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**Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response**

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<b>Enw / Name:</b>	Meilyr Rowlands
<b>Rôl / Role:</b>	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales
<b>E-bost / Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:ChiefInspector@estyn.gov.uk">ChiefInspector@estyn.gov.uk</a>
<b>Rhif Ffôn / Tel No:</b>	029 2044 6446
<b>Dyddiad / Date:</b>	29.01.21
<b>Pwnc / Subject:</b>	<b>Alternative arrangements for the award of VTQs and other general qualifications in 2021</b>

**Background information about Estyn**

Estyn is the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, Estyn is independent of the Welsh Government.

Estyn's principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, Estyn must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by education and training providers in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Estyn's remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary schools, secondary schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and teacher education and training.

Estyn may give advice to the Assembly on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, Estyn has set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

## Response

### Consultation questions

**Q1. Are there any other written exams due to take place from April onwards this academic year, that should be in scope and therefore not go ahead?**

Not that we have identified.

**Q2. Do you agree that written exams for other general qualifications that are not GCSEs, AS or A levels due to take place from April onwards this academic year, should be subject to alternative arrangements similar to that taken for GCSEs, AS and A levels, as addressed in part B of this consultation?**

**Yes**

Yes. It would be helpful to put in place alternative arrangements for reasons of parity and coherence, so that there is no disadvantage for learners, and to allow them to progress into education, training or employment.

**Q3. Do you agree assessments for Functional Skills qualifications should be permitted to go ahead where they can be delivered in line with public health measures, including remotely, from April onwards, and otherwise be awarded through alternative arrangements set by Ofqual?**

**Yes/No**

Yes. We broadly agree that having a form of assessment in place, where it is safe to do so, will help support learners' development of these skills.

In Wales, the equivalent skills qualifications are Essential Skills Wales qualifications, regulated by Qualifications Wales. Qualifications Wales published adaptations to assessment arrangements in December 2020. See <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/essential-skills-wales-update> and <https://www.qualificationswales.org/media/6848/201113-esw-updated-adaptations.pdf> . We broadly agree that the Qualifications Wales adaptations to assessments for ESW are appropriate under the circumstances. For example, the requirement for learners undertaking Application of Number or Communication qualifications at Levels 1-3, to take the confirmatory test but not the separate assessment task, is a suitable compromise.

**Q4. Do you agree that T Level core component exams should not go ahead this summer and should be taken in the second year, but that students should still have the option to take the employer-set project?**

**Yes/No**

N/A

T level qualifications are generally not taken in Wales. However, we agree with the general approach of delaying core exams and allowing learners to continue with their employer-set project.

**Q5a. Do you agree that practical exams required for employment and apprenticeships should continue to go ahead throughout the academic year, where they can be delivered in line with public health measures, or otherwise will need to be delayed?**

Yes – this will be important to allow learners to complete their apprenticeships or other courses and support employers and the economy. However, as we note in answer to Q17, it will be difficult to ensure that learners undertaking vocational qualifications are not disadvantaged relative to those undertaking general qualifications, particularly where they need to complete practical occupational competence exams.

**Q5b. If you do not agree, which practical, occupational competence exams do you think should not go ahead?**

N/A

**Q6. What, if any, important differences of approach do you think need to be taken to exams for Ofqual-regulated Level 4-5 qualifications?**

We agree that the same principles and approaches should be followed for these qualifications as those at level 3 or below.

**Q7. Are there any qualifications in scope of alternative awarding arrangements where a form of teacher assessment is not appropriate?**

**Yes/No**

None that we have identified.

**Q8. Do you agree that internal assessment should continue, where relevant, for all learners where possible?**

**Yes/No**

Yes

**Q9. Do you agree with the impacts we have identified and are there any other impacts, including equalities impacts, of the policy set out in Part A that should be considered?**

The equality impact assessment is a well-considered evaluation of the impact on different groups of learners, including those with protected characteristics. It also makes appropriate reference to the potentially negative impact on learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in relation to learners' access to IT equipment and internet access, which continues to be a limiting factor in learners' participation in Wales.

In Wales, there also needs to be consideration to the needs of learners who wish to be assessed wholly or partly through the medium of Welsh. For example, it will be important that supporting materials and assessment resources made available by awarding organisations operating within Wales are produced in both English and Welsh for qualifications where this would normally be the case.

**Part B - Approach to awarding VTQs and other general qualifications**

**This part of the consultation sets out proposals for how Ofqual will implement the Department's policy. This includes asking for views on what should happen if the Department decides to adopt the policy proposals set out above following this consultation. This means that references below to qualifications in scope means the qualifications proposed to be in scope as set out in Part A.**

**Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the alternative regulatory arrangements should only apply to the qualifications identified in Part A of this document?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree

**Q11. To what extent, do you agree or disagree that the alternative regulatory arrangements should apply to all learners expecting to sit exams or assessments in the academic year 2020/2021 for the qualifications identified as in scope in Part A of this consultation?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree

**Q12. Should other general qualifications such as Pre-U, AEA, Core maths and the International Baccalaureate be included under the measures proposed for GCSEs, AS and A levels or under the alternative arrangements for awarding VTQs we propose to put in place?**

- **Under the measures proposed for GCSEs, AS and A Levels or**
- **Under the proposed alternative arrangements for awarding VTQs**

For qualifications offered in Wales, we agree with the general principle, as outlined on the Qualifications Wales website (<https://qualificationswales.org/english/awarding-2021/statements/consultation-on-approach-to-designated-vocational-qualifications-have-your-say/>) of considering the approach to vocational qualifications that are similar to GCSE, AS and A level qualifications (ie those assessed through a largely examinations-based route) in the light of the approach taken to general qualifications in Wales.

**Q13. For learners expecting to sit assessments in January, are there any particular factors that would need to be taken into account in the development of the alternative regulatory arrangements to seek to ensure fairness?**

We are reassured that, for learners who would normally have certificated in January, alternative regulatory arrangements will seek to ensure that these learners are not disadvantaged and can receive results, irrespective of whether they sat an external examination in January.

**Q14. Do you have any comments on how exams could be defined for qualifications in scope of the alternative regulatory arrangements?**

As implied, it would be helpful if a consistent set of terms were defined and used. The term 'exam' could be reserved exclusively for assessments that satisfy the conditions set out in paragraph 66. Assessments that do not meet these criteria could be simply be termed 'assessments' with appropriate prefixes such as 'open-book' and 'externally set and internally marked' where appropriate. Using these defined terms, it will be very helpful to specify which types of assessment would be considered viable, which unviable, and any exceptions where awarding organisations, or providers themselves, would be best placed to decide whether the assessment is viable.

**Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to permit awarding organisations to make awards when not all internal assessments have been completed in qualifications in scope of the new regulatory arrangements?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree – to enable learners to progress to the next stage of their lives

**Q16. Do you have any comments on what should be the guiding principles for awarding organisations for the award of qualifications where exams do not take place and/or where learners cannot complete all internal assessments?**

The tension between principle 2 and 4 is unhelpful. These require awarding organisations to 'maintain standards, as far as possible, within the same qualification in line with previous years' (principle 4), while ensuring that 'adaptations which it makes to a qualification do not serve to advantage or

disadvantage learners taking that qualification against their peers taking general qualifications' (principle 2). In light of the significant increase in the grades awarded for general qualifications in 2020, notably A levels, in order to satisfy condition 2 would awarding organisations need to ensure a broadly similar increase in vocational qualification grades compared to previous years? If so, would this likely negate principle 4? It may help to explicitly state in all guidance materials whether or not the principles are presented in priority order.

The proposed fifth principle (paragraph 76) of seeking to issue results to as many learners as possible, raises potential confusion due to the use of the word 'possible'. Technically it is possible to do so for all learners, therefore it would be helpful if the wording used were carefully refined. In addition, if these principles are presented in priority order, this proposed fifth principle should perhaps appear below that which refers to maintaining the validity and reliability of qualifications (principle 3).

It may be useful to consider how the proposed principles relate to similar principles already established in other UK nations, for example as part of the Welsh Government's [Independent review of the summer 2020 arrangements](#) to award grades, and considerations for summer 2021 (see paragraph 3.6 of [the final report](#)).

**Q17. Do you have any comments on how Principle 2 might apply for in scope qualifications in light of the new approach to assessment proposed for GCSEs, AS and A levels?**

It is difficult to ensure that learners undertaking vocational qualifications are not disadvantaged relative to those undertaking general qualifications. The proposed arrangements mean that any pandemic-related gaps in teaching and learning for general disciplines will have fewer knock-on effects on the award of qualifications in comparison to vocational disciplines. For example, learners of general qualifications will not be subject to delays in the awarding of their qualifications. In the case of vocational and technical qualifications the need for assessment is discussed and justified in paragraph 20. Nevertheless, the qualification arrangements as a whole, are at risk of being more advantageous to learners of general qualifications than those undertaking vocational courses.

**Q18. Do you have any comments on whether Principle 4 is still appropriate for in scope qualifications, awarded where exams do not take place and/or all internal assessments cannot be completed?**

We agree that Principle 4 in the Extended ERF as currently drafted remains appropriate as a principle, but adhering with it in practice may not be possible based on the experience of 2020.

**Q19. Do you have any comments on our proposed approach to arrangements for awarding in scope qualifications where exams do not take place and/or learners are unable to complete all internal assessments?**

We broadly agree with the proposed approach. We welcome the statement in paragraph 90 that the approach developed by awarding organisations should not place more burden on centres and learners than the original assessment, and emphasise the importance of maintaining learners' engagement with learning during periods of lockdown or partial lockdown. We also support the need to consider parity with other similar qualifications outlined in paragraph 89.

**Q20. Do you have any comments on the arrangements that should be put in place to authenticate the eligibility of candidates or claims for the award of in scope qualifications?**

We broadly agree with the proposed approach.

**Q21. Do you have any comments on the guidance that should be put in place to support teachers and learners to implement the new arrangements?**

We agree with the proposed approach. It is very important that teachers receive timely guidance.

**Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to Special Consideration?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree

**Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should supplement General Condition I1 with additional guidance around appeals for qualifications in scope?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree, although the example cited in paragraph 104, that 'awarding organisations have discretion to include additional grounds should they wish to do so, such as allowing appeals to be accepted directly from learners', should be consistent across awarding bodies, in order that learners are entitled to similar rights of appeal irrespective of which awarding organisation their centre uses for its qualifications.

**Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our approach to certification for qualifications in scope?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree

**Q25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach for private candidates/learners?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree

**Q26. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our approach to awarding for qualifications in scope which are also taken internationally?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree

**Q27. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our approach to regulatory oversight and record keeping?**

**Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree**

Agree

**Q28. Are there other potential positive or negative equality impacts that we have not explored?**

**Yes/No**

Yes

In Wales, there also needs to be consideration to the needs of learners who wish to be assessed wholly or partly through the medium of Welsh. For example, it will be important that supporting materials and assessment resources made available by awarding organisations operating within Wales are produced in both English and Welsh for qualifications where this would normally be the case.

**Q29. Do you have any views on how any potential negative impacts on particular groups of learners could be mitigated?**

Paragraphs 158 - 160 make reference to access to reliable fast internet and IT equipment. Awarding organisations and centres should take care that assessments do not inadvertently disadvantage learners with limited access to these, through for example, using timed assessments or streaming video where slow internet connection may interfere with a learner's ability to engage with an assessment.

**Q30. Are there any regulatory impacts, costs or benefits associated with the implementation of our proposals that are not identified in this consultation?**

**Yes/No**

No

**Q31. Are there any regulatory impacts, costs or benefits associated with the implementation of our proposals that are specific to teachers not identified in our consultation?**

**Yes/No**

No

**Q32. What additional costs do you expect you will incur through implementing our proposals? Will you save any costs? When might these costs and savings occur? Please provide estimated figures where possible.**

N/A

**Q33. Are there any additional or alternative approaches we could take to minimise the regulatory impact of our proposals?**

No