

Made for Wales GCSEs and Related Qualifications

Overview of Consultation Findings



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Background

In June 2023, Qualifications Wales published Approval Criteria for a suite of made-for-Wales GCSEs and related qualifications (<https://qualifications.wales/regulation-reform/reforming/qualified-for-the-future/made-for-wales-gcses/#approval-criteria>).

Qualifications Wales have decided that these qualifications will be introduced in a phased way; WJEC is now developing the qualifications that are to be available for first teaching from September 2025 to meet these requirements.

WJEC recruited a Subject Development Advisory Group for each subject and discussed proposals for each qualification. We also developed principles and guidance to help us ensure that the qualifications developed will support the Curriculum for Wales. Based on the Approval Criteria, our principles and guidance and discussions with our Advisory Groups, we developed a qualification outline for each qualification that sets out the high-level focus, structure, unit purposes and assessment approach.

Before using these outlines to form the basis of our detailed specification and sample assessment material development, we wanted to hear from a broader range of stakeholders and held an open consultation on our website in two batches:

Batch 1 Qualifications	Batch 2 Qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level 2 Award in Additional Core Cymraeg• GCSE Art and Design• GCSE Business• GCSE Computer Science• GCSE Core Cymraeg• GCSE Drama• GCSE French, German and Spanish• GCSE Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GCSE Cymraeg Language and Literature (Single and Double)• GCSE English Language and Literature (Single and Double)• GCSE Food and Nutrition• GCSE History• GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy• GCSE Music• GCSE Religious Studies• GCSE The Sciences (Double)

The consultation for Batch 1 opened Wednesday 18 October 2023 and closed Wednesday 8 November 2023. The consultation for Batch 2 opened Wednesday 25 October 2023 and closed Wednesday 15 November 2023. While the consultation was open, we also discussed the outlines with our overarching GCSE and related qualifications Development Advisory Group, Learner Advisory Group, Union Reference Group and Stakeholder Reference Group. We are extremely grateful to all of you who shared your views with us as part of our commitment to co-constructing these qualifications.

Since then, we have analysed and considered the feedback in the context of the requirements of Qualifications Wales' Approval Criteria and the Curriculum for Wales and made some revisions.

Many of the comments made apply across subjects – a summary of these issues can be found in the general feedback section. An overview of subject-specific feedback follows, grouped by Area of Learning and Experience.

General Feedback

Consultation responses were generally positive with respondents broadly agreeing that the qualification structures were appropriate, that unit purposes were appropriate and engaging for learners whilst meeting the qualification purpose and aims, that the approach to assessment was appropriate and that the qualifications would support the Curriculum for Wales. There were some subject-specific exceptions – mainly English Language and Literature, History, Core Cymraeg and The Sciences – but comments made by respondents indicated that these were driven mostly by Approval Criteria requirements set by Qualifications Wales that WJEC must adhere to. The subject-specific section of the report goes into further detail around the concerns raised.

Manageability, both for learners and centres, attracted the lowest levels of agreement. Whilst most of the concerns were linked to the proportion of non-examination assessment, GCSE The Sciences (Double Award) which doesn't include non-examination assessment also attracted lower scores. The comments made indicated that the concern here was around the level of content that we must include in our qualification.

Non-examination assessment

Concerns about the amount of non-examination assessment, both within individual qualifications and across the suite of qualifications, came through clearly in our consultation responses. A notable area of concern in consultation responses and discussions with stakeholder groups links to learners undertaking non-examination assessment across a number of subjects, and the potential negative impact this could have on learner wellbeing. Another key concern raised in relation to non-examination assessment was an increase in teacher workload. This was particularly prevalent in qualifications where the non-examination assessment is either new or significantly increased.

It must be noted that WJEC cannot change the amount of non-examination assessment or the proportion to be marked by schools, in the new made-for-Wales GCSEs and related qualifications. Qualifications Wales considered the proportion of non-examination assessment and its marking during their process of developing the Approval Criteria, and their final decisions are reflected in their published Approval Criteria which we must adhere to. Qualifications Wales noted in its June 2023 consultation report that introducing a bigger proportion and variety of non-examination assessments would ‘in turn result in more assessment-related workload for schools’ (<https://qualifications.wales/media/dkcr1u/made-for-wales-gcses-main-consultation-report-january-2024-update.pdf>). Qualifications Wales has asked us to ensure manageability, within the parameters of the Approval Criteria, which we have been discussing with stakeholders and will continue to do so as we develop the detail of the qualifications.

A key theme that emerged from the consultation responses and discussions with our overarching stakeholder groups was equity for learners. Welsh Government's guidance on well-being, equity and inclusion (<https://hwb.gov.wales/evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/the-national-resource-evaluation-and-improvement/what-is-the-national-resource/well-being-equity-and-inclusion/>) describes equity as meaning equitable access to opportunities to perform in assessments, access to the same materials and spaces, unbiased assessment tasks, preventing prejudice or stereotyping and allowing students to access the assessment regardless of their background. Some stakeholders felt that non-examination assessment can further disadvantage some learners, for example, those who do not have support or access to adequate resources at home. Whilst parents or carers can also provide support for exam revision, the impact of support at home could be greater for non-examination assessment where the requirements of the non-examination assessment are clear in advance and support can therefore be more targeted. Some stakeholders did not consider this to be in line with the aims of Welsh Government's Education in Wales: Our national mission (https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-03/our-national-mission-high-standards-and-aspirations-for-all_0.pdf) or its Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (<https://www.gov.wales/anti-racist-wales-action-plan>).

Respondents noted that they felt that appropriate controls should be in place to ensure that all schools assess fairly, or there could be a lack of confidence in qualification results which would consequently mean learner attainment would have less value associated with it.

The majority of the stakeholders we engaged with in our overarching stakeholder groups echoed this view, including our Learner Advisory Group, who were very concerned about a potential lack of fairness to all in non-examination assessment.

In our discussions, it was also noted that an increase in non-examination assessment weighting could potentially raise the likelihood and incentive for malpractice, and several respondents noted a concern about Artificial Intelligence and its monitoring, with a fear that low controls could make the use of Artificial Intelligence difficult to monitor, threatening fairness for learners.

However, one stakeholder group had a different view on what impacted equity, requesting that the GCSEs have a range of assessment methods, focusing on competency-based continuous assessment methods, rather than coursework or mini-tests, to maximise equity. This group felt that controls should be low with more faith placed on teacher assessment.

When we submit our qualifications to Qualification Wales for approval, we must stipulate how we have managed the balance of manageability, engagement, reliability and validity. Qualifications Wales' Standard Conditions of Recognition also require that our qualifications, as far as possible, secure validity, reliability, comparability, manageability and minimising bias, and to ensure that we achieve the optimum balance of these factors in the context of that particular qualification.

Our guiding factors relating to non-examination assessment prior to the consultation period and discussions with stakeholders were manageability and minimising the negative impact of assessment on teaching and learning. Whilst these are clearly very important considerations, we now propose that we put learner equity at the heart of our design and decision making in relation to non-examination assessments. Our focus on equity may lead to controls which limit some of the flexibility that could have helped centres balance some of the manageability concerns. Ensuring assessments are sufficiently controlled does not mean that we will take a uniform approach to assessments that feel like an exam taken in the classroom; we are still proposing a range of non-examination approaches, including performances, portfolios and extended practical investigations and enquiry tasks. In line with the views of the majority of the stakeholders we have heard from, we will aim to ensure that our tasks and associated controls minimise any unfair advantage or disadvantage whilst also considering the manageability burden on both learners and centres, the validity, reliability and comparability of the assessments, and learner engagement.

Digital submission of non-examination assessment

The Approval Criteria require us to make it possible for centres to submit non-examination assessment digitally. In our draft outlines, we proposed that digital submission would be the only option, as this would create an equal playing field for all. While some positive comments were made around digital submission where learner work has been produced digitally, respondents expressed a concern linked to teacher workload and centre manageability where the infrastructure isn't available to schools to enable the work to be produced digitally by learners in the first place. Where this is the case, scanning and uploading of non-examination assessment could be time-consuming, particularly when considering the scale of non-examination assessment across the suite of qualifications. It is difficult to ascertain the extent or impact of the concerns from the feedback gained, and difficult to judge to what extent concerns will have been addressed through improved infrastructure by the time the qualifications are introduced. We are undertaking further focused work to explore in more detail and will clarify our expectations in the Spring.

Digital examinations

Respondents also expressed concerns around a lack of infrastructure in schools to support digital examination assessment. Qualifications Wales, as part of their change management programme, are discussing centre readiness with stakeholders, including WJEC.

Amount of content

Some stakeholders found the volume of content in the qualification outlines to be overwhelming. Some of the comments made indicated that the number of hours allocated to some subjects differed significantly to the guided learning hours, and this raised concerns around their ability to cover the content in the time they were allocated by their school. Other comments indicated that the volume of content we had included in our draft outlines was excessive for the guided learning hours allocated. More detail around this aspect can be found in relevant subject-specific sections. In the next stage of development, we will be reviewing the volume of content carefully within the parameters of the Approval Criteria.

Further Education re-sits

A number of Further Education providers raised concerns around re-sits, with particular concerns relating to Mathematics and Numeracy, and English Language and Literature. We are exploring this issue in greater detail with Qualifications Wales and we will also be discussing the issue with Further Education providers.

Concepts

Some respondents were confused by our use of concepts in the qualification outlines. We used the word as conceptual understanding is key to the Curriculum for Wales. We wanted to reflect this and ensure our initial development work started from key concepts and big ideas rather than granular content. However, we have reviewed our use of concepts across the outlines and in some cases, where the word does not add value or the Approval Criteria does not refer to concepts, we have removed the references.

Detail

Some respondents noted that it was difficult for them to comment at this stage due to a lack of detail. We understand this comment; the qualification outlines are not intended to provide the detail that a full specification will include, and we trust that the full specifications will provide stakeholders with all of the information they require in due course.

Subject Specific Feedback

Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience

GCSE Art and Design

WJEC received 38 responses, with over half of the respondents answering on behalf of a school, the majority of those indicating that they were a teacher.

The majority of respondents agreed with all aspects of our proposed qualification outline, indicating that the proposed structure and assessment approach is appropriate, that the unit purposes are appropriate and engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales.

The majority of respondents felt that the qualification will be manageable for both learners and centres. However, we acknowledge the concerns that some respondents raised around manageability. A couple of respondents proposed setting limits on the time spent on or volume of work to be submitted for the portfolio; however, after consulting further with stakeholders via our Development Advisory Group, we have decided not to proceed with this but to retain the current flexibility. However, we have asked our specification writers and reviewers to be mindful of learner workload when developing the content of the portfolio.

GCSE Drama

WJEC received 24 responses, with the majority of those being from practitioners within a school.

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed qualification structure and assessment approach is appropriate, that the unit purposes are appropriate and engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed qualification will be manageable for centres and learners alike. Some respondents welcomed the structure of the new qualification and felt it struck the right balance of theory and practical.

We also received positive comments regarding:

- the proposal to release the materials for the devising unit at the beginning of the course, rather than in Year 11
- the opportunity to complete the devising unit at an appropriate point during the two years
- the flexibility and choice in terms of text selection.

However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Respondents noted their concern regarding the weighting of the examination unit in relation to the devising and performing units. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that a total of 30% of the qualification must be assessed by digital-only external examination which must be set and marked by the awarding body.

- Concerns were raised regarding written work linked to the practical aspects of the devising and performing units. The Approval Criteria note that as part of the devising unit, learners must submit a reflective log in a non-prescribed format; this will be compulsory to access the full range of marks. Our specification writers are aware of the concerns raised within the consultation and are working to ensure that the reflective log does not impede learners' creativity and enthusiasm within the devising unit. Consequently, we have removed the requirement for a discrete evaluation task in the devising unit. We have also removed the requirement for the Artistic Intentions element; therefore, we have not included any additional written work within the performing unit.
- Respondents noted concerns about the unprepared work(s) in the external examination. The Approval Criteria states that 30% of the qualification must be assessed by external examination which must include questions on unprepared works. Our specification writers are looking at opportunities to use different types of questions and the use of digital assessment to support and augment this aspect and to support the Curriculum for Wales.

GCSE Music

WJEC received 37 responses, with half of the respondents answering on behalf of a school, the majority of those indicating that they were a teacher.

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed qualification structure and assessment approach is appropriate, that the unit purposes are appropriate and engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales and that the proposed qualification will be manageable for learners. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed qualification would be manageable for centres.

We also received positive comments regarding:

- the proposal to release the composition briefs at the beginning of the course, rather than in Year 11
- stipulating that both the performing and composing units could be assessed anytime during the course
- not including any additional written work within the performing unit.

However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Respondents noted their concern regarding the weighting of the examination unit in relation to the performing and composing units. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that a total of 35% of the qualification must be assessed by digital-only external examination which must be set and marked by the awarding body.
- Concerns were raised regarding written work linked to the practical aspects of performing and composing. The Approval Criteria note that as part of the composing unit, learners must submit a reflective log in a non-prescribed format; this will be compulsory to access the full range of marks. Our specification writers are aware of the concerns raised within the consultation and are working to ensure that the reflective log does not impede learners' creativity and enthusiasm within the composing unit. As noted above, we have not included any additional written work within the performing unit.
- Some concerns were also raised regarding the use of composition briefs. The Approval Criteria note that learners must be given opportunities to apply understanding of the creative process to create their own music and realise artistic intentions in response to a range of briefs. Our specification writers are being guided regarding the use of composition briefs to ensure that learners are given the required choice and flexibility within this unit.

Humanities Area of Learning and Experience

GCSE Business

WJEC received 36 responses, with the majority of respondents answering on behalf of a school and most indicating that they were teachers.

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed assessment approach is appropriate, that the unit purposes are appropriate and engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the assessment approach is appropriate.

However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Concerns were raised about the number of assessments for the qualification and the number of non-examination assessments specifically. We are unable to address these points as they reflect decisions made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that there must be two examination assessments and two non-examination assessments and that the non-examination assessments account for 40% of the qualification.
- Some respondents felt that the suggested time allocation for the non-examination assessment tasks was too short. Consequently, we have increased the length of the assessment from four hours to five in Unit 2 and from six hours to eight in Unit 4.
- Some concerns were raised about a potential lack of focus on business fundamentals and theory. This was not our intention. Consequently, we have added business fundamentals to the purpose of Unit 1 and have added more of a business focus to the purpose of Unit 3. We have also changed the name of Unit 3 to ‘Business Strategies for Success’ to emphasise that the course will focus on specific business concepts and theory.
- Some respondents expressed concern about the potential amount of content to be covered for the number of teaching hours available. Our specification writers are being guided on the number of Guided Learning Hours per unit to ensure that the content is teachable in the time and we will strengthen our focus on reviewing manageability linked to this aspect.
- Some concerns were raised about collecting data about local businesses. The Approval Criteria from Qualifications Wales state that learners need to develop their knowledge and understanding of different business models, technology and the role of enterprise and entrepreneurship from a local perspective. It also states that learners must develop ‘an understanding of business processes, incentives, and outcomes, within their cynefin’. However, it is our intention to provide guidance on criteria for selecting a suitable business to support centres.
- Some respondents felt that Unit 4 would be more appropriately stated as a synoptic unit. Consequently, we have updated the outline to reflect this.

GCSE Geography

WJEC received 77 responses, with the majority of respondents answering on behalf of a school.

The majority of respondents agreed that the unit purposes are appropriate and engaging for learners and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the unit purposes meet the qualification purpose and aims and that the proposed qualification structure and assessment approach is appropriate.

Some respondents commented that the proposed qualification would help develop ethical and informed citizens and some noted that they liked the way content is organised by themes.

However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some concerns were raised around the number of non-examination assessments. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that there must be two non-examination assessments that account for 40% of the qualification.
- Some concerns were raised about the fieldwork being marked internally. The Approval Criteria state that one of the non-examination assessments must be marked by the centre and moderated by the WJEC. Consequently, we have now decided that the fieldwork will be set and marked by WJEC. As the Approval Criteria state that one of the non-examination assessments must be marked by the centre and moderated by the WJEC, the Decision Making Exercise will now be marked by centres and moderated by WJEC; this non-examination assessment is 15% of the qualification and is therefore smaller than the fieldwork non-examination assessment at 25%.
- Some respondents wanted to see a higher weighting for the Decision Making Exercise. However, following discussions with our Geography Qualification Development Advisory Group, we have not increased the weighting as we would consequently have to lower the fieldwork weighting; the Group did not favour this due to the time it takes learners to complete the fieldwork non-examination assessment.
- Some concerns were raised about the potential amount of content to be covered for the number of teaching hours available. Our specification writers are being guided on the number of Guided Learning Hours per unit to ensure that the content is teachable in the time.
- Some concerns were raised about a possible imbalance between human and physical geography. This was not our intention. Consequently, we have changed the title of the Unit 1 to 'Our physical and human world'. We have updated the wording of the outline document to emphasise that there will be an equal balance of physical and human geography and we have updated the possible areas to be covered to reflect more physical aspects.
- In terms of fieldwork, some respondents were concerned that the fieldwork assessment would not consider the whole enquiry process. This is not our intention. Some respondents were also concerned about the emphasis on the local area. Consequently, we have removed the reference to exploring fieldwork in learners' locality, to widen out the area that learners can explore. However, it is likely that most fieldwork enquiries will take place in the local area.
- Some concerns were raised about the proposed length of the examinations. We propose to explore this further in the next stage of development being mindful of fairness, the ability to differentiate, coverage and the need for reading time.
- Following feedback on digital submission we will be exploring this further at the next stage of development.

GCSE History

WJEC received 74 responses, with half of the respondents answering on behalf of a school, the majority of those indicating that they were a teacher.

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that that the proposed assessment approach is appropriate and that the unit purposes are appropriate, engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims.

However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some respondents were concerned that learners would not find medieval history interesting. Other respondents raised a general concern about the time periods learners would study, suggesting this might result in a lack of engagement. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that learners must be given opportunities to demonstrate historical knowledge and understanding of different historical eras (this must include medieval, early modern, and modern).
- There was a mixed response to the amount of Welsh history. Some respondents expressed that there was excessive emphasis on Welsh history (Unit 1 – An in-depth study on Welsh history and Unit 4 – Wales and Britain/the UK) whilst others welcomed the focus, noting that they felt it aligned with the Curriculum for Wales. Consequently, we have updated the outline document to propose that Unit 4 provides learners with an opportunity to focus their studies on a location of their choosing within a specified area. We have also renamed Unit 4; it will now be called ‘People and progress?’ We have retained the focus of Unit 1 on specifically Welsh history, in line with the Approval Criteria, which states learners must be given an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of Welsh history, along with Wales and the Welsh perspective.
- While some respondents welcomed the increase in non-examination assessment, others expressed concern that it might devalue the qualification. Additional concerns were raised regarding the potential negative impact of increased non-examination assessment on teacher workload. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that there must be two non-examination assessments that account for 40% of the qualification, one of which must be marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding body.
- Some respondents questioned why Unit 1 and Unit 3 examinations had the same weightings despite variations in their likely lengths. Additionally, some respondents expressed the view that allocating only one hour for the Unit 1 examination was insufficient. We have considered this feedback but have concluded that the variation in times allocated for each unit is considered appropriate because of the variation in focus between units. Unit 1 focuses on a specific issue in Welsh history, whereas Unit 3 takes a broader look at an issue in history over an extended period. Therefore, the time allowed for each examination is deemed suitable. To maintain equitable weightings for both units, the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) will be used.
- Some respondents expressed concern about the potential amount of content to be covered during the number of teaching hours available. Our specification writers are being guided on the number of Guided Learning Hours per unit to ensure that the content is teachable in the time.
- There was a low level of agreement that the qualification would be manageable for both learners and centres. We have revisited Unit 4 as a result, and simplified and shortened the non-examination assessment. The revised version of the non-examination assessment allows centres to devise a title or titles within set parameters, ensuring that the breadth of the period studied is covered in a more manageable way.

GCSE Religious Studies

WJEC received 90 responses, with half of the respondents answering on behalf of a school, the majority of those indicating that they were a teacher.

The majority of respondents agreed that the unit purposes are appropriate, engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales.

Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed qualification structure and assessment approach is appropriate and that the proposed qualification was manageable for learners.

Some respondents were encouraged by the introduction of non-examination assessment and felt it would help all learners of a range of abilities. The introduction of non-examination assessment into Religious Studies was seen by some as positive as it allowed the subject to align with other humanities qualifications and provided equal opportunity across humanities subjects. Some respondents felt that the new qualification suited the Curriculum for Wales as it features opportunities for learners to explore their cynefin and provides opportunities to debate and ask questions. However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some concerns were raised about a perceived emphasis on religious beliefs as opposed to non-religious beliefs and philosophical convictions. This was not the intention – the qualification will place equal value on religious and on non-religious beliefs and philosophical convictions. However, there is more specificity relating to teachings and practices associated with some belief systems than others (for example, in relation to life after death) and the balance of content in the new qualification will reflect this. We have amended the outline to reflect our intention; we have discussed our intention and wording with Qualifications Wales who have agreed that this reflects their intentions for the qualification as described in the Approval Criteria.
- Linked to this, some concerns were raised about optionality and that there was a lack of clarity surrounding the religious and non-religious beliefs and philosophical convictions learners could study. The Approval Criteria from Qualifications Wales states that learners must develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity (or Catholic Christianity) and at least one other religion to be chosen from the following list: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism (Sikhi). Learners must also be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of non-religious beliefs and philosophical convictions, such as atheism and humanism. Consequently, we have changed the wording in our outline document to clearly reflect the Approval Criteria, ensuring that there is no confusion.
- Some concerns were raised about the qualification not meeting the Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) statutory requirements. As explained in Qualifications Wales' report on their outcomes on the Approval Criteria consultation (<https://qualifications.wales/media/knaphlc0/consultation-outcomes-by-subject.pdf>), GCSE Religious Studies is not designed to cover all aspects of the Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) guidance.
- Although some respondents welcomed the increase in non-examination assessment, others expressed concern that the weighting was heavy and it would impact on teacher workload. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that there must be two non-examination assessments that account for 40% of the qualification, one of which must be internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding body. Some concerns were raised about the amount of content to cover in relation to the amount of teaching time. Our specification writers are being guided on the number of Guided Learning Hours per unit to ensure that the content is teachable in the time.
- Some concerns were raised about the reference to concepts in our outline with some respondents stating that our diagrams were confusing. This was not our intention and consequently, we have removed the diagrams from our outlines. We are confident that the concepts underpin the Religious Studies qualification we are developing.

- Relating to the specific units, some respondents felt there were repeated topics i.e. human rights, with some respondents questioning why a religious studies qualification was teaching human rights. Unit 3 – Human experience and the world focuses on how environmental issues are approached by people with different religious and/or non-religious beliefs, whereas, Unit 4 – Human rights focuses on ethical/moral, human rights issues from religious and non-religious perspectives. Human rights have historically been an area of study within religious studies, and the Approval Criteria from Qualifications Wales states that human rights must be explored through the unique subject lens of religious studies.

Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience

GCSE Food and Nutrition

WJEC received 21 responses, with the majority of those being from practitioners within a school.

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed assessment approach is appropriate, that the unit purposes are appropriate and engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed qualification structure is appropriate and that the proposed qualification will be manageable for centres and learners alike.

Some respondents expressed satisfaction with the balanced approach to theoretical and practical elements. Some respondents noted that the qualification showed clear progression for learners. We also received positive feedback in relation to the links to natural resources and the environment. However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some respondents raised concerns about the release dates of non-examination tasks. In the draft outline, we proposed that we would release both Unit 2 and 3 non-examination assessment tasks in September of the second year of study. Some respondents felt this would give learners and teachers less time to prepare. Consequently, we have decided to change the release dates of Unit 2 and 3 of the non-examination tasks to May of the first year of study, thus giving learners and teachers more time to prepare.
- Concerns were raised about the prospect of food waste, particularly associated with Unit 2 as some respondents felt that the experimental nature of the assessment often led to food being thrown away. Consequently, we have updated the outline document so that centres can decide whether the food experiments are conducted by individual learners or groups of learners and whether or not the teacher performs the control element of the food investigation for the class. All learners will have to complete written evidence individually to ensure the validity of the non-examination assessment.
- Some respondents felt that the food investigation was not popular with learners and lower ability pupils would find this difficult. We are unable to address these points as they reflect decisions made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that there must be a food investigation that accounts for 20% of the qualification. Our writers developing the new qualification will be mindful of the full range of GCSE learners when writing the content for the Food and Nutrition qualification to ensure that the content is accessible.

Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience

Level 2 Award in Additional Core Cymraeg

WJEC received 21 responses, with the majority of those being from practitioners within a school.

Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed qualification structure and assessment approach is appropriate, that the unit purposes are appropriate and engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales.

We also received positive comments regarding:

- the emphasis on understanding and use of the language in a spontaneous and confident manner
- the opportunity to explore Welsh culture, history, and people in the wider world
- the flexibility and choice offered.

However, we acknowledge the following:

- Some respondents expressed concern about the potential amount of content to be covered for the number of teaching hours available. Our specification writers are being guided on the number of Guided Learning Hours per unit to ensure that the content is teachable in the time.
- Concern was raised regarding the level of control for Unit 2. We believe a low level of control is appropriate in the context of this qualification to help ensure an authentic experience for learners. It will validly secure the requirements of the Approval Criteria that learners must develop their skills from reading a variety of text and media, understand and interpret their meaning and message and allow them to further explore “Cymraeg and me”, whilst building on the skills and knowledge developed as part of the Core Cymraeg qualification.

GCSE Cymraeg Language and Literature (Single and Double)

WJEC received 47 responses, with over half of those being from practitioners within a school.

Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed assessment approach is appropriate; that the unit purposes are appropriate, engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims; that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales; that the proposed qualification will be manageable for learners and that the text types are appropriate.

Respondents gave positive comments regarding:

- the inclusion of a creative writing task within the non-examination assessment
- the choice of focuses within the individual units
- the inclusion of podcasts as a means of presentation within the oral assessments.

Other elements of the proposed qualification were generally well received; however, concerns were also raised by some respondents. These include:

- Freedom of choice regarding the visual text/poetry within Unit 2 and Unit 3. While most respondents welcomed the flexibility offered, others raised concerns regarding reliability of assessment. Within these units, our specification writers have been instructed to offer clear guidance regarding suitable texts/range of poems to ensure clarity for centres regarding their choices that will lead to reliable assessment.
- The merging of language and literature within individual units. Again, some respondents welcomed this proposal and embraced it as a key development linked to the ethos of the Curriculum for Wales. Other respondents raised concerns about the study of literature not being suitable or relevant to some learners. However, Qualifications Wales' Approval Criteria note that both the Single and Double awards must include both narrative fictional prose and visual literature, a range of poems and a range of non-fiction texts.

We also acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some respondents noted that discussing elements linked to film within the study of a visual text was more akin to Media Studies rather than Welsh. However, it was felt within our Qualification Development Advisory Group that these elements were now firmly established within the qualification and support progression to post-16 study.
- Concerns were also raised regarding linking short stories to the examined Unit 6 of the Double Award, with some respondents noting that learners find this genre to be uninteresting and lacking in relevance. We must respect the demands of the Approval Criteria when deciding on the textual focus for each unit and must ensure that all criteria are met over the qualification as a whole. Our specification writer for this unit is aware of the concerns and we will aim to include writing that represent a variety of perspectives reflecting the diverse nature of Welsh citizenship and its cultures in order to make the unit interesting and relevant to learners.

GCSE Core Cymraeg

WJEC received 47 responses, with over half of those being from practitioners within a school.

Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the unit purposes are appropriate, engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales.

We also received positive comments regarding:

- the emphasis on understanding and use of the language in a spontaneous and confident manner
- the weightings of the tasks
- the opportunity to emphasise Welsh culture, history, and people in the wider world.

However, we acknowledge the following:

- Concerns were raised regarding the amount of work marked by the centre. We are unable to address these points as they reflect decisions made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria states that 50% of the qualification will be assessed through non-examination assessment and marked by the centre.
- Respondents raised concerns around the completion and submission of all work during the final year of the course. We are unable to address these points as they reflect decisions made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that this is a linear qualification, and that assessment must take place in the final year of the course. To help support concerns about teacher and learner workload, we have spread the non-examination assessments across the Autumn and Spring terms to aid manageability.

- Concerns were raised regarding the requirement for learners to translanguag. As stated in the Approval Criteria, assessment materials and/or stimulus materials must give learners the opportunity to translanguag. However, based on the feedback received, we have moved the translanguaging task from Unit 4 (Reading and Writing-creative) to Unit 3 (Reading and Writing-formal). This amendment will allow the translanguaging task to be more of an authentic and engaging task for learners, to better prepare learners for the world of work and beyond.
- Some respondents expressed concern about the potential amount of content to be covered for the number of teaching hours available. Our specification writers are being guided on the number of Guided Learning Hours per unit to ensure that the content is teachable in the time.
- Concerns were raised regarding the manageability of Unit 2 as an individual task. Consequently, we have changed the task to a group task to help support manageability for centres.
- There were some concerns from respondents over the opportunities for learners to study and engage with a variety of literary works. In response, we are exploring opportunities to add set text to Unit 2 and Unit 4. This would help ensure the study of a range of literature whilst promoting flexibility and choice for centres in terms of topics, themes, and diversity. We are also exploring opportunities to commission work that will satisfy the requirements of learners and the new Curriculum for Wales.

GCSE English Language and Literature (Single and Double)

WJEC received 164 responses, with half of the respondents answering on behalf of a school, the majority of those indicating that they were a teacher.

Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the unit purposes are appropriate, engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims, and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales.

However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some respondents were not in agreement with the combined Language and Literature approach, the organisation into Single and Double award, or the reduction to two assessment objectives. We are unable to address these points as they reflect decisions made by Qualifications Wales published in their Approval Criteria.
- Some concerns were raised regarding the number of units and overall structure of the qualification being excessive and complex. Given the requirement of the Approval Criteria that a certain percentage of the single and double awards units should be common to both qualification routes, we believe that the proposed structure is the most appropriate one to meet these demands.
- There were concerns expressed about the percentage of the assessment that is focused on oracy tasks. We are unable to address these points as they reflect decisions made by Qualifications Wales published in their Approval Criteria.

- Some respondents felt that we were being too prescriptive regarding the texts for study. We must respect the demands of the Approval Criteria when deciding on the textual focus for each unit and must ensure that all criteria are met over the qualification as a whole. For Unit 2, we are offering a longlist of around 40 narrative fictional prose texts which we consider to be a broad range from which centres can choose. We propose to curate anthologies of poetry and of non-fiction texts to support teachers in both classroom delivery and preparation for assessment – these will be relevant to the examined Units 1 and 6, and to the non-examination assessment in Units 3 and 5. The anthology will ensure a standardised approach to demand and challenge, leading to an equitable experience for all learners. Learners will be allowed and encouraged to supplement the anthology texts with their own selections when preparing for the non-examination assessment tasks in Units 3 and 5.
- Concerns were expressed about the management of oracy tasks, with many respondents conveying that oracy tasks were time consuming and difficult to administer. As a direct result of this feedback, we have redesigned some of the units so that not one unit focuses solely on oracy. We believe this will lead to oracy assessments being conducted in more manageable batches that allow learners to utilise their knowledge and skills from the whole unit, rather than having an entire unit assessed only via oracy tasks.
- We have also changed the focus of the oracy tasks for the common units, as a result of feedback that told us that an analytical oral response to poetry would prove too challenging for many, especially lower ability learners. We have therefore decided to move poetry to an examined unit in the Single Award, where students will respond in writing. Learners following the Single Award will now have the group discussion focused on non-fiction texts. This will remove the expectation that learners discuss issues relevant to their local area, and offer them scope to talk about wider issues that interest them.
- Some respondents expressed the view that there was too much poetry in the qualification. Assessments based on poetry feature once in the common units and once in a discrete double award unit. The current GCSE English Literature qualification requires the assessment of poetry in two units: the comparison of two unseen poems in Unit 1 and Unit 3 requires the comparison of two poems from fifteen specified poems listed for study. Furthermore, the nature of the tasks in the different units will be different, with analysis/comparison assessed in the examination, and poetry used as a vehicle for the oracy task in Unit 5, which will focus on the discussion of attitudes rather than literary analysis. This means that learners will have the opportunity to use the studied poetry as a vehicle for discussing how attitudes have changed over time – addressing AO2 – rather than providing a textual analysis (AO1).
- Double Award Unit 5 was felt by many respondents to lack cohesion. In response to this, we have rationalised the assessment tasks so that the focus of the unit is clearly on ‘Continuity and change’ with regards to both language and ideas. There will now be one oracy task based on poetry, including one poem from the period 1600-1900, and one extended writing task based on the centre’s choice of a play by Shakespeare.
- Questions were raised over the inclusion of a Shakespeare text. This is a stipulation of the Approval Criteria for the Double Award, and we must therefore include it. There were also several respondents, however, who felt Single Award learners should be given the opportunity to study Shakespeare. In response to this, we have decided to offer a play by Shakespeare as one of the five choices of drama in Unit 4 of the Single Award.
- The description of the non-examination tasks as a ‘portfolio’ caused some respondents to question what this would involve. We have clarified in the revised outline how many tasks would contribute to the submissions for Units 2, 3 and 5.
- The length of the examinations for Units 1, 4 and 6 were considered by some respondents to be too long. Consequently, we have shortened the duration of these exams from 2 hours to 1.5 hours each. We will keep these durations under review during the detailed development process.

- We recognise practitioners' desire to ensure that progression routes to advanced study of English are supported by this new qualification and we will work to ensure that this is the case.

GCSE French, German and Spanish

WJEC received 90 responses, with over half of those being from practitioners within a school.

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed qualification supports the Curriculum for Wales. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the approach to assessment is appropriate and that the unit purposes are appropriate, engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims.

Some respondents noted that they were pleased to see relevant broad themes, inclusion of cultural and societal awareness in the countries of the assessed languages, the use of high frequency and high utility grammar and core vocabulary, an extensive and comprehensive list of grammar and a more skills-centred approach.

We asked stakeholders for their preference for a 4- or 5-unit structure and received an equally split response. Taking into regard all comments from the consultation, there was concern that five units may put learners off from opting for a language and that it would appear to be more challenging than other subjects. We have therefore decided that the qualifications will be made up of 4 units.

We acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some concerns were raised around the number of non-examination assessments. We are unable to address these points as they reflect decisions made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that a total of between 45–50% of the qualification must be assessed through non-examination assessment tasks that are set by the awarding body and marked by the awarding body. We have opted for the lower percentage following feedback from teachers.
- Some responses in the consultation referred to non-tiering impacting learner confidence and take up. We are unable to address this point as it reflects a decision on tiering made by Qualifications Wales as reflected in the published Approval Criteria.
- There was some concern regarding the number of themes (the current spec has 3 broad themes, 8 sub-themes and 18 sub-sub themes). In the revised qualification outline, we have the same three themes and have reduced the proposed number of sub-themes to 8; there are no sub-sub themes.
- There was some concern over the timing of Unit 1 non-examination assessment in terms of clashes with Welsh oral assessments during the established 5-week oral assessment window. We will consider the timings of all oral assessments to avoid clashes.
- There was some concern regarding the proposed duration of the written exams. Consequently, we have reduced the duration from 1.5 hours to 1 hour for Unit 2 so that it can be completed during one timetabled lesson and from 2 hours to 1.5 hours for Unit 4.
- Some concerns were also raised over the duration of the Unit 3 listening exam (set at 45 minutes) which was deemed to be too long. However, the current Foundation Tier listening is set at 35 mins with 5 mins additional reading time, and Higher Tier 45 with 5 mins additional reading time. We have emphasised the inclusion of the reading time in the revised qualification outline.

- Some concerns were raised regarding the sourcing of texts in Unit 2 and the fairness of less able learners studying the same text as more able learners. WJEC will set parameters for text selection along with exemplars in each language. In the revised qualification outline we have updated the wording to emphasise that centres and learners will have a free rein in the choice of different texts for different learners.
- Listening was said to be the most challenging aspect for learners, with respondents noting that it would be beneficial for learners to be able to listen to the recordings in Unit 3 multiple times. In the revised qualification outline we have specified that each extract will be played three times.
- The difficulty of translating from English to the assessed language in Unit 4 was also questioned. This was included in the original draft outline to reflect the requirements of the Approval Criteria. However, Qualifications Wales have since removed this requirement from the Approval Criteria and the qualification outline has therefore been revised to include translation from the assessed language into English only.

Mathematics and Numeracy Area of Learning and Experience

GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy

WJEC received 105 responses, with half of the respondents answering on behalf of a school, the majority of those indicating that they were a teacher.

The majority of respondents agreed that the proposed qualification structure and assessment approach is appropriate; that the focus of units is appropriate; that the unit purposes are engaging for learners and meet the qualification purpose and aims; and that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the proposed qualification was manageable for centres and learners alike.

Respondents commented that they particularly welcomed the following elements:

- Reducing the overall number of assessments from four to three examinations.
- Having a focus on financial maths for Unit 1. This supports the Curriculum for Wales' focus on financial literacy and learner wellbeing.
- Introducing mixed tiering into the new qualification. This will allow learners to be entered for different tiers across different units, addressing respondent concerns that many learners could be capped at a C grade.

Respondents noted that content should be prescribed for each unit to enable the unitised model to work successfully, rather than requiring learners to cover all subject content before undertaking any assessment. We confirm that this will be the case, and that the specification will provide clarity on which topics will feature in each unit.

Respondents asked for clarification whether Unit 1: Financial Mathematics and Other Applications of Numeracy would permit the use of a calculator. We can confirm that this is the case, resulting in the GCSE having an overall split of 70% calculator permitted assessment, and 30% non-calculator assessment.

A number of respondents' concerns related to elements of the qualification that have already been set by Qualifications Wales' Approval Criteria for GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy and that we therefore cannot address. These include:

- moving from three tiers to two tiers
- making the GCSE a Double Award, with no option of a Single Award
- mixed views in relation to unitisation

- mixed views in relation to the qualification being assessed through 100% external examination.

Some respondents expressed concern that the proposed duration of 1 hour 45 minutes for the examination of Unit 3 is too long at foundation tier. We have considered whether it would be reasonable to reduce the assessment duration of the final unit. Learners need to have sufficient time to complete a paper that will sample 40% of the qualification's content, and this time needs to be proportionate to the time assigned to the other units which will each sample 30% of the qualification's content. On balance, we have decided to continue with the 1 hour 45 minute duration. This will be kept under review during the detailed development process.

We consulted on two options for the first award of GCSE Mathematics and Numeracy:

- Option 1: First Award November 2026
- Option 2: First Award Summer 2027

Following feedback on these options, the decision has been made to move forward with Option 1, which was supported by the majority of respondents.

Science and Technology Area of Learning and Experience

GCSE Computer Science

WJEC received 55 responses, with 45% of respondents answering on behalf of a school.

The majority of respondents agreed that the focus of the units were appropriate and that they were relevant and engaging for learners. Respondents generally agreed or partially agreed that the qualification structure and approach to assessment are appropriate, that the proposed qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales and that the proposed qualification was manageable for centres and learners alike.

However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Some concerns were raised around the stipulation of a single programming language. However, this decision was already made by Qualifications Wales; the Approval Criteria state that one programming language was to be chosen by the awarding body. Although a few respondents questioned our choice of Python, we chose it as it is widely available, free to use, widely used in industry and an easy to learn syntax.
- Some respondents raised a concern that there was not enough of a programming element in the subject content. However, the subject content is prescribed in the Approval Criteria; we feel that adding more content alongside this prescribed content could result in unmanageable teaching and learning.
- There was also some concern that Artificial Intelligence is not included in the subject content. In conjunction with our Computer Science Qualification Development Advisory Group, we feel that the computer science behind Artificial Intelligence is too demanding for GCSE level but will be included in the non-assessed Experiences section of the specification.
- A number of respondents expressed concern regarding the move away from non-examination assessment to a 2-hour digital exam to assess programming. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales and reflected in the Approval Criteria.

GCSE The Sciences (Double)

WJEC received 124 responses, with half of the respondents answering on behalf of a school, the majority of those indicating that they were a teacher.

The majority of respondents agreed with the proposed approach to tiering. Respondents generally agreed with the focus of the units and that the unit purposes meet the qualification purpose and aims.

Respondents noted that the practical science unit was suitable to assess learners' use of practical science and acknowledged that the approach to the choice of tasks was more manageable for centres. However, we acknowledge the following concerns:

- Many respondents referred to the loss of the separate science qualifications. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales. It should be noted that the results of examinations for Unit 3 – Biology, Unit 4 – Chemistry, and Unit 5 – Physics will include sub-reporting of grades for the individual science subjects. This means learners will receive an overall grade for the qualification, and sub-grades for biology, chemistry, and physics.
- Some respondents commented that the qualification would not meet the needs of all learners. Qualifications Wales have announced that a Single Award GCSE Science qualification will be available for first teaching in 2026, a year after the Double Award qualification is available. In the interim, the existing GCSE Applied Science (Single Award) qualification will continue to be available. This new Single Award qualification will offer the same challenge as all other GCSEs but will not be designed to support progression to science AS and A level qualifications. The Sciences Double Award will be designed to support progression to science AS and A level qualifications and the sub-reporting will help centres measure attainment of the separate science disciplines.
- Some responses in the consultation referred to the high weighting of assessment in Year 11. We are unable to address this as it reflects a decision made by Qualifications Wales and reflected in the Approval Criteria. The practical science assessment will be taken early in the spring term so that learners have had the opportunity to undertake numerous science practical assessments as part of their learning.
- There was some concern about the proposed approach to the assessment timing for Unit 1 – Bringing the Sciences Together and, the appropriateness of the focus of the unit. The decision to offer the option to sit the assessment in the first year of study was already made by Qualifications Wales and stipulated in the Approval Criteria. The content that will be assessed as part of the unit will be clearly identified in the specification from the given content in biology, chemistry, and physics. We have amended our qualification outline to clarify this.
- The majority of respondents disagreed that the qualification would be manageable for learners and centres, with respondents noting the amount of required content for the qualification. The topics that the qualification must cover are prescribed by Qualifications Wales in the Approval Criteria. However, WJEC is working with a Development Advisory Group for The Sciences, including sub meetings for Biology, Chemistry and Physics, which includes over 20 practicing teachers. The group will advise us on the breadth and depth of the prescribed topics as we develop the detail of the specifications. We will ask them to be mindful of consultation respondents' concerns about the amount of content, within the parameters of the Approval Criteria. Our specification writers are being guided on the number of Guided Learning Hours per unit to ensure that the content is teachable in the time.