to participate in the working group in the creation of approval criteria for insulation and building treatments, which is taking place on 4 March and also stonemasonry and building maintenance which is taking place on 11 March.

Action 5: Members to contact Dean Seabrook (dean.seabrook@qualifications.wales) or Alex Eslor (alex.eslor@qualifications.wales) if any colleagues who are not already involved in developing the criteria for the construction occupational trades wish to become involved.

5. Matters arising from Further Education and Work Based Learning engagement

- 5.1 JP noted that CC is keen to participate in the discussions with QW on post-16 English and Cymraeg provision via the Curriculum and Quality Group meeting.
- 5.2 SJ reiterated the need for WG and Medr to consider the change in policy in England to remove the requirement for apprentices over the age of 19 to have functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics, and also noting the reduction to the apprenticeship minimum length from 12 to 8 months to fast-track some learners. SJ asked if QW has been involved in the progression pathways consultations and the route to apprenticeships. Finally SJ noted the work of the Credit and Qualifications Framework Group and asked about QW's involvement in this work, as Medr is considering aspects of this in its work.

Action 6: EC to check who in QW has been involved in the progression pathways consultations and the route to apprenticeships and also if QW is still involved with the Credit and Qualifications Framework Group.

6. AOB/forward plan

6.1 EC noted some key dates in the QW Forward Plan circulated prior to the meeting, including qualification reform and decision reports. The next meeting of this group will be on 26 June.

Actions

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Action 2: NH to follow up discussions on potential changes to SASW with Medr, ColegauCymru, NTfW, QW and any other relevant stakeholders.

Action 3: LH to consider the request to have H&C qualifications available as early as possible, whilst balancing a range of requirements.

Action 4: QW to consider progression routes within from pre-16 NQs to post-16 qualifications and to engage with relevant organisations to discuss the factors that need to be considered prior to the qualifications being delivered for first teaching from September 2027.

Action 5: Members to contact Dean Seabrook (dean.seabrook@qualifications.wales) or Alex Eslor (alex.eslor@qualifications.wales) if any colleagues who are not already involved in developing the criteria for the construction occupational trades wish to become involved.

Action 6: EC to check who in QW has been involved in the progression pathways consultations and the route to apprenticeships and also if QW is still involved with the Credit and Qualifications Framework Group.

Next meeting

26 June 2025 (13:30- 15:00)