

Vocational Qualifications Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting

Notes & actions of meeting held on 23 June 2026

Qualifications Wales attendees:

Gareth Downey	(GD)	Head of VQ Monitoring and Awarding Body Compliance
Leanne Hallett	(LH)	Senior Qualifications Manager
Dean Seabrook	(DS)	Senior Qualifications Manager
Lleu Williams	(LW)	Head of Strategic Engagement
Andrew Shipway	(AS)	Qualifications Manager
Elaine Carlile	(EC)	Strategic Engagement Manager

Stakeholder attendees:

Christopher Stevens	(CS)	Welsh Government
Jassa Scott	(JS)	Estyn
Vivienne Wilfred	(VW)	Medr
Barry Walters	(BW)	Chair of CC Strategic WBL Group
Kelly Edwards	(KE)	ColegauCymru
Jeff Protheroe	(JP)	ColegauCymru
Sarah John	(SJ)	NTfW

Apologies:

Yana Williams	(YM)	Chair of CC Curriculum and Quality Group
Heather Davidson	(HD)	Medr
Mererid Williams	(MW)	Estyn
Jo Richards	(JR)	Executive Director of Qualification Policy and Reform, QW

1.1 Welcome

- 1.1 EC welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies.
- 1.2 EC led a review of the notes and requested updates on relevant actions from the February meeting, confirming that all the actions were closed.

2.1 Welsh Government Update

- 2.1 CS provided a comprehensive update on the Welsh Government's priorities under new ministers. He explained the need for careful reaffirmation of policy decisions with the new ministers, highlighting the shift in government and the importance of aligning actions with ministerial objectives. The skills team at WG is now integrated into the TED (now STED) directorate, aiming for better alignment within Welsh Government for skills and tertiary education.
- 2.2 CS outlined the government's 100-day commitments, including a review of university funding and reform of the Seren programme, with a written statement expected soon. He outlined the timeline for the skills audit (due March next year) and the upcoming skills summit in October. There are plans to operationalise the vocational education and training strategic direction document, ensuring it is informed by the skills audit and summit, and integrating post-16 qualification reform into the broader strategy.

3.1 Medr Update

- 3.1 VW provided an update on apprenticeship framework developments, including new units for the Level 3 media diploma, the completion of the Level 5 digital engineer update, and ongoing work on Level 4 digital forensics, with timelines aligned to sector needs.
- 3.2 VW explained the imminent consultation on Level 2 bricklaying and carpentry and Level 3 floor covering and refrigeration frameworks. The consultation will be very brief to ensure that entry requirements and new qualifications on the framework are appropriate. Following questions from BW, DS confirmed that the timelines for this work are very tight, due to the announcement made by WG in February to introduce the level 2 apprenticeship by this coming September. DS confirmed that draft C&G qualification materials, particularly the handbooks, are available on the [Skills for Wales website](#) and work is currently being undertaken in reviewing the draft assessments. C&G hosted the first webinar to introduce the qualifications to providers last week and there is a centre engagement plan in development. JP clarified that Medr's consultation focuses on the apprenticeship framework, particularly entry and exit requirements, and that the process follows statutory requirements with no major surprises expected.
- 3.3 VW provided a summary on the engagement during Medr's funding consultation, which closed last Friday, noting the 80/20 funding proposal as the main focus of feedback, with 120 organisations participating and outcomes to be shared in due course.

4.1 Estyn Update

- 4.1 JS provided updates on Estyn's recent work. There were positive trends in [adult social care apprenticeships](#), with rising attainment rates and strong learner support. However, there are ongoing challenges with employer engagement and higher-level provision.
- 4.2 In terms of [timely completion across apprenticeships](#), the report having been just published, JS noted improvements with 70% completing within one month of their planned end date, but noted persistent delays in health, social care, and construction sectors due to a variety of factors.
- 4.3 There is an Estyn Live event this week which will draw out some of the key message from the cycle of inspections that have occurred. Information available [here](#) and [here](#). Members were encouraged to attend the event.
- 4.4 JS previewed findings from the post-16 attendance thematic review, indicating lower attendance at entry and Level 1 courses and little difference between school sixth forms and FE colleges, with more variation by course level than by institution type. The report will be published in October.
- 4.5 Finally, an outline was provided on the start of Estyn's mid-cycle review with engagement planned to ensure alignment with Medr's regulatory and quality frameworks. JS welcomed input from members about any areas that Estyn should consider including in its plan. The intention is to publish arrangements at the start of the 27-28 academic year. In terms planning for future apprenticeship inspections, this follows a different cycle, aligned to the contract period. Work will

commence to consider the inspections for apprenticeships and engagement will be taking place in due course.

Action 1: Members to encourage attendance at the Estyn Live event.

Action 2: Members to contact Estyn if they wish to contribute any ideas regarding the next cycle of Estyn inspections.

5.1 Qualifications Wales

- 5.1 GD reported a successful summer assessment series, ongoing monitoring of approved qualifications, and encouraged stakeholders to provide feedback via the ['Have Your Say'](#) survey which closes on the 3 July. If any issues arise during the lead up to issuing of results or when results are provided, members were requested let providers know that they should contact the relevant awarding body in the first instance and if issues remain unresolved, to then notify QW.
- 5.2 DS detailed the introduction of new Level 2 and Level 3 construction qualifications and the extension of registration deadlines for the existing level 3 bricklaying and site carpentry qualifications. As discussed earlier in the meeting, the new level 2 apprenticeship qualifications will be available from this coming September, with the new level 3 qualifications in bricklaying, site carpentry being available for first teaching from September 2027. These new level 3 qualifications are specifically for those who are looking for progression rather than as an initial entry point. There is work being undertaken on a fourth level 2 route in the building improvement operations level 2 (maintenance, multi-trade repair and refurbishment). This development is being undertaken by Agored Cymru and the qualification should be available early in 2027. Work is ongoing with Medr on arrangements to update the existing frameworks due to the City & Guilds qualification being withdrawn. Two additional qualifications will be launched in September 2026, the construction level 3 floor covering qualification and the EAL Level 3 in Building Services Engineering (level 3) refrigeration, air conditioning and heat pumps. Both of these qualifications are being introduced due to the phasing out of the legacy qualifications. The qualifications are being introduced at level 3 only, because the industry is ending recognition for trade cards for learners who complete floorcovering at level 2.
- 5.3 LH outlined progress on the [post-16 VQ action plan](#), focusing on advice to Welsh Government and securing current qualification offers. Information was shared at recent stakeholder meetings with follow up meetings scheduled this month and next month where a more detailed analysis of the options discussed will be explored. A [letter](#) was sent to stakeholders in March due to the defunding of a range of qualifications via the DfE in England. On a positive note, the current defunding of the qualifications in England should have a minimal direct effect on Wales. Meetings are ongoing with awarding bodies and many qualifications have been extended for learners in Wales until at least 2028/29. Following concerns raised by JP and SJ about the need for content updates in extended qualifications, LH confirmed that discussions had taken place with awarding bodies to refresh content on qualifications being extended, especially where they are completely outdated.

- 5.4 In terms of the publication last week of QW's decisions on the reform of Essential Skills Wales qualifications following the consultation that took place between November and February, AS provided a summary of the [decisions](#). These included significant reductions in assessment time for numeracy and literacy qualifications, the retention of on-demand assessment, and the decision not to reform Level 3 or entry-level 1 and 2 digital qualifications due to low uptake. A full decisions [report](#) has been published along with approval criteria for each subject, [numeracy](#), [literacy](#) and [digital](#). The next steps will be for awarding bodies interested in developing and delivering the qualifications to undergo an additional recognition process, with QW providing further information on the availability of legacy qualifications. The reformed qualifications will be available for first delivery in autumn 2028. Following the concerns raised by SJ regarding the long lead in time before the new qualifications are available, AS mentioned that there is still a significant amount of work to be done in recognising awarding bodies that wish to develop/deliver these reformed qualifications, the development process awarding bodies will undertake which will involve stakeholder engagement, and finally the process to approve the qualifications. An update will be provided on where QW is with development at the next meeting of this group in October.
- 5.5 EC provided updates on key aspects of QW's recent work, including the publication of updated [learner journey resources](#), encouraging their use in schools to support post-16 progression planning and vocational pathway awareness, the publication of [approval criteria for post-16 GCSEs](#), and the development of a national qualifications guide for post-16 providers, with plans for further engagement and publication of the first version by August/September 2026.

Action 3: Members to encourage tutors and learners to complete the [Have Your Say](#) survey on the summer exams/assessments.

Action 4: Members to pass on the message to providers that in the first instance they should contact the relevant awarding body if there are any issues leading up to or after results are issued this summer and if issues remain unresolved to then notify QW.

Action 5: Update the group on progress of the development of Essential Skills Wales qualifications at the October meeting.

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

6.1 JP highlighted the urgency around construction apprenticeship frameworks, the need for timely communication with providers, and the challenges of condensed timelines for enrolment and consultation. The challenges of communicating with stakeholders, including the publication of awarding body materials was discussed and further consideration to be given as to how information can be disseminated in a more effective manner.

6.2 KE raised concerns about exam timetable clashes and the availability of Welsh and English versions of assessments, with ongoing discussions with WJEC to address these issues.

7. AOB/forward plan

7.1 JP suggested including the upcoming consultation on apprenticeship standards in the next meeting agenda, which EC agreed.

7.2 EC asked members to notify QW if there are any issues with the proposed date for the next meeting: 19 October between 13:00 and 14:30.

Action 6: EC to include an agenda item on the upcoming consultation on apprenticeship standards in the October meeting.

Action 7: Members to inform EC if there are any issues with the proposed date of 19 October between 13:00 and 14:30 for the next meeting.

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Next meeting

19 October 2026 (13:00 – 14:30)