

## Vocational Qualifications Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting

### Notes & actions of meeting held on 26 June 2025

#### Qualifications Wales attendees:

Leanne Hallett	(LH)	Senior Qualifications Manager
Andrew Shipway	(AS)	Qualifications Manager
Lleu Williams	(LW)	Head of Strategic Engagement
Elaine Carlile	(EC)	Strategic Engagement Manager

#### Stakeholder attendees:

Sarah John	(SJ)	NTfW
Rachel Cable	(RC)	ColegauCymru
Jeff Protheroe	(JP)	ColegauCymru
Kathryn Watkiss	(KW)	Welsh Government
Chris Stevens	(CS)	Welsh Government
Heather Davidson	(HD)	Medr
Vivienne Wilfred	(VW)	Medr

#### Apologies:

Jo Richards	(JR)	Director of Qualification Policy and Reform
Gareth Downey	(GD)	Head of VQ Monitoring
Mark Campion	(MC)	Estyn
Nick Herbert	(NH)	Welsh Government
Kelly Edwards	(KE)	ColegauCymru
Yana Williams	(YM)	Chair of CC Curriculum and Quality Group
Barry Walters	(BW)	Chair of CC Strategic WBL Group

## 1. Welcome

- 1.1 EC welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies. Introductions were made as CS, RC and LW were new to this group.
- 1.2 EC reviewed the notes, matters arising, and actions from the February meeting, confirming that all the actions were closed with the exception of action 4 which will be carried over to this meeting.

**Action 1:** 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.

## 2. Welsh Government Update

- 2.1 Chris provided an update on WG's response to the VQ Review and the Hefin David report. A vocational education reference group has been established which met in June and agreed on the five identified work strands which will sit within the overarching agenda to develop a VET Strategy. The group will meet monthly to discuss each delivery strand, aiming to produce a vocational strategy by April next year. Stakeholder input has been gathered through individual conversations over the last few months. This input has been incorporated into the identified work strands and will continue to be a part of the monthly reference group meetings. The strategy will articulate key objectives and bring together various strands and themes into a core document.

- 2.2 A new Ministerial Board for Vocational Education and Training is being established to facilitate strategic discussions about vocational qualifications, providing opportunities for ministers to discuss key priorities including economic development, green jobs, better participation in education, and the wider skills agenda. Further information is available on the [written statement](#) from Vikki Howells which was published on 26 June 2025.

### 3. Medr Update

- 3.1 VW provided an update on the framework reviews for apprenticeships, stating that they are on schedule. The reviews cover various apprenticeship frameworks, and the team is working on different aspects of these reviews. Information on the framework review cycle 2024-2027 is available [here](#). JP noted that the link seemed to be broken and VW took an action to ensure links were checked.

**Action 2:** VW to ask Medr colleagues to check that current links to documents on the website are working as expected.

- 3.2 VW also provided an update on the new staff who have recently joined Medr. Gail and Beth are now working on the development side, with Nicola focusing on funding and technical aspects. Eddie will be the senior sector manager for construction, Lindsay will handle health and social care with Richard and Kelly working on policy.
- 3.3 HD and VW outlined the upcoming consultation for the 2027 apprenticeship programme, which will start on 1st September and runs until mid-October. Medr is engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including industry bodies, providers, and other stakeholders, to gather input on the programme design and funding model, aiming to finalise the design by January and implement the programme the following year.
- 3.4 Following questions from JP and LH, it was noted that review of the funding model for the overall delivery of apprenticeships is in the early stages of development and this is not likely to be part of the September consultation. The goal is to make the funding model more logical and easier for stakeholders to engage with. Following questions from members about engagement with some specific stakeholders, such as NTfW, CC and QW before the consultation is published, HD and VW agreed to hold meetings with these and other key stakeholders to discuss the final proposals prior to the publication of the consultation.

**Action 3:** HD/VW to set up meetings with NTfW, CC, QW and potentially other stakeholders, prior to the publication of the consultation on September 1.

- 3.5 Following a question from SH, VW provided the email address [Apprenticeships@medr.cymru](mailto:Apprenticeships@medr.cymru) which should be used for any queries that employers, or other stakeholders may have on the creation, or deletion, of an apprenticeship framework.

**Action 4:** Members to direct queries about apprenticeship frameworks to the [Apprenticeships@medr.cymru](mailto:Apprenticeships@medr.cymru) email address.

#### 4. Qualifications Wales

- 4.1 LH provided an update on the [learner journeys](#) project, which aims to map out qualification pathways for learners in various sectors. The pilot for sport and public service has received positive feedback, and the team has considered suggestions for improvement, making amendments such as changing titling and distinguishing work-based learning and FE provision with different colours. Additionally, some careers examples have been included which signposts to Careers Wales website. The final versions are going through internal governance and, once the templates are approved, similar maps will be produced for other sectors with the aim of publication in the autumn term. The learner journeys in 23 sector areas (subject sector areas as outlined in QiW) will be updated annually, via the QW sector qualifications groups to ensure they remain current and relevant. Following a question raised by JP, LH confirmed that QW would take account of updates made by other stakeholders, such as Medr, if changes were made to the sector areas. Following a question from CS, LH confirmed that the final learner journeys would be published on QW's website and would be shared via QW's usual communication channels, ie letters to centres, inclusion in newsletters and in our engagement meetings with providers and other organisations. HD noted that Medr is also considering learner journeys from a different perspective and proposed that Richard from Medr and Lisa from QW discuss the work from their perspectives.

**Action 5:** LH to send HD Lisa's contact details so that Richard from Medr and Lisa from QW can discuss their respective work on learner journeys.

- 4.2 LH shared the initial findings from the Hair and Beauty sector qualifications review that had been led by Vikki at QW, highlighting the range of qualifications, Welsh medium availability, content, and assessment. The review found that most learning providers are satisfied with the range of qualifications, but some find the variety confusing whilst others appreciate the flexibility of the offer. It was felt that there was a good range of Welsh medium qualifications with providers understanding the importance of Welsh medium provision but sometimes found it difficult to access teaching and learning resources. Other challenges noted included the breadth of content in the level 2 beauty apprenticeship and the need for more practical assessment opportunities. There was an excellent response to the learner survey and, following a question from JP about the low number of employers contributing to the review, QW confirmed it will be considering its approach to employer engagement.

**Action 6:** QW to consider its approach to employer engagement

- 4.3 Following the update provided to the group at the last meeting regarding the development of a suite of post-16 vocational level 2 and level 3 designated landbased qualifications by four awarding bodies, LH provided an update on some points raised at the SQG meeting earlier in the month, and the follow up work that QW had undertaken. This involved discussing the assessment model and the grading of the level 3 qualifications, as well as the allocation of UCAS points for learners

progressing to university. At a recent meeting, a discussion was held about the qualifications that will be available to learners in England compared to those in Wales, as well as a discussion on the size and practicalities of delivering a T level. Work is ongoing in this area, and the relevant groups will be updated during the process. The awarding bodies have invited providers to work with them on developing the qualifications, including writing units.

- 4.4 AS provided an update on the reform of Essential Skills Wales qualifications, focusing on entry levels 1-3 and levels 1 and 2 for application of number, communication, and entry level 3, and levels 1 and 2 for digital literacy. A recent [survey](#) gathered feedback on the high level content that should be included to meet the purpose of the qualifications, ie ensuring they prepare learners for life, learning and work. AS gave a brief overview of the findings of the survey. A series of meetings will be held with stakeholders to discuss the results and finalise the content. The team will then move on to discussions about assessment. Following a point raised by SJ regarding collaboration within assessment for senior managers undertaking some qualifications, HD noted that use of ESW in level 4 and 5 frameworks was being considered within the SASW legislation and Medr has been working with WG on the new legislation post 2027. HD requested that QW arranges a meeting with Medr staff to discuss the current pilot that has been undertaken in integrating the essential skills into the main construction qualification. JP also raised the construction pilot, and a desire to consider such a model in other sectors, acknowledging the evaluation of the pilot is not due until 2030.

**Action 7:** QW to liaise with Medr to set up a meeting to discuss the construction pilot.

- 4.5 EC displayed a slide detailing other relevant work that QW is undertaking, including the engagement with stakeholders on the next steps in reviewing and reforming post-16 qualifications, and the [consultation](#) on the design requirements for AS/A level Cymraeg qualifications for first teaching from September 2027.

**Action 8:** Members to share the [AS/A level Cymraeg consultation](#) with relevant staff and organisations to encourage as many responses as possible by the closing date of **12 September 2025**.

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

- 5.1 RC noted that CC is currently finalising its manifesto ahead of the 2026 Senedd election, focusing on three missions. The first is about growing the economy, equipping industry in the workforce with the skills needed for the future, and changes ahead with net zero and AI. Mission two, focusing on participation, progression, and outcomes - about breaking down barriers, helping young people to make the right choices first time round and about delivering high quality learning and teaching. The third mission is about tackling intergenerational inequality and poverty. The manifesto will be shared with the group prior to publication. RC also mentioned that tickets are on sale for the [ColeaguCymru Annual Conference](#) which will take place on 23 October with speakers including Vikki Howells, Cefin Campbell and James Owen. There are also exhibition and sponsorship opportunities for the event.

- 5.2 JP raised concerns about the low number of construction apprenticeship starts, highlighting it as a significant issue. EC acknowledged the concern and mentioned that discussions are ongoing to address the concerns.
- 5.3 SH noted that NTfW launched its [manifesto](#) earlier in the week and the event was well attended. Following a recent board meeting, Lisa had shared with Medr some anomalies that were noted in the framework library, and Medr is working on this. HD noted that most of it sits on the WG rather than the Medr website but will move over in due course. SH also mentioned the growing interest in AI apprenticeships, with employers from England inquiring about equivalent programmes in Wales. VW welcomed any information on this topic, as digital qualifications are reviewed regularly (this relates to action 4).

## 6. AOB/forward plan

- 6.1 QW's high level Forward Plan was circulated prior to the meeting, including qualification reform and decision reports. The next meeting of this group is scheduled for 14 October.

### Actions

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### Next meeting

**14 October 2025 (13:30- 15:00)**