

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

QW 05

Qualifications Wales Bill

Evidence from : Catholic Education Service (Adviser for Wales)

Consultation questions

The Explanatory Memorandum prepared by the Welsh Government describes the Bill's main purposes in the following terms:

The Bill provides for the establishment of Qualifications Wales as the independent regulatory body responsible for the recognition of awarding bodies and the review and approval of non-degree qualifications in Wales. Qualifications Wales will also, along with the Welsh Ministers, be responsible for preparing a list of priority qualifications, designated as such by reason of the significance of the qualification, having regard to the needs of learners and employers in Wales. The intention is, through the establishment of Qualifications Wales, to strengthen the oversight of qualifications and of the qualification system in Wales.

The Bill is intended to address the four main limitations of the current system. These are outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum as:

- there is no single organisation that is dedicated to ensuring the effectiveness of qualifications and the qualification system;
- there are no powers to prioritise qualifications and to thereby focus regulatory activity where it is most needed – with the result that there are large numbers of regulated qualifications but limited resources to ensure effectiveness;
- there are no powers to select a single provider of a given qualification to ensure that learners across Wales take the same qualification; and

- the capacity to drive forward the strategic development of qualifications within the current arrangements is too limited – creating a risk that Wales’ qualifications will not be held in as high esteem, nationally and internationally, as those in other nations.

The Bill provides Qualifications Wales with the following principal aims, and it must act compatibly with these when exercising its functions:

- a) Ensuring that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and
- b) Promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system.

Question 1 – Is there a need for a Bill for the purposes outlined above?

Yes. The Catholic Education Service welcomes the establishment of Qualifications Wales designed to develop world-class qualifications for Wales for the good of learners in Wales and for the greater good of Welsh society and culture.

We also welcome the strategic vision and plans to ensure that the qualifications, including Welsh-medium qualifications, are respected by employers and universities and that will enable learners to progress along their chosen pathways.

If you believe there is a need for the Bill, what are the main issues that need to be resolved?

Public confidence in Qualifications Wales and the portability of qualifications. We welcome the clear statements already made concerning these aspects.

The Catholic Education Service has some concern with the long term plan to develop Qualifications Wales towards an awarding of qualifications function alongside its currently proposed approval and quality assurance function. We welcome the planned continuing dialogue on this aspect of the strategic development of a national qualification system for Wales.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	√
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 2 – Do you think the Bill, as drafted, delivers the stated objectives as set out in the Explanatory Memorandum?

Yes.

If not, how do you think the Bill should be amended to take account of this?

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 3 – Are the sections of the Bill as drafted appropriate to bring about the purposes described above?	
Yes. In particular, the Catholic Education Service welcomes the emphasis on the independence of Qualifications Wales from the Welsh Government in order to ensure freedom from short-term political pressures.	
If not, what changes do you believe need to be made to the Bill?	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	
<i>1 – This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 – This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 – This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 – Not a problem.</i>	
Question 4 – Has the Welsh Government correctly identified the four main limitations of the current arrangement, and will the two principal aims the Bill sets for Qualifications Wales, as well as the eight matters which it must have regard when exercising its functions, effectively address these limitations?	
Yes	
If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 5 – What are your views on the proposals for determining ‘priority qualifications’ and, within these, ‘restricted priority qualifications’?	
<p>The Catholic Education Service welcomes the concept of ‘priority qualifications’ to ensure inclusivity, Welsh-medium and English-medium comparability standardisation and qualifications tailored to meet the needs of learners in Wales and of Welsh society as a whole.</p> <p>However, there is a concern regarding the status and nature of Religious Studies. We welcome the Welsh Government’s decision to allow for the option of a range of subjects to be included in the new Capped Points Score indicator of standards at 16, which protects the status of Religious Studies as a contributory subject to those standards. In terms of the development of Religious Studies for all educational phases, within the oversight of Qualifications Wales, the Catholic Church would welcome reassurance that due cognisance will be made of the Catholic school’s obligation to ensure its Religious Studies programme meets the Canonical and Trust Deed requirements of the Church.</p>	
If you think there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?	
<p>We recognise that the current ‘priority qualifications’ are those of the ‘core’ curriculum for the Welsh Government. If the system evolves to the point where Welsh schools deliver a solely Welsh qualifications programme, and Religious Studies at all levels lies within that programme, the Catholic Church would welcome the continuation of the</p>	

very helpful partnership that already exists between the WJEC (and its future successor) and Diocesan Authorities, to ensure the needs of both the country of Wales and the Catholic Church are met.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - *This is a key, urgent problem.*

2 - *This is a problem that needs to be addressed.*

√

3 - *This is a minor problem*

4 - *Not a problem.*

Question 6 – What are your views on the commissioning type process Qualifications Wales would undertake under the Bill, in respect of restricted priority qualifications?

The clarity regarding the open, fair and transparent commissioning of a single suite of qualifications is welcome.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - *This is a key, urgent problem.*

2 - *This is a problem that needs to be addressed.*

3 - *This is a minor problem*

4 - *Not a problem.*

Question 7 – How will the Bill change what organisations do currently and what impact will such changes have, if any?

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	
<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 8 – What are the potential barriers to implementing the provisions of the Bill (if any) and does the Bill take account of them?	
If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	
<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
Question 9 – Do you have any views on the way in which the Bill falls within the legislative competence of the National Assembly for Wales?	

Question 10 – What are your views on powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (i.e. statutory instruments, including regulations, orders and directions)?

In answering this question, you may wish to consider Section 5 of the Explanatory Memorandum, which contains a table summarising the powers delegated to Welsh Ministers in the Bill to make orders and regulations, etc.

The Catholic Education Service recognises and welcomes the power Welsh Ministers have in determining the required contents of a qualification if it ensures the best outcomes for learners and for Welsh society, providing the independence of the commissioning and awarding bodies is maintained.

However, we have a particular concern regarding Religious Studies. Religious Studies, which we believe should remain a required subject for all learners in Wales, 4–16, provides the skills, knowledge and understanding of values, beliefs and ways of life that play a crucial part in exploring fundamental questions of human existence, widening horizons and removing barriers of ignorance. Such a requirement, which is also the strategic vision of Catholic Religious Studies, also allows Catholic schools to fulfil their canonical requirement to develop learners' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic response to such areas.

We would welcome an assurance that if Welsh Ministers used their powers to specify requirements in Religious Studies, the dialogue between the Welsh Government, and Catholic Church officers, would continue in order to ensure that the needs of both parties were met.

Question 11 – What are your views on the financial implications of the Bill?

In answering this question you may wish to consider Part 2 of the

Explanatory Memorandum (the Regulatory Impact Assessment), which estimates the costs and benefits of implementation of the Bill.

Question 12 – Are there any other comments you wish to make about specific sections of the Bill?