

1. Thank you for inviting Qualifications Wales to submit evidence to inform the inquiry into Welsh Government's proposed Welsh Language Strategy.
2. Our response to the recent consultation on the proposed strategy is published on our website¹. We welcome this opportunity to further discuss our views on the proposals to help inform the development of a clear strategy to meet the aims set out by Welsh Government.
3. To realise the ambitious target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050, the Welsh language strategy will have to be carefully planned and sufficiently resourced. It will have to be a national project and there will need to be joint understanding and working amongst a wide range of organisations, movements and bodies. Qualifications Wales welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively with Welsh Government and other stakeholder to realise the strategy's vision.
4. Here we offer our perspective on some of the main challenges that we believe the strategy will need to address in order to achieve that vision.

Curriculum and qualifications reform

5. As the committee will be aware from our letter to Welsh Assembly Members earlier this year², we have reformed the GCSE Welsh Second Language qualification for first teaching from September 2017. When it is introduced, the current full and short course provision will be removed.
6. The new qualification will:
 - strengthen the focus on speaking and listening to ensure that learners have the everyday Welsh skills they need for the real world;

¹ <http://qualificationswales.org/publications/?lang=en&category=Correspondence>

² <http://qualificationswales.org/media/2063/open-letter-to-ams-on-gcse-welsh-second-language-eng.pdf>

- remove the reliance on narrowly defined vocabulary and topics that can constrain learning and attainment in the language;
- clarify the expectation that the time dedicated to teaching should be the same as for other GCSEs.

7. We know already from our extensive and continuing engagement with stakeholders in this field that these changes will require a different approach to teaching the subject, which will pose a significant challenge to some schools. A particular concern we often hear of is the shortage of teachers who are competent and sufficiently trained to teach the subject. As we have said previously, we consider the changes we have introduced to this qualification to be an initial interim step towards the removal of the distinction between Welsh and Welsh Second Language education and qualifications. The scale of challenge in terms of upskilling and expanding the education workforce should not therefore be underestimated.
8. We support the Welsh Government's commitment to removing the distinction between Welsh and Welsh Second Language as part of the reforms to the curriculum, based on a single continuum for Welsh language acquisition and development. We believe it will support learners in achieving their full potential. This in turn will contribute to the development of the future education workforce. We are working with Welsh Government to understand appropriate assessment approaches for the new curriculum. To develop our thinking in relation to qualifications, we have commissioned University of Wales Trinity Saint David to research how a continuum of language acquisition could be developed to support good teaching and learning and effective assessment. We plan to commission further research early in the new year to look at different approaches to articulating the continuum so that we can consider the implications for assessment and qualifications.

9. We know that one of the key contributing factors to successful language acquisition and progression is to provide as many opportunities as possible for learners to hear, see and use the language. This is in line with the vision set out by Professor Graham Donaldson in Successful Futures for learners to develop their proficiency in languages, literacy and communication in conjunction with all other areas of the curriculum.
10. Effective language acquisition in schools will be key to delivering the strategy. We support Welsh Government's objective of creating 'a workforce with the appropriate skills to educate and provide services through the medium of Welsh' as we need a competent, high quality Welsh language workforce. An important first step will be for Welsh Government to gain a full understanding of the current capacity and capability in relation to Welsh language skills across the education workforce. This will need to drive a concerted programme of work to build that capacity and capability over the coming years – this will need to impact upon the incentives to become a teacher, initial teacher training and continuing professional development for existing teachers.
11. The introduction of the new Wales-only qualifications and the Curriculum for Wales provides an opportunity to develop provision that is tailored to the needs of learners in Wales. However, it brings with it a challenge in terms of securing Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching and learning resources. The lack of Welsh-medium resources, in particular, has been raised by schools as a barrier to delivering qualifications through the medium of Welsh.
12. Qualifications taken only by learners in Wales present a significantly less attractive proposition to commercial publishers than ones taken across the three-countries. As a consequence, the resources available to learners in Wales has narrowed. This effect is exacerbated for Welsh-medium resources. As a result, there needs to be a more effective and efficient mechanism for Welsh Government to work with others to

facilitate the equitable provision of teaching and learning resources. This can be realised through careful planning and early collaboration with stakeholders, including publishers and training organisations. The important lesson learnt from the current GCSE and A level reform programme is that the programme of change must allow sufficient time for 'whole system readiness' – this has not been possible in the current reforms due to parallel reforms in England.

Availability of Welsh-medium and bilingual qualifications

13. We recognise the importance of seeking a wide range of Welsh-medium and bilingual qualifications for learners in Wales. As a result, we offer a Welsh language grant to support awarding bodies in responding to demand for assessment through the medium of Welsh. Since actively promoting its availability, there has been a notable increase in applications. However, there is a limit to our resources to make these grants available and the awarding bodies' responsiveness to the financial stimulus.
14. One of the most significant barriers awarding bodies have identified to the provision of qualifications through the medium of Welsh is a lack of personnel who are able, or who feel confident enough, to assess qualifications through the medium of Welsh without translation. We are exploring possible mechanisms for awarding bodies to connect with individuals who can provide Welsh-medium and bilingual assessment and quality assurance services. However, this is a short term solution and does not address the wider workforce issues.
15. We look forward to discussing these matters further with the Committee in December.

Yours sincerely

Ann Evans
Chair

Philip Blaker
Chief Executive