



Developing the Network to Deliver Excellence in Vocational Skills
Datblygu'r Rhwydwaith i Gyflawni Rhagoriaeth mewn Sgiliau Galwedigaethol

Submission to the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the Qualification (Wales) Bill

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Introduction

1. The National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) is a membership organisation of over one hundred organisations involved in the delivery of learning in the workplace. It is a Wales wide representative body for all those organisations or individuals involved in the training industry. Members range from small specialist training providers to national and international organisations, as well as Local Authorities, Further Education Institutions and third sector organisations.
2. The NTfW represents the interests of learners, employers and learning providers across Wales and aims inform them about all aspects of the education and training agenda.
3. Members work across Wales in rural, urban, bi-lingual and Welsh medium settings, and have strong links with over 35,000 employers across Wales ranging from small enterprises through medium sized companies to large multi-nationals and public sector organisations.
4. The NTfW maintains close working relationships with Welsh Government Ministers, Welsh Assembly Members, the Department for Education and Skills, Careers Wales, Jobcentre Plus and Sector Skills Councils.

Aim

5. The aim of this Submission Paper is to provide evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee ahead of a planned meeting which will take place at the Senedd on Wednesday 7th May 2014.

Background

6. Over recent months, NTfW (and its members) have been actively engaged in consultation exercises surrounding the development of qualifications for 14-19 year-olds in Wales, and the proposals to establish a new qualifications body for Wales (Qualifications Wales). The evidence in this Submission Paper is drawn from our various Consultation Responses, and is based on the broad areas of focus of the Committee's pre-legislative scrutiny.

a. **Is the proposed vision and remit for Qualifications Wales an effective organisational model?** Yes. NTfW fully embraces the vision set out for Qualifications Wales.

b. **What good practice can be adopted from other countries on separating the roles of exam regulator and awarding organisation within one body?** Unsure. NTfW does not feel qualified to make a comment on this, but we have confidence in the fact that work has been undertaken by Welsh Government officials and members of the Qualifications Wales Review Board, to identify areas of good practice from across the UK and further afield.

c. Will the relationship between Qualifications Wales (and awarding organisations including the WJEC in the short term) and the Welsh Government work effectively? Yes, if managed correctly.

(1) NTfW welcomes the fact that regulation will be independent of government, but that accountability will be maintained by the National Assembly for Wales (NAW). However, in our response to the Our Qualifications – Our Future consultation, we highlighted our desire to see the proposed Qualifications Wales' Annual Report to be closely linked to other key reports about the education and training sector, most notably, Estyn's Chief Inspector's Annual Report.

(2) With regards to the relationship between awarding organisations (in the short term) and the Welsh Government, NTfW would urge caution in how these relationships are managed. It is recognised that there are 5 awarding organisations that offer General Qualifications (GQs) in Wales, but over 120 offering Vocational Qualifications (VQs). NTfW would like to see the choice of awarding organisation stay with the provider, as it is felt that this not only ensures established systems, and ways of working are maintained, but it is also felt that no one awarding organisation can offer the broad spectrum of specialisms required to work across the various (employment) sectors. Furthermore, NTfW feels that there is a risk to how we ensure awarding organisations continue to invest in the development of qualifications for Wales, which are specific to Wales.

(3) In terms of building relationships with other key stakeholders, NTfW has urged Qualifications Wales to link its work with other bodies within the education and training landscape in Wales, such as the General Teaching Council for Wales (or as proposed, the Education Workforce Council) and Estyn.

d. What will be the impact of Qualifications Wales on the accreditation of vocational qualifications (including Apprenticeships)? This is as yet unknown, but it is hoped that it will be a positive one.

(1) NTfW would welcome (strongly) an increasing role for Qualifications Wales in the area of Apprenticeships, and would particularly welcome Qualifications Wales becoming the 'Issuing Authority' for Apprenticeship Frameworks in Wales.

(2) Within the context of WBL, particularly in the design and delivery of future Apprenticeships, a considerable amount of change is proposed, which could see a great deal of divergence between England and Wales. With this in mind, Qualifications Wales is urged to keep a close eye on developments, and ensure that any potential negative impacts are minimised.

(3) NTfW notes that part of the vision for Qualifications Wales is to ‘strengthen public confidence in, and information about, qualifications in Wales.’ We also note that as part of Qualifications Wales’ functions and activities that it will play is role in ensuring ‘fitness of purpose’ for all of the qualifications it is responsible for. Increasingly, “employers are shouting about the importance of employability and life/work skills” and NTfW urges Qualifications Wales to ensure that all qualifications are scrutinised (as part of the quality assurance process) to ensure they offer the ‘employability’ skills required by the intended user i.e. the employer. It is felt that in order to make this a reality, Qualifications Wales needs to develop a close working relationship with the soon to be established Sector Qualifications Advisory Panels (SQAPs) to ensure that any current, or future, VQs are ‘fit for purpose’ in terms of meeting employer demand.

(4) In its response to the Review of Qualifications for 14-19 year olds in Wales consultation, NTfW wholeheartedly welcomed the move to initial vocational education and training (IVET) qualifications and continuing education and vocational (CVET) qualifications. However, it is felt by NTfW that there is an extremely low level of understanding of IVET / CVET qualifications amongst not only ‘wider stakeholders’ i.e. parents, employers etc., but more importantly (and worryingly) amongst key Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) practitioners as well. It is felt that Qualifications Wales should play an important part in explaining the qualifications system in Wales to all stakeholders, and that it should become the single source of information for all (less HE) qualifications in Wales. However, it is vitally important that any Communication Strategy has the flexibility to ensure that the messages are targeted towards the intended audience, be that practitioners, parents, (potential) learners and/or employers.

(5) Within the context of Work-based Learning (WBL) many providers work across (geographical) borders. One of the issues faced by providers with this is the lack of ‘portability’ of qualifications across these borders. Similarly, as most WBL work with school leavers, there are also issues of ‘portability’ between qualification systems i.e. there are no ‘proxy qualifications’ for Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications. This creates the situation, where the learner feels that they are doing the same qualification twice.

Summary

7. Due to our scope and remit, NTfW feels suitably placed to offer evidence in regards to the establishment of a single body to be responsible for the regulation and quality assurance of non-degree qualifications, which is separate from Government, but answerable to the National Assembly. Furthermore, NTfW (and its members) have been active stakeholders in all recent consultations in regards to the changing qualifications landscape in Wales. Overall, NTfW is very supportive of the proposals to establish a new

qualifications body for Wales (Qualifications Wales) However, we feel that more could, and should, be done by Qualifications Wales to ensure that VQs and Apprenticeships delivered here in Wales are 'fit for purpose,' in order that they meet the needs of the intended users, most notably employers.